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Drawing the Line: Student Reassignment Policies In South Carolina

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DRAWING THE LINE:
STUDENT REASSIGNMENT POLICIES IN SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife. Her love, strength, and support through all the challenges involved in completing this project have been immeasurable. I am in awe of the sacrifices she has made so that I could pursue my dreams. Not only has she been a constant source of encouragement and love throughout this entire endeavor, she also created two beautiful children that fill my life such enormous meaning and pride. Everything I do, I do it for you!

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex nature of student reassignment plans developed

between 2006 and 2008 in three South Carolina school districts: York School District 3,

Dorchester School District 2, and Greenville School District. The study is guided by the

following research question: How are the district policies for student reassignment

understood through the lens of institutional and organizational theories? To answer this

question this research draws on Institutional Theory (both old and new) to develop a

comprehensive model that specifically addresses the strategies a district uses to create a

plan that responds to the demographic and political pressures exerted on them. Using a

case study approach, this research investigates the organizational motivations for change,

the evolution of district policies, and the strategies of implementation. The findings

indicate that each school district employed a variety of strategic responses that was

unique to the specific institutional pressures exerted on and by district officials.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A majority of schools in the United States allocate students to elementary, middle, and high schools based on student assignment plans that are adopted and implemented by their corresponding school districts. These student assignment plans are intended generally to assign students to specific schools within their districts based on a variety of factors such as grade level, distance from school, school capacity, and racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic diversity. The goal for most schools is to maximize the utility of resources available to the district and balance student demographics (Bogart & Cromwell 2000). Sometimes these policies involve building new schools and reassigning students to populate it, and other times these policies involve adjusting school attendance boundaries when a school becomes overcrowded or disparate in terms of race, ethnicity, or income.

In South Carolina every school district has an assignment plan in place to determine which school each student attends. Although many districts do offer opportunities for school choice, the majority of students in South Carolina currently attend the schools to which they are zoned. The assignment policies that exist throughout South Carolina's schools take into account a variety of student characteristics and many are still influenced by the legal policies of court ordered desegregation. As student enrollments have increased across the nation, many of South Carolina's schools have experienced the need to address issues of overcrowding by modifying existing assignment policies. Since 2000, the student enrollment in South Carolina's public

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schools increased by over 100,000 students and across the state, more than 200 new schools were built to accommodate these student demands (Facilities Survey 2009). Therefore, the issue of how to *reassign* students from their current schools to new or existing schools within their districts has become a prominent topic at both the local and national level.

As discussed later in this section, there is a vast literature in the sociology of education that explores the outcomes of students as a consequence of their school environments, as well as literature that investigates issues of school diversity and the role it plays in educational outcomes for students. However, there is very little research that explores the role of school attendance boundaries on student outcomes, and there specifically exists no formal sociological perspective explaining the development, implementation, and modifications of student assignment policies in public school districts. This research therefore seeks to provide both a historical and contemporary understanding of the organizational and institutional patterns associated with developing and modifying student assignment plans by applying the concepts of new institutional theory to the unique case of three school districts in South Carolina that have been faced with the task of reallocating their students to new or existing schools.

It is the central objective of this study to examine how the assignment plans that were developed and implemented in these three school districts can be explained through the lens of a sociological theory of organizational environment and change. Seeking an appropriate explanation of the similarities and differences in the assignment policies that have been developed and implemented in these three districts, I address a series of related research questions: (a) What pressures are being faced by a district to modify its

assignment policy; (b) Where do these pressures stem from and who are the major actors exerting the pressures on each district; (c) Is there a particular template for assigning students that a district is being pressured to adopt; (d) What is the political context in which a school must develop and implement its reassignment plan; (e) What organizational strategy does the district employ to mediate the pressure to reassign students; and (f) To what degree does the resulting change in reassignment policy converge or deviate from the policies that have been instituted by neighboring districts.

To answer these questions I use a theoretical framework that illustrates the process of change in an institutionalized environment such as education. This framework, which is discussed further in the following section, is built on key concepts in new institutional theory and specifically relies on components of the theory that address the organizational environment and the strategies used by organizations to respond to pressures exerted by members of their environment regarding a perceived need for change. Institutional theory is a sociological theory that spans many disciplines and addresses a variety of organizational elements. I therefore begin by providing an overview of how the new institutional theory developed from the old institutional theory and explain how the more recent developments in institutionalism provide an important framework for investigating organizations such as school districts, school boards, and other organizations that are related to the process of educational policies and decision making. I then identify key components of institutional theory that can be integrated into a framework that specifically addresses how organizations respond to and implement new reassignment policies, and utilize this framework to address three specific reassignment plans that occurred in South Carolina's school districts. Using a case study approach and

employing document analysis has allowed me to gather the necessary information to conduct a thorough examination of these policies and to provide a much needed understanding of the process that schools engage in to determine how best to allocate their resources among the students and families in their local communities.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This research uses the theoretical framework of institutionalism to examine the behaviors of school districts in South Carolina as they develop, adopt, and implement reassignment plans in response to demographic changes within their communities. I specifically focus on the antecedents associated with the necessity for each district to consider and adopt a reassignment plan and the strategies that are employed by these districts as a result of these motivating factors. Using institutional theory as a general guide, I create a comprehensive framework from the expansive literature regarding organizational changes that can account for the variety of responses that have taken place in South Carolina's school districts over the last decade. The review begins with a general overview of the developments and trends in institutional theory and then proceeds to explain a selection of institutional models that are useful in understanding the motivations, process, and results of the changes experienced by South Carolina schools.

Institutional Theories: From Old to New

The evolution of institutional theory dates back as far as Max Weber (1947), and has grown to such an extent that a clear distinction is now made between the old and new institutionalisms. The foundations of old institutionalism are most notably conceptualized in the works of Philip Selznick (1948) and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967).

Both Selznick (1948) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) drew on Weber's (1947) views of social and economic organization to describe organizations as rational systems that require leadership and membership of rational actors to achieve greater efficiency, calculability, and rationality. Selznick (1948) also argued similarly to Weber that routines and practices become institutionalized over time by adapting to external environments with the goal of ensuring organizational survival and success through continued efficiency; the routines and practices reduce uncertainty by constraining human behavior and increasing predictability. Berger and Luckmann (1967) also laid important groundwork for institutional theory through their assertions regarding the social creation of reality. A key element in studying institutions and organizations was the "recognition of humans' symbolic interpretations of rules and conventions that produce cognitive frameworks" (Berger & Luckmann 1967:16). In general, the early form of institutionalism emphasized the capacity of people and organizations to rationally construct their environments and focus their attention on the dynamics of organizational change (Hirsch & Lounsbury 1997). Much of the literature coming from this perspective focused on the relationship between an organization and its environment and portrayed organizations as actors responding to situational circumstances in order to adapt and secure an appropriate technical or market based fit among other organizations (Greenwood et al. 2008).

The works by recent sociologists, such as John Meyer, Brian Rowan, Lynne Zucker, Paul DiMaggio, Walter Powell, Richard Scott, and Pamela Tolbert in the late 1970s and early 1980s represented a paradigm shift from the old institutionalism to what is now referred to as the *new* institutionalism. Beginning with the two seminal papers of

both Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Zucker (1977), the focus of organizational research shifted to understanding institutions as a result of human activities, and understanding the process of institutionalization as one that tends to reduce diversity in exchange for greater homogeneity among institutions within the same fields (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). In contrast to the old institutionalism, a distinctive feature of the new institutionalism became that it "departs from …technically oriented approaches by turning our attention to *institutional* environments," and that it "focuses on organizational rules and rituals" (Orru et al. 1991: 361). Rather than viewing organizations as rational actors that are continually adapting and changing to achieve greater performance, organizations are seen as captives within their environments with a goal of greater legitimacy. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) further clarify this distinction by suggesting that Weber's (1968) emphasis on the competitive market as a driving force in organizational change should be replaced with a view of institutional change shaped more strongly by the demand for legitimacy through conformity or *institutional isomorphism*. They stress the understanding that although organizations may appear to be changing and adapting to achieve greater productivity, they are actually changing in ways that reproduce behaviors of other organizations that are believed to have a high level of legitimacy within the field.

New Institutionalism

The central theme of studies in new institutionalism is to account for isomorphism in organizational fields. These studies emphasize the pursuit of legitimacy rather than efficiency and maintain that legitimacy is "an organizational 'imperative' that is both a source of inertia and a summons to justify particular forms and practices" (Selznick 1996: 271). Organizations are pressured to enhance their legitimacy, not their efficiency, and do

so by conforming to the practices and structures around them perceived to be most legitimate. Both the perception of legitimacy and the pressures to conform to a particular type of legitimacy are social constructs influenced by similar organizations within the same institutional environment.

Meyer and Rowan were initially interested in understanding the process of rationalization and diffusion of formal bureaucracies which they saw as inherently tied to "the complexity of networks of social organization and exchange" and "the institutional context" (1977:346), and they paid particular attention to how organizations relate to their environments through the development of structural elements which lead organizations who serve similar functions to resemble each other in structure (Meyer & Rowan 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) also built upon this idea arguing that there exists an "organizational field" which is "those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services and products" (p. 148). Organizations within a field develop shared systems of meanings and a socially constructed reality through interactions with each other, and it is this shared belief system that defines the boundaries of the field (Greenwood et al. 2008). As an organizational field becomes structurated, or institutionalized, it begins to exert a powerful influence on the behavior of the other organizations within them. These pressures are summarized in three concepts put forth by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and have been used to answer the question of "why there is such startling homogeneity of organizational forms and practices" (p. 148). Coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures

cause organizations within a field to become increasingly homogenous as they collectively strive for rationality and legitimacy.

Coercive isomorphism describes the process of an organizational field becoming increasing similar because the organizations within the field are conforming to requirements of the state (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Coercive forces can be exerted by the government, regulatory, or other agencies and are often associated with legal requirements, health and safety regulations, or contractual obligations with other actors, and constrain organizational variety. Scott (1987) comments that "an institutional perspective gives special emphasis to authority relations: the ability of organizations, especially public organizations, to rely on legitimate coercion" (p. 502). The role of coercive forces, then, highlights the impact of political rather than technical influences on organizational change.

Mimetic isomorphism results when organizations imitate other organizations' processes, structures, or practices and specifically, "organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful" (DiMaggio & Powell 1983:152). This process occurs especially under conditions of uncertainty when actors are unsure of the relationship between organizational means and ends (Ashworth et al. 2007). When faced with uncertainty, organizations look to their peer organizations that have a perceived high level of legitimacy and adopt structures and practices that have already been deemed legitimate by others in their field (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Mimetic isomorphism may be undertaken without any clear evidence of performance improvements, only a *perceived*

legitimacy, and therefore can be used to explain the widespread adoption of, practices for which there is little empirical evidence of performance benefits.

Normative isomorphism describes the effect of professionalization, a process of defining conditions, standards, and boundaries of professional practices, on organizational characteristics (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). Organizations are expected to conform to standards of their professional communities and adopt systems and practices that are considered to be legitimate. Therefore, professional communities influence organizations to collectively develop a set of practices and frameworks that reflects collective beliefs and conventions within a professional grouping. Once theses sets of standards are established, they tend to become taken for granted and reproduced through the education, training, and certification through professional bodies (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

The concept of isomorphism is therefore used often in institutional theory as a way to explain how organizations tend to change their structure to reflect changes in their environment by imitating external environmental elements. Some argue that this isomorphism is a result of interdependence between organizations and their environments, while others argue that isomorphism symbolizes that organizational leaders learn from their external environment and make behavioral adjustments to reflect that knowledge (Hannan & Freeman 1977). Regardless of its nature, isomorphism promotes the success and survival of organizations, especially when their structural elements are subject to evaluation by others in similar fields (Meyer & Rowan 1977). However, isomorphic changes do not necessarily promote internal

efficiency; rather, they are strategies for organizations to establish legitimacy and their

position within an organizational field.

Education from an Institutional Perspective

Institutional theory helps explain the role of the environment in shaping organizational

development by reinforcing and reproducing existing structures and processes. The

sphere of education is an ideal example of one such field that has benefited from this

institutional perspective, especially in recent years. Much of the early work that examined

education through the lens of institutionalism attempted to understand education in the

context of larger worldwide patterns and as cases studies of broad social phenomena (see

Meyer et al. 1981). More recently, however, institutional scholars have begun to shift

their focus to micro-level processes such as the interactions between educational policies

and teaching practices in the classroom (Burch 2002; Burch & Spillane 2004; Coburn

2001; Ogawa 1992; Spillane & Burch 2006). Overall, institutional analyses of public

education have increased in the last decade and have brought much attention to the role

of broader cultural norms influencing organizational behavior (Scott 1995; Scott &

Christensen 1995). By incorporating the concept of organizational field, the institutional

perspective allows for an expanded understanding of the range of relevant actors and the

links between individuals and organizations that are involved in similar aspects of

educational practices but play different roles.

The connection between education and institutional theory dates back to the

formation of the new institutional perspective. New institutionalism began as a response

to limitations of the old institutionalism, specifically the recognition that certain

organizations, especially educational organizations such as schools, did not seem to

conform to key tenets of the older institutional theory. For example, although bureaucratic hierarchies were assumed to be held together by tight relations between the top and bottom levels, scholars began to see evidence that higher and lower levels of the hierarchy in schools and colleges often were *loosely* coupled (Meyer & Rowan 1978; Weick 1976; March 1981). Moreover, although early institutional theory predicted that these loosely coupled organizations would be unstable, they instead proved to be remarkably stable over a long period of time. Meyer (1977) therefore argued that the effects of schools on students were more subject to institutional authority than to the internal structure and network of schools, and that schools were in fact institutionalized organizations, whose most important constraint was not efficiency but rather legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Meyer 1977; Meyer & Scott 1983; March 1981).

Studies of schools, school districts, and community colleges have all been used to further illustrate this phenomena (see Brint & Karabel 1991; DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Meyer & Scott 1983; Meyer et al. 1987). These studies have focused on two main themes: How organizations that have little interaction and are located in diverse settings adopt policies and practices that are similar, and on how what happens at the top of the organization is minimally connected to what happens at the technical core of the organization (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Meyer et al 1981; Ogawa 1992). The first theme emphasizes the deeply rooted norms and routines of practice in the schools, and uses examples such as how ideas of school based management, the modern university, and mass education are replicated across time and geographic location (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Meyer et al. 1981; Ogawa 1992). The second theme is more frequently applied to policy research and seeks to explain the perceived break between policy

design, practice, and implementation (Meyer & Rowan 1978; Weick 1976). For example, there are many instances of school reform policies that have been faithfully implemented yet very few examples of sustained improvements at the core of schooling (Burch 2010).

According to new institutional theory, maintaining legitimacy is the primary concern of schools and causes schools to incorporate the practices and procedures institutionalized in the wider society to keep the appearance of legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Further, according to institutional theory, it is the process of decoupling that enhances and maintains the legitimacy of the educational organization. The loose coupling of educational organizations means that educational organizations do not normally dictate what is taught in the classrooms or how it is taught, have weak formal inspection of instruction, few detailed standards of instructional content or procedure, and little direct authority over instructional work (Meyer & Rowan 1978). Decoupling also strengthens the stability of the educational organization because a lack of close coordination makes schools more impervious to radical change. Further, schools may only respond to actions proposed by significant institutions like the government, but only when their legitimacy is threatened. Even then, schools may only make symbolic changes that imitate the successful actions performed by more prestigious schools.

Although loose coupling is still a commonly applied concept in institutional theory, over the past twenty years many reforms at the local, state, and national level appear to have resulted in a tighter coupling within educational systems. For example, site-based management and state-wide testing regulations have significantly increased the authority of school principals by giving them greater control over the classroom work of their teachers. Further, state education departments have also gained decision making

power in the classroom as illustrated in Texas where a state-wide test of public schools holds schools accountable for results, in California where schools are only allowed to order textbooks only from a prescribed list compiled by the state education departments, in New York, where public schools follow a state-designed curriculum that is followed by a complementary end of the year test, and in Wisconsin where the state allows low income students to use public funds to transfer to other public schools, private schools, or parochial schools (Greene 2000; Binder 1998; Witte 1996).

The introduction of the concept of organizational field in institutionalism has been another important addition that made this framework useful for examining the dynamics of schools. The conception of fields has its roots in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and the development of field analysis in cultural sociology. Field analysis allows for social scientific analysis through an interest in forces, dynamics, and processes as opposed to more static variables such as categories and social groups (Fligstein & McAdam 2011), and builds on Bourdieu's (1998; 2000) theory that there is a two-way relationship between the structures of social fields, habitus, and political life and that fields are only viable if their logics are embedded, for the most part unconsciously, in agents' dispositions. Fligstein and McAdam (2011) build upon these ideas, as well as elements of new institutionalism and assert that scholars of organizations and institutional actors are fundamentally concerned with "efforts of collective actors to vie for strategic advantage in and through interaction with other groups" or "strategic action fields" (pp. 4).

Educational organizations, like any other type of organization, exist in what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) called an organizational field. According to the concept of organizational fields, schools are located in specific organizational environments that

exert coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures to produce a common, although distinct set of organizational forms (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Although old institutionalism had adopted the perspective that schools lacked variation, the concept of organizational fields allowed for a reexamination of the role of school communities with an emphasis not just on the earlier examined demographic and cultural characteristics of local communities, but on legal climates, regulatory contexts, and political institutions as well as other relevant organizations (Meyer et al. 1987; Meyer et al. 1998). Further, the new institutionalism posits that schools are not simply embedded in local communities, but in larger fields that include governmental actors, suppliers, consumers, regulators (Scott 1995; Burch 2010) accreditation agencies, teacher training programs, state boards of education, state legislatures, courts, universities, parent groups, and textbook producers (Hanson 2001), and these fields cause educational practices to become a reflection of a school's institutional community than of a school's neighborhood or community (Scott & Meyer 1994; DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 1991).

The formal and informal expectations, regulations, information flows, norms, myths, values, laws and other factors impacting schools develops a form of connectedness that causes the interaction between organizations to become patterned through information sharing, contractual relationships, formal and informal agreements, and mutual awareness of governance procedures (Scott et al. 2000). As connections and accommodations are made and reinforced between the organizations in a school's field, the field begins to act like a network of constraints. For example, textbooks are written and teacher training programs are shaped to accommodate state board standards, which are framed by state and federal legislation, which must respect limits imposed by courts,

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and so forth (Hanson 2001). The pressures on schools from organizations and agencies in their organizational are similar across the country, and in consequence, schools in one region tend to act like schools in other regions just as is described by the process of institutional isomorphism (Hanson 2001).

Although there are many similarities in organizations that are due to wider institutional beliefs, new institutionalism shows us that local variation among schools still exists, and that at least part of this variation is related to local political conditions (Hannaway 1993). Although the wider institutional environment may explain why educational organizations are so similar to each other in the belief systems and expectations about how schools should operate (Meyer et al. 1987), each school's particular local environment may offer explanations regarding the differences among them (Hannaway 1993). For example, in some areas unions are an especially powerful component of the institutional environment whereas in other areas they may play a more marginal role. In some states educational policies are aggressively dictated at the state level and in other states these policies are only passively imposed (Hannaway 1993). As I will show later in my research on the York, Dorchester 2, and Greenville school districts, these variations in a school's local environment shape the strategies employed by each district and allow for similar outcomes in reassignment policy developed through a diverse set of approaches.

The literature on education and institutionalism identifies at least three external forces that may bring about organizational change and variation: environmental shifts, environmental regression, and environmental shocks (Hanson 2001). Environmental shock is a condition in which changes in the educational system's external environment

changes in a way that makes small, incremental adaptations impossible. For example, shifts in technology such as the introduction of the hand held calculator and the internet, shifts in laws such as the integration of schools, and shifts in public awareness such as the publication of "A Nation at Risk" that showed American students ranking extremely low academically in comparison to other industrialized nations (Hanson 1991). Environmental regression occurs when the activities of an organization move so far beyond the accepted norms of an institution that its legitimacy is questioned, and consequently environmental pressures are exerted to initiate changes needed to bring the organization back in line with the accepted standards (Hanson 2001). An environmental shift occurs when one or more of the organizations in a field modify some aspect of an expectation or requirement that has been placed on a school, such as a new court decision or a state mandated change in testing procedures (Hanson 2001). Oliver (1991) identifies five strategies an organization can use to accommodate environmental shifts: acquiesce (schools can do what is expected of them), avoid (delay a policy implementation and hope that it is repealed), compromise (create a modified version of some expectation), refuse (attack the new procedure or policy as ideologically or culturally wrong), or manipulate (flat out reject and attempt to change the expected change). These strategies are reviewed in the following section and are then used specifically to create a framework for understanding the development of reassignment policies in the three districts under review for this study.

In an effort to summarize the dearth of literature on institutionalism and educational organizations, Burch (2007) outlines several core ideas that have been central to institutional analyses of educational policies and practices. First, the practices and

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policies adopted by schools and governing agencies reflect the rules and structures in wider society (Meyer et al. 1992; Meyer & Rowan 1978; Meyer & Scott 1983; Meyer et al. 1988; Ogawa 1992). The work of Meyer and Rowan (1977) specifically focused on the idea that educational agencies are not simply affected by external pressures, but that external pressures and cultural values can also give shape to educational agencies, which in turn helps to determine what schools are and what society should expect from them. Second, institutional theory offers explanations for why organizations that are located in very diverse settings and that may have very little interaction nevertheless adopt policies and practices that are very similar (structural isomorphism). Many scholars have used this concept, specifically applying it to the case of educational policies and reforms (see Ogawa 1992; Rowan 1982, 1995, 2001; Rowan & Miskel 1999; Tyack & Tobin 1994), arguing that the popularity of many of the reform strategies that have been instituted since the 1980s and 1990s are derived from institutional pressures and fueled by schools' efforts to imitate other schools that are presumed to have high levels of legitimacy in their fields. Lastly, loose coupling draws attention to the circumstances where policy practices are often loosely coupled with policy makers' intentions as a way to maintain legitimacy in an organizational field (see Coburn 2004; Driscoll 1995; Malen et al. 1990; Rowan & Miskel 1999).

In sum, educational studies that draw on institutional theory have brought a much needed contribution to the understanding of how educational policies and practices interact with institutional environments to shape a variety of outcomes. Specifically, these studies have drawn attention to the role of many different actors in shaping whether and how policies and practices achieve their intended impacts, and have contributed

different explanations of why schools and governing agencies with different needs in diverse settings adopt practices and policies that look the same (Burch 2007). Institutional theory has been widely applied to the realm of education starting with Weick's (1976) work on loose coupling in educational organizations and eventually encompassing such phenomena as the structure of schools and school districts (Rowan & Miskel 1999); how educational organizations learn (Hanson 2001); how new education policy impacts school districts (Burch 2007; Firestone et al. 1999; Fusarelli 2002); how global institutions impact national and state education systems (LeTendre et al. 2001); and how educators react to their institutional environments at the micro-level (Bidwell 2001; Coburn 2001). These concepts regarding the reproduction of legitimized policies are further discussed in the section on organizational responses to institutional pressures.

Institutionalism and Organizational Change

Despite the contributions institutional theories have made to the understanding of educational organizations, there has been limited and varied research detailing the explicit *process* of how an organization, such as a school district, might respond to pressures that are exerted from the institutional environment. This next section, therefore, provides an integration of key concepts from institutional theory that can be applied to the case of educational organizations to serve as a guiding framework that allows for an understanding of the connections between the general concepts of institutionalism and the process and rationality that exists during a period of time when and educational organization must respond to pressures exerted within its institutional environment.

Types of Change: Convergent or Radical

Although a majority of studies framed in the institutional perspective have readily accepted the existence and perpetuation of isomorphic change, recent studies have begun to criticize such a strong focus on homogeneity and the absence of research regarding the possibility of variation through substantial change (DiMaggio 1988). It is therefore important to understand and consider the possibility that different types of triggering events may lead to a variation in the changes that an organization or organizational field experiences (Goodrick & Salanick 1996; Oliver 1992). Rather than assuming that all responses by an organization will be isomorphic in natures, understanding the organizational field as providing a "template for organizing" (DiMaggio & Powell 1991: 27), makes it possible to also consider the possibility for radical change as discussed in the following section (Greenwood & Hinnings 1996).

Convergent or isomorphic change occurs within an already existing template and is the focus of much of the framework of institutionalism discussed so far. With convergent change, organizational change is structured around an already existing or accepted template which maintains the stability of the organizations and the organizational field despite changes in the larger environment (Tolbert & Zucker 1983). Organizations are strongly influenced by the aforementioned pressures for compliance exerted by their organizational fields. These influences are also reinforced through 'institutional logics' or broader cultural templates (Friedland & Alford 1991). Therefore, actors in organizational fields develop an iron cage that constrains action because "social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule like status in social thought and action" (Meyer & Rowan 1977:341). Once an organizational field has been

established, whatever change does occur tends toward greater conformity (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Scott 1987). Unwritten rules about how things should be done and what behaviors are considered legitimate become 'taken for granted' within the cognitive schema of the organizational field and therefore become difficult to change even when new laws and regulations occur in the external environment that should lead to significant changes within an organization (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). As templates become taken for granted within an organizational field, actors unknowingly accept the existing templates as the only or the only acceptable way of operating (Greenwood & Hinnings 1996). Therefore, although organizations may experience change, the nature of the change becomes one of constant reproduction and reinforcement of existing templates of thought and organization (Greenwood & Hinnings 1996).

Clemens and Cook (1999), also add to the literature of understanding isomorphic change by focusing on the likelihood of "institutional reproduction" as related to how tightly coupled the networks are within an organizational field (p. 450). For Clemens and Cook (1999), change can occur due to an internal change regarding what is organizationally possible, because of internal contradictions caused by challenges to the status quo from individuals within the organization, or when an organization recognizes that similar institutions are following or adopting different patterns of behavior. Regardless of the motivation to change, organizations will tend toward "choice within constraints" (Clemens & Cook 1999: 446), and are less likely to change when they are surrounded by a tightly coupled network because the more tightly coupled an organization is within its field, the more likely the field is to exert pressures that contain, diffuse, or mediate any significant external or internal changes (Clemens & Cook 1999).

Recently, though, some studies in the institutional perspective have begun to question the assumption of institutional conformity and have pointed to the existence of radical change - when an organization moves entirely from one template that is currently being used to another (see Greenwood & Hinnings 1996; Fligstein & McAdam 2011). Although the majority of new institutional theory view organizational fields as arenas of routine social order and reproduction, Fligstein and McAdam (2011) disagree, arguing that there is a constant jockeying going on within any given field due to the inherent nature of a field comprised of actors of varying power levels making adjustments to the conditions of their given fields based on the actions of others. When fields are oriented toward settlement among actors, conflict may be lessened and the positions of actors may be reproduced, but the relationships and meanings that are created or re-established can also be undermined at any time leading to instability of change within the organizational field (Fligstein & McAdam 2011).

Similarly, Greenwood et al. (2002) explain that radical institutional change can occur when an event jolts or destabilizes established practices. Those events allow for new actors to enter the organization, they may be used to change the roles of existing actors, or they may be used as a way to introduce new ideas and therefore the possibility of substantial change (Tolbert 1996). Examples of some instances of radical change can be found in the works of Townely (2002) and Davis and Greve (1997) where the authors focused on a 'shocking' event that caused organizations to adopt radically different structures or behaviors than those that previously existed within their organizational fields. Kraatz and Zajac (1996) also put forth evidence of radical change in their study of how low status colleges did *not* make changes to resemble their higher status

counterparts, and Washington and Ventresca (2004)'s study of strategies used by intercollegiate athletic departments showed no evidence that strategies were adopted in a similar fashion among the different organizations they reviewed. Although these findings challenge the proposition of isomorphism, specifically mimetic isomorphism, the existence of radical change is still empirically difficult to capture and therefore makes subsequent theorizing about its existence infrequent in current institutional literature. Further, although the possibility of radical change exists, the more embedded an organization is within its field and the tighter the coupling an organization has to a prevailing template, the more difficult it is for an organization to be in a position where it can achieve a radical change.

Responses to Institutional Pressures

Although organizations tend to change in an isomorphic way, the motivations, processes and outcomes of change processes do contain variation. Oliver (1991) has put forth one of the most comprehensive summaries of the behaviors organizations may enact in response to pressures from their institutional environments. Oliver (1991) proposes five strategic responses all of which include the role of active agency in organization-environment relations to studies that have been mostly dominated by a focus on only the institutional environment on structural conformity. These strategies include: acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation. The inclusion of active agency has particular relevance to the case of school reassignment plans in South Carolina, as they must be decided upon and implemented through many local and internal school actors.

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Organizations acquiesce to conformity though habit, imitation or compliance. Habit refers to "unconscious blind adherence to preconscious of taken-for-granted rules or values," whereby "organizations reproduce actions and practices of the institutional environment that have become historically repeated, customary, conventional, or taken-for-granted" (Oliver 1991:152). Imitation is consistent with the concept of mimetic isomorphism and refers to "either conscious or unconscious mimicry of institutional models, including, for example, the imitation of successful organizations" (Oliver 1991: 152). Lastly, compliance is defined as "conscious obedience to or incorporation of values, norms, or institutional requirements" (Oliver 1991:152), and is a more active form than imitation or habit because it requires that an organization consciously and strategically choose to comply with a particular pressure with the anticipation of some self-serving benefit (Scott 1991, DiMaggio 1988, Meyer & Rowan 1983). Compliance may enhance an organization's legitimacy by reducing its vulnerability to negative assessments of its conducts, products, or services (Oliver 1991). Overall, acquiescence depends on an organization's intent to conform, its awareness of the general institutional processes, and the expectation of whether the strategy will prove to be self-serving (Oliver 1991).

When organizations are met with conflicting or inconsistent institutional demands, acquiescence may not be an option regardless of the enhanced legitimacy it may supply. Instead, organizations my find themselves in a situation where they need to employ a compromising strategy by balancing, pacifying, or bargaining. Balancing refers to "the accommodation of multiple constituent demands in response to institutional pressures and expectations" (Oliver 1991:153). This strategy is employed most often in

cases where external expectations for multiple constituents conflict. Pacification is similar to balancing, but differs in that an organization "mounts a minor level of resistance to institutional pressures, but devotes most of its energies to appeasing or placating the institutional source or sources it has resisted" (Oliver 1991:154). Bargaining is the more active form of compromising and involves the effort of the organization to "exact some concessions from an external constituent in its demands or expectations" (Oliver 1991:154). This strategy assumes that an organizational environment is open to negotiating and exchanging among constituents. In general, organizations that compromise are more active in promoting their own interests by only partially complying with their institutional pressures (Oliver 1991).

Avoidance is an important form of response acknowledged by (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 1983; Meyer et al. 1983; Powell 1988; and Scott 1987) and is defined as "the organizational attempt to preclude the necessity of conformity" and is achieved by "concealing their nonconformity, buffering themselves from institutional pressures, or escaping from institutional rules or expectations" (Oliver 1991:154). An organization may establish elaborate procedures in response to institutional requirements in order to disguise the fact that they do not intend to implement them (Oliver 1991). This has been referred to in institutionalism as ritualism, ceremony, and symbolic acceptance (Meyer & Rowan 1977), and is therefore distinguished from acquiescence and compliance due to the lack of real conformity to institutional pressures. Buffering refers to "an organization's attempt to reduce the extent to which it is externally inspected, scrutinized, or evaluated by partially detaching or decoupling its technical activities from external contact" (Oliver 1991:155). Institutional theorists have extensively elaborated this idea in

the literature pointing to examples where internal work activities are decoupled from formal structures as a means of maintaining legitimacy, specifically in school instruction and production organizations (Meyer & Rowan 1983; Powell 1988). The most extreme avoidance response is escape in which an organization may "significantly alter its own goals, activities, or domain to avoid the necessity to conform altogether" (Oliver 1991:155). Rather than attempting to partially or totally conform to institutional pressures, escape is motivated by "the desire to circumvent the conditions that make conforming behavior necessary" (Oliver 1991:156).

Defiance is one of the most active forms of resistance to institutional pressure and can take the form of dismissal, challenge, or attack (Oliver 1991). Dismissal is the process of "ignoring institutional rules and values" and is likely to occur "when the potential for external enforcement of institutional rules is perceived to be low or when internal objectives diverge or conflict very dramatically with institutional values or requirements" (Oliver 1991: 56). A challenge to institutional pressure occurs if an organization "goes on the offensive in defiance of these pressures and may indeed make a virtue of their insurrection" (Oliver 1991:156). For example, although there is a widely accepted understanding of what a school *should* be, there exist alternative schools that have departed from these generally accepted definitions. Organizations are more prone to challenging when "the challenge can be reinforced by demonstrations of organizational probity or rationality" (Oliver 1991:156). Attack differs from challenge in its level of intensity and aggressiveness (Oliver 1991). Organizations that engage in attack "strive to assault, belittle, or vehemently denounce institutionalized values and the external constituents that express them" (Oliver 1991:157). This form is likely to occur when

"institutional values and expectations are organization-specific rather than general or defocalized, when these values and expectations are particularly negative and discrediting, or when the organization believes that its rights, privileges, or autonomy are in serious jeopardy" (Oliver 1991:157). In contrast to the other strategies discussed, defiance is an "unequivocal rejection of institutional norms and expectations" and occurs when the cost of departure appears to be low, when internal and external values diverge, when organizations feel that they are able to demonstrate rationality on their own, and when organizations believe they have little to lose by antagonizing the constituents that oppose them (Oliver 1991:157).

The last strategy that an organization may employ in response to institutional pressure is manipulation. Manipulation is the most active response and "is intended to actively change or exert power over the content of the expectations themselves or the sources that seek to express or enforce them" (Oliver 1991:157). Manipulation can occur through attempts to co-opt, influence, or control institutional pressures (Oliver 1991). Co-opting an institutional pressure is an "attempt to persuade an institutional constituent to join the organization," and the intended use of such a technique is to "neutralize institutional opposition and enhance legitimacy" (Oliver 1991:157) as is often seen in coalition building attempts. Influence tactics tend to be "directed toward institutionalized values and beliefs or definitions and criteria of acceptable practices or performance" (Oliver 1991: 158), and because organizational performance is institutionally defined, much of the criteria or definitions regarding acceptable performance are open to reinterpretation and manipulation (Oliver 1991). Controlling tactics are "specific efforts to establish power and dominance over the external constituents that are applying

pressure on the organization" (Oliver 1991:158), and are more actively aggressive because they seek to dominate rather than shape or neutralize pressure. These manipulative responses share a common theme, regarding pressures and expectations as malleable and not constraints that must be accepted.

Motivations for Change

According to Oliver (1991), organizational responses to institutional pressures are dependent on an understanding of why these pressures are being exerted, who is exerting them, what form these pressures take, through what means they are exerted, and in what context the pressures are being exerted. Institutional literature suggests that there are two main motives for institutional pressures: social legitimacy and economic efficiency. When an organization anticipates that conformity will enhance legitimacy or economic efficiency, change will most likely result through a process of acquiescence (Oliver 1991). The constituents within an organization and within an organizational field, including the state, interest groups, and the general public, impose laws, regulations, and expectations on organizations. The way in which constituents affect the process of change depends on two factors: are there multiple conflicting pressures being brought forth from constituents and how strongly does a particular organization depend on its constituents. When the multiplicity of constituent demands is high, the probability of acquiescence is low and organizations are more likely to rely on compromise, avoidance, defiance, or manipulation techniques. When there is a strong dependence on organizational constituents, acquiescence and compromise are more likely while avoidance, defiance, and manipulation are generally lower (Oliver 1991; DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

To what norms and requirements an organization is being pressured to conform is another important element of the change process that must be considered (Oliver 1991). If the pressures being exerted are consistent with the goals of the organization acquiescence to the pressures is more likely. Moderate consistency between organizational goals and the pressures being exerted results in compromise and avoidance, and low consistency results leads to the adoption of defiance or manipulative responses (Oliver 1991; Powell 1988). The feeling of constraint, or the loss of autonomy an organization may experience due to the pressures exerted on them can also affect the process of change. The less constraint an organization experiences the more likely they are to acquiesce. A moderate loss of autonomy will cause an organization to use some form of compromise, while a more sever loss of autonomy will result in avoidance, defiance, and manipulative tactics (Oliver 1991).

Whether or not pressures to conform occur through legal coercion or voluntary diffusion also impact how organizations response to the impetus of change. When legal coercion is high organizations are highly likely to acquiesce because it is in their best interest so as not to receive any legal retribution (Oliver 1991). Moderate amounts of coercion may result in either compromise or avoidance, and low levels of coercion most likely results in defiance or manipulation. Expectations or practices may also be diffused throughout an organization field in a voluntary manner. Consistent with mimetic isomorphism, the more broadly diffused an organizational practice is, the more likely organizations are to conform to those expectations or practices (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Fligstein 1985; Tolbert & Zucker 1983; Oliver 1991). On the other hand, when a

set of values, practices, or expectations are not widely diffused within an organizational field, the more likely organizations are to resist them (Oliver 1991).

The last motivating factor that must be considered in the process of organizational change is the environmental context in which institutional pressures are being exerted. Pressures can be exerted in an uncertain environment or within one that contains a high degree of interconnectedness with other organizations (Oliver 1991). Environmental uncertainty refers to "the degree to which future states of the world cannot be anticipated or accurately predicted" (Pfeffer & Salanick 1978:67), while environmental interconnectedness refers to the number of inter-organizational relationships that exist within a given organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Pfeffer & Salanick 1978; Oliver 1991). When environmental uncertainty is high, an organization will most likely use a strategy of acquiescence, compromise, or avoidance (Oliver 1991), and organizations are also more likely to mimic one another (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Organizations are also likely to acquiesce, compromise, or avoid when the institutional environment is highly connected (Oliver 1991), which is consistent with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) argument that high degrees of interconnectedness and structuration in the institutional environment lead to isomorphism and conformity.

Framework for Understanding School Responses to Demographic Change

Based on the literature review, the goal of this project turns to integrating relevant components of the vast literature of institutionalism in an effort to create a comprehensive lens through which the specific cases of student reassignment policy changes can be better understood. The central theme of studies in new institutionalism is

to account for isomorphism in organizational fields, with a strong emphasis on the pursuit of legitimacy rather than efficiency. Therefore, the fundamental perspective held by most scholars of institutionalism is that organizations are pressured to enhance their legitimacy by conforming to the practices and structures around them that are perceived to be most legitimate. They further stress that although organizations may appear to be changing and adapting to achieve greater productivity, they are actually changing in ways that reproduce behaviors of other organizations or taken for granted procedures that have been perceived to achieve a desired level of legitimacy within a particular field.

These classic formulations of new institutionalism, however, under appreciate the range of responses an organization has to pressures from constituents in an organizational field. Although organizations that attempt to change in response to pressures from their constituents may often end up reproducing an existing template from their organizational field that does not necessarily mean that all organizations will respond in the same ways to the pressures they experience. The work of Oliver (1991) and Fligstein and McAdam (2011) attempt to address that limitation by proposing a series of strategic responses organizations may enact when pressured from a number of constituents or in response to a variety of triggering events. These responses are meant to describe a *process* that organizations undergo when responding to the demands of their fields rather than solely focusing on the resulting conformity of the organization.

According to new institutional theory, maintaining legitimacy is the primary concern of schools and causes schools to incorporate the practices and procedures institutionalized in the wider society to keep the appearance of legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Therefore, this study incorporates the assumption that schools are seeking

legitimacy and will do so by continuing to engage in institutional isomorphism, as well as Oliver's (1991) conceptualization of organizational responses, which can account for variation in the process of how schools arrive at their isomorphic outcomes. Although I rely heavily on Oliver's (1991) framework of strategic responses to demonstrate how each of the school districts employed a variety of strategies to cope with the pressures being exerted upon them, I also seek to account for the role of isomorphism and the pursuit of legitimacy as an important source of inertia for the adoption of a particular reassignment plan.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL REASSIGNMENT PLANS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

This study empirically investigates the process of developing and implementing school reassignment plans in three South Carolina school districts. Over the last decade, many school districts in South Carolina have altered their school attendance zoning maps in response to a number of demographic and policy changes at local, state and federal levels. Most commonly, these changes have been made to address issues of overcrowding and to replace outdated facilities across the state (Facilities Survey 2009). Although the reassignment policy changes in South Carolina have been largely driven by these two factors, any school reassignment plan in the state may also occur in the context of a particular legal framework, past or present, due to South Carolina's long history with de jure and de facto school segregation practices.

Desegregation Policies in South Carolina

South Carolina, like other states in the south, has a long history of racial segregation in its schools. At the time of the Supreme Court Ruling in Brown v Board of Education, all public schools in South Carolina were segregated by race, and following the ruling 34 of the 85 districts we placed under federal desegregation mandates (SC Advisory Committee 2008). Although 51 districts were not placed under court ordered desegregation, those districts were responsible for reaching a voluntary agreement with the Department of Education indicating how they would comply with desegregation

efforts. Of the 34 districts that were initially placed under a federal mandate, 19 have since been granted unitary status and have been released from their federal desegregation plans (SC Advisory Committee 2008). Interestingly, 16 of those 19 districts were only recently granted unitary status; occurring between 1991 and 2007 (SC Advisory Committee 2008).

Federal desegregation orders require school boards to undertake specific actions to accomplish desegregation goals, and courts are supposed to enforce these orders until all the effects of past discrimination have been remedied. When a school district is under a federal desegregation mandate they face factors such as; needing to seek permission from the court before district decisions on school closures and openings, attendance zones, tax rate changes, and facility improvements can be made, mandatory busing of students to non-neighborhood schools, needing to seek permission for the use of state facilities funding or possible denial of such funds, paying fees associated with desegregation orders including transportation and legal fees, and the inability to open charter schools that do not contribute specifically to the reduction of racial imbalance (Orfield et al. 1997). These factors indicate that for many districts in South Carolina, policy changes that affect student's assignment are influenced to some degree by either the existence of such orders either presently or in the past.

Whether legally enforced, or voluntarily achieved, racial segregation in South Carolina's schools has created a climate of racially conscious policies that have even recently been important for many of the state's school districts. It follows then that, school districts in South Carolina fall into three distinct categories. Districts have either been placed under a federally mandated order to desegregate and are currently still under

that jurisdiction, were placed under a court order, but have since achieved unitary status and been released from federal enforcement, or have never been formally placed under a court order to desegregate and instead have developed a voluntary compliance agreement to maintain racial balance among the student population. Therefore, three specific typologies are used in this study to account for the different climates in which reassignment decisions are made: districts that have attempted to maintain voluntary desegregation plans since the ruling in Brown v Board of Education, districts that are currently still under court ordered desegregation plans, and districts that were once under court ordered desegregation plans but have been granted unitary status.

Table 3.1 School District Desegregation Status

District Name	Case Name	Year Case Initiated	Year Unitary Status Attained
Dorchester County School District 2	U.S. v. Dorchester County School District No. 2	1968	N/A
Greenville County School District	Whittenberg v. School District of Greenville County	1969	1985
York County School District 3	N/A	N/A	N/A

School Districts Reviewed

For this research I reviewed one student reassignment plan from three school districts in South Carolina. Each district was chosen to represent a particular legal framework that may have impacted how school reassignment plans were developed: 1) districts with voluntary desegregation plans; 2) districts with court ordered desegregation plans; and 3) districts that have been granted unitary status after experiencing court ordered desegregation. It is anticipated that a district's experience with court ordered or voluntary

desegregation will affect to some degree the school board policies and the public attitudes regarding reassignment procedures that are discussed and eventually implemented.

As originally conceived, this project intended to include two typologies that addressed unitary status: recently granted unitary status versus long standing unitary status. Greenville School District would have satisfied the long standing unitary status category. However, the only district that would have met the research goals and could be classified having been granted unitary status recently was Lexington 1 School District. Despite several efforts, I was unable to conduct interviews with personnel from the district, and the amount of available archival data in the form of newspaper articles and school board meeting minutes was significantly less than that from the other three districts. Further, although Greenville School District experiences a long standing unitary status, throughout my interview with the Executive Director of the Planning, Demographics, and Transportation Department, it was apparent that the history of being under a court ordered desegregation plan in the past was still currently on the minds of the policy makers in the district. Therefore, I consolidated the two typologies into one that accounted for having been granted unitary status and will discuss the various implications of that legal framework in the section concerning Greenville School District's reassignment plan that accompanied the opening of Rudolph Gordon Elementary School.

Voluntary Desegregation: York County School District 3

York County School District 3 is also known as Rock Hill School District (RHSD) and is located in Rock Hill, South Carolina, approximately 20 miles south of Charlotte, NC. RHSD is the largest school district in York County. RHSD has never been

under a court mandated segregation plan, but in 1965, following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the district began to make changes in student school assignments aimed at achieving racially balanced schools (Smith et al. 2004). These initial changes were specifically aimed at gaining approval from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare which had threatened the district with an enforced desegregation procedure if it could not create appropriate levels of racial heterogeneity in its schools. Although the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare dropped all proceedings against RHSD in 1977, the district has continued to pay particular attention to issues of desegregation, and has since maintained relatively high levels of racial balance compared to other districts in the nation future (Smith et al. 2004).

Currently Under Court Ordered Desegregation: Dorchester School District 2

Unlike the voluntary efforts to achieve racial balance in RHSD, Dorchester School District 2, located in Dorchester County in the southern portion of South Carolina, has been under a court ordered desegregation plan since 1968. Although the superintendent has stated a desire to obtain a declaration of unitary status in the near future, that has not yet occurred (SC Advisory Committee 2008). Therefore, any student assignment policies should take racial balance, or the lack thereof. This district should exemplify the experience of a school district that must alleviate overcrowding while meeting racial guidelines set forth by the federal government.

Unitary Status: Greenville School District

Greenville County School District in located in the Upstate region of South Carolina and encompasses all of Greenville County including the city of Greenville. Not only is Greenville School District the largest school district in the state, it also has the state's largest school choice plan with approximately 14% of students exercising the

option to attend a school that they are not zoned for (CCD). Greenville County School District was put under a court ordered desegregation plan in 1969, but achieved and maintained unitary status since 1985 (SC Advisory Committee 2008). It is expected that although this district is no longer required to explicitly maintain racial balance at its schools, the vestiges of that process may still be on the minds of either school officials or community members that would like to see the district maintain the balance they worked to achieve in 1985.

Student Reassignment Plans

For each school district I reviewed one instance of school attendance boundary rezoning through the lens of the institutional change process outlined in the previous section. The reassignment plan for each district was chosen based on how recently the plan was implemented and what grade levels were involved in the reassignment plan. There is a consensus among most theories of child development as well as in the field of education studies that regularity and stability are most important in early learning environments such as elementary schools (Cole and Cole 1993) and that these disruptions are associated with lower school achievement (Alexander et al 1996; Ream 2005), increased risk of dropping out (Ou and Reynolds 2008; Rumberger and Larson 1998; South et al 2007), increased need for remedial education (Alexander et al. 1996; Ou and Reynolds 2008), and social and psychological difficulties (Rumberger 2003; Swanson and Schneider 1999). Therefore, my goal was to limit this project to examining elementary school reassignment plans for each of the aforementioned districts.

If there were multiple elementary school reassignment plans, I considered the time frame in which the change took place. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled in *Parents*

Involved in Community Schools v Seattle School District No. 1 (Parents Involved 2007), striking down the voluntary integration plans that were in place in school districts in Seattle and also in Louisville, Kentucky. The court ruled that because the plans used a student's race as a fundamental determinant of their school assignment those plans were in violation of the Constitution. For states, like South Carolina, that have a history of school segregation and therefore race based integration plans, the consequences of this ruling have substantial implications for the reassignment plans schools may use.

Therefore, this project reviews only those elementary schools reassignment plans that were created and implemented after the *Parents Involved* ruling. This is possible in Greenville School District and York School District 3. However, in Dorchester 2 the most recent elementary school reassignment plan occurred in 2007. Although, this school was built and opened before the ruling, I decided to still review it in the current study for two reasons. First, Dorchester School District 2 is still under a court ordered desegregation mandate which means that the pressure to desegregate through a legal framework would exist with or without the *Parents Involved* ruling. Second, review of the *Parents Involved* case by the Supreme Court began in 2006 and was followed intensely by many civil rights organizations and school districts in the nation. Even though the ruling may not have legally affected Dorchester 2's 2007 reassignment plan, the impending ruling was a substantial issue at the national, state, and local level and may have affected the reassignment plan regardless. See Table 3.2 on the following page for a complete list of schools built in each district.

Table 3.2 Schools Built in Dorchester 2, Greenville & York School Districts 2000-2010

	Elementary Schools	Middle Schools	High Schools
York District 3	India Hook (2007) **Mount Holly (2008)** Old Pointe (2002)	Castle Heights (2004) Dutchman Creek (2008)	South Pointe (2005)
Dorchester 2	Fort Dorchester (2002) Williams Reeves (2007) **Eagles Nest (2007)**	River Oaks (2007)	Ashley Ridge (2008)
Greenville	Alexander (2001) Brook Glenn (2005) Augusta Circle (2002) Blythe Academy (2003) Brushy Creek (2001) Sue Cleveland (2005) Sara Collins (2004) Plain (2005) East North Street (2001) Hollis Academy (2002) Lake Forest (2000) Mauldin (2002) Mitchell Road (2002) Monaview (2005) Simpsonville (2003) Mountain View (2003) Paris (2003) Pelham Road (2005) Slater Marietta (2003) Stone Academy (2001) Summit Drive (2001) Taylors (2006) Tigerville (2005) Westcliffe (2003) Woodland (2002) Woodside Ellen (2000) Grove (2005) Bell's Crossing (2002) Robert Cashion (2003) Cherrydale (2004) Thomas Kerns (2006) **Rudolph Gordon (2008)**	Hillcrest (2000) Beck Academy (2001) Hughes Academy (2000) Northwood (2007) League Academy (2006) Tanglewood (2005) Blue Ridge (2001) Ralph Chandler (2008)	Berea (2006) Blue Ridge (2005) Carolina (2006) Eastside (2007) Wade Hampton (2005) Mauldin (2002) Riverside (2006) Southside (2006) Travelers Rest (2005) Woodmont (2005)

Based on these considerations, the following school reassignment plans were chosen for further review in this study. For York County School District 3 I investigate the reassignment plan that accompanied the opening of Mt. Holly Elementary School in 2008. In Dorchester School District 2 I investigate the rezoning that occurred due to the opening of Eagle Nest Elementary School in 2007. Lastly, in Greenville County School District I review the rezoning that took place when Rudolph Gordon Elementary School opened in 2008.

Although I chose Rudolph Gordon Elementary through my data collection criteria, once I began reviewing the information regarding the assignment process required to populate that school, it became apparent that the reassignment process was part of a much larger and more complex process than any of the other schools reviewed for this project. The opening of Rudolph Gordon Elementary was part of a 10-year plan that shifted students in Greenville School District at all grade levels and in many different parts of the county. I found that there was very little discussion of the redrawing of any of the elementary school lines as part of this process and instead much debate over the high school and middle school attendance zones that were shifted. Therefore, my discussion of the Rudolph Gordon Elementary assignment process will also include a discussion of the larger plan specifically focusing on the most controversial aspect – the movement of Hillcrest Middle and Hillcrest High students.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

This research project uses an in-depth case study approach to examine the development and implementation of school reassignment plans in three school districts in South Carolina. I collect data through archival research and analyze a number of school district documents, newspaper articles and interviews, and court documents to examine each district's reassignment plans against a guiding framework of organizational response.

To connect the theoretical constructs of institutional theory to the specific cases of reassignment policies reviewed for this research, I first summarize the possible strategic responses each district may employ and identify a series of indicators for each of those responses. I then use the data collected to determine whether there exists evidence for or against the use of a particular strategy in each district. This allows me to show more completely how the causes, constituents, content, control, and context of the pressures to create new zoning plans leads to the use of one or more change strategies as well as provides a theoretically grounded expectation of employment for each of the cases.

Further, I also use the data to show whether or not the final reassignment plan represents a convergence with existing templates or a radical departure from the initial proposals presented by district officials. The identification of convergence with existing templates also seeks to distinguish whether the final proposals in those cases represent an instance of coercive, mimetic, or normative isomorphism.

Research Questions

Based on the framework of organizational change, my research questions address why a district is being pressured to establish a new attendance zone for its schools, where the pressures to do so are coming from, what particular norms, policies, or practices they may be pressured to conform to, how the pressures are being exerted, the context within which the pressure to rezone is occurring, the specific type of response each district adopts, and what type of change results from the particular strategy used.

1) Why is a district being pressured to or considering the implementation of a new school attendance zoning plan?

This question seeks to understand the driving purpose for a school district to redraw its existing school's attendance boundaries. Specifically, it is of interest to understand whether or not a new school has been built that requires a new attendance zone to be created. As well as whether or not there is a pressure to further integrate schools that have been deemed to be too racially homogenous. Further, is the change in reassignment plan perceived as one that will enhance the legitimacy or a particular district or the efficiency of their technical operations?

2) Who is exerting the pressure on a district to create new attendance zones for students?

Specifically, this question seeks to understand what actors or organizations exist within the school district's organizational field, and which are involved in the process of pressuring a school to consider, develop, and implement a new reassignment plan? Are there conflicting pressures being placed upon the school district by a variety of actors? How much does or must the school district depend upon the approval of these actors?

3) What particular norms, policies, or procedures, are schools being pressured to comply with?

What are the goals of each school district before the pressure to create a new reassignment plan comes about? Does the pressure to create new attendance zones conform to these existing goals? How much control does the school district have in deciding whether or not they will create a new plan, develop the plan, and implement the plan?

4) Through what means are the pressures to establish new attendance zones being exerted?

Has the school district decided to create new attendance zones on their own or are they doing so in response to an external pressure such as a court order or state or federal policy change? What practices or policies are already in place in other neighboring school districts? How well aware are school districts of the options that exist to model their reassignment plans after?

5) What is the overarching context in which pressures to create new school attendance zones are being exerted?

What is the level of connectedness does a particular school district have to the constituents in its organizational field? Does the school district have any connections to neighboring districts? Are there resource sharing policies in place for the reviewed districts that might indicate stronger connections with other particular districts in South Carolina? What are the nature of any of the relationships that exist between the district and the other actors in its organizational field?

6) What strategy for implementing new school attendance zone planes does each

   district adopt?

Does a school district that is faced with the pressure of reassigning its students to

different schools acquiesce to the pressures exerted by its organizational field,

compromise with actors in the organizational field on the implementation of a plan, avoid

creating a new reassignment plan to not have to deal with the pressures being exerted

from actors in the field, defy the need to create a new plan by either dismissing the

pressure, or challenging or attacking the plans that have been proposed by other actors, or

does the school district attempt to manipulate the environment from which the pressure is

being exerted so as to not have to develop and implement a new reassignment plan?

7) Does the resulting reassignment plan reflect a convergent change or a radical

   change?

Is the reassignment plan that a school district decides upon one that is consistent with,

or conforms to other existing plans within the district's organizational field? Or is the

reassignment plan substantially different that those plans that have been created and

implemented by other districts within the same organizational field? If the final plan

represents a convergence with an existing template, does that case demonstrate coercive,

mimetic, or normative isomorphism?

Indicators of Strategic Response

In order to specifically address the question of what strategies were employed by the

districts in response to institutional pressures exerted on them I use a series of indicators

to determine whether or not there was evidence of the utilization of a particular approach.

These indicators are derived from Oliver's (1991) overview of tactics and examples for strategic response to institutional pressure and are summarized in the following table.

Table 4.1 Indicators of Strategic Response.

Strategies	Tactics	Indicators
Acquiesce	Habit Imitate Comply	• Follow taken for granted rules or norms • Engage in a decision making process that follows the guidelines of previously employed procedures • Final plans resemble those of other organizations in the institutional field • Accepting advice from professional organizations • Imitating plans considered successful in the past • Conscious incorporation of values and norms that provide self-serving benefits • Obedience to or compliance with an institutionalized procedures or policies
Compromise	Balance Pacify Bargain	• Negotiate with and accommodate multiple constituents and constituent demands • Working to achieve compromise among competing objectives • Staging a minor resistance to institutional demands, but ultimately devoting much effort to appeasing constituents • Exacting concessions from constituents in order to establish and agreed upon outcome
Avoid	Conceal Buffer Escape	• Establishing elaborate plans and procedures to respond to institutional pressures without the intention to conform • Provide an appearance of compromise but no actual plans to yield to constituent demands • Reduce inspection and the scrutinizing of organizational procedures through a decoupling process • Abandon practices that are being challenged by constituents or change goals or activities completely to prevent attacks on legitimacy
Defy	Dismiss Challenge Attack	• Overt disregard and noncompliance with institutional rules and values • Initiate specific challenges to institutional norms • Assault or denounce those who exert institutional pressures
Manipulate	Co-Opt Influence Control	• Persuade opposing constituents to abandon their efforts and join the organization • Attempt to alter the public perception regarding the legitimacy of existing norms • Use power and dominance over constituents to disband or take over an opposing group

Research Design: Case Study

This project uses a case study research design in the context of a theoretically informed analysis of the changes to school attendance zones in these four South Carolina school districts. A case study aims to understand a specific case in-depth, and in its natural setting, aiming to understand its complexity and its context. It is "an attempt to systematically investigate an event or set of related events with the specific aim of describing and explaining some phenomenon" (Berg 2007:283). Further, the aim of a case study is to "provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied" and this method is "particularly suited to research questions which require a detailed understanding of social or organizational processes because of the rich data collected in context" (Hartley 2004: 12). Therefore, as a comprehensive research strategy, the case study approach copes with technically distinctive situations with many points of interests and as such, relies upon multiple methods to support data sources (Yin 1994). All data relevant to the case are gathered, and all available data are organized in terms of the case.

Case Studies in Institutional Research

Case studies have often been relied upon as an effective technique to understand the dynamics that occur within institutions and their environments. Because institutions and their environments can be large and complex organisms, case studies offer a useful tool for examining such aspects as motivating events, processes of change, and structural consequences to organizations that undergo a change process in their most complete form. Case studies in institutionalism also permit researchers to discover complex sets of

decisions and recount the effects of those decisions within a given time period. Some notable case studies in the field of institutionalism are reviewed below.

Much of the empirical work that has been done thus far in the field of institutional research has been in the form of qualitative analyses such as case studies. Many of these case studies have been aimed at understanding the dynamics of institutional changes and adaptations. For example, the study by de Holan and Phillips (2002) explored how managers at a Cuban manufacturing firm implemented organizational changes in the context of a complex and uncertain institutional environment, providing a foundation for much of the institutional literature regarding entrepreneurship and isomorphism as reactions to radical changes. Greenwood et al. (2002) also examined the process of change in the organizational field by focusing on the role of professional organizations, finding evidence that professional organizations play an important role as regulatory agencies that endorse and shape concepts of legitimacy. Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) extended the previous study, showing that changes in an organization are influenced not only from external forces in their field, but also by actors embedded in the institutional context. Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) were also building upon work conducted by Van de Ven and Garud (1993) that used a case study of the cochlear implant industry to show the importance of accounting for both internal actions of entrepreneurs embedded within an organization as well as the structure of the organizational field.

The investigation of organizational fields and the important dynamics between actors, organizations, and their fields are also illustrated in a number of case studies. Modell's (2001) study of the institutional changes made by a large Norwegian hospital takes into account the interests of a wide range of institutional constituents and draws on

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Oliver's (1991) framework to characterizes the variety of responses actors have during the process of organizational change. Wiewel and Hunter (1985) use the case of two newly formed neighborhood development organizations to suggest that preexisting organizations within an institutional environment provide a variety of resources necessary for the genesis of new, similar organizations, and that the absence of similar organizations hinders the creation of new organizations. Covaleski and Dirsmith's (1988) case study of a university's budgeting system showed how specific individuals in the organization and also in the larger society actively articulated organizational expectations creating a process that was infused with power from self-interested actors within the organization as well from extra-organizational relations.

Institutional research that focuses on the competition of institutional logics or archetypes has also benefited from case study methodology. Fligstein's (1991) case study of a Fortune 100 company provides an example of not only the importance of inter-organizational dynamics within an organizational field, but also the strategies employed when an organization is faced with conflicting institutional demands. Kitchener's (2002) analysis of academic health centers also explores the effects of competing managerial level logics and the responses of the organizations to merger initiatives, and Reay and Hinnings (2005) use a similar approach in their examination of structural changes that have taken place in Canadian health care organizations.

Case studies have also been heavily applied to the concepts of institutionalism situated in the educational context. Malen and Ogawa's (1988) case study of site based governance councils in Salt Lake City is a highly cited example of how schools respond to pressures in their institutional environment by making symbolic changes in structure

and procedures but decouple these from actual classroom practices. Coburn (2004) also uses a case study of teacher's reading instruction practices in California schools to explore similar concepts of decoupling practices. Burch (2007) uses the case of the Glendale school district help provide connections between the institutional perspective and studies of the complex educational environment, examining how interactions between the public and private sector mediate the design and implementation of policy, how innovations in the organizational field gain legitimacy and are diffused, and how educational reforms aimed at classroom teaching contribute to policy shifts in the broader environment. Burch (2010) expands this research in a subsequent case study using for-profit kindergartens as a setting for investigating how the design and implementation of interim assessment technologies reflects the complex pressures that are exerted on school districts to increase efficiency, compliance, and therefore legitimacy in their institutional fields. Hallett (2010) also addresses the relationship between policy and the educational environment by using a case study to understand instances where conformity to policy ideals does translate into actual classroom practice that is recoupled with institutional standards.

The Case of the South Carolina School Districts

Given the research goals of this project, a case study approach will prove valuable in analyzing the pressures to create and implement new student assignment plans in South Carolina schools as they provide an appropriate example of an instance in which we seek an empirical understanding of an unfolding institutional process within its real life context (Yin 1994). In addition, case study inquiries benefit from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin 1994).

Institutional theory has had a wide application in the field of sociology and there is a strong theoretical grounding underlying its analysis in the domains of political science, business, management, and economics. Further, the application of institutional theory to the realm of education is a rapidly growing area of research in sociology and educational contexts continue to provide an important setting for the exploration of a variety of recent institutional conceptualizations.

This study follows a similar approach to the case studies described above. The project greatly benefits from the case study method due to the fact that I examine the applicability of social theory to a specific set of schools. In order to understand the process of developing and implementing student reassignment plans in these schools through the lens of institutional theory it is important to understand the many complex relationships that operate within the local communities and between the schools and the state and federal government. Although empirical data can be collected regarding school expenditures, student enrollments, and student demographics, those variables alone cannot tell us about the underlying processes guiding the exchanges that take place in order to create a reassignment plan that addresses multiple institutional demands.

This study follows the process of creating and implementing student reassignment plans in three schools. I apply specific concepts of institutional theory, especially concepts drawn from the literature on organizational change to this complicated and multi-level process that schools across the nation are often confronted with. I am not attempting to develop a new theory, but to understand how the most relevant concepts of institutional theorizing can shed light on these three specific cases of student reassignment in South Carolina.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to answer the research questions posed in this study, I have collected data mainly by means of archival or document research. To understand the causes, constituents, content, control, context, and strategies used by these three districts in their cases of creating new school attendance zones I specifically examine archival reports obtained from newspapers, school district publications, South Carolina Department of Education publications, city and county documents including special reports commissioned by the South Carolina Commission on Civil Rights, interviews with school district employees, school websites, as well as other relevant school district or school related websites.

I began the data collection for this research project by collecting data from the 2009 School Facilities Survey of South Carolina public schools. This data shows how many new schools were built in each of South Carolina's school districts since 2000. Once I determined the number of new school built in each district, I contacted administrative offices at each of the districts and determined how many of those new schools required an attendance boundary change and therefore a change to the district's current student assignment plan. This data was then used to justify the selection of an instance of reassignment within each of these districts discussed above (York School District 3, Greenville School District, and Dorchester School District 2). Data for this research were also supplemented with statistics from the Common Core of Data as well as Census data to assess the population growth and racial and economic variation among school district populations.

For each instance of change to a school district's reassignment plan, I reviewed archival data to answer the proposed research questions. I specifically relied on

newspaper articles that covered the public discussions of the reassignment plans that are proposed by the school board and communicated to the public. Using newspaper coverage of these events also allowed me to examine public reactions and statements regarding the proposed changes made by the school district. I also relied heavily on the official records from the school board meetings where the proposed changes to the district's assignment policy are discussed. These meeting minutes allowed me to capture the *process* that the administration employs when examining their existing plans and what factors they determine are useful in creating a series of reassignment proposals. Minutes from these school board meetings also allow me to determine the actors that are involved in the decision making process including, but not limited to, any school level officials, government agencies, public participants, and private firms that may be hired to assist with the development of a new assignment plan.

School districts are required to make their reassignment proposals available to the individuals that reside in the districts. Therefore, I also examined the school district's website and the website of the schools that were affected by the reassignment plans to gather any information that was presented to the public regarding the plans to reassign students or the implementation of those reassignment plans. Any public documentation filed with the state department of education or submitted to the state or federal government regarding student reassignment was also examined for each of these cases.

Because I investigated school districts that have a history of federally enforced desegregation policies and some districts that are currently still guided by these policies, I also collected federal and state legal documents that outline the policies that were in place, and the ones that are still in place. For each district I examined, I determined the

initial court case that put the district under court ordered desegregation and then identified the mechanisms that were agreed upon to create more heterogeneous student populations in that district. For the districts that have been released from court ordered desegregation plans, I not only located their initiating case, but also their official petitions to the federal government to be released from these court ordered policies.

The last source of data comes from interviews with a variety of school or school district officials that supplemented the publicly available documentation I collected. I conducted interviews with individuals who were responsible for developing, reviewing, and/or approving the reassignment plans for each district. For Dorchester School District 2, I interviewed the Director of Federal and State Programs/Community Planning who is responsible for creating new attendance zones by using mapping software in combination with district wide student demographic statistics (Dorchester 2013). The Director of Federal and State Programs/Community Planning is in close communication with the district superintendent, with whom potential attendance line issues are discussed (Dorchester 2013).

The Executive Director for the Planning, Demographics & Transportation Department in the Greenville County School District was the subject of my interview regarding the attendance policies and issues in that district. The Executive Director for Planning, Demographics & Transportation leads the department responsible for reviewing planning reports and responding to coordination of student reassignment associated with the need for new schools (Greenville 2013). The Executive Director's department develops proposals for new school attendance lines, disseminates them to the public, and reviews issues and concerns with the district's superintendent's office

(Greenville 2013). If the superintendent determines that there is a need for a citizen's advisory committee to be created in order to assist in the process of reassignment, the Executive Director is also responsible for sitting on that committee.

Lastly, for Rock Hill School District, I interviewed the Associate Superintendent as well as an Administrative Assistant. The Associate Superintendent's department is responsible for developing attendance zones, facility planning, student assignments and transfer, and strategic planning. My interview offered an overview of the district's policies and procedures regarding the modification of school attendance zones, the formation of a committee from potentially affected schools that offers input and guidance, and information regarding the relationship between the superintendent's office and contracted officials at North Carolina State University that assist the district with mapping software and algorithms to maintain balance in student populations. The individuals interviewed for this district were hesitant about the inclusion of their names or the districts names being tied to my research. Therefore, in an effort to maintain the confidentiality requested, no information from the interview was included in this research that did not also exist in publically available documents as well.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

On the basis of the above mentioned documents and interviews, I have summarized the process of reassigning students in the three school districts of interest. The summaries of each of these school districts' experiences details the motivations for the school district to reassign students, those actors involved in exerting pressure on the district to create new attendance plans, the policies and procedures each school district is expected to use to modify attendance zones, through what means the pressures to adopt a particular reassignment plan are being exerted, and a description of the connections and/or relationships each district has with its neighboring school districts. In the last section, I use Oliver's (1991) typology of antecedents of organizational change to analyze the components of each school district's reassignment policies. I then use the data to show evidence, or lack thereof, for the use of particular strategic responses by each district as a consequence of the pressures exerted on them by factors in their institutional fields.

Dorchester School District 2: Eagle Nest Elementary

Eagle Nest Elementary opened in the fall of 2007 as one of many schools built as part of a $128 million construction plan (Dorchester Minutes 2004) aimed at addressing significant overcrowding in many of the district's schools. When work began on the new schools in July 2006, district officials were hopeful that they could alleviate overcrowding in classrooms, but also knew that they would have to settle controversial

issues such as setting new attendance boundary lines for many of the schools in the district (Hagen 2006a). The task of determining where students would attend school fell to district administrators and school board members who pledged to make the redistricting process smooth and to give parents a chance to give input before the new plan was finalized. "It's an emotional process, so you want parents and students going to the new schools to have a comfort zone as soon as possible," said the former district superintendent who had been involved in a controversial decision making process when a new high school was opened during his term (Hagen 2006a).

The growth in Dorchester County had been increasing rapidly over the past few years as many new subdivisions were being planned and built at a rapid pace. The county growth was felt very strongly in the school district, and was illustrated through a series called "At a Crossroads" that was published in the local newspaper. When the school year began in August 2006 the growth was more apparent in the schools then many had thought with the district's enrollment surpassing 20,000 students for the first time in its history (Hagen 2006b). "It's a little overwhelming," said the school board chairman. "Our teachers and staff are handling it well, but we cannot continue to put this kind of stress on them" (Hagen 2006b). The district Superintendent also began to address the effects of the enormous population group explaining to school board members that, "there's too much growth, too quick, with the infrastructure not being ready" (Hagen 2006b). He pointed out that not only were the schools filled to capacity, but that bus transportation was also being affected by the extreme growth. Many students were being forced to wait for buses to double back and pick them up after their first runs, not arriving home until close to an hour after school had let out (Hagen 2006c). Further, many parents

found themselves unable to enroll their children in their schools' extended day programs because the programs had filled so quickly to capacity by the start of the school year, causing many problems for parents that could not afford private after school programs (Hagen 2006c).

The construction plan that was approved by the Dorchester 2 school board in January of 2006 was aimed at ameliorating many of these growth issues by building two new elementary schools, one new middle school, one new high school, and adding additions to many existing schools (Hagen 2006d). Although this effort would help alleviate the overcrowding issues in the schools, it would also create the need to redraw the attendance boundary lines for almost every school in the district. The director of school and community relations, who was also well one of the administrators tasked with redrawing the boundaries explained in October 2006 that this would be one of the most massive re-drawings the district had embarked on and that the main goal, other than easing the capacity of schools, would be to create balanced schools that comprised students of various backgrounds (Hagen 2006d).

By the middle of October 2006, once the district's database had been properly updated to account for all the new pupils, the district announced that it was ready to begin the process of creating proposals for the new school attendance boundaries (Dorchester Minutes 2006a). The director of school and community relations released a statement explaining that preliminary proposals would be ready by early November, after which officials would hold a series of community meetings throughout the district to gather input from parents and neighborhood groups (Hagen 2006d). Many parents were anxious to know what schools their children were going to be zoned for in the coming school

year, knowing that although they may not want to change schools, due to the extreme circumstances in the district, thousands of students would need to be moved in order to regain stability. One parent from the district, who had a child at Gregg Middle School and another at Oakbrook Elementary School, said that she knew many parents who were anxiously waiting to hear how the redistricting efforts would affect their children (Hagen 2006d). "They don't want to leave Oakbrook, but they have a feeling it's coming," she said. "A lot of people just want to know already so they can make plans accordingly" (Hagen 2006d).

Knowing the enormity of the reassignment plans, district officials and school board members tried to reassure parents early on that the preliminary plans were a starting point for the conversation and that no final decisions would be made until input had been gathered from the community. One school board member, who had three children enrolled in three of the district's overcrowded schools, said that she expected large crowds to attend the community meetings (Hagen 2006d). "Anytime you make changes someone is going to be upset," she said. "As a board member I'd stress that nothing on the first proposal is set in stone. Parents should attend the meetings, hear what's going on, and think through their objections. Change is always scary, and we understand that. We know that kids take their attitudes from the tone of their parents. If parents are supportive, there's no doubt their kids will adapt" (Hagen 2006d).

The preliminary school attendance boundaries were unveiled at the November 9th school board workshop meeting, and both school board members and the public were shown boundary shifts that would move approximately 2,400 students beginning the following school year (Hagen 2006e). In order to populate the new Eagle Nest

Elementary, the proposal called for Fort Dorchester Elementary to keep students from Wescott Plantation and the subdivisions of Coosaw Creek and Whitehall to be moved to the Eagle Nest. This move would then create a domino effect resulting in every other school then shifting its populations to fill the spaces relieved by the students transferred to Eagle Nest (Hagen 2006e). A similar pattern would follow for middle school lines. For instance, the new River Oaks Middle School would take a majority of students from Oakbrook Middle School and then a portion of students currently attending Alston and Gregg Middle Schools would then switch to Oakbrook to fill the vacancies and relieve overcrowding in their former schools (Hagen 2006e). The attendance boundaries for Flowertown and Newington Elementary schools would also be adjusted, and several parents in attendance at the workshop immediately began questioning the changes impacting Newington Elementary (Hagen 2006e). One Newington parent who found out her section of Corey Woods would be switched to Knightsville explained that she was upset that, "they are splitting my neighborhood. You'll have friends on different sides of the street going to different schools" (Hagen 2006e).

The district superintendent once again reassured the public that no firm decisions on the proposal would be made until the completion of six public meetings (Hagen 2006e). "It was a lot to digest," said the superintendent, however, due to the extreme overcrowding the district was facing, the situation did not have much "wiggle room" (Hagen 2006e,f). He further explained that if parents were upset and wanted to come to one of the meetings to argue for keeping their neighborhood zoned to an existing school, it would be up to them to also propose a feasible idea for a similar neighborhood that could take its place (Hagen 2006e). Although, the initial proposal also included changes

to accommodate the opening of Ashley Ridge High School in 2008, district officials decided to delay the discussion on the high school boundaries so that they could focus their efforts on resolving the elementary and middle school boundaries first (Dorchester Minutes 2006b).

After the first three community meetings, district officials responded to input put forward regarding many of the attendance boundary proposals (Hagen 2006g). "We knew when we started the public meetings that they're not just for show, they're for input" the district spokeswoman said (Hagen 2006g). After reviewing the feedback from the community both the school board and the Superintendent agreed that in the initial proposal some of the changes were moving children that didn't really need to be moved. The spokeswoman continued, "It appears there are going to be some major changes that will incorporate some of the (community) suggestions, particularly for the borderline areas" (Hagen 2006g). Some of the criticism that officials specifically took note of included the large movement of students in and out of Summerville Elementary. Community feedback highlighted that with the initial plan Summerville would be turning over almost 400 students, or half its population, which was not in line with the concept of moving as few students as possible (Hagen 2006g). The other issue presented with the turnover at Summerville was that the new students' population at Summerville would increase the school's percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch by 38% making it higher than any other school in the district. Although the spokeswoman stated that adjusting the number of students at the poverty level was not a top priority for the district, school officials had taken note of the significant increase the move would cause and would attempt to address it (Hagen 2006g).

On November 29th a revised proposal was presented to the public (Hagen 2006i). The new proposal incorporated many of the suggested changes that had been made over the course of four public community meetings including the call to move fewer students from school to school. "Our mission was to put as many students back in their home schools as we possibly could," said the superintendent (Hagen 2006i). The director of school and community relations, who orchestrated the changes to the first proposal, explained that he incorporated about "90% of the feasible suggestions discussed by parents at the meetings" (Hagen 2006h). He further explained that "This plan changes a lot less than the other one," and that "we tried to accommodate everyone that we could" (Hagen 2006h). Some of the most notable changes included keeping the subdivision of Corey Woods intact and attending Newington instead of moving to Knightsville Elementary, and instead moving the Indian Springs area from Beech Hill Elementary to Knightsville, and keeping the Ashborough subdivision attending Newington. The altered plan also allowed Summerville Elementary to keep a majority of its population by abandoning the part of the proposal that sought to shift students attending schools in the center of Summerville to accommodate those in fast growing outer regions of the county (Hagen 2006h). This change to the proposal also reduced the number of students that fell into the low income category by about 10%, which would bring Summerville's demographics more in line with the rest of the schools in the district (Hagen 2006h).

Many community members and school administrators and staff responded well to the proposed changes when the plan was presented publicly at the November 30th school board meeting (Hagen 2006i). The Summerville Principal commented that the new changes brought "a sigh of relief. We are keeping our stable population, and less

movement means there won't be as many new children who need to learn our school culture" (Hagen 2006h). Although the changes seemed to ease the concerns from the Summerville area, some parents at Newington still weren't satisfied with the plan that moves their children to Flowertown or Knightsville Elementary schools (Hagen 2006i). Windham explained that the changes could not satisfy everyone and the school board chairman assured the public that the administration and school board would continue to seriously consider the public's views. He further commented on the situation saying that officials are faced with the positive problem that parents are so happy with their current schools that no one wants to leave them (Hagen 2006i).

On Monday December 11th school board members had the opportunity to review the new proposal, provide their input, and ask any final questions during their workshop meeting (Hagen 2006j). "Changing attendance lines is the number one nightmare for a school board member, since it affects the heart of everyone in the district, but we've made as many adjustments as we possibly could to this plan, and now, it's time to go vote" said one school board member (Hagen 2006j). "When we were running for school board, one of the complaints we heard was that input from the community wasn't well-received by this board," said another board member, "no one can complain about this process. This has been the ultimate in community relations, and I don't know of any other district that has conducted a process like this" (Hagen 2006j). The workshop was followed by a unanimous vote to approve the new elementary and middle school attendance boundaries (Dorchester Minutes 2006c).

The approved proposal moved 2,100 elementary school students across the district and approximately 1,200 middle school students (Hagen 2006k). Summerville

Elementary lost 14 students while gaining 56 new children, Newington Elementary lost

132 students while gaining 80 newcomers, Fort Dorchester Elementary lost 714 students

to the new Eagle Nest Elementary, and Knightsville and Flowertown each sent over 300

students to the new Reeves Elementary (Hagen 2006k). No parents attended the final

board meeting and no community member made public comments about the proposed

alterations (Dorchester Minutes 2006c). One board member said that she remembered

past attendance zone changes that were controversial enough to bring a room full of

parents to the school board meeting in protest, and "to not have to deal with that situation

speaks volumes about the success of this process" (Hagen 2006k).

York School District 3: Mount Holly Elementary

Mount Holly Elementary, opened in 2008, was one of two elementary schools, one

middle school, and one high school built in York School District 3 (Rock Hill School

District) aimed at alleviating overcrowding in York county, South Carolina. Due to the

location of the two elementary schools – India Hook Elementary in the northern portion

of the county and Mount Holly Elementary in the southern portion – the district decided

early on to limit the reassignment plans to the northern portion in 2007 and then address

the reassignment of the southern portion in 2008 (Smith 2010). As had happened with

many reassignment processes in the past, Rock Hill School District encountered

significant controversy with regard to both reassignment plans, particularly as a result of

a previous court settlement that arose from the reassignment plan for Sunset Park

Elementary in 2002 (Smith 2010).

Even before discussion began over how to reassign students to populate the new

elementary school, a controversy arose over the naming of the school. At the March 26th

2007 school board meeting, two members addressed the full board expressing hope that they would consider naming the new elementary school Mount Holly Elementary (Rock Hill Minutes 2007a). They also presented a petition signed by members for the Mount Holly neighborhood as well as a letter of endorsement from a prominent community member (Rock Hill Minutes 2007a). The board had a lengthy discussion regarding the procedures used in the past for selecting a school name, and were reminded that this was a similar scenario to when the third high school was named. The first vote that was taken on the school name then failed because the vote was split with one member abstaining due to the perception that the name selection was seen as a racial divide in the community. This point was later clarified and the school name did pass but only by one vote (Rock Hill Minutes 2007a).

On August 27th 2007, the district's associate superintendent reported that the reassignment committee had developed a proposal that would be shared with the board at the next school board meeting and specifically thanked two of the board members for their work on the reassignment committee (Rock Hill Minutes 2007b). The initial maps were presented to the board on September 24th and the associate superintendent offered explanations and answered questions (Rock Hill Minutes 2007c). The proposed maps, presented to the public on October 1st, sought to move 3,476 students; 1,175 in elementary school, 1,381 in middle school, and 380 in high school (Schonberg 2007b). Despite the need to move so many students, district officials assured the public that those students who were moved during the India Hook Elementary reassignment and those who were moved during the South Pointe High reassignment would not be moved during this

process (Schonberg 2007b). Of the 1,175 elementary students, 557 students would be moved to Mount Holly Elementary to populate that new school (Schonberg 2007b).

Parents in the Rock Hill School District were given an opportunity to voice their opinions about the proposed school reassignment maps at a public hearing on October 1st 2007 (Schonberg 2007a). The maps were designed to populate the newly opening Mount Holly Elementary and Dutchman Creek Middle schools, as well as alleviate the current overcrowding at Old Pointe Elementary and Rock Hill High. The maps were also created in a way that all schools would have similar if not equal percentages of students with low scores on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), relatively similar percentages of students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program, and equal levels of projected future enrollments to ensure that no one school outpaces other in student population growth (Schonberg 2007a). The public had already begun reviewing the maps which were posted on the district's website as well as placed in the district office and the associate superintendent had already begun to receive both positive and negative feedback before the scheduled public forum (Schonberg 2007a). "Every time we've done it, we've always given everybody a chance to express their concern about the maps so that we can compile everything and make sure that there was nothing missed in the planning stages," said the school board chairman (Schonberg 9/29/07).

About 75 people, 20 of whom spoke on record to the board, attended the October 1st school board meeting (Schonberg 2007b). The community grievances focused mainly on the transportation issues arising from the proposed changes as well as frequent reassignment that some families had already experienced (Schonberg 2007b). Although many parents thanked the board for giving the opportunity to present their concerns, most

begged the school board to reconsider the proposed lines and instead allow their children to continue to attend the schools that were closer to their homes and neighborhoods (Schonberg 2007b). For example, a resident whose freshmen child would be rezoned under the current plan explained that to her "the biggest issue is transportation," and that the current plan would be a "huge change for them, for me, for travel time and for gas" (Schonberg 2007b). Another complaint lodged by parents of middle school students dealt with the change in school uniforms for students that moved from one middle school to another. Because the district did not have a unified school dress code, students like those who currently attended Rawlinson Road Middle would be forced to not only switch schools, but also change dress codes (Schonberg 2007b). A parent of one such student told the board members that she had spent "time and money getting his wardrobe to fit school code, and if we get rezoned, more than half the shirts in his closet won't fit the school code" (Schonberg 2007b). District officials assured the public that the proposals were not final and that the board would still be meeting to discuss the plans and make necessary changes before a final approval vote was taken.

On October 8th, Rock Hill School Board members spent over two and a half hours of their work session manipulating their digital reassignment models testing the effects of alternate reassignment possibilities in response to public feedback gathered at the presentation meeting (Schonberg 2007d). The school board chairman acknowledged that, "all of us agree that the situation needs to be improved, but none of us know what the solution is" (Schonberg 2007c).

The board members specified the key concerns at each school level and combined those with the district's desire to still maintain socio-economic balances as well

(Schonberg 2007c). At the elementary school level, the most significant concerns included the lengthy drive that students reassigned to Belleview would have to make as opposed to attending Lesslie, Independence, or Mount Holly Elementary, and the fact that allowing those students to instead attend a closer school would likely increase the percentage of students that qualified for free or reduced lunch and that had the lowest PACT scores at Belleview to over 60% (Schonberg 2007d). The district's director of school climate explained that the current reassignment proposal kept this number in the lower to mid-fifties instead (Schonberg 2007d).

Although the district maintained its philosophy that balanced schools were best for the district, many parents continued to have a hard time understanding how it was in the best interest of their child to travel away from a school already in their neighborhood. For example, one parent raised concerns with how early his kindergarten aged daughter would have to get up each morning to wait for a bus that would take her to Belleview Elementary eight miles away, as opposed to attending one of the three other elementary schools that are within three miles of their home (Schonberg 2007d). "It seems like if a school is in your neighborhood, that should be the school you go to," he explained (Schonberg 2007d). That situation was similar to about eighty other students in the Village Green/Wellsbrook area who would be affected by the rezoning to Belleview Elementary (Schonberg 2007d). Another parent in the affected area according the proposal pleaded with the school board to be "left within her community" (Schonberg 2007d). She stated that she understood that the district had a very difficult job to do in order to keep balance at the schools, but that she felt the current proposal was "not fair" and that "if you look at a map, we have been scooped out and sent into town" (Schonberg

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2007d). Another resident from the same Village Creek/Wellsbrook community took another approach to addressing the board, and wrote a public opinion statement in the Rock Hill Herald (Stringer 2007). This resident reiterated the community's shared distress over the early wake ups for their children, the long distances children would travel on buses, concerns over increased traffic on their roads, and the closeness of the three other elementary schools (Stringer 2007). In response to this opinion piece and editorial was also published in the Rock Hill Herald supporting the district's efforts to maintain balanced schools (Staff 2007). The editorial pointed out that residents needed to adapt and change due to growth and a shifting population, facing the reality that it was no longer practical to make neighborhood schools the primary objective in the district. Lastly, it was stated that balance was the most important technique that the district should use to ensure that all schools had approximately the same advantages and opportunities to achieve excellence (Staff 2007).

Despite the mixed opinions from parents and the community regarding whether balance was necessary, the school board continued to defend its reassignment philosophy asking the reassignment committee to continue its work to ensure that the percentage of low-income students and the percentage of students with low PACT scores were balanced across the schools in the district while also alleviating and not adding to the overcrowding faced by schools in the district. The school board chairman explained that "parents have one goal, and that is what's best for my child. Our approach must be what's best for every child" (Schonberg 2007d). He further justified the board's position explaining that when school attendance zones were drawn primarily based on distance to school, it resulted in schools with high concentrations of rich or poor students and the

schools with higher levels of low income students struggled to keep good teachers (Schonberg 2007d). The chairman also cited the role of parent involvement in schools and stated that schools with higher percentages of low-income families had fewer parents with the time and resources to volunteer at their children's schools (Schonberg 2007d). The associate superintendent for planning and program support, also maintained that neighborhood schools were not the answer, and stressed that a closer to home assignment plan would not adequately address the overcrowding issues that the district was facing (Schonberg 2007d). "They'd still fill up," she said. "The district is growing four-to-500 students a year. Schools are going to fill up" (Schonberg 2007d).

At the October 22nd board meeting, the associate superintendent shared updated maps that took into account the community concerns following an October 10th work session with board members (Rock Hill Minutes 2007b). The revisions to the elementary reassignment plan were made available to the public and the board opted to give the public another chance to review the proposed changes and again give feedback to the district before a final vote took place (Rock Hill Minutes 2007b). The updated proposal amended the map so that several neighborhoods in the Village Creek/Wellsbrook area would remain at their currently zoned schools and instead the district proposed moving a segment near Oakdale Elementary school (Schonberg 2007e). Although the plan looked like it would satisfy the families in the Village Creek/Wellsbrook area, the school board chairman commented that, "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to look at this and know where the next push will come from" (Schonberg 2007e). Another board member and a member on the reassignment committee shared that although she wasn't "real crazy over Belleview's numbers right now," she believed that "some of the segment changes we

made do make sense for the community and for the people that live in those segments"
(Schonberg 2007e). Overall, the board seemed to agree that this new proposal might be
the best scenario they could come up with because it moved fewer students than the first
plan and was still able to maintain somewhat of a balance in the percentage of low
income and low performing students (Schonberg 2007e).

During a work session on Monday, November 12th, the board once again devoted
a large portion of their meeting to discussing the proposed changes to the elementary
reassignment plan (Schonberg 2007f). "Everybody's got heartburn at different places.
This is where mine is right here" said the board chairman, pointing to the area on the
boarder of Oakdale and Belleview attendance zones (Schonberg 2007f). Although the
board struggled to find a way to keep Belleview's attendance numbers up and it's
percentage of students on free or reduced lunch and with low PACT scores down, the
board ultimately decided to keep the updated plan that moved the Oakdale segment rather
than the Village Creek/Wellsbrook neighborhood (Schonberg 2007f). The final plan was
approved at the school board meeting on November 26th although not unanimously (Rock
Hill Minutes 2007c).

Grenville School District: Rudolph Gordon Elementary
Rudolph G. Gordon Elementary School opened its doors on August 19, 2008 as one of
the last new schools built during a major building and expansion plan that took place in
the Greenville School District from 2002-2008 known as the BEST project. The original
cost for that building plan started at $756 million, but quickly rose to $999 million as the
district decided to build many more new schools rather than expand existing ones in
response to the continued and significant growth the district was experiencing, especially

in the Gold Strip area of the county (Barnett 2006). Specifically, $60 million of those funds were approved in order to add the construction projects of Rudolph Gordon, Greenbrier, and A.J. Whitenberg elementary schools (Barnett 2006), that would be specifically constructed to "facilitate the progressive student population growth in the South east area of Greenville County" (Rudolph Gordon 2013).

The initial proposal to reassign students to accommodate the massive building plans of the BEST project and reduce overcrowding across the county was presented by district staff on Monday, February 7th (Fletcher 2005a). The proposal sought to reassign about 1,600 elementary, middle, and high school students in the district with adjustments aimed at boosting the number of students at Woodmont High School, the new South Central Middle Schools, J.L. Mann Academy, Beck Middle Academy, a new Southeast Area Elementary, and Greenbrier Elementary (Silvaggio 2005a). Construction on the new Woodmont High School was scheduled to be completed that summer with a capacity of 1,600 students to provide relief to Hillcrest High at a minimum of 300 students (Silvaggio 2005a). A new South Central Middle School was also being built, and scheduled for completion in the summer of 2006, in the current Woodmont Middle School attendance area as a "relief" school. This school would boast a capacity of 750 and was hoped to pull a minimum of 250 students from Bryson and Hillcrest Middle Schools (Silvaggio 2005a). Any new growth in that area would then be balanced between Woodmont Middle and the new South Central Middle considering both schools' capacities. J.L Mann was expected to have a capacity of 1,500 students when its new building was ready in 2007, and the goal for that facility was to pull a minimum of 150 students from Mauldin High School (Silvaggio 2005a). Beck Middle Academy's new

relocated facility would have capacity for 1,000 students when it was ready in the summer of 2006 and be able to provide relief in the amount of at least 300 students to Mauldin and Riverside Middle Schools, and a second new "relief" school with a capacity of 750 was being built to provide space for the overcrowded conditions at Bell's Crossing Elementary and Bryson Elementary. Officials said they hoped to pull a minimum of 250 students from those campuses. This new Southeast Area Elementary, which would become Rudolph Gordon Elementary, was to be completed by the summer of 2006 (Silvaggio 2005a). Greenbrier Elementary School's expanded facility for 1,000 students was also expected to be completed by the summer of 2006, and plans were for it to relieve Mauldin Elementary by at least 175 students (Silvaggio 2005a).

A Student Assignment Advisory Committee (SAAC), consisting of fifteen community members appointed by school board members and the superintendent (Greenville County Schools 2010), spent almost four hours Monday night listening, but not responding to the district staffers presentation of the proposed reassignments and receiving information from the staff members regarding how and why the district believes their plan is the most logical way to redraw the attendance zones (Silvaggio 2005b, Fletcher 2005a). The SAAC was then tasked by the superintendent to review the district's proposal and determine over the course of the following months whether the plan should be adjusted, and if so to provide the superintendent with options by the March 8th school board meeting (Greenville County Schools 2010). The SAAC was also reminded that their recommendation needed to take into account the school board's education plan, the school board's long range facilities planning, as well as eleven factors set forth by school board policy that were to be used without regard to any order of

priority: utilizing schools between 80 and 100 percent capacity, minimizing the time that students spend on the bus, considering the distance that students must travel from home to school, preserving the integrity of neighborhoods, minimizing a school's concentration of students of poverty – measured by the number of students receiving free or reduced meals, considering student geocodes, avoiding a high concentration of low performing students, preventing impact on special programs or services, providing feeder patterns that result in elementary schools sending at least 10 students to the same middle school or a middle school sending at least 25 students to the same high school, striving to assign students in islands to a contiguous school when possible or to a school closer to their residences, and considering the number of times that recent boundary changes have affected the same students or areas (Greenville County Schools 2010).

The district staff assured the committee and the community that their proposal was a starting point for discussion, but that they had already given much consideration to the impact such changes might have on academic scores and the percentage of students at each school who qualify for free and reduced priced meals (Silvaggio 2005b). The chairman of the committee, who was also the director of community relations for Michelin North America Inc., said that "at this point, I think it is very difficult to say how much change from the proposed plan from the school district the public will see," but he explained that the committee would deliberate, gather feedback from the community, and make a recommendation to the superintendent by March 8th (Silvaggio 2005b). "We're going to try to do this whole thing with a minimum of disruption if that is possible," the committee's acting communications liaison, said. "It is a growth issue, and relieving pressure is what it is all about" (Silvaggio 1/27/05). District officials said that they realize

many parents choose where they live by the school their children will attend, but that the rapid growth in some areas has led to overcrowding that must be addressed in an effort to improve the learning environment for all students (Silvaggio 2005b). Citing the construction of Woodmont High School, the communication liaison explained that just because new schools were being built, did not necessarily mean that the committee could or would recommend just "snatching students out of Hillcrest High School. It could be middle school students who would be going to Hillcrest that will be moved to Woodmont. It is never as cut and dry as it looks" (Silvaggio 2005a).

Many parents in the district agreed that something needed to be done to address the overcrowding issues in their children's classrooms, but expressed mixed reactions about the specifics of the proposal as the information began to circulate around the county. For example, one parent, who had a son at Hillcrest High School and another son at Hillcrest Middle School, gave the perspective that "the teachers are getting too much pressure. So whatever they can do to alleviate the pressure off the teachers and give better attention to the students, I'm all for" (Silvaggio 2005b). Another parent, whose daughter attended Hillcrest Middle School, also agreed saying "I think you have to consider the greater good for all children. With smaller classes, everybody will get a better education, the classrooms will be more manageable and the schools will be safer" (Silvaggio 2005b). She furthered explained that she felt that "Hillcrest High is so crowded that something has to be done. There are so many students there it is like a little city. I know change might be inconvenient, but I think it is best for all children if they can be in a smaller environment" (Silvaggio 2005b).

However, other parents expressed displeasure with the idea that students would be forced to switch schools in the middle of their careers at their existing schools. One such parent who had a sophomore daughter said that he thought "at this point in her career it would be difficult to switch schools," but that "if she was in seventh or eighth grade, I don't think I would mind" (Silvaggio 2005b). He also expressed concern about the sports offerings for his daughter if she was forced to switch schools. He stated that his daughter was currently participating in lacrosse and swimming and that he did not believe those options would be available to her if she switched to Woodmont (Silvaggio 2005b). He again echoed the concern of many other parents saying "hopefully we can get a decision soon so they can start preparing. It's the uncertainty that is as much a problem as anything" (Silvaggio 2005b). A parent from the Brentwood neighborhood, who found out that based on the current proposal his family would most likely not be affected by the reassignment plan said that he still planned on staying informed. He also commented that he had spoken to many of his neighbors about the pending reassignment proposal and that some had told him that "if it comes down to it, they'll put their homes on the market and move to the other side of town" (Silvaggio 2005b).

SAAC members said that they understood that many families would feel anxious during the decision making process, but that they hoped everyone could maintain a positive attitude. "It is a complicated task, but I think we have to keep in mind two main focuses – the impact on the students and their families and properly using our district assets," said the committee chairman (Silvaggio 2005a). The committee scheduled d two public hearings to gather input from the community for Tuesday February 8th and Tuesday, February 15th, and according to the chairman they expected to hear a lot of

feedback from the community specifically "listening to see there is something in the proposal that negatively impacts students and will hamper their achievement in school" (Silvaggio 2005b). The chairman reminded the public that "one thing is clear is that there is no cookie-cutter solution. If there was, the school district really wouldn't need a committee to do this" (Silvaggio 2005a).

Overall, many parents were just anxious to get a final decision. For example, one parent whose family was already moved twice before in attendance zone shifts explained that "the rumor mill has been churning in Simpsonville. But we're trying to keep an open mind" (Silvaggio 2005a). Although her family had very positive experiences following both school changes, she described the experience as "nerve-racking" and said that "we'll just be glad to get some answers" (Silvaggio 2005a). Another parent who had a seventh grader assigned to Hillcrest Middle and then Hillcrest High school, said she wasn't surprised to learn that her neighborhood of Longcreek Plantation is one of the areas included in the proposal to be reassigned to Woodmont schools, and that she and her daughter had been mentally preparing for that possibility (Silvaggio 2005b). She explained that although she was nervous about sending her daughter to a school she knows little about, she believed that the school system was going to do everything they could to make it work (Silvaggio 2005b). However, she hoped that the district would "go ahead and make a final decision as soon as possible so they can get incoming freshmen registered," and that "it would just ease everyone's mind if they could go ahead and start that process" (Silvaggio 2005b).

Over sixty Simpsonville parents, twelve of whom addressed the committee, attended the first of two public hearings on reassignment plans for the district on

Tuesday, February 8th to voice their concerns over the district's plan to reassign more than 1,600 students over the next three years in an effort to relieve overcrowding across approximately 10 of the district's schools (Fletcher 2005a). Several parents blamed the Greenville County Council for plans to move their children because council members did not plan for new schools before approving dozens of new subdivisions that are driving school growth (Fletcher 2005a). One of these parents was lived in Long Creek Plantation and had a daughter who was a sixth grader at Hillcrest Middle School. Under the preliminary plan she would be reassigned to the South Central Middle School when it opened and then would attend Woodmont High rather than Hillcrest High School (Fletcher 2005a). The parent stated that "It bothers me that older, established communities are being penalized for new subdivisions that are popping up in the Golden Strip area. When decisions are made to allow new homes to be built in certain areas…infrastructure and planning should come first, as opposed to seeing how many subdivisions you can crowd into a wooded lot" (Fletcher 2005a). He also asked the committee to consider letting children finish out their years at the school they're attending, then switch to new middle or high school explaining that the committee should "Give us the option to help us to smooth out that transition" (Fletcher 2005a).

One neighborhood in particular was especially angered by the district's proposal and that was the subdivision of Neely Farm. Neely Farm residents were upset because they had heard for six years that they would attend the new South Central Middle school when it was completed in 2006 which is closest to their community and has the academic and extracurricular activities they want for their children, and the new proposal would reassign their children to Woodmont Middle and High School (Fletcher 2005c).

Therefore, after the February 8th public hearing, members of the subdivision decided to gather together to respond as a community to the district's proposal. The Neely Farm homeowner's association organized a meeting on Friday, February 11th at which parents could strategize a plan to fight the district's proposal that would move their children to Woodmont Middle and High Schools (Fletcher 2005b). More than 100 parents and students attended the meeting to voice concerns about their children missing out on academic and extracurricular programs, to understand how they could be effective in changing the district's plan, and to find out what options would be left if their efforts failed (Fletcher 2005b). A Neely Farm homeowner who had a 5th grade daughter told the group that his daughter was "very involved with a lot of advanced classes. She's involved in Challenge and I want to make sure she has the opportunity to grow in the future" (Fletcher 2005b). Another homeowner and parent of two said he moved to Neely Farm three years ago because of the schools and that this reassignment proposal is "like taking our investment and just stamping on it" (Fletcher 2005b). Other residents echoed these same concerns, and one homeowner in attendance said that he thought the whole thing was politically motivated and that "they had Woodmont (High) that was failing, so what's the easiest way to fix it? You moved all the kids. Part of the reason we're here is the reputation Woodmont has. What guarantee do we have that our 139 children are really going to change Woodmont that much?" (Fletcher 2005b).

One SAAC member, who was also a resident of the Neely Farm neighborhood, was also present at the meeting to offer advice to the group, as was a school board member (Fletcher 2005b). the SAAC member explained to the crowd that the public hearing scheduled for Tuesday, February 15th would be the last opportunity to make a

case to the committee for changing the district's proposal and that "nothing in this process weighs more heavily on the minds of this committee than those public hearings" (Fletcher 2005b). The school board member also advised parents against insulting other schools explaining that "the one thing that people do not respond to is sort of slamming the school you don't want to go to" (Fletcher 2005b). She further explained that she wanted to see Neely Farm children go to the South Central Middle School, a school she said she's worked for six years to bring to the community and that "it would not matter if Woodmont Middle School were the best school in the country, it's not the right school for us. I think it's totally unworkable, untenable, unbelievable that we would be asked to move this far from a middle school we've been anticipating for years" (Fletcher 2005b).

The SAAC member echoed this idea and suggested that the group should work to convince the committee to rezone their children for the new South Central Middle School (Fletcher 2005b). He urged them to cite reasons such as the extra driving distance to Woodmont, their community ties to Simpsonville, and the unfairness of using Neely Farm children to boost test scores at Woodmont Middle School (Fletcher 2005b). However, he told the group that they probably had very little chance of avoiding Woodmont High School. Therefore, he suggested that instead of asking to stay at Hillcrest High School, parents should ask that children enrolled in advanced academic programs not offered at Woodmont be grandfathered at Hillcrest High as well as asking of a year's delay so that parents can apply for charter and magnet schools – deadlines that had already passed that year (Fletcher 2005b). The school board member urged parents to take this advice and adopt a more positive and patient attitude about the prospects for Woodmont High. She explained that if parents and children demanded more

extracurricular programs and AP courses, the district, she promised, would provide them (Fletcher 2005b). "We have to be able to acknowledge that, programmatically, we are not there yet," she said. "But it's a mistake to believe that it can't or won't be" (Fletcher 2005b). Although some parents seemed receptive to those strategies, for others, the thought of waiting another year before their children were rerouted to Woodmont was still not a good enough answer. For example, one Neely Farm homeowner said he's already making plans to send his son to J.L. Mann High School or St. Joseph's Catholic School explaining that his son is "not going to Woodmont. He's not going to go" (Fletcher 2005b).

On Tuesday February 15th, more than 100 people attended the second public hearing to discuss the reassignment proposal, many from the Neely Farm and Long Creek Plantation neighborhoods (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). Many of the concerns brought to the committee centered on parents' fears that their children would be uprooted from their neighborhoods and separated from their friends. They also spoke about worries that some families would be split between two high schools, increased commutes, and distress that educational opportunities would be lost (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005).

One of the parents addressed the committee and explained that her family purchased their home in Long Creek Plantation because of the schools the neighborhood was assigned to, and that she believed her neighborhood and others were targeted to bring down the free and reduced lunch ratio and to boost test scores of some under-performing schools (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). The president of the Neely Farm Homeowners Association also spoke to the committee emphasizing the intimate link that the neighborhood had with the Simpsonville community. "We have no connection with the

Woodmont area," he said. "We go to church in Simpsonville, we shop in Simpsonville and currently Neely Farm is considering annexation into Simpsonville" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). He also stressed the opportunities that children living in Neely Farm would miss by going to Woodmont Middle School. "The new Woodmont does not have the programs or after school activities currently available at Hillcrest, such as swimming, state level competitive softball and debate club, honors choir, robotics, and lacrosse. And there does not appear to be a sufficient number of honors and AP courses to meet the needs of our students" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). He concluded by asking the committee to consider postponing the move until adequate programs and extra-curricular offerings could be implemented at Woodmont (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005).

Other parents addressed concerns about the moving of children from Mauldin and Riverside Middle schools to Beck Middle Academy and the reassignment of students from Mauldin High School to J.L. Mann High School (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). A resident of the Asheton subdivision, who had a sixth grader at Mauldin Middle School and a ninth grader at Mauldin High School, told the committee that "since Asheton subdivision was started in the early 1980s, it was zoned for Mauldin High School," and that "over that time, families have established an identity with the school, and it truly is a neighborhood school" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). She expressed further concern that "if the proposed zoning is approved and seniors are grandfathered, a hardship would fall on us as parents and others in our neighborhood and surrounding area in similar situations trying to get our children to two different high schools with no easy access to a J.L. Mann from our side of town" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005).

One student also addressed the committee at the hearing. She explained that she lived in the Asheton subdivision and was attending Mauldin Middle where she took "pride in my work and my school, and for me to move to J.L. Mann my sophomore year would be heartbreaking. I came out of school today to talk to you guys so you would understand a student's point of view. We are the ones who have to go through this" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005).

Not all parents attended the hearing to voice concerns or ask for alterations to the reassignment proposal. One parent, who had a child at Woodmont High, told the crowd that she too was concerned at first about sending her son there, but that "we decided to make it a good experience, and that is exactly what it's been" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). The PTSA president at Woodmont also talked about her daughter, a junior at Charleston Southern University, and her son, who was recently accepted to Clemson stressing that "my children were not accepted to two of the finest colleges in this state just because they were on the swim team or the lacrosse team, or because he was on the golf team, they were accepted due to their academics, their abilities, and yes, their extra-curricular activities, along with community service" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). She also praised the commitment of the Woodmont High faculty and encouraged the Simsponville parents to give their school a chance saying "we want you to become part of our family. We want you to grow with is to become the best high school in Greenville County. Come with open minds. Come willing to work together. Come with a positive attitude" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005).

Members of the committee acknowledged that switching schools was an emotional issue for both parents and students and a former assignment committee

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member and current CEO of the Urban League of the Upstate explained that, "people believe that their schools in certain neighborhoods are the best schools and they want to preserve those particular schools. It's very emotional for (parents) in that they want their kids to go to the same schools, to go the schools closest to them" (Silvaggio & Fletcher 2005). The three hour meeting ended with the SAAC asking the district to analyze four alternative options for redrawing its attendance lines for the Simpsonville schools and told the public that they would not make a decision until they had viewed the district's analysis, which they expected to have by Saturday, February 26th (Fletcher 2005c). The Neely Farm homeowner's association president, said that he felt "fairly good" that one of the options his group had proposed would prevail (Fletcher 2005c). He said that he believed the loud and organized opposition could be the reason the committee is taking more time to consider the proposals (Fletcher 2005c). The SAAC chairman explained that "I think that we have to do, in all fairness, is come up [with] some scenarios that are fair and will address the charges" (Fletcher 2005c).

However, with regard to the attendance zones for J.L. Mann High School, Beck Middle Academy, the new Southeast Area Elementary school, and Greenbrier Elementary School, the chairman said that the SAAC's decision would most likely not change before the committee sent its recommendation that the district continue with its originally proposed plan (Fletcher 2005c). The SAAC felt confident with the plans for those schools because they struck a good balance, "I think we're pretty firm on our deliberations," he said (Fletcher 2005c).

On Saturday, February 26th, after an hour long debate, the Student Assignment Advisory Committee released its recommendations on the student reassignment issue in

the Gold Strip area on the Eastside of Greenville County (Silvaggio 2005c). The SAAC decided to recommend that rising fifth graders, eighth graders, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the district would not have to change schools, but they will support the district's original plan to move more than a dozen subdivisions currently zoned for Hillcrest Middle and High schools to Woodmont Middle and High schools despite the outcry from parents in those neighborhoods (Silvaggio 2005c). Although many parents, especially from the Neely Farm neighborhood, argued that the new South Central Middle School was closer to their homes and a better fit for their children, the SAAC decided that it was not feasible given their task to balance factors such as distance students must travel from home to school, avoiding high concentrations of low performing students, and minimizing a school's concentration of children receiving free or reduced meals (Silvaggio 2005c).

An associate professor of education at Clemson University agreed with the committees decision and said that she thought it was a good compromise and that she believes "it is important to let children stay together their final years in a school because they've bonded and there is a camaraderie there that helps them not only academically but socially" (Silvaggio 2005c). However, the president of the Neely Farm homeowner's association was upset with the decision to send children from his community and other area neighborhoods to Woodmont Middle and High schools (Silvaggio 2005c). He did concede that the grandfather clause was a step in the right directions, but stated that "by no means is this over. The committee largely has been a rubber stamp of the school district's original proposals" (Silvaggio 2005c). Further, he did not believe that the SAAC gave equal weight to the eleven factors they were charged with balancing among

the schools. "From what I've seen, they only analyze two criteria, he said. "That is free and reduced meal scores and test scores with no consideration given to the remaining criteria" (Silvaggio 2005c).

A SAAC member, who represented the Simpsonville area on the committee, tried repeatedly to convince his colleagues to allow the Golden Strip students to attend the South Central middle school, and continued to disagree with the recommendation of the SAAC (Silvaggio 2005c). "These people want to go to the closest school to their homes, and they feel like they've been jerked around. I'm having a hard time explaining that they can't go to that school because we're saving space for people who aren't there yet, and that they are being sent elsewhere to solve other problems" (Silvaggio 2005c). However, another SAAC member who represented northern Greenville County on the committee explained that it was important to balance the numbers of low performing students and children receiving free and reduced meals (Silvaggio 2005c). Although she admitted that she did not "have a dog in this fight, we have to care about all the children not just those on one side of the boundary line" (Silvaggio 2005c). She continued, "it isn't just about two schools. We need to get past this" (Silvaggio 2005c).

On March 3rd, a community member wrote an article in the Greenville News also expressing her dismay with the SAAC's decision to go with the district's proposal that would move children from Hillcrest Middle and High schools to Woodmont Middle and High schools. Brooks pointed out that both Woodmont Middle and High schools earned below average ratings on their 2004 Report Cards, and that the new assignments would move kids from well performing schools to below average schools (Brooks 2005). She explained that many parents in the Neely Farm neighborhood believed that their children

were being selected largely in an effort to fix the low test scores in the Woodmont schools.

Adding to the controversy surrounding the student reassignment process, in a surprise decision on Thursday, March 31st, the district superintendent announced that she would not go with the SAAC and district's proposal to reassign the Neely Farm children to Woodmont Middle School (Fletcher 2005d). Instead, the superintendent recommended that 149 children, including those from Neely Farm, should go to the new South Central Middle school (Fletcher 2005d). The superintendent explained that her decision was not made in response to the protest's by parents in the Neely Farm are, but that it was made in order to open space at Woodmont Middle School for rising sixth graders who wanted to continue in their International Baccalaureate program which the new South Central Middle School won't have (Fletcher 2005d). She also conceded that the proximity of the 149 students' homes also played a prominent role in her decision, and that reassigning any other neighborhoods would have created pockets of students not contiguous to other homes in their attendance area, which would not have been in line with district policy (Fletcher 2005d).

Neely Farm families were thrilled to hear the news, especially the president of the homeowner's association, who had spoken persistently on behalf of the community. He shared that "we're quite elated, in fact, over the superintendent's decision with the new South Central Middle assignment. It's the school that Neel Farm had been planning for" (Fletcher 2005d). Another Neely Farm resident and parent said of the new decision that, "it made perfect sense for the children, being that close" (Fletcher 2005d). He also explained that "it makes no sense to go to another community, especially because

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everybody around isn't" (Fletcher 2005d). The school board chairman said Thursday March 31st that although he had not received an official copy of the superintendent's recommendations, her plan would stand unless school board members decide to change it (Fletcher 2005d).

Woodmont Middle School and Fork Shoals Elementary School had only been approved two weeks ago for the International Baccalaureate program and therefore its impact was not factored into the SAAC decision making process because their work had been completed several weeks earlier (Fletcher 2005d). The superintendent maintained that public comments had nothing to do with the change in the proposal and claimed that she had not even read emails from parents about the issue, and stressed that "anyone who knows me know that I didn't cave to any pressure. I make decisions based on what's best for our children and our school district" (Fletcher 2005d).

The new plan increased the number of students who qualified for free or reduced meals at Woodmont Middle School from about 55% to 58%, a number that the district's initial proposal had attempted to balance (Fletcher 2005d). However, the superintendent responded that an increase of 3% would not make much difference and that as development continued around the school, the number would decrease (Fletcher 2005d). The superintendent's plan would still exempt students who were entering 5th, 8th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grades the year the school opens and agreed with all other recommendations of the SAAC (Fletcher 2005d). In addition her plan would move 49 students from 10 geocodes in the downtown Greenville from Beck Middle Academy to Hughes Middle Academy in order to provide more capacity at Beck Middle Academy for its foreign language immersion program. Her plan would also give students reassigned in 2004 from

Baker's Chapel Elementary School to Grove and Welcome elementary schools first priority if they wish to attend the combined Baker's Chapel/Greenview Elementary if space is available (Fletcher 2005d).

Summary of Strategic Responses

Based on the indicators of strategic response outlined in Table 4.1, the data collected from each of the districts is used to show evidence of the utilization of particular strategies across all three districts. In conjunction with antecedent factors present in each district, this summary provides support for theoretically grounded expectations and understandings of the outcomes uncovered by this case study. See Table 5.1 at the conclusion of this chapter for a graphical summary of this evidence.

Acquiesce

The findings presented above indicate evidence that all three school districts acquiesced to the institutional pressures in their districts. In each of these districts, the school boards in charge of guiding and finalizing the reassignment policies conformed to habit, imitated previous procedures and plans, and consciously complied with institutional pressures exerted upon them. In Dorchester 2, the school board often trusted the work done by the Director of Planning and the Superintendent and very rarely disagreed with the proposals presented to them (Dorchester 2013). Rather than working with either official, the board members trusted the initial proposals and revisions and granted their approval based on habit and taken for granted norms, imitating policies and procedures that were considered successful in the past. The Director of Planning himself stated that, "they have not had many complaints with the way they have been doing things, so they keep doing it the way they have done before" (Dorchester 2013). The

adherence to taken for granted rules was also exemplified in the Greenville school district. Although the SAAC listened to public input and heard numerous ideas for policy alterations, it ultimately approved almost the exact plan as the initial proposal. For the most part, very little feedback and suggestions from the community were incorporated into the recommendation from the SAAC, who determined that their final decision would need to only adhere to the balancing factors set forth by the district. This imitation of and obedience to the way things had always been done was apparent to community members who commented that, "the committee has largely been a rubber stamp of the school district's original proposals" (Silvaggio 2005c).   In the Rock Hill and Greenville school districts acquiescence through habit and imitation were also evidenced through their desire to reproduce actions and practices that had become historically repeated and customary. Reflecting similar histories with desegregation efforts, both districts sought reassignment plans that would maintain desegregation efforts that had long been in place.

The factors considered when reassigning students in Dorchester 2 were very similar to those used in both the Greenville school district and the Rock Hill school district, indicating the existence of mimetic isomorphism within the institutional environment. In all three districts capacity, socioeconomic balance, and the equalization of test scores were taken into consideration when developing reassignment plans although none of the district officials indicated knowledge of the procedures being utilized in other South Carolina school districts. These unconscious similarities represent an institutionalization of specific procedures and policies that have garnered obedience and compliance across the districts.

In each of the three districts, acquiescence was also achieved through the utilization of compliance tactics. The Dorchester 2 school board made a conscious effort to incorporate and comply with many of the pressures exerted by its constituents. The final reassignment plan for Eagle Nest Elementary incorporated about 90% of the input received from community members. Rock Hill's final plan incorporated the values of its constituents as well, specifically addressing and the request by a group of individuals representing the Village Creek/Wellsbrook community to keep students in schools that were closer to their homes. In the Greenville school district, compliance to institutionalized procedures and polices was apparent throughout the entire process and adoption of its reviewed reassignment plan. The Greenville school district had adopted a series of factors that were to be used when reassigning students, and despite pressures from community members, district officials and the SAAC remained steadfast in their adherence to these guidelines while working to develop new attendance zones in concurrence with the opening of Rudolph Gordon Elementary.

Compromise

The data collected from each district also shows evidence that compromising tactics were used in all three school districts. In each of the districts, community members challenged the districts' initial reassignment proposals. In response, each district negotiated and accommodated the multiplicity of constituent demands. In Dorchester 2, the Director of Planning and the Superintendent proposed an initial plan that addressed issues of overcrowding in schools across the district. Community members, however, pushed for a plan that would move fewer students, keep children in schools closer to their homes, keep neighborhoods intact, and not increase the poverty rate at Summerville

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Elementary. The final reassignment plan agreed upon by the district accomplished these goals and balanced the community's demands with the goals of the district. Further, the reassignment process in Dorchester 2 also illustrated the use of a pacification tactic to achieve compromise among the competing constituent demands. The superintendent mounted a minor level of resistance to the initial community pressures telling the public that although the district would of course listen to their concerns, due to the tremendous amount of overcrowding there was little "wiggle room" with regard to the current proposal (Hagen 2006e). This however, proved not to be the case as the final plan differed greatly from the initial proposal moving 500 fewer students and reducing the poverty level by 10% of the original plan.

The case of Dorchester 2 also demonstrates the use of bargaining as a means to achieve compromise with district officials demanding some form of concession from the constituents as they negotiated the final reassignment plan. At the first public hearing in the district, the superintendent explained that if parents were upset and wanted to argue for keeping their neighborhoods zoned to their current schools, they would have to propose feasible ideas for substituting a similar neighborhood to take its place (Hagen 2006e). The community responded to this task, and the final reassignment policy reflected those negotiated substitutions.

Less actively, constituents in both the Rock Hill and Greenville schools districts bargained with their district officials and concessions were made from both sets of constituents to compromise on a final reassignment plan. The Rock Hill School District was ultimately able to approve a solution that kept a level of balance in the schools, but also satisfied the public's desire, especially the group from Village Creek/Wellsbrook, to

keep students in schools that were closer to their homes. Rather than remaining steadfast in their commitment to keep balanced schools, the school board and the reassignment committee devoted large portions of their work sessions to readjusting the plans, bringing them more in line with what the public was calling for. In Greenville, the SAAC's final recommendation to the superintendent showed a clear effort to balance not only the district's eleven reassignment goals but also an effort to balance those goals with the concerns raised specifically by the Neely Farm residents. The SAAC agreed with the community that rising 5th, 8th, 10th, and 11th graders should be exempt from changing schools, but supported the district's original proposal to move students from the Hillcrest Schools to the Woodmont schools.

Avoidance

I did not find evidence that the Dorchester 2 school district employed any of the tactics that would indicate an avoidance strategy. I did however find evidence for the use of partial avoidance tactics in both the Rock Hill and Greenville school districts. In the Rock Hill school district there is evidence that the district attempted to conceal their balancing efforts from the legal framework within which they were working. Due to the ruling in the district's 2002 court settlement as well as the Supreme Court's ruling in *Parents Involved*, the district was prohibited from explicitly using race as a way to balance their schools. However, the fact that the concentration of students receiving free or reduced lunch and the concentration of students with low state-wide test scores were extremely correlated to race in the district (Smith 2010), allowed for the district to continue its work toward achieving racial balance as long as they used those two variables as the dominant guiding factors. This evidence is further supported by

comments made by many of the school board members expressing disappointment in the racial imbalance that resulted from the concessions made to the public in the Mount Holly reassignment plan, although race had never been formally discussed as a point of interest in the reassignment process.

The Greenville school district also engaged in concealment tactics through its ritualistic response to institutional pressures. As opposed its acquiescence and compromising strategies, the role of the SAAC was largely a symbolic one that gave the appearance of a desire to conform to institutional pressures, but ultimately had no intention to do so. Although the committee was tasked with collecting public input it remained constrained by the district-approved policies and according to the Executive Director in the planning department, the initial recommendations of their office were almost always accepted as the final plan by the school board (Greenville 2013). As was the case in the reassignment proposal reviewed here, the SAAC collected a large amount of feedback from the community as well as some clearly defined counter proposals from the Neely Farm residents, however, the SAAC still largely recommended the provisions of the district's initial plan. Further, although the Superintendent's final recommendation did give the concession of transferring students to Woodmont Middle, the Woodmont High plan remained in place and the Superintendent argued that she was in no way responding to the pressures from the community. She went so far as to say that she had not even read emails from parents regarding the issue and that "anyone who knows me knows that I didn't cave to any pressure. I make decisions based on what's best for our children and our school district" (Fletcher 2005d).

Although it is not clear through the data collected whether this tactic was used in a conscious manner, there is evidence that the district also altered its own goals and activities to avoid the necessity to conform altogether to the pressures exerted by its constituents. The district was able to circumvent the direct pressure from the Neely Farm Homeowner's Association to keep their children at the new South Central middle school by making a last minute program change. Although the final reassignment plan allowed the Neely Farm students to stay at the new South Central middle school, the Superintendent maintained that the decision was made only due to the approval of an International Baccalaureate Program at Woodmont Middle school, which would leave no room there for the Neely Farm children. Further, after the final reassignment plan was approved, the district superintendent commented that the resulting increase in the poverty level at Woodmont Middle school would not make that much of a difference. Because one of the district's eleven reassignment factors includes maintaining equal poverty levels at the districts' schools, this statement indicates at least a slight departure from the districts' goals, further indicating that avoidance was utilized.

Defiance

My findings do not indicate that the Dorchester 2 or Greenville school districts employed any of the tactics that comprise a defiance strategy. However, I did find negative evidence for the use of dismissal tactics in the Rock Hill school district. In Rock Hill, the school district's stance on voluntary balance across the district was clearly in conflict with much of the public's desire for closer to home schools as well as a growing national sentiment for a similar change in how schools were populated (Smith 2010). Parents in the district that attended the public hearings complained about travel time and

the location of schools closer to their homes however the district consistently maintained

its balancing approach at the public hearings and defended itself in the media against the

public criticism. One resident summed up the public sentiment saying "it seems like if a

school is in your neighborhood, that should be the school you go to" (Schonberg 2007d).

However the school board chairman reflecting the approach of the district countered that

"parents have one goal, and that is what's best for my child. Our approach must be what's

best for every child" (Schonberg 2007d). Further, the Rock Hill school district's stance

departed from the national trend toward re-segregation as fewer schools relied on

mandatory integration efforts and instead turned to the neighborhood school model

(Smith 2010), and openly discussed the importance of racial considerations at a time

when the ruling in the case of *Parents Involved* seemed to be dealing a final blow to race

based integration efforts across the country.

Manipulation

The date provides no evidence that any of the districts employed a manipulation

strategy. However, it is important to note that an influential tactic was present in the case

of the Rock Hill school district. Although it is unclear from the data what role the school

district might have had in it, the Rock Hill Herald's editorial staff published a lengthy

article in support of the balancing efforts of the district officials. The article attempted to

address the institutionalized values and beliefs of the district's residents explaining that

the community needed to adapt and change due to the growth in the district and the

shifting population. They went on to write that residents of Rock Hill needed to face the

reality that neighborhood schools were not practical and that balance was important in

order to ensure that all schools had approximately the same advantages and opportunities to achieve excellence (Staff 2007).

Table 5.1 Summary of Strategic Responses

School District		Strategies Employed														
		Acquiesce			Compromise			Avoidance			Defiance			Manipulation		
		Habit	Imitate	Compliance	Balance	Pacify	Bargain	Conceal	Buffer	Escape	Dismiss	Challenge	Attack	Co-Opt	Influence	Control
	Dorchester 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Rock Hill	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	○	X	○	○	○	✓	○
	Greenville	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○

✓   Evidence Found
○   Absence of Evidence
X   Negative Evidence Found

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

By using concepts of new institutional theory that address organizational environments and the strategies used by organizations to respond to external pressures, I provide a more comprehensive understanding of why each district was pressured to conform to a particular reassignment plan, which organizational constituents were involved in exerting pressures on each district, how consistent those pressures were with each district's organizational goals, in what manner the pressures were applied, and the larger context in which the reassignment plans were being proposed and debated. Further, my results allow for a discussion of the type of institutional isomorphism each district experienced. Although Oliver's (1991) typology of strategic response propose distinct categories for the reactions of a particular organization, the findings above provide clear evidence that the school districts of Rock Hill, Greenville, and Dorchester 2 show instances of employing more than one particular strategy.

Additionally, although each district responded to institutional pressures in diverse ways, the final reassignment plans adopted by each district indicate the presence of mimetic isomorphism as all three districts adopted plans that were not only similar to templates used for reassignments in the past, but also plans that did not differ greatly from district to district. It can also be argued that the changing legal landscape regarding the use of race in student assignment policies as well as local level zoning and

land use regulations provided evidence that coercive isomorphism was present to some extent as well in at least two of the districts.

Review of Institutional Factors

The events surrounding the reassignment processes in each of the aforementioned school districts allow for an examination of five specific institutional factors that play an important role in understanding the type of strategy a district is more likely to employ. These five factors – cause, constituents, content, control, and context – described for each of the three school district reassignment plans under review are summarized as follows.

Cause: Why is the organization being pressured to conform to particular norms?

There are two components to understanding the *why* of reassigning students to new schools in each of the districts reviewed. First, we must understand why the school needs to reassign its students taking into account factors such as the construction of new school which must be populated, overcrowding in schools that must be alleviated by redistributing students across the districts' schools, or some combination of both. Second, it is necessary to understand the reason that each district feels an institutional pressure to conform to a particular reassignment policy. In general, the reason for these institutional pressures either stems from a desire to maintain social legitimacy or economic efficiency.

For each of the districts included in this study, increasing student population and the resulting need for the construction of new schools in the districts, was the key impetus for transitioning students. However, in all three districts, reassignments to populate a new school were also accompanied by transfers of students in and out of other schools in the district that were either over-or-under-capacity. For example, in Dorchester School District 2, the reassignment plan to populate the new Eagle Nest Elementary as well as

Reeves Elementary resulted in Summerville Elementary sending 14 students to Eagle Nest, but gaining 56 new children and Newington Elementary sending 132 and gaining 80 new students. A similar situation occurred in the Rock Hill School District. The reassignment plan to populate the new Mount Holly Elementary School and Dutchman Creek Middle School was also designed to alleviate overcrowding at neighboring schools as seats opened up in Old Pointe Elementary and Rock Hill High School. Although the Greenville School District too used their reassignment plan to address issues of overcrowding, the district also used their plan to boost enrollment at some under capacity schools such as Woodmont High, J.L. Mann Academy, and Beck Middle Academy.

As each of the three districts prepared, modified, and approved their reassignments plans there was pressure to maintain both social legitimacy as well as economic efficiency. Schools in general have been characterized as seeking to satisfy state and public expectations of appropriate structure and as "sharing the same educational culture" (Meyer et al. 1983:52) and that held true for all three school districts in this study. School board officials were under pressure from their constituents to make decisions that were in the best interest of all, and therefore needed to create reassignment plans in a manner that seemed fair and logical to families within the district.

Further, in each of the school district there was a pressure to equalize socio-economic characteristics among schools in the district. Many district officials were quoted saying that balancing the socio-economic characteristics at the school was what was best for *all* children. For example, in the Rock Hill school district school board chairman defended his board's decision to maintain socio-economic balance stating that "our approach must be what's best for every child" (Schonberg 2007d). Another sign of

efforts to maintain legitimacy was the inclusion and encouragement by each of the districts to give parents and community members a voice in the discussion process for the determination of new attendance boundaries, as well as in the fact that for all three school districts the final reassignment plan included at least one suggestion from public input.

All three school districts also sought to maintain high levels of economic and academic efficiency in the creation of their reassignment plans. Attempts to reduce the distance traveled by students from home to school, equalizing the concentration of students receiving free or reduced lunch, and balancing state administered test scores across the district reflected a common effort among the districts to distribute their resources in a balanced manner. Academic efficiency is also related to economic efficiency in a school district due to provisions in the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act. For instance, continuously underperforming schools that fail to meet AYP status, are required to offer and pay for services such as student transfers, tutoring programs, supplemental education resources, or the restructuring of schools. It is therefore in the best interest of school districts to balance low and high performing students across schools illustrated best in the case of the Greenville School District. One of the most contentious issues that district faced in its reassignment plan was the proposal to move the high performing students at Hillcrest Middle and High Schools to the lower performing Woodmont Middle and High Schools.

Constituents: Who is Exerting Pressure and what does that pressure look like?

The institutional constituents in each of the school districts include the state, professions, interest groups, and general public that impose a variety of laws, regulations and expectations on the decision making process of each district's school board. Aside

from identifying key players in the reassignment decisions for each district, it is also important to determine the constituent demands, the degree of multiple, conflicting, constituent expectations exerted on a particular district, and the level of dependency each district has on its constituents. When organizations encounter a multiplicity of demands, those pressures may inhibit the ability of the organization to conform to a particular strategy. Pfeffer and Salanick (1978) argued that when organizations confront incompatible and competing demands it makes unilateral conformity difficult because the satisfaction of one constituent often requires the organization to ignore or defy the demands of another. This was the case, in varying degrees, for all three districts.

In Dorchester School District 2, some of the key constituents involved in the reassignment plan accompanying the opening on Eagle Nest Elementary included the district superintendent, the director of Federal & State Programs/Community Planning, and the school board members. A variety of parents of children in the affected schools also participated in the reassignment process including a group of parents from the Corey Woods subdivision upset by the initial proposal to send half their neighborhood to Newington Elementary and the other half to Knightsville Elementary.

Of all the districts reviewed, Dorchester School District 2 had the least amount of conflicting constituent demands. The district has no official guidelines for how they reassign students in their district, but factors such as balancing the amount of students receiving free or reduced lunch and minimizing the distance traveled from home to school do play a role (Dorchester 2013). Once the initial proposal was presented to the public there were only two major issues that arose which centered on the movement of student out of Newington Elementary due to the splitting of the Corey Woods

neighborhood and the large number of students (almost half the population) that would have been moved out of Summerville Elementary. Another concern raised by the community about the Summerville move was that it would leave the school with a poverty rate higher than any other school in the district. Each of these matters were addressed at the public hearings with community members voicing their concern that these parts of the proposal were not in line with what the district stated as its important considerations when reassigning students.

With regard to the reassignment plan that accompanied the opening of Mount Holly Elementary school in the Rock Hill School District, important constituents involved in that process included the district superintendent, the associate superintendent, the Director of School Climate, and the school board members. Other constituents included the district appointed reassignment committee, parents from some of the affected schools, and the Rock Hill Herald which weighed in on the reassignment debate with an official editorial in support of maintaining balanced schools in the Rock Hill School District.

There existed a multiplicity of constituent demands over the reassignment proposals in Rock Hill. The Rock Hill School District has made it a priority since 1965 to maintain high levels of socio-economic balance and racial diversity in its schools (Smith 2010). These goals have been achieved mainly in part by the district's insistence on busing students to schools that are not always closest to their home in order to maintain a balance (Smith 2010). Community members, however, raised concerns over transportation issues and the distances their children would have to travel, the disruptions that previous attendance shifts had already caused in their children's schooling, and

school uniform changes. One of the largest disagreements that were expressed by the community was frustration with the district's core policy of maintaining schools that were socio-economically balanced, with many residents in the affected areas claiming that efforts to maintain this balance were unfair and outdated.

In the reassignment process reviewed for the Greenville School District, influential constituents included the district superintendent and the school board members. Similar to the Rock Hill School District, the Greenville School District also appointed a committee known as the Student Assignment Advisory Committee to work on revisions of the district's initial proposal. Parents affected by the reassignment plans also provided input especially a group of residents from the Neely Farm Homeowner's Association who were led by the association's president.

The reassignment proposals in the Greenville School District represented the most significant examples of conflicting constituent demands. Similar to the Rock Hill School District, the Greenville School District has made a conscious decision to strive for socio-economic balance in its schools, and all reassignments in the district area determined using eleven district approved factors that take elements such as test scores and free and reduced lunch rates into account (Greenville 2013, Greenville County Schools 2010). Residents in areas affected by the proposed changes, however, challenged many aspects of the district's proposal as well as the recommendations made by the SAAC. Parents were infuriated by the idea that although they bought homes in particular areas of the counties largely due to the quality of school their homes would be zoned for, their children would now be attending schools that were further away and ranked lower in state-wide test scores. Residents were also unhappy that extracurricular activities and

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academic course offerings would change if their children were rezoned to different schools. The constituents in the Neely Farm subdivision were especially upset that not only did proposals send their children to lower performing schools with fewer district sponsored activities, but that a brand new middle school had just been built close to their community that there children would now *not* be able to attend. Many parents also explained to the district that the proposed changes would remove their children from schools in their community that they had many ties to and instead force them to attend school in a community they knew nothing about. Lastly, parents of rising 5th, 8th, 11th, and 12th graders were adamant that their children should not be forced to change schools while completing their careers at their current elementary, middle, and high schools.

Content: To what norms or is the organization being pressured to conform?

Whether or not the institutional demands are consistent with the goals of the district plays a significant role in the district's decision to adopt any recommendations from its constituents. Therefore, it is important to understand what norms the district is being pressured to conform to and whether those pressures are consistent with the goals of each school district. Further, each district must at some point consider whether consenting to a particular institutional pressure jeopardizes its legitimacy or efficiency.

The goals of the Dorchester School District 2 and the concerns raised by its constituents were very much in line with one another. Although there are no official guidelines that must be followed to reassign students in Dorchester School District 2, the district has for many years made an effort to keep students at schools that were closest to their homes, move as few students as possible, while also making an effort to maintain some degree of socioeconomic balance (Dorchester 2013). When the initial proposals

were presented to the public, the main concern from the community was that these factors had not been adequately considered. Parents were upset that a community might be divided in two and that an unnecessarily large number of students would be moved from Summerville Elementary School. After the hearings on the proposed changes, both the school board and the Superintendent agreed with the public's concerns, and the final plan implemented in the district moved a much smaller amount of children and kept the poverty rate at Summerville much lower than if the initial proposal had been kept.

The situations in the Rock Hill School District and the Greenville School district presented a very different situation. In both districts, the goals and policies adopted by the districts were in direct conflict with the constituents pressures. In Rock Hill, parents begged the school board to allow their children to attend schools that were closest to their homes, citing a strong desire to the idea of having neighborhood schools. However, the district officials maintained their position that what was more important to the overall well-being of students in the district was attending a school that had high levels of socio-economic and academic balance. The Greenville School District faced a similar challenge from its constituents. The district policies clearly identify eleven factors that are considered when reassigning students and the consideration of the concentration of students receiving free and reduced lunch as well as the distribution of state-wide test scores are two such factors. Unlike Rock Hill, Greenville does not give more weight to one particular factor, but instead strives to take into consideration all eleven factors without priority (Greenville County Schools 2010). When the SAAC upheld many of the district's planned reassignment changes, parents in the community not only disagreed with the consideration of freed and reduced lunch students and test score equalization,

they went so far as to accuse the district of giving more weight to those factors and less consideration of the concerns parents had brought forth. Although some concessions were made to the public, in both districts, the final reassignment plans remained largely similar to their initial district proposals.

Control: Through what means are pressures being exerted?

Institutional control describes the method by which institutional pressures are imposed on an organization. These pressures can be exerted through legal guidelines that force an organization to conform to particular local, state, or federal procedures or through voluntary diffusion of a particular practice throughout the institutional environment. In the case of these three school districts, both factors played a role in the reassignment plans reviewed for this study.

Legal pressures are most clearly exemplified by each of the district's requirement to maintain appropriate capacity levels at their schools. Every school district in a state is required by state law to stay within the capacity limits of the school or else they must purchase portable classrooms, expand existing schools, or build new schools (Dorchester 2013). In the Dorchester 2, Rock Hill, and Greenville school districts, alleviating overcrowding was above all, the primary reason for initiating a reassignment plan. Legal pressures were also significant in the reassignment proposals for Rock Hill and Greenville due to those districts desire to maintain balanced schools and the federal laws that influenced the resulting processes.

In the Greenville School District, the district had a strong commitment to creating and maintaining diverse schools, especially given that the district had, in the past, been under a federally mandated desegregation plan. In the mid-1990s the district made a

promise to remain unitary despite being released from an official court order and developed a comprehensive magnet and school choice program in an attempt to induce some voluntary integration across the district (Greenville 2013). In addition, the district adopted its policy of considering eleven factors including poverty levels and student test scores to further achieve balance.

The requirements of state and local level policies also greatly affected the reassignment policies in Greenville due to the influence of zoning and land use policies on the initial placement of new schools within the district. Before attendance lines are even proposed, a district must determine where to locate a new school and that decision weighs heavily on the resulting boundaries drawn to create an attendance zone. In the Greenville School District, more so than in the other two districts reviewed, policies from the South Carolina Department of Transportation and the South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control were mentioned as contributing significantly to the location of new schools built in order to relieve overcrowding (Greenville 2013). Unlike Greenville, the Director of Planning from Dorchester School District 2 explained that his district's decision on where to build a new school often is related to available land offered to the district by developers of new subdivisions and by natural boundaries that exist in his district such as a swamp and river that divide sections of Dorchester County (Dorchester 2013).

The Rock Hill School District had a unique relationship with legal pressures during the reassignment process reviewed here. Federal involvement was a fundamental component in two ways. First, the continued pursuit of achieving balance was made possible by a change in the way school board members were elected due to the threat of

litigation against the school district by the Department of Justice (Smith 2010). In April

2000, after the Department of Justice had been petitioned by Black activists from York

County, the school board was forced to adopt a school board election plan where five

school board members would be elected from single member districts and only two

members would be elected at-large, a departure from the previous system in which all

members were elected at-large resulting in a white dominate school board mostly made

up of members residing in the wealthier northern portion of the county (Smith &

Kedrowski 2008). Additionally, the boundaries of two of the single member districts

were drawn to make it likely that a Black school board member would win from each

(Smith & Kedrowski 2008). The introduction of this diversity to the school board

specifically in the elections of Ann Reid and Mildred Douglas, led to racial balance being

ranked as one the most important criteria in the reassignment of students in the district

during a major shift in the student population in 2001 (Smith & Kedrowski 2008).

That same school reassignment plan from 2001 consequently contributed to more

legal implications for the Rock Hill School District. Although the reassignment plan

creating racial balance was approved and implemented by the school board, reactions

from the community spurred a lawsuit against the district. A settlement was reached

between the district and then community plaintiffs that allowed for the district to continue

to pursue "meaningful diversity," but with the restriction that "race will not be the

predominant factor in that assignment of students" and that "the school district shall not

employ numerical racial quotas or targets in the assignment of students in any future

student assignment plan, including future high school and middle school student

assignment plans" (Smith & Kedrowski:1000). Although the settlement did not bar the

district from using race in its reassignment plans completely, it made district officials hesitant to consider race in future proceedings including the proposals presented for the Mount Holly reassignment (Smith 2010).

Dorchester 2 provided a noteworthy instance of the role of legal pressures, in that, the district did not appear to have any pressures to adopt a particular reassignment plan despite the fact that the district was and is still currently under a federal mandate to continue efforts to integrate its schools. Further, through both my archival research as well as through my interview with Dorchester 2's Director of Planning, there did not appear to be a clear district level policy addressing a formal procedure or accepted guidelines for determining best practices related to the creation and modification of attendance boundaries.

Oliver (1991) explains that organizations may also feel pressure through a process of voluntary diffusion whereby and idea or a practice is already established leading institutional constituents to call for its continued use. In all three cases reviewed in this study, the idea of balancing schools was mentioned by the districts, but not generally accepted in any of the school districts communities. The need to alleviate overcrowding was the only theme in all three districts that appeared to be voluntarily diffused through the institutional environment. Although community members in all three districts often called for keeping children in schools closest to their homes, in none of the cases, did there appear to be a traditional or widely accepted established practice for reassigning students among institutional constituents other than the district officials.

Context: What is the environmental context?

The environmental context within which institutional pressures are exerted plays a role in determining how an organization will respond to the influences being exerted by its constituents. Specifically relevant to the understanding of how school districts respond to the institutional pressures to adopt a particular reassignment plan, is the function of interconnectedness among other occupants of the organizational field. Interconnectedness not only facilitates the voluntary diffusion of norms and shared information (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Pfeffer & Salanick 1978), organizations are more likely to yield to institutional pressures if those pressures come from constituents that are highly interconnected (Oliver 1991).

The highest level of interconnectedness found in this study, existed in the Greenville reassignment case. Although they were not entirely successful in their efforts, the organization of the Neely Farm Homeowner's association exemplified the interconnectedness of the residents around a few key issues that were decided upon by all and presented by their president Dave Stewart. Parents from the Newington subdivision in the Dorchester 2 case also came together against the district's initial proposal to split their neighborhood among two schools, however the level of planning, and organization leading up to those requests being presented at the first public hearing were not nearly as developed as those seen with the Neely Farm residents. In the investigation of Rock Hill's reassignment, there appeared to be no formal organizations of people that spoke against the district's reassignment proposals, although the editorial published in the Rock Hill Herald did attempt to disseminate and urge a shared sense of the importance of balanced schools in the district.

With regard to the larger organizational field that included other neighboring districts, each of the officials I interviewed indicated that their district made decisions without consideration of what other districts in the state were doing. This is especially interesting considering that each of the districts proposed plans that had similar factors in mind such as minimizing distance from home to school, balancing low income students, and equalizing test scores. It is also noteworthy because the districts each faced opposition from parents in their districts who made it clear that neighborhood schools were most important.

Varied Responses, Isomorphic Outcomes, and the Role of Legitimacy

Due to the similarities and differences that existed among the institutional factors reviewed above we expect to see resulting parallels and variations in the strategic responses employed by each of the districts. All three districts experienced pressures to maintain social legitimacy and economic efficiency while balancing the demands of school district policies and competing constituent demands within a similar environmental context. However, differences existed in the factors of content and control that resulted in varied use of avoidance, defiance, and manipulation strategies. Ultimately though, each of the districts adopted isomorphic reassignment plans that both resembled one another as well as were similar to the process and outcomes of past reassignment procedures in each of the three districts.

The Dorchester 2 school board acquiesced to institutional pressures making a conscious effort to incorporate and comply with the pressures from their constituents and resulted in some self-serving benefit. By incorporating about 90% of the input from the community the school board was able to enhance the organization's legitimacy by

reducing its vulnerability to negative assessments of its conduct. As one school board member was quoted, "when we were running for school board, one of the complaints we heard was that input from the community wasn't well-received by this board. No one can complain about this process. This has been the ultimate in community relations" (Hagen 2006j). Although, it is not clear to what degree the school board was aware of how self-serving their process would be, it is safe to say that for elected officials to walk away from such an emotional issue with a great amount of support from their community, organizational legitimacy was served to some degree.

In the end, Dorchester School District 2 created and adopted a reassignment plan similar to the processes and the templates used previously by district officials. Although one might have expected to see the distinct role of coercive isomorphism due to the districts federally mandated desegregation orders, mimetic isomorphism exemplified the outcomes in this district to a larger extent. Rather than express constraints based on the need for racial balance as dictated by the court order, district officials modeled their initial proposals after templates that they had used many times before and that the public and the school board had not raised concerns about, therefore maintaining the perception of legitimate and successful reassignment policies across the district. Although district officials did not indicate knowledge about, or specific guidance provided by reassignment policies employed in other districts, the way in which students were assigned to schools, and the factors that were taken into consideration when manipulating attendance boundaries were almost identical to those used by both the Greenville School District and the Rock Hill School District. Further, when the initial proposals presented to the public were met with controversy, the district officials quickly worked to reassign students in a

way that garnered more public support and continued to preserve the legitimacy of the district among its institutional constituents.

The school board in the Rock Hill School District had a much larger role directing the work done to create initial reassignment proposals. School board members were actively engaged in the debate and workshops to produce the original proposals and were responsible for appointing and directing a reassignment committee to conduct further modifications to the plan. Further, the Rock Hill School Board had clear objectives to pursue racial and socio-economic balance for their schools that had previously been voted upon and written as official district policies.

The extent to which the district chose to comply with particular pressures in an effort to increase legitimacy is clearest when the district chose to conform to the pressure exerted by the parents from the Village Creek/Wellsbrook neighborhoods who were most vocal about the increase in travel time the initial proposal would have placed on their children by sending them to Belleview Elementary as opposed to Lesslie, Independence, or Mount Holly elementary schools, all of which were closer. The final reassignment plan allowed this group of residents to remain zoned for Belleview Elementary and instead moved a neighborhood closer to the Oakdale elementary school, despite the fact that making that concession resulted in a racial and socioeconomic imbalance at neighboring schools (Smith 2010). As one school board member commented, she wasn't "real crazy over Belleview's numbers," but that she believed "some of the segment changes we made do make sense for the community and for the people that live in those segments" (Schonberg 2007e).

The Rock Hill case showed a clear and conscious departure from other schools in its organizational field due to its voluntary efforts to keep its schools integrated even in a national climate of increased school re-segregation and return to neighborhood schools. A clear example of this contrasting stance on school balance can be seen in the lack of relationship between the Rock Hill School District and its close neighbor the Charlotte-Mecklenberg School District in North Carolina. The Charlotte-Mecklenberg school system is just across the state line from Rock Hill and that district had been involved a prominent Supreme Court case, Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education which developed mandatory busing practices to integrate the district's schools in the 1970s and 1980s (Smith 2010). Once that district was declared unitary in 1999 the district largely abandoned its pursuit of desegregation, however, Rock Hill School District, which was very much aware of the situation in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, did not imitate or conform to the pressures of felt in or from that district and instead fought a difficult court battle to maintain their racially balanced reassignment policies (Smith 2010).

Although the Rock Hill School District took a more varied approach to responding to its institutional pressures than the Dorchester 2 School District, the resulting reassignment plan was largely convergent with plans that had previously been instituted across the district. In this case the district conformed to the policies adopted previously and continued their efforts to maintain balance in the district despite any clear evidence of performance improvement or economic efficiency. Instead, district officials used the idea that balance was best and that losing balance among its schools would reduce the legitimacy of the district and the practices it had long fought to sustain.

Additionally, Rock Hill School District also experienced coercive isomorphism

during its process of reassignment reviewed for this study. It is clear based on Rock Hill's experiences with voluntary desegregation efforts that racial balance was historically an important goal. However, the lawsuit that was brought against the district in 2001 resulted in an increased hesitancy to use race as an explicit factor in subsequent reassignment processes. Although the district was able to use socioeconomic factors in place of race to achieve a similar goal, the fact that the district chose to abandon its overt use of race as had previously been done reflected a legal constraint as well as political force that resulted in a plan comparable to the types of balance employed in both Dorchester District 2 and the Greenville School District.

The process of response that existed in the case of the Greenville School District's reassignment resulted in a policy that was in many ways in line with original proposal and that followed templates for reassigning students that the district had used over the last decade. Although there was much controversy surrounding the entire decision making process, the policy that was ultimately adopted by the district was not that dissimilar to the policies approved in Dorchester of Rock Hill with socioeconomic balance remaining one of the most significant factors considered by district officials. As the district encountered opposition to its original plans, officials made some concessions to their constituents, but overall were able to maintain the policies of the district that had secured its legitimacy in the community throughout previous reassignment debates.

Officials from all three districts insisted that their reassignment plans were not influenced by the policies and procedures that existed in neighboring school districts within the state. However, the guiding factors used in all three districts were almost exactly alike and the decision making process for each district were strikingly similar

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confirming the presence of mimetic isomorphism whereby the districts were engaged in

an unconscious mimicry of other institutional models.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The cases reviewed here of three school districts in South Carolina, responding to demographic and political pressures to develop modifications in their student assignment plans, provide a distinct opportunity to apply concepts of new institutionalism to a real world and under researched topic. By using a framework of strategic responses that took into account the various institutional pressures that existed during each of the reassignment processes, I was able to clearly identify important antecedents such as a desire to maintain racial and economic diversity at the district level, reproductions of existing reassignment guidelines, and structural differences of each district and their planning departments. Although all three districts used strategies of acquiescing and compromise, the variations in institutional pressures allowed me to reveal important divergences in the level to which each district acquiesced or compromised, as well as to show variation in how Rock Hill and Greenville used components of avoidance, defiance, and manipulative strategies.

Additionally, variations in the response techniques employed by each district did not lead to a radical departure from previously utilized reassignment templates. This reinforces the assumptions of new institutionalism that as organizations strive to maintain legitimacy the will adopt forms and practices that are homogenous with both existing templates in their own organizational fields, as well as with the templates employed across organizations in the larger institutional field. The districts of Dorchester 2,

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Greenville, and Rock Hill used a variety of strategic responses when faced with pressures from their constituents. However, each district ultimately adopted a plan that focused on socioeconomic and academic balance across its districts' schools. The mimetic and coercive pressures exerted on these districts were met with a variety of responses, but the plans that were adopted represented a clear reproduction of and reinforcement of the structures and processes that previously existed in each district as well among the three schools more generally.

This research also has both broader intellectual and social implications. School districts are some of the most interesting organizations to study particularly because they are so diverse and deal with a wide range of social, cultural, economic, and organizational issues. These factors also make it vital to understand the wide range of processes that occur within school districts. Although there is a wealth of educational research in many academic disciplines, and studies of school instruction from an institutional perspective, there have been no studies that use an institutional approach to understand the strategies a school district may employ when faced with the pressure to reassign students. This research, therefore, adds to the relative power of institutional theory, especially the application of theory components that allow for the investigation of the relationship between specific institutional antecedents and resulting organizational strategies. Additionally, the institutional approach used here allows for a superior understanding of how the totality of institutional pressures in a complex system such as a school district converge in an isomorphic manner to reproduce many of the same aspects of policy that have existed in the past as well as across other schools in the organizational environment.

This case study also adds to the literature in both the fields of institutional theory and education studies as well as to the literature involving case study methodologies. The case study approach used here allows for an in-depth understanding of the local politics and school district policies that were the driving force behind the development of each district's reassignment plan. The richness of data that were available through archival sources and interviews with district officials created a unique picture of the entire event from the perspective of multiple constituents involved in the decision making process. Because institutions and their environments are so large and complex, this technique offered a distinct way to reveal the underlying processes, motivations, and decisions that were integral in the each district's policy modifications.

In addition, this study provides an application of specific sociological theory that will offer further understanding of the factors associated with school districts as educational organizations in general and local educational policies and politics more specifically. Further, applying theories, or important aspects of theories, allows for a better understanding of not only my specific case but of other similar school level processes for future research. While centered in South Carolina, it is anticipated that the results of this research will have a wider application in the literature regarding the usefulness of institutional and organizational theories in explaining numerous instances of school level policy development. As was already seen in these three cases, each of the school districts used common strategies and had similar resulting reassignment plans even though district officials did not have strong ties with other districts in the institutional environment. I believe that as studies similar to this one are conducted in

other districts across the nation we will see similar results emphasizing the important role that isomorphism has on educational policy making.

Admittedly, this study has its limitations. This research relies heavily on archival sources that reflect community reflection on the process of reassignment and to a large degree voices of disagreement with district proposals because those were the individuals who chose to speak out at public hearings. Future research would benefit from the consideration of more opinions that were in support of district proposals. Further, the findings presented in this research would be strengthened through more comparable of contrasting examples of reassignment processes in districts from other places in the nation as well as from districts that are perhaps organized differently. It may also be useful to compare and contrast cases with districts of different sizes and in different regions of the country. It would also be useful to identify districts that may have radically diverged from an existing policy. For instance, the school districts that were sued in the case of Parents Involved are currently being tasked with reconstructing policies regarding student assignment that does not take into account a student's race. These districts should provide a good contrast to the isomorphism or reproduction of existing reassignment philosophies that exist in many school districts across the country.

Lastly, Oliver (1991) also hypothesizes particular instances in which an organization may be more or less likely to employ particular strategies. Future research in this field may be improved by looking at multiple instances of student reassignment within one particular district over a longer period of time in order to test theses proposed hypotheses. This research focused on utilizing an institutional framework to better understand the process by which different school districts respond to their institutional

pressures, however that evidence could also be collected to support or dispute specific assumptions regarding conditions under which a district is more or less likely to adopt a particular strategic response.

This research provides both a historical and contemporary understanding of the institutional patterns associated with developing and modifying student assignment plans through the lens of new institutional theory. Each of the districts reviewed employed strategies of acquiescence and compromise with constituents exerting institutional pressures. However, the degree to which the districts utilized strategies of avoidance, defiance, and manipulation differed due to district policies and the power organization of each district. The complex process of developing and modifying a district level policy while maintaining a balance between local, state, and federal constraints is clearly described by integrating key components of new institutional theory as put forward by this research.

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