

**BUILDING CAPACITY AND SUSTAINING
AN ALL-GIRLS PUBLIC SCHOOL**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2008

The purpose of this study was to investigate how an all-girls' urban public school has built capacity and sustained itself. Through this study, the researcher interviewed faculty and staff in their natural setting to identify the capacity building strategies the school has developed and used to sustain itself as a reform model. By presenting the data in narrative form, the researcher exposes the reader to a culture and climate that she experienced during her visit to the school.

By analyzing the data collected, the researcher found that a nurturing environment built on collaboration, building relationships and high expectations by a dedicated faculty are necessary components to building capacity at an all-girls' public school. These characteristics have sustained this school for more than a decade, and it has become a standard that other schools and districts attempt to replicate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VIII
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION.....	3
1.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	3
2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	4
2.2 SINGLE SEX EDUCATION STUDIES	7
2.2.1 Student Achievement	8
2.2.2 Gender Equity and Stereotypes.....	10
2.3 RESILIENCY	13
2.4 CAPACITY BUILDING.....	16
2.5 SUSTAINABILITY	19
3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 CONTEXT	21
3.1.1 Setting.....	21
3.1.2 Participants	22
3.2 PROCEDURES.....	23
3.3 DATA ANALYSIS	27

4.0	INTERPRETATIONS	30
4.1	NARRATIVE ACCOUNT: A DAY AT GACC.....	31
4.1.1	Interpreter of Maladies.....	35
4.1.2	Collaborating for Professional Growth.....	51
4.1.3	Building Resiliency	56
4.1.4	Taking a Leadership Role.....	57
4.1.5	Sounding Republican	67
4.1.6	Creating a Nurturing Environment	70
4.1.7	Building Relationships	71
4.1.8	Meeting the Girls of GACC	75
4.1.9	Creating a Support System.....	79
4.1.10	Dedicated Faculty with High Expectations	81
4.1.11	A Collaborative Environment	86
4.1.12	Changing Roles	89
4.1.13	Riding the Elevator Alone	93
4.2	CONCLUSION	94
5.0	IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	96
5.1	IMPLICATIONS	96
5.2	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	99
	APPENDIX A.....	103
	APPENDIX B	106
	APPENDIX C	107
	APPENDIX D.....	108

APPENDIX E	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	111

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an era of education reform, districts are scrambling to meet their annual yearly progress goals as mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. In the Pittsburgh Public School District, the High School Reform Committee was formed in 2006 to analyze and research possibilities for non-traditional schools with the hopes of raising student achievement. One of the options the committee has considered is opening single-sex high schools. With the October 2006 Department of Education news release regarding Title IX, public school districts are permitted to group students by gender, as long as the education for both groups is “substantially equal” (Davis, 2006). This leaves the door open to experiment with opening single-sex high schools.

To complete this study, it was necessary to review previous research conducted on single-sex education. Unfortunately, research pertaining to the effectiveness of single-sex schools in the public sector is lacking. There is, however, an abundance of research completed outside of the United States and in private and parochial American schools. For the purpose of this study, the researcher reviewed the historical background of single-sex education, as well as more recent studies on the subject. Since single-sex education has become a reform model, the researcher also reviewed research pertaining to supporting resiliency in students, building capacity, and sustaining change.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the Girls' Academy of Central City (GACC) has built capacity and sustained itself as an all-girls public school. For the purpose of this study, the researcher relied on Lambert's (1996, 2003) research and utilized her characteristics of a Quadrant 4 school to develop interview questions and a framework. Through a case study portraiture, the researcher interviewed faculty and staff at GACC to identify the capacity building strategies used to sustain as a reform model and to become a standard that other schools and districts attempt to replicate.

By visiting the school, the researcher created a portrait of the school and identified four characteristics that a single-sex school should incorporate to reach GACC's level of achievement. The school opened in the 1990s to offer a single-sex education choice to girls, who would not necessarily have the option. Despite initial controversy, the school has operated for more than a decade and posts successes that have exceeded its coeducation urban counterparts. These characteristics are necessary components that a school leader should include to assist the students and faculty in maintaining relationships, high standards, and academic success.

As of November 2007, at least 366 public schools offered single-sex education opportunities of which 88 schools qualified as entirely single-sex (NASSPE, 2008). With this in mind, studies that analyze single-sex education are necessary. In an age of education improvement and accountability, it is necessary to identify viable ways to educate American children; therefore, studies are needed to analyze reform models and their place in public education.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

How has the Girls' Academy of Central City built capacity and sustained itself as a single-sex public school?

1.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were two limitations in this study. The first limitation was that the researcher could only access the site for one day. Since the site is an all-girls public school, it was difficult for the researcher to access the school beyond the school day. Since the school is a successful model, there are multiple visitors to this site on a daily basis; therefore, the researcher could only schedule one eight-hour visit into the school's calendar.

The second limitation is that the researcher could not gain access to parents. This information could have added another dimension that would have informed the results; however, no parents were available during the school day.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review is organized into four sections. The first section presents the themes of single-sex education. Since a caring and nurturing environment is often present in an all-girls school, the next section addresses resiliency. Finally, single-sex education has become a reform model; therefore, the last two sections focus on building capacity and sustaining change. While there is some research available on building capacity, there are few studies on sustaining reform because most reforms do not last.

2.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The United States education system is predominately coeducational. Since the passage of Title IX in 1972 and the Supreme Court's 1996 decision requiring the Virginia Military Institute to admit women, most public school districts avoided single-sex schools fearing that they would somehow violate the law. Title IX was enacted during the height of the women's movement and was considered a victory by those fighting for equal rights. Longsdon (2003) reports that Federal Courts have consistently handed down decisions that have directly impacted Title IX, maintaining that single-sex education does not violate the law. On the contrary, Longsdon states that as long as single-sex "comparable classes and facilities are available to both males and females, single-sex public education is constitutional" (p. 294).

Title IX was passed for many good reasons and with good intentions. Before its passage, programs for men and women were not always equal. Girls and boys were steered into vocational tracks based solely on sex and not on ability or interest level. In Philadelphia, boys had better resources at Central High School than the girls attending Girls' High School. The boys' campus was three times larger with twice as many library books and computer labs. The boys also had nearly three times as many teachers with doctoral degrees. Financially, the boys' school raised \$380,000 through its foundation over 12 years, while the girls relied on magazine sales (DeBare, 2004).

After its passage, Title IX changed the face of public schools. Districts were not permitted to separate girls and boys into unequal curricula, and athletic programs needed to be equal. With its passing, girls sued to attend Central High School in Philadelphia, because it was viewed as providing higher quality education. In 1974, boys also sued Hunter School in New York City, and 18 boys entered the school in 1975 (DeBare, 2004). By 1985, the New York City School Board was forced to admit boys into Washington Irving School in Gramercy Park.

By the early 1990s, only two all-girls public high schools remained: Girls' High School in Philadelphia and Western High School in Baltimore. Although these schools were as selective and college-bound as private school counterparts, no one tested the Title IX law. Since 1844, Western has significantly outperformed its coeducational peers. Vail (2002) states that the percentage of students passing the Maryland state achievement exam rarely drops below 98%. Currently, Western serves more than 1000 girls, who are 83% African American or Asian, from first generation college families. All of the students take the SAT and must complete at least one term of Latin. The graduating class of 2001 accumulated more than \$5.1 million in scholarship

money (DeBare, 2004). Until the passage of NCLB, this school lasted only because no one challenged it.

Then, Ann Rubenstein Tisch tested Title IX by opening The Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS) in East Harlem, New York. Under the direction of Tisch, TYWLS was the first public single-sex school to open since the passing of Title IX. The opening of TYWLS ignited major controversy and split feminist groups down the middle. When it opened its doors in September 1996, no one thought that it would outlast the legal scrutiny. Now, this school is considered the birthplace of the new era of single-sex education and has spawned replicas across the country. Since opening, every senior has graduated and been accepted to a four-year college (Weil, 2008).

In 2001, President George Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation paved the way for school reform. Grants and incentives to revisit the idea of single-sex education were also included in NCLB (Hughes, 2006). This gave districts the opportunity and the monetary assistance to experiment with single-sex schools. Starting in 2002 and culminating in 2006, the Department of Education continued to revise Title IX to make it easier for schools to adopt single-sex education policies.

There are individuals and organizations that have opposed single-sex education. Some believe that it violates the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling of "separate but equal" (Hughes, 2006). The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) argue that separating students by sex is the same as separating by race. They also believe that it is a historical and legal step backwards in the rights of women. They do not, however, cite that unlike *Brown v. Board of Education*, single-sex education is a

choice. Datnow, Hubbard, and Conchas (2001) found that in order for single sex programs to be successful, parents and students must choose to be a part of the program and not forced into it.

Opponents also argue that coeducation is better because it prepares students for the real world. They make the argument that it is important for the development for both boys and girls to interact with the opposite sex (Hughes, 2006). They believe that single-sex students will not develop into men and women who understand one another. On the contrary, Vail (2002) argues that single-sex education eliminates the distraction of coeducational schooling and allows teachers to accommodate the different learning styles of boys and girls.

2.2 SINGLE SEX EDUCATION STUDIES

Most of the research in single-sex education has been completed internationally and in private and parochial schools American schools. Not all research has favored the implementation of single-sex schools. Some studies have shown that it does not always benefit the students involved (Jackson, 2002; Jackson & Smith, 2000; Singh, Vaught, & Mitchell, 1998); however, other studies have shown that it does affect students' achievement especially for at-risk students (Riordan, 1994). While the research available in the public sector is limited, there are common themes found in the studies such as how student achievement, gender equity, and stereotypes are affected by the single sex environment.

According to the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE), there are at least 366 public schools in the United States offering some sort of single-sex educational opportunities (NASSPE, 2008). Most of the schools offer single-sex classes within a

traditional, comprehensive high school. There are, however, 88 entirely single gender public elementary, middle, and high schools operating in the United States. Many of these schools serve at-risk or inner-city youth.

2.2.1 Student Achievement

There are multiple studies on the effectiveness of single-sex in relation to student achievement completed in international, private, and parochial schools. In this area, the data is mixed. Some studies show that all students show major gains in a single-sex environment (Mulholland, Hansen, & Kaminski, 2004; Riordan, 1994), while other studies have shown that this environment is not always beneficial to boys (Singh, Vaught, & Mitchell, 1998).

In an Australian study, Mulholland, Hansen, and Kaminski (2004) examined a program that addressed underachievement in boys and offered single-sex mathematics and English classes in year 9. In this study, the authors found that both girls and boys showed a significant increase in English. Overall, girls' achievement in math also increased. The study found that parental support was also an influence on the students' achievement.

There are numerous international studies that show support of single-sex education. In 1985, a study of 1,146 Jamaican boys and girls showed that single-sex educated students outperformed those in a coeducational environment. Students were also more likely to study subjects that were traditionally studied by the opposite sex (Salomone, 2003). In a more recent study completed in 2002 of nearly 2,000 schools in Great Britain, researchers concluded that girls excelled in an all-girls environment especially in math (Salomone, 2003).

Critics argue that studies conducted in private or parochial schools can not be correlated to urban education, because private and parochial schools are often synonymous with white,

wealthy children from prestigious backgrounds. Riordan (1994) studied an urban Catholic school that served 890 students of African American and Hispanic backgrounds. In this study, he found significant effects favoring the all-girls environment on cognitive tests. The results held true when he added the variables of home background and initial cognitive ability into his statistical model. In fact, he found that white girls were a half grade higher than their coeducational peers in reading, writing, and math and a year higher in science than their coeducational peers. The difference in minority girls was even higher. They were 0.8 grades ahead in reading, writing, and math, and 1.5 grades ahead in science. This advantage was maintained for seven years beyond high school. Riordan believed that socio-economic background played a factor in achievement especially for white boys from wealthy backgrounds; however, he found that girls achieved better in a single-sex environment no matter what their background.

In another study, Singh, Vaught, and Mitchell (1998) compared the attendance and achievement of 90 African American fifth graders attending two single-sex and two coeducational inner-city facilities. The students involved in this study were characterized as average learners by their principals and teachers. Their teachers, however, were described as “master teachers.” To complete the study, the researchers examined the students’ scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. To gather attendance data, teachers’ records were used to identify daily attendance rates. In this study, the authors found that compared to their coeducational and boys-only peers, single-sex educated girls performed significantly higher on Iowa Basic Skills Tests in mathematics. Boys, however, scored significantly lower than their coeducational peers. In attendance, however, the data revealed a significantly higher student attendance rate in the same-sex classes. This study

established that more research must be completed to identify influences on achievement in single gender schools that serve African American males.

2.2.2 Gender Equity and Stereotypes

Another area of interest for researchers in single-sex education has been related to gender equity and sexual stereotypes. In this research, the debates regarding “separate but equal” emerge. In studies completed in the United States and abroad, researchers have found that in some cases gender stereotypes are reinforced and boys display inappropriate behavior (Jackson and Smith, 2000); therefore, intense professional development is necessary to avoid this situation (Datnow, Hubbard, & Conchas, 2001; Warrington & Younger, 2003).

In England, Jackson and Smith (2000) interviewed girls in a coeducational school with single-sex math classes for year 7. In this study, the authors found that girls reported that they felt more confident, wanted to remain in single-sex math classes and believed that this environment directly had an impact on their achievement. The boys, however, reported that they preferred their coeducational classes and felt less confident in the boys-only classes. Jackson (2002) also found that was higher incidence of bullying and the “strong, macho male” mentality was reinforced in all-male classes. She argued that single-sex programs are often instituted to assist girls in courses that are dominated by males; however, it can not be assumed that it will be beneficial for boys as well.

Datnow, Hubbard, and Conchas (2001) present their findings from a study of the impact of legislation on single-sex public schooling in California. In this study, the authors analyzed qualitative data from 12 single-sex academies and focused on the influence of policy makers’ and educators’ values and agendas in the schools. Through analysis, the researchers

studied the legislation, politics, and resources and their impact on the push to reform California's public school system. While the study identifies the impact of policy on single-sex education, it adds little research on achievement in single-sex education.

Within the academies, the researchers found that minor elective choices or curriculum changes were made on the basis of gender equity. Novel choices were different in the girls and boys' academies. For examples, girls chose to read *Pride and Prejudice* and the boys preferred *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The authors believed that this type of superficial attempt to meet the needs of the learners did not address equity issues. Instead, it perpetuated stereotypes. Since there was no guidance for these issues in the legislation, educators attempted to meet the gender needs of their students. It should be no surprise that once the funding was pulled from these academies; they closed under political pressure and lack of monetary commitment.

Although this study did not focus on student achievement, it did offer suggestions for the field of single-sex education. According to this study, the overall goal of the single-sex school must be gender equity. Second, more research is necessary in the public sector. Finally, those involved in single-sex education must receive effective professional development. Without these factors, the authors believe that future single-sex schools will meet the same fate of the California Pilot Program.

Warrington and Younger (2003) found similar results. Using a case study of a comprehensive English High School where a majority of the classes were single-sex, the researchers found significant gains in student achievement for both sexes. They did, however, add that a coherent professional development plan must be implemented to insure success. The program must address teaching and learning strategies which include students' reflections on their environment.

While each of these studies adds some insight into the world of single-sex education, none look at how a single-sex school maintains itself. To understand this model, it is important to research how the school functions and meets the needs of its students. Since a successful model of an all-girls' school is located in East Harlem and others are opening in urban areas, it is necessary to recognize how the schools address the resiliency of students from difficult backgrounds.

2.3 RESILIENCY

According to Britt (2006), approximately five million children each year experience some form of traumatic event. More than two million of these children are victims of physical and/or sexual abuse, nearly 1.5 million live in an atmosphere of domestic violence, and millions lose a parent to incarceration, death, or divorce. By the time a child reaches adulthood, he or she has the probability of one in four of being touched directly by trauma. Despite these odds, research has shown that children have the ability to deal with stress and go on to live healthy competent lives (Britt, 2006; Bernard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992). In essence, they are resilient.

Bernard (1993) defines resiliency as the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks. Protective factors, such as family, school, and community, help to buffer stresses for the child. As a protective factor, educators must realize that stress is a part of a child's life and move beyond just identifying the problems. Instead, educators can create conditions to assist the child's healthy development.

A resilient child possesses four characteristics: social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Bernard, 1993). Resilient children have the ability to create positive relationships with adults and demonstrate social competence. From that they develop empathy, caring, communication skills, and a sense of humor. A child who can problem solve has the ability to think abstractly and to be reflective in both educational and personal situations. This skill allows children to negotiate their environment even in the worst situations. Autonomy allows a child to take control. An autonomous child could detach himself or herself

from a negative environment to create an identity. Finally, a resilient child must possess a sense of purpose and future. This allows the child to establish confidence and a sense of self beyond their environment (Werner & Smith, 1992).

To facilitate the development of a resilient child, schools must look beyond the temptation to “blame the victim” or “fix the kid.” Instead, schools need to identify what has fostered resiliency in children. Children, who have been protected by their families, schools, and communities, have been exposed to a caring and supportive environment, held to high expectations, and have been provided with opportunities to participate in their environment (Bernard, 1993).

Being exposed to a caring and supportive environment nourishes resiliency in a child. According to Garnezy (1991), schools have become a protective shield for many students. At school, students not only have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities, but also can identify with positive role models. In many cases, teachers act as buffers in the lives of children who have overcome adversity (Werner & Smith, 1992). Children not only learn academics; however, they are exposed to positive and nurturing relationships.

One way for schools to create resiliency in students is through student advisory groups (Buhlman Barker, Basile, & Olson, 2005). Advisory groups increase positive connections between students and adults that are critical component of development. They create a climate of trust and caring (Noddings, 2002). Advising groups also provide time for problem solving, communication, and negotiating conflicts. Through these types of interactions, students are able to build positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Buhlman Barker et al., 2005).

In the case of single-sex education, Sax (2005) argues that building relationships is essential to a girl’s development. At school, girls are likely to look to teachers for acceptance

and to find an ally. According to Sax (2005), resilient girls are more likely to perform successfully when they look to their teacher as a mentor or confidant. Building relationships with peers is also important. Resilient children have the basic human need for social support, caring, and love. If they can not find this type of support in their homes, schools often take on this role of helping children develop caring relationships (Bernard, 1993).

According to Lambert (2003), schools must also establish high expectations for all children and support them to meet these expectations. By avoiding the “at-risk” label, schools open the door for all children to succeed. A school that focuses on student learning and leadership understands resiliency. In these schools, student leaders search to find their place in the world and understand that their future depends on their effort and success. These students can also recover from adversity and resist being pulled into the negativity that may be present in their home environment.

Lambert (2003) states that resilient students display “self-direction, problem solving capabilities, social competence, and participation in the world around them,” (p. 58). To contribute to a student’s resiliency, a school can protect their students by not only caring about and supporting them but also by maintaining high expectations and leadership programs (Krovetz, 1999). Nurturing a student’s resiliency is a major factor in building capacity at a school (Lambert, 2003).

2.4 CAPACITY BUILDING

Since the Russians launched Sputnik in 1957, school reform and improvement have been a focus of the American education system. Culminating with the 1983 release of *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, schools have focused on raising the standards for students and teachers. Over the past sixty years, however, most school reforms have become ineffective in terms of improvement and not resulted in any significant change of practice (Cuban, 1993). Foley (2001) argues that these reforms fail because the schools lack the capacity to change.

According to Newmann, King, and Young (2001), the culture and structure of the school must change along with implementing a reform. These cultural characteristics include a commitment to high expectations, support for inquiry, and collaborative relationships. Structurally, the school must allow time for teachers to collaborate, create an atmosphere of reciprocal leadership, and incorporate staff development without the interruption of organizational constraints (Lambert, 2003; Newmann, King, and Young, 2001). By addressing both the cultural and structural components of a school, there will be an improvement in building capacity.

Elmore relates capacity building to professional knowledge and skills (Farrace, 2002). This knowledge forces educators to shift teaching from a private tradition into a collaborative, engaging practice. Through capacity building, educators can become co-leaders who engage one another in teaching and learning opportunities (Lambert, 2003). It also creates an atmosphere of inquiry, participation, knowledge construction, and reflection. In essence, schools succeed when teachers are a part of strong learning communities. In fact they are four times more likely to

improve academically than those without (Lewis, 2002). All of these factors, however, are unimportant if they are not supported by the school leadership.

Capacity building is directly associated with school leadership. Leaders need to think about the learners' views, challenge them, and engage them in assessments that take the big picture into account. It is up to the leadership to help teachers reach their full potential, which does not occur until they have the opportunity to participate in leadership. In a high leadership capacity school, teachers choose to lead because their environment has allowed them to do so. When teachers are leaders, they believe that they can make a difference or are engaged by their community (Lambert, 1996, 2003).

Teachers are the largest and most stable group of adults in a school. In most cases, teachers' tenure outlasts administrators; therefore, cultivating their leadership abilities would assist in carrying long-range plans (Danielson, 2007). Their impact on the school and student achievement can not be ignored; therefore, a leader needs to foster their talents and plan time for collaboration and reflection (Lambert, 1996, 2003). Utilizing teachers as leaders also reduces isolation and increases collegial interaction (Moore Johnson, & Donaldson, 2007).

Schools with leadership capacity create meeting agendas that go beyond clerical information. Instead, meetings focus on modeling and teacher leadership skills by discussing outcomes, roles, topics, and observations (Lambert, 2003). These meetings also develop the school's vision and its effect on the classroom.

By building capacity, the school community creates a shared vision based on core values and their hopes for their school. Creating a vision ensures the stakeholders' commitment to its realization and distributes the accountability of educating. Conzemus and O'Neil (2001) believe

that when there is a shared responsibility of student learning every student improves regardless of their race, ethnicity, or social economic background.

Reeves (2003) states that 90/90/90 schools have a “laser-like focus on student achievement” (p. 3). He discusses the 90/90/90 schools, which are populated by students who are 90% minority, 90% free and reduced lunch qualified, and 90% successful on standardized assessments. Through his research in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Reeves found five common characteristics of 90/90/90 schools. These schools focus on and have a strong emphasis on student achievement, clear curricular choices, and frequent assessment with chances for students to show improvement. These schools also have a strong emphasis on writing across content areas and externally score student work (Reeves, 2000, 2003).

Reeves (2000) also believes in the importance of teacher involvement. There is an ongoing focus on professional development including collaboration, modeling of effective teaching and assessment, and communication between school staff, parents, and students. In this culture, there is consistent tracking of student progress both academically and emotionally (Reeves 2000, 2003).

To successfully implement change, principals, teachers, students, and parents must be involved in the work of leadership. To this end, a school must possess six characteristics to become successful: broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership; shared vision; inquiry based use of information to inform decision making; defined roles and responsibilities that reflect involvement and collaboration; reflective practice; and high student achievement (Lambert, 1996, 2003). If this occurs, the school will have a high leadership capacity and high student performance and is considered a Quadrant 4 school on Lambert’s (1996, 2003)

Leadership Capacity Matrix. According to Lambert (2003), the school will implement change that is not only effective but also sustainable.

2.5 SUSTAINABILITY

When discussing school reform, it is very important to consider sustainability. Since reforms often come and go very quickly, it is somewhat difficult to identify long-term sustainability or the impact of their implementation. Several studies have focused on externally developed reforms (Datnow, 2001; Yonezawa & Stringfield, 2000) or reforms implemented by internal restructuring (Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994; Fullan, 1999; Ucelli, 1999). One study specifically traced the sustainability of a single-sex school pilot in the public sector (Hubbard & Datnow, 2001); however, the schools in this study did not ultimately remain open. Therefore, there is a significant gap in research examining a successful model of single-sex education in a public system.

Both Datnow (2001) and Yonezawa and Stringfield (2000) found that a reform's sustainability was directly linked to politics. When political support was aligned with the school's culture, a reform was more likely to last. When external forces are involved in school reform, a school's culture and system must be taken into account. Often, external forces implement policies and strategies without thinking beyond their implementation.

Sustaining change requires more than just changing practice or strategies (Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994; Fullan, 1999; Ucelli, 1999). It also requires anticipating upcoming obstacles and developing an infrastructure to support change. Ucelli (1999) identified key components of a supportive infrastructure to maintain reforms. Districts and schools need to cultivate a shared

vision, open multiple channels of communication, and adapt to meet the needs of the community, as well as develop a plan of evaluation, reflection, and action research. Anderson and Stiegelbauer (1994) and Fullan (1999) also found the importance of continuous, supportive leadership. Turnover in both the administrative and teaching roles of schools highly impact the success rate of school reforms (Moffett, 2000).

In the only study completed on the sustainability of a single-sex school, Hubbard and Datnow (2001) analyzed qualitative data from the California Single-Sex School Pilot Project. They concluded that the single-gender schools must be driven by a strong theory of single-sex education not as a fix-all, and found that stable leadership is a necessity when driving a reform. They also found that the goals of the reform effort must match their intended purposes. Although this study did add some insight to sustainability, it does not show a school that has succeeded. Because of this lack of success, research is lacking of a single-sex public school that has sustained itself and is doing well.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the Girls' Academy in Central City (GACC) has built capacity and sustained its existence. Through case study methodology, I examined reasons why this reform model of single-sex education has outlasted other models over the past decade. This study did not, however, examine the academic performance of GACC. By visiting the school and interviewing its faculty and staff, I attempted to gain an insider's perspective of the school's success and why it has become one of the standards for single-sex schools throughout the United States.

3.1 CONTEXT

3.1.1 Setting

The Girls' Academy in Central City is located in an urban area in the United States. Founded in 1990s by an American proprietor, GACC was one of the first single-sex schools to open in the United States in twenty-five years. The school was established for inner city young women who did not have access or the choice or chance to excel in a single-sex environment.

An American proprietor, Amy Wood, was motivated to open the school by an inner-city young mother she met. Through this girl, she learned that daycares alone were not enough to

help teenage mothers receive an education. After her marriage to a business tycoon, Amy gained the resources to help teenage mothers. She decided to open an all-girls school in Central City to steer girls away from pregnancy and into college.

During the 2006 – 2007 school year, 422 girls in grades 7 through 12 attended GACC. Approximately 70% of the girls lived in surrounding neighborhoods with the remaining students living in other Central City Boroughs. The student body is 56% Latina, 43% African American, and 1% of various backgrounds. There are 28 teachers at the school with a principal, an assistant principal, a college counselor, a school counselor, and other staff members.

The Girls' Academy of Central City is supported by an outside Educational Agency. High expectations and achievement are the cornerstones of every school that it opens. Currently, there are several all-girls public schools around the country operating under the direction of this agency. The agency's major contribution to the school is the salary of the college counselor. The agency also supplements school field trips or projects through grants for which teachers may apply.

3.1.2 Participants

The interviewees in this case study were teachers, administrators, and staff members of GACC. I also interviewed the GACC's Director of Education, who was previously the longest serving principal of the school. Each interviewee participated voluntarily and was not compensated for their participation. Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix A), which described the study, their place in it, and the researcher's role. The consent form also discussed confidentiality. To protect the anonymity of the participants, I changed the school's name as well as any other identifying information of the participants.

3.2 PROCEDURES

A qualitative case study methodology was used in this study. According to Yin (2003), case studies answer the “how” and “why” questions being posed, “when the investigator has little control over events, when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). In this case, the real-life context was GACC not a laboratory or other experimental setting. By using a real-life setting, I was able to gain a first-hand understanding of the school in a naturalistic setting (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

By visiting the site, I was able to make direct observations. One of the on-site interview rooms was the principal’s office, which was a heavy traffic area for faculty, staff, and students. According to Yin (2003), observational evidence provides additional information to the case study. In this case, I had the opportunity to observe the school’s faculty and students in their environment without direct contact. I also had the chance to interact with the girls who attended the school through informal conversations and during a tour of the facilities. These observations resulted in additional data in the form of field notes. Field notes allowed me to describe the setting, participants, and comment on the surroundings (Merriam, 1998). Throughout the visit, I was able to jot down observations that were later transcribed in more detail taking on the form of a mini-field journal.

According to Mertens (2005), it is important for the researcher to know the audience before the survey is conducted. Therefore, I analyzed public documents pertaining to GACC and its agency. Through an internet search of press documents and an analysis of single-sex education books, I was able to gain an understanding of the school before the visit.

To complete this study, I contacted a member of the Girls’ Academy of Central City’s Education Agency to gain permission to access the school. This contact connected me with a

teacher from the school, who coordinated my visit. Prior to the interviews, I sent a copy of the questions to the contact teacher. By sending the questions before the interview, I hoped that the interviewees would be prepared for the questions. The contact person scheduled informal appointments and directed participants to me throughout the day of the visit. Through the visit, I was able to interview nearly ten of GACC's faculty and staff.

As described by Mertens (2005), the interviews were minimally structured. Prior to the interview I created an initial script of questions for members of the foundation (see Appendix B) and GACC faculty and staff (see Appendix C); however, more questions emerged from the conversation. This allowed me to build a rapport with the respondents and to gain their trust. According to Stake (1995), interviews also allow a researcher to gain multiple perspectives and realities of the setting and its population.

The interview questions were developed with the six characteristics of a Quadrant 4 school in mind. According to Lambert (2003), a Quadrant 4 school has a high-participation and high degree of skill in leadership capacity. By ranking the questions according to the characteristics of a Quadrant 4 schools, I was able to identify what areas this school focuses on and completes successfully to be considered a school with high capacity. From this data, themes in their answers in accordance with how they have built capacity and sustained could be identified.

During the interviews, I realized that in some ways I had limited the amount of information that I would gain by solely relying on the prepared questions. First of all, the questions were focused on building capacity and beyond the knowledge of my participants. In other words, they were too difficult to follow. This was not the case with the Director of

Education, because she was well-read in the areas of capacity building, but the teachers had some difficulty interpreting the questions.

For some of the prepared questions, there were long pauses in responses of the first and second teachers, which forced me to explain what each question meant. By explaining the question, I feared that I would guide the participants to a specific answer. To avoid this, I rewrote and deleted questions on-site for the remaining interviews. These were also the questions that I forwarded to my contacts at GACC following my visit (see Appendix E). Since the interviews were minimally structured (Mertens, 2005), I was able to elaborate or revise the questions keeping to the basic premise of building capacity in a single-sex environment.

During the visit to GACC, I interviewed one member of the Agency and ten employees at the school. Before the visit, I hoped to interview eight Agency members as well five parents. I could not gain access to additional members of the Agency or parents during my study. I also planned on interviewing 24 members of the GACC faculty; however, I overestimated the size of its staff. After I found out that there were only 28 teachers in the building, my original goal was unrealistic and unattainable.

By the end of the study, I was able to interview ten of the school's faculty, staff, and administration. This sample size provided adequate data for the study. Due to time constraints and actual size of the staff, I was unable to meet her original goal. Initially, I planned on spending half of a day at the Agency's offices in downtown Central City, and the remainder of that day and a second day at the school. As I negotiated my visit with the Director of Education for over a month, those hopes quickly vanished.

My last conversation with the Director of Education before the visit was less than promising. The director was concerned about the amount of time and effort the visit would cause

to her and the school. The school is inundated with researchers, dignitaries, and politicians, and I would only add to that burden. Once I requested the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Pittsburgh's Letter of Permission, the conversations became less cordial. It became apparent that the Director did not want to put the permission to research in writing and regretted agreeing to participate in the study; however, once I arrived, her regret was not so obvious.

Once my visit was complete, I was hopeful that I had established contacts and would be able to continue her analysis from Pittsburgh. The Director's eagerness to share the questions with other schools in GACC's network as well as the contact teacher's agreement to reach out to some of the faculty, whom I missed during the visit, left her with an unearned optimism. Although I had collected ample information from the visit, I believed that I had the opportunity to follow-up with the participants and would only add to the study. Unfortunately, the hope to gather more data was quickly erased.

After I returned to Pittsburgh, I immediately sent thanks and the questions to my contacts at GACC. During my interview, the Director of Education told me that she would send me the school's professional development model as well as other things pertinent to my research. After I requested these items, I received responses containing only the attachment. After a week, I found an empty mailbox with no replies from my contacts at GACC. Despite multiple attempts, I realized that I would receive no additional data and would have to work through what I had accumulated. Basically, my collection of data was over.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis should occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1993; Mertens, 2005). To facilitate this process, I developed codes according to capacity building research and the characteristics Quadrant 4 School (Lambert, 2003):

- SL = Principals, teachers, parents, and students as skillful leaders
- SV = Shared vision resulting in program coherence,
- IB = Inquiry-based use of information and inform decisions and practice,
- CC = Broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions,
- RP = Reflective practice that leads consistently to innovation, and
- HSA = High or steadily improving student achievement.

These codes were used throughout the study, and allowed me to identify common threads and themes between the semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document analysis. Once similarities or differences were identified, information could then be linked to a matrix that I created using Lambert's (2003) characteristics of a Quadrant 4 School (see Appendix D). This process would allow for data source triangulation and validation of the study and would allow me to cross-reference between the interviews and other documents (Stake, 1995).

When this study began, I felt that I would be able to identify the capacity building strategies completed at GACC by using the framework that I adopted based on Lambert's (2003) capacity building research. From this framework, I would then identify GACC as a Quadrant 4 school, which consistently demonstrates broad-based skillful participation in the work of

leadership; shared vision; inquiry based use of information to inform decision making; defined roles and responsibilities that reflect involvement and collaboration; reflective practice; and high student achievement (Lambert, 1996, 2003). Instead, I found that using this framework as a basis of my analysis of GACC would cause me to pigeonhole the school to fit into Lambert's concept, and that would not be fair to the school or my research. I believe it would have biased my research to make GACC fit into the Quadrant 4 School model.

Although starting out with this conceptual framework helped me initially frame my research, I found that I could not use it as the only lens for studying GACC. It did, however, help identify an area of concentration by modeling the interview questions after the qualities of Quadrant 4 schools (Lambert, 1996, 2003), and gave me a preliminary focus.

Following the original methodology, I went through each interview using the codes that I developed to find the trends and themes in the data I collected. I triangulated the interviews with my field notes and additional information that I accumulated through public documents. Then, I began transferring this information into the matrix and attempted to analyze the data (Stakes, 1995).

By using this matrix, I thought that I could prove how GACC meets the qualities of a Quadrant 4 school. I could break down each of the six characteristics and relate them to GACC. For example, I could identify that GACC demonstrated broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership (Lambert, 1996, 2003) by engaging its teachers in staff in participating in all facets of leadership in the school. There was ample evidence to support this claim. Teachers are expected to participate in and eventually run study groups. They are also expected to attend weekly staff meetings, where their opinion will be heard. By doing this, GACC cultivates its leaders from within. These characteristics ultimately build capacity at a school. On another

note, they also have high rates of student achievement by maintaining rigorous teacher-written curriculum and building resiliency in the girls (Lambert, 1996, 2003).

I did not find ample evidence to support that GACC engages in inquiry-based use of information and inform decisions and practice. During the interview with the Director of Education, she acknowledged that they have done little to address the school's vision (Lambert, 1996, 2003). As I continued using the matrix, I realized that there was more to GACC than just the capacity building strategies used to sustain the school. With that in mind, I started to question my methodology. By trying to classify GACC as a Quadrant 4 school, I felt that I lost the real picture of what GACC is and what they have accomplished. Therefore, I started to look for themes in my data to identify what strategies the schools uses to create an environment of success. From these themes, I identified characteristics of a successful all-girls school that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.0 INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is a narrative account of time spent from the Girls' Academy of Central City. In this section, the interviews with the employees at the Girls' Academy of Central City Agency and school are presented along with interpretations of the climate and atmosphere. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), the method is a type of qualitative research called portraiture. In a portraiture study, the researcher is visible and "attempts to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety" of the subject (p. xv). This portraiture is written as a chronological story and reflects the first-person account of my experience. After each interview, I also add reflection and relate the interviews to research from the literature review in relation to single-sex education, resiliency, capacity building, and sustainability.

In the second section, I hypothetically return to GACC and explore the changes at the school and the implications those changes might have on future studies. This section introduces a change in leadership as well as the launching of a new website.

4.1 NARRATIVE ACCOUNT: A DAY AT GACC

As I hailed my first cab in Central City, my stomach flipped. I was starting my research journey to the Girls' Academy of Central City, and I was overwhelmed with excitement. I knew a little bit about my subject. I knew that I was going to one of the first public all-girls' school to open in the United States since the passing of Title IX. This is the school, where celebrities visit and give motivational speeches. This is the school that is the model for other single-sex schools in the country. This is the school that has become a haven for African American and Latina girls, who have achieved success at rates higher than any other public school in the country. I knew the basic facts about my destination; however, I also knew that books and internet sources could only begin to introduce me to its culture or people.

As my cab sped through the streets of Central City, I watched my surroundings change. I looked out at the gorgeous sites of city. I was chauffeured past the million dollar penthouses of the Village, and watched the children with their nannies take their morning walks. The longer we drove uptown, the more the sites transformed. The sense of urgency felt in lower Central City was replaced by barren morning streets. The high-class, luxury homes became a memory. Instead, I noticed clusters of apartment complexes that resembled housing projects. The chauffeured white faces dressed in suits were replaced by faces of color, which dressed more casually and waited for public transportation. The pristine streets of the Village, with storefronts of fashionable boutiques and quaint coffee shops, were replaced with check cashing facilities, discount stores, and fast food restaurants. I realized that as my journey continued that at some point, I had passed Central City's invisible line of social class.

As an assistant principal in the Pittsburgh Public School District, I am familiar with diversity. I am not a naïve person, oblivious to poverty and despair. On a daily basis, I interact

with children looking like those I watched walking to school; however, I felt out of my element. This area seemed different than Pittsburgh. While the streets reminded me of the Hill District or Homewood neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, they were older and had more character. There were more businesses and more people out and about at that time of day. They did, however, have the same problems of crime, hopelessness, and unemployment. I imagined that the inhabitants of these streets had the same dreams as the children who I knew. The students, who I know, want to obtain an education so that they could move on to bigger and better things. Considering the success of the school that I was visiting, I believed that its students felt the same way.

After about fifteen minutes in my taxi, I arrived at my destination. From my research, I knew that the Girls' Academy of Central City shared five floors of a renovated office building with an entertainment company; but, I guess that I still had the image of a traditional school in my head. Instead, the building looked like an average multiple floor office or apartment building in Central City. It was no more or less welcoming than any other school I had entered; however, physically it was very different. It did not look like the typical All-American high school with a sprawling campus. Instead, it resembled a business or a bank, and made me realize that I was entering a school that was foreign to me.

As I hopped out of the taxi, I immediately noticed dozens of girls dressed in uniforms. They were not, however, completely uniform. Some girls wore the typical Catholic school-girl plaid skirt with navy vest. Others were dressed in gym uniforms with gray sweats and GACC t-shirts. I later learned that during Catherine Young's term as principal, uniforms became less of a focus or issue. Although girls are not permitted to dress in street clothes, they have a few options with their daily wear.

The middle school girls must wear green and gold colors, while the high school girls wear green and navy. They also may wear their gym uniforms when they have physical education. It is, however, mandatory that girls dress in uniform, and during my visit one morning announcement directed teachers to send students who were not in uniform to the office. This reminded me of announcements that we might make at my school regarding dress code. It quickly forced me to reconcile with the fact that this school had the same issues as any other school. The only difference might be that it was all-girls.

The girls and I entered the same door, and we were met by the building's security guard. He was an older man, who seemed to greet visitors more than anything else. We exchanged greetings and I huddled into the elevator with the girls. As I rode up the elevator, I realized that there were no metal detectors at the door. In this age of urban education that is a rarity; however, GACC is not a "scanning school."

About a dozen girls and I crammed into the elevator. The girls are only permitted use the elevators during arrival and dismissal. Although I was intrigued by their conversations, they did not appear to notice my presence. They spoke about last night's homework and the latest song on the radio. They had typical conversations like other teenage girls at any high school that could be heard around the country.

After a short ride, the doors opened to the ninth floor. This time, I was greeted by the school's security guard, who was an older woman. She was also very friendly, and checked my identification. She directed me to the main office, where I met the assistant principal. She immediately knew that I was the "researcher from Pittsburgh." It made me laugh that she referred to me as a researcher, but I realized that was going to be my role here. I needed to settle myself down and get focused. I only had one day to learn everything that I could about GACC,

so I had to get to work and pay attention to everything that occurred around me. Although my mind was racing, I waited patiently for Catherine Young to arrive.

As I sat in the office, I observed teachers filing in and out of the office. They completed the same morning tasks as the teachers in my building. They signed in for the day, picked up their daily mail, and interacted with the office staff. I watched the assistant principal discuss the field trip procedure with a teacher. To accommodate personal days and school activities, the teachers sign a calendar to allow the school to plan accordingly for substitutes or class coverage. As in most schools, substitutes are a hot commodity, and in Central City they must also be certified teacher. To accommodate for the lack of substitutes, teachers must fill in for absent colleagues. At GACC, they must cover one class per semester, and they are compensated for any additional coverage beyond that. During class coverage, they are expected to teach. According to the GACC handbook, students are not permitted to do homework or play games in the absence of their regular teacher.

Since it is a small school, it seems as if this calendar procedure works when followed; however, the discussion that I witnessed was with a teacher who did not comply. While it was a relatively pleasant conversation, it was also stern. The administrator explained the importance of the calendar, and how it could easily break down. As I observed this interaction, I realized how important this type of observation would be to my research.

After only a few minutes, Catherine arrived. Considering our last email, I was a little nervous about meeting her. After weeks of negotiating my visit, our final email was less than comforting. Catherine was concerned about how much of a burden my visit would be on her and the school. With deep reservations, she connected me with a GACC teacher named Roxanne, who coordinated my visit. Despite her apprehension, Catherine greeted me enthusiastically and

walked with me to the principal's office, which she occupied for over five years until she was recently promoted to Director of Education for the Girls' Academy of Central City's Education Agency. It was in the principal's office, which was full of teachers, students, and staff members, where my first interview occurred.

As Catherine and I walked from the main office to the principal's office, I took note of my surroundings. The halls were full of colorful bulletin boards of students' work and photographs of the girls who I imagined were students. Classrooms lined both sides of the hallways of the square, and were painted white with blue detailing. The classroom doors were all opened and showed rooms full of tables and chairs rather than traditional desks. I noticed girls were seated getting ready for the day. They appeared to be chatting quietly as their teachers took homeroom attendance. As we walked, Catherine and I made small talk about my trip and Pittsburgh. I tried to stay focused on my surroundings as well as our conversation. Before I knew it, we arrived in the principal's office and sat at a large conference table.

4.1.1 Interpreter of Maladies

Catherine is an icon at this school. She is a woman in her 60s with salt and pepper hair; however, she has the energy and spontaneity of any 20-year-old whom I had met before. She often referred to her "senior moments," but that was just a part of her engaging humor. I was not surprised that nearly every teacher who I interviewed referred to the influence and importance she had on the school. One specifically stated, "She saw the bigger picture. While it's important that students are in uniform, it's also important that they have eaten. That the teachers are healthy and comfortable teaching." When she was principal, her faculty felt supported and believed that

she drew on their strengths and weakness to draw them, as well as pulling parents and students into the community.

As the Director of Education for the Agency, Catherine believes that she is an “interpreter of maladies.” She tries to be the mediator between the building and the bureaucracy. She believes that she must try to stay ahead of what the principals need, because so many are trying to pull their focus away from the students. With this in mind, she will read the latest 50-page memo from the state or district office and decipher its importance to the school and the principal. In this role, she plans to implement a Principals Planning Institute for the summer, where they will review essential things to have in place for an effective school year. She also is a day-to-day trouble shooter for the schools. This idea goes along with the Agency’s belief that they need to have eyes and ears in the schools every day and Catherine fulfills that need.

Catherine works predominately with the Central City schools. She spends a significant amount of time with visitors from the Agency’s non-Central City schools by sharing what they have developed at GACC. She has traveled outside of Central City a few times, but does not directly supervise those schools. She does facilitate teacher exchanges, but primarily works with GACC and the other Central City schools that the Agency supports.

She sees the Agency as a supportive component of the school. She agreed that they can be a little intrusive at times, but prefers to look at their positive contributions. On the day of my visit, the Agency invited 15 visitors from Chile. Instead of dwelling on the negative, however, she believes that they can “make lemonade out of the lemons.” From the Chile visitors, they could make a really nice connection and something good could come out of it for the kids.

Catherine’s interview gave me an administrator’s perspective to the success of the school. First and foremost, she believes that the Agency greatly influences the school. She believes that

it not only supports the school monetarily; it also nurtures the school. She stated that founder of the school is a pioneer of public/private partnerships that have bloomed over the past decade through the education reform movement.

After meeting Catherine, I was not surprised that she influenced the school so dramatically. Her enthusiasm and passion for urban education was obvious. She is an advocate for the 6 – 12 model as well as single-sex education. She believes in supporting her students and staff to reach their fullest potential. This belief system has maintained a core group of teachers, who with Catherine's support have sustained this school.

Catherine was the third principal following a few years of turmoil. The first principal, Augusta Buhl, worked with the founder, Amy Wood, to open the school. Her leadership style was critical in opening such a controversial school. She recruited teachers, solicited parents and students, and fought off the naysayers. One teacher stated that the first principal was a crucial part of the opening of the school; however, her leadership was not what the school needed to sustain itself. One teacher described her as totalitarian in her views and "more concerned with appearances than what was beneath the surface." She worked at the school for four years before moving on to other projects. During this time period, there was a major turnover of the teaching staff.

The second principal, Janice Jones, acted as an interim leader for one year. Those I interviewed thought she was "very nice"; however, she had a difficult time following the first principal. She interviewed for the permanent position, but Catherine was chosen through the Central City interview process. The Central City interview process is an interview and review of transcripts by superintendents, teachers, and parents. It is a rather intense experience that

ensures that Central City hires not only competent administrators but also people who would be a good fit for their school. Every administrator hired in Central City goes through this process.

Through my interview with Catherine, I also learned about the selection process of students attending the school. GACC is in the South Section of the Central City school system. Initially, the South Section was one of the first districts of choice in Central City. Now every child has the “school choice option,” and at the end of elementary school, they must apply to a middle school. GACC is one of 14 schools from which applicants choose. Each school has its own recruitment process by holding open houses and parent information programs. Originally, GACC held an open house and selected 60 to 65 students. Now that the district operates through school choice, GACC must select 75 girls, whether or not there is room. However, a percentage of space is reserved for girls from the South Section of the city.

GACC has two requirements for enrollment. The child must be eligible for promotion to the next grade, and parents must attend an open house with the child and hold a one-on-one conference with a teacher to attempt to gauge if they are informed about their decision to attend an all-girls school. This decision includes wearing a uniform and understanding that boys will never attend the school. Although the girls always ask, Catherine jokes that boys do not miraculously show up in ninth grade. Along with that, they must agree to take part in the early college and college bound program. They must understand that they are expected to go to college and will have to work hard to get there.

Catherine admits that the school’s selection process is more of an art than a science. There is no entrance exam and the admissions personnel do not seek out the most gifted and talented girls in the city. They attempt to accept students on a type of bell curve of girls who are at standard, slightly above, and slightly below. This allows the school to create heterogeneous

groups without tracking students. Catherine admits that they do not have success with students who are accelerated. She believes that their size prohibits the school from meeting the needs of students ahead of grade level. They also do not have programs for students with severe disabilities; however, they do have students with manageable learning disabilities. These students are pulled out of class once a week to work with special education teachers. For the remainder of the week, they are mainstreamed. They choose to use the inclusion model for their special education students rather than a self-contained special education classroom. Although Catherine is not an advocate for self-contained special education, the lack of space is also a factor in choosing inclusion model.

Once they reach the high school level, the girls must reapply. The high school program is referred to as a screened program in the Central City Handbook; however, 95% of the girls move on to ninth grade at GACC. There are usually very few external seats available for ninth grade girls from other schools. In the 2006-07 school year, five girls chose to leave GACC. Four left for positive reasons such as the desire to play competitive sports or to go to a specialized school such as an art school. One girl left because it was not a good fit for her.

In the Central City handbook, it states that girls must have above an 85% grade point average to be accepted into ninth grade at GACC; however, the eighth graders do not always meet that requirement, and they continue onto the high school level at GACC. This illustrates that GACC is not necessarily a screened program that takes only the best students in the city. Throughout my interviews, each participant stressed that the girls who attend GACC are just “typical girls.”

Before GACC, Catherine worked at a large middle school in Central City. She was a part of a restructuring team, where she broke the school down into small learning communities. She

believes that one has to do this in middle schools, because middle school students need personalized attention.

As a supporter of 6 – 12 schools, she tied GACC's achievement to its configuration. Although she recognizes the difficulty of managing this type of school, she believes that it is another element of the success of GACC. She realizes that it is difficult because a child goes to school from the end of elementary school through all of the changes of adolescence. It is also a challenging model because school leadership must be experts in curriculum from sixth grade reading to Advanced Placement Calculus. She believes that one needs to hire smart people who can interpret that scenario, as well as support the faculty through professional development.

To address professional development, Catherine, along with the current principal Michael, created a teachers' professional development program. In her words, it provides "teacher survival." Through this model, she believes that teachers are supported to grow as professionals and stay at the school. It provides an environment, where teachers are retained instead of developing the "hit and run mentality" that often occurs in urban education.

The first strand of this program addresses assisting the teacher with coming into a new school or system. This strand is entitled, "How do I survive?" She described it as the "nuts and bolts" of becoming a teacher. The administration actively supports the teacher in finding an apartment, parking, health insurance or other basic survival issues. During this strand, teachers are acclimated with the school's mission, vision, and mandates. They are also introduced to the policies and procedures of the school, as well as given the school's handbook.

The second strand addresses collaboration and communities of practice within a school. This strand is entitled, "How do I collaborate?" It supports teachers in collaborating with fellow grade level teachers, advisory groups, or school-based achievement groups to breakdown

isolation among teachers. It attempts to make teaching a more public practice to help new teachers learn to collaborate and to draw on the experience and knowledge of a more veteran colleague.

The third strand deals directly with the teacher developing personally, and is entitled “How will I reflect and thrive?” In this area, each teacher develops their own personal and professional goals. They create a personal career ladder, so that they can find their role outside of the classroom. They are expected to seek out external professional development and to find membership on a study group of their interest. They are also pushed to take an active role in leadership.

Catherine believes that teachers need to find their role as a leader in their school. Whether they choose to become a floor captain or to mentor a new teacher, teachers need to become involved in the school beyond their classroom. As proof of building leaders from within, GACC believes in nurturing and growing its leaders from within its system.

Each of the principals from the other Central City neighborhoods has spent significant time at GACC. One principal spent a year, another spent three years, and another spent five years at the school by working through the ranks as a teacher to a leader of a planning team to becoming a principal at her own school. Teachers at GACC can also transfer between the other Central City schools, and those left behind see the possibilities to advance or change environments.

The final strand of the model deals with evaluation and is entitled, “How will I be supervised?” Again, this supports the teacher with their role in the school and helps them to understand how they will be evaluated. In this strand, teachers review their pedagogical goals. They develop their curriculum and course outlines through department lesson study. They also

are expected to review data and observe other teachers. Finally, they are introduced to not only clinical supervision, but also alternatives to traditional administrator observations which could include a walk through or peer observation.

Catherine believes that this program avoids teacher burnout and helps to keep it fresh for teachers. She believes that by nurturing, sharing resources with, supporting, and allowing teachers to grow and develop ultimately retains them. The school and foundation are very cognizant of their teachers and their needs and replicate that throughout their schools.

Throughout all of the interviews, it was apparent that the teachers did indeed feel supported. They have tremendous freedom to teach in their classroom. According to the school handbook, the teacher is a “coach or guide on the side, and the students are workers, who take full responsibility to become a lifelong learner.” Like any other American student, however, GACC students must pass state exams. In Central City, they are referred to as the Graduation Exams. The Graduation Exams are directly tied to No Child Left Behind (NCLB). During the 2005 – 2006 school year, 100% of Girls’ Academy students passed the Math, English, Science and History Exams. This was the highest rate of scores in their section of Central City’s high schools.

As any other public school in the United States, GACC faces the pressure of NCLB. They are also pushed to be data driven. In the past, GACC did not have to focus on their middle school scores; however, that will no longer be the case. Despite Catherine’s aggressive fight to look at the 7 – 12 school as one school, political pressure does not see it that way; therefore, the school must not only meet high school standards, but they must also meet the middle school standards. Next year, the school will receive two report cards: one for middle school and one for high school.

Catherine argued that the students at GACC have the same potential to succeed as any other student in the city. She believes that the major hurdle that they must overcome is that they often lack primarily language deprivation and life experience. In many cases, the girls have never been outside of their neighborhood.

To combat that situation, she believes that they must give the girls a well-rounded middle school education that includes art, music, technology, hands-on science, physical education, and health. These are things they have not necessarily been exposed to before, and might also get lost in the “drill and kill” test preparation curriculum. Catherine believes that it is the school’s moral obligation as well as getting them ready to pass a test. She also believes that they achieve success their own way, but realizes that they no longer have the luxury to solely explore that philosophy. They too might have to succumb to the pressures of NCLB.

During the two years in middle school, teachers are expected to take the girls from thinking in concrete terms to thinking more abstractly. According to the GACC handbook, this will prepare them for the “scholastic commitment required in the college prep upper school, grades 9 – 12.” Along with that, girls are exposed to developing organizational skills, study habits, responsibility for one’s learning, and social development. The curriculum at this level is project oriented and interdisciplinary which GACC believes keeps the girls motivated and enthusiastic for their learning.

At the high school level, the girls are challenged with advanced study in all areas. According to the handbook, the curriculum “demands more than the minimum requirements for graduation and emphasizes methods of inquiry and the written and oral expressional necessary to the study of all of the disciplines.” They are encouraged to study Women’s Studies, Marine Science, Physics, or Journalism. They are also encouraged to pursue their studies outside of the

classroom, and are expected to take advantage of extended day activities and tutoring, as well as the partnership opportunities available to them throughout the city.

At GACC, they allow the teacher to break down mandated curriculum and create scope and sequence into “big ideas.” They have done a lot of work with Grant Wiggins and *Understanding by Design* (2005) to assist teachers in this endeavor. Using Wiggins work, the teachers utilize backward planning. This type of planning has become a major push in the city and forces teachers to think about exit assessments and what students need to know to get to graduation.

The teachers have also received professional development on how girls and boys learn based on brain research and rely heavily on Joann Deak (2002), who is a brain researcher and was a principal of an all-girls school. Catherine believes that it is important for the GACC faculty be exposed to that type of research; however, they must also explore their own areas of interest.

To meet their personal needs, teachers may lead study groups to take ownership of their own learning. The faculty is expected to take part in “rolling study groups designed from a meaningful menu of choices developed by staff and administration together and based on the needs of [their] students” (GACC Handbook). These study groups have revolved around curriculum, where teachers work together to create benchmark assessments or break down curriculum based on the clientele. They also do a lot of work around literacy and adolescence, and engaging the girls by incorporating pieces from their own culture. Catherine believes that no matter if the student is a girl or a boy, “Literacy is the key to the kingdom.”

The one area that Catherine believes needs work at GACC deals with developing and monitoring the vision. She believes that the mission and vision must be revisited every year, but

the transition of the 2006 – 2007 school year did not allow for that process. In August, Catherine found out that she could transform into her new role, and Michael was pulled from his classroom. The first half of the year was spent on transitioning Michael into the principal role and Catherine out. Because of this upheaval, Catherine believes they lacked in the area of professional development in relation to developing the school's mission. She believes that it is necessary to "take [the mission's] pulse, how do we keep it alive, where are we, who's going to take hold of that, and what do we need to do." Unfortunately, they just lacked the time to do that this year.

There is a core group of teachers that have been at GACC since its second year of operation. To support their life changes, they have adapted to meet their needs. For example, they converted a storage room into a breast pumping room because there were so many teachers with infants. Catherine believes that this showed the teachers that they were valued and took a human approach to education. This is one reason that she believes the teachers have stayed on staff and not moved on as so many in other Central City schools do. Luckily, they have not had many openings; however, when openings occur they usually have multiple applicants. One of the greatest recruiting techniques for GACC is that its teachers talk to their friends in other schools and the availability of the vacancies gets out through a word of mouth method. They also post vacancies on the internet through an educational think tank in Central City. Catherine explained that they expect a math vacancy for the next school year, and have started in March to fill it. According to her, they already have many resumes and have set up interviews.

Catherine believes that communication is another key to the school's success. The faculty and staff meet once a week to discuss issues. At GACC, staff meetings occur every Friday from 2:10 P.M. to 3:10 P.M. It allows them to "take the pulse of the school." Catherine

compares these weekly meetings to the students' advisory groups. Every teacher is empowered to speak up about any issue. They also utilize email to communicate discussing a new professional development topic or concerns about particular students. Catherine believes that the teachers must feel empowered to keep those types of conversations going. They need to feel that they have a forum in a full faculty meeting and individually, and that their voice will be heard.

Since it is a small school, teachers have an active role in planning. The principal's office door is always open, and they expect classroom doors to be open as well. Each teacher is expected to visit each other's departments. They facilitate round robins, where history teachers can go into one another's classrooms. Through this approach, they have had success in publicizing the often private world of teaching. At GACC, teachers are expected to collaborate both departmentally and interdepartmentally. Catherine says that it is not uncommon to walk into a conversation of teachers discussing a new approach to the lesson. They are also expected to participate in the school outside of their own classroom.

According to Catherine, teachers are involved in every committee in the school. They serve on the professional development committee as well as the hiring committee. They have the opportunity to participate fully in the entire life of the school, and nothing is done in the school without a teacher. Each teacher is empowered to be a teacher leader, and this contributes heavily to the school's success. Catherine believes that it is important to involve teachers not only for the well-being of the school, but it also helps fulfill roles that assistant principals might fulfill. Since GACC is a small school, they do not always have the funding available to hire people for specific roles.

The Girls' Academy of Central City's budget is compiled like every other school in Central City. It is a school based budget that changes every year. For the 2007 – 2008 school

year, the district is implementing a new funding formula for school based budgeting called fair student funding. It was referred to as “Backpack Funding,” where the student carries her funding in her backpack no matter what school she attends. At the time of this study, GACC did not know their budget for the next school year. They were told that they would receive three budget screens. One screen that shows what they would have received last year. One that shows what they would get in the new formula and a third if they had fully implemented the new formula. They did not know whether they would gain or lose money. One dynamic that changed is that all veteran teachers would still be figured into the budget at the average salary of the district; however, new hires would be figured at their actual salary. This concerned Catherine, because veteran teachers can make well over \$100,000, which could greatly impact the school’s budget and future hiring practices.

Contrary to outsiders’ beliefs, the Girls’ Academy of Central City’s Education Agency does not directly supplement the school’s budget. They only pay for the college bound advisor and contribute to the teacher grant fund. The teacher grant fund allows teachers to apply for grants for less than \$500 to pay for field trips or classroom supplies.

During my visit, I observed the politics involved in the teacher grant funds. Although a science teacher was told by an Agency member that her grant was denied, Catherine suggested that the teacher go directly to the founder for approval. Catherine seemed very confident that the teacher would receive the funding with Amy’s assistance. Again, this type of observation proved that GACC is not above some of the red tape or back-door politicking that occurs in other American schools.

The Agency does pay for the school’s college bound advisor. This is the only salary or major contribution to any of its schools. Critics argue that this advisor is the main reason why

the school's post-secondary success is so high; however, six other Central City coeducational high schools also have college bound advisors, and do not have the same success. Catherine defined the college bound advisor as the school's "goose that lays the golden egg." She understands that it is a luxury to have one person solely dedicated to the college application process. She believes it is the most effective form of college counseling for first generation college students, and is the main reason why GACC can post such high post-graduation statistics. According to the Agency's website, 87% of GACC alumni have either graduated from college or are enrolled in a college.

Another contributor to GACC's success is the relationship that they have formed with the community. Catherine explained that they have really hustled to create partnerships in the community. They have many groups that want to work with GACC, because they have high expectations for their students, and from that they have created a culture of success. Since they have many resources in Central City, they have established partnerships with major contributors to the medical and arts worlds. They also have a partnership with the entertainment company in its building, which set up a digital Videography class for the students. They work with over 50 organizations at GACC. Catherine agreed that at times there is a lot going on, but it is nice because "success breeds success." She believes that once one creates a successful enhancement to the program then people want to continue working with the school. If their partners encounter additional opportunities, they bring them right to the school.

Most importantly, Catherine is an advocate for the students at GACC. She fights for their resiliency. The students at GACC come predominately from South Section Elementary Schools, which has very high rates of poverty and one of the highest rates of sexual predators in the city. According to Catherine, these girls were given passing grades in elementary school because they

went to school and were quiet. She believes it is job of the faculty of GACC to challenge the girls to learn how to be students. She realizes that graduating high school is one of the hardest things that they will do, but it is their duty to show the girls that it is worth it.

Catherine's enthusiasm was evident. Throughout our conversation, she joked and shared personal anecdotes. More importantly, she was a fountain of information about GACC. Through her, I became entrenched in and engaged by GACC's culture and history. She insisted that I meet the girls and interact with the staff. She drew me into the GACC family, and invited me on the tour with the delegates from Chile.

According to previous research, the culture of the school must support reform for sustainability (Newmann, King, & Young 2001; Lambert, 2003; Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994; Fullan, 1999; Ucelli, 1999). At GACC, the school's single-sex environment is not necessarily a factor in the school's sustainability; however, the culture of high expectations, supporting teachers and students, and collaboration has maintained the school. According to this research, teachers and students must be valued and feel supported to dedicate themselves to the school and its leadership. Through Catherine's leadership, these factors have sustained the existence of the school.

During her role as principal, Catherine believed in the necessity of supporting teachers to become leaders in the schools, which not only supports the school but also increases collegiality (Danielson, 2007; Moore Johnson, & Donaldson, 2007). She understood the importance of a teacher's role in the school and reduced teacher turnover during her tenure. Catherine recognized that teachers must take ownership of their role in the school and need to grow by collaborating with their colleagues. During her tenure as principal, she engaged teachers to

become leaders and be aware of their role in the school, but also take ownership of their own professional development.

Catherine created meaningful staff development. Through her staff development model, teachers not only participate in the activities, but also take control of it through their personal study groups or book talks (Newmann, King, & Young, 2001; Lambert, 2003). She also changed the weekly staff meeting from focusing on school clerical issues to staff development topics that engage teachers and give them a forum to express themselves professionally (Lambert, 2003). Catherine's influence has nurtured the teachers to become life-long learners, who not only engage their students, but also engage their colleagues.

Catherine also spoke about an area of weakness in GACC's capacity building. She shared that they did devote time to the school's vision during the 2006 – 2007 school year. According to Lambert (2003), a school's vision should be reviewed regularly. Although that did not occur during the transition year, the school's commitment to high expectations is evident and the entire community rallies around that belief (Conzemius & O'Neil 2001). This commitment keeps the school on track and instruction is aligned with it. This would need to be an area of focus to define GACC as a Quadrant 4 school.

After our interview, the delegates from Chile were about to arrive. To prepare for their visit, I was moved into a nearby storage room or quasi-office space. Unfortunately, I think that I lost a few subjects during my stay in the small office. Originally, participants were directed to Michael's office, and I did not know if they knew about my new quarters. It was in this area that I interviewed my first GACC teacher.

4.1.2 Collaborating for Professional Growth

After a few minutes, Maggie arrived. Maggie was a music teacher, who was in her twenties and dressed very casually in corduroy pants and a long sweater. She was the first music teacher at GACC, and she has held that position for the past four years. Like Catherine, Maggie's enthusiasm for GACC and its students was apparent. She described herself as a perfectionist. I agree with her self-analysis, but I would also describe her as an overachiever. In her four short years in education, she has accomplished things that many do not achieve over the course of their career. Maggie came from a coeducational environment as a student and student-teacher. At first, she thought it would be a huge adjustment to work at this school; however, she quickly found out that she liked that it was "all-girls because it was so friendly." She disputed that the girls are her friends, but agrees that women are naturally more nurturing and affectionate. Although she admitted that she misses the balance that boys might add, she does not miss the energy of a seventh grade boy. At GACC, she does not have to worry about the older boys and their drama or about girls fighting over boys. On the contrary, she shared that fighting is very minimal at GACC.

Maggie was referred to Catherine and GACC by a former mentor. She did not know about the school or its reputation. She did not even know that it was an all-girls' school. At that time, she did not know that a music position was open at the school. She described her experience a "really lucky." Her interview at GACC was her fourth after her college graduation. She said that she fell in love with the school the second that she walked into the building. She loved how clean it was and how nice the staff appeared. She even confided in her mom that she would love to work at GACC, because everyone seemed so supportive and was willing to work

with a first-year teacher. She got the job and along with that the opportunity to start the first music program at the school.

As a first-year teacher, Maggie walked into an un-established music program. She now teaches music to every seventh and eleventh grade student in the building, and believes that it is her role to expose the girls to new experiences and to “open their eyes.” She was the first teacher to conduct a show in the winter, which she has turned into a yearly concert called the “Town Hall.” In the spring, she directs another big concert. She believes that these concerts and her program have brought the school even closer together, because it allows the girls to see each other in a different light. It has given the girls a way to perform in front of their peers and community. These concerts have grown from small performances in front of the GACC family into standing room only events at a local high school’s auditorium. She looks at each year as a challenge to do something new. Last year, they did a throwback concert to the fifties and sixties. This year, the concert’s theme is love. She believes that she needs to constantly changes things to keep it fresh and exciting for the girls and school.

Maggie and I joked back and forth about how amazing it was that a first-year teacher could start her own music program. She agreed, but added that she is pretty good at “biting off more than [she] can chew.” Ironically, the challenge was one of the things that drew her to GACC. She relished the idea of building something from scratch and making it her own.

Maggie believes that the staff models leadership for one another all of the time through their interactions with and observations of one another. She also feels that she has a voice in the school’s professional development, and is empowered to share her opinion. Maggie cited that the school is very interdisciplinary, and since she is the only music teacher that is very important. To fulfill her need to observe others, she can observe a biology teacher. She argues that although

it is another discipline, it is still helpful especially when it is a teacher with a lot more experience. She believes that she might see something that she may add to her own lesson plans by tweaking it to fit to a music curriculum. She suggested that the dedicated faculty and staff have been instrumental in helping her develop as a teacher. Since this position has been her only teaching experience besides student teaching, she understands the importance of a supportive environment.

Maggie describes her class as performance-based. She believes that she needs to find a new way to assess them every day. Her class sizes range from her largest of 28 girls to the smallest of 18. Since she was preparing for the May concert, every day has been an assessment. In her class, the girls are constantly performing and showing that they know the material. Because of their curiosity, she said that the girls are willing to learn new things. Although she acknowledged that each class is different. While one class might be more challenging behaviorally, another might be more vocally challenged.

To help in her practice, Maggie stated that she reflects every day. She shared that some days she goes home and realizes that lesson was a disaster and finds another way to do it better. She believes that a teacher, who does not reflect at least two or three times a week, is not doing their job. Since she defined herself as a perfectionist, she believes it is just a normal part of her day.

Maggie is proud to be a part of GACC. She described it as a small community with administrators and staff working hard. The girls also work hard. She said, “Forget that [GACC] is college-prep. From seventh to 12th grade, you have an exceptional group of girls.” She does, however, look at the girls as “just normal kids” in that they are not all gifted. They need the same nurturing and adult interaction as anyone else. They need to be spoken to with the same

respect as a coeducational environment. She agreed that it is different because she is a woman and they are girls; but since they are a smaller school, they can make connections. She also realizes that it is important to interact with the parents.

As most teachers do, she tends to talk to the parents of students who are not achieving, but when those girls do a good job, she will call home then as well. She said that she is lucky that she does not have to contact homes for behavioral problems. She believes that it is because she knows every student by their first name in the building, and that helps fulfill her niche here.

Maggie also described the staff as dedicated. They work hard to get the girls to learn and succeed. They collaborate and get along. She knows that they care about her and her needs. As a part of this support, Maggie has been able to get any outside professional development that she needs. She can attend anything that she believes will make her a better teacher. Since she has started her own program, she has also had the ability to purchase any supplies or materials to support that program.

As I spoke with Maggie, I quickly forgot that she was a relatively young and inexperienced teacher. Along with her concerts, she has also written grants to VH-1 “Save the Music Program” for instruments and has created partnerships with world-renowned classical music groups. Her accomplishments and maturity are beyond her years, and as we sat in the small space, I wished that she was a teacher at my school. Her personality would engage any student with or without musical abilities. After about twenty-minutes, Maggie went on to her class by thanking me for coming to GACC. At first I found this odd, but I believe that she looked at my presence as a way of voicing her love for this school and its students.

Maggie detailed GACC’s commitment to empowering teachers. She discussed feeling supported by not only her administration but also her colleagues. As a new teacher, she was

supported not only financially to create the music program, but also professionally through her collegial support and professional development. The school's culture of interdisciplinary collaboration is a reason for her growth and success as a teacher (Lambert, 1996, 2003). She was given the opportunity and encouraged to observe and interact with more veteran colleagues on a daily basis. The faculty at GACC reached out to Maggie and assisted in her development to become a professional educator. As the school's only music teacher, this type of collaboration is important to her growth and allows her to reflect on her own practice.

According to Lambert (2003), reflective practice leads to innovation. In line with this research, Maggie engages in reflection every day and believes that it is a part of her job. Because of her reflection, she has developed a performance-based music program that has engaged the student body and staff at GACC. The program's concerts and performances have allowed Maggie to reach out to the community and parents as well. Again, this type of collaboration and practice has been modeled for Maggie by her colleagues. In order to build capacity, the school community must engage in these ideas.

After my interview with Maggie, my fear of isolation came true. Although I believe that I did lose a few participants, I had no way of knowing how many looked for me in Michael's office. Along with my one-day visit time constraint, I believe that my time in this office area was the reasons that I only interviewed ten members of the GACC faculty. Although I might have lost a few interviews in my new space, I was still able to complete research. I had the ability to observe the girls during their exchange of class. Like any other school, they chatted with friends on their way to class. During my stay in this office, I observed one of the most interesting situations of my visit.

4.1.3 Building Resiliency

During a class exchange, I heard some girls yelling. It was not unlike any noise I had previously heard in a school, but I later found out it was a rarity at GACC. A teacher escorted a small-framed African American middle school student named Jaleesa to my temporary space. Since she seemed a little angry or agitated, I did not attempt to interact with her. She sat there alongside me and took deep breaths. After a few minutes, Michael walked past the door. Jaleesa jumped out of her seat and yelled “Michael” down the hall.

This was my first observation of the girls referring to the adults by their first names. It was foreign to me, and struck me as odd; however, it works for the GACC community. Although they do admit, this type of familiarity sometimes “blurs the lines” between adults and students. Responding to the call, Michael arrived at the door to discuss Jaleesa’s situation. Of course, I listened intently.

Through the conversation, I found out that another student had insulted one of Jaleesa’s friends. The insult dealt with teen pregnancy and her peer’s dismissal of teen pregnancy as “gross.” Jaleesa was extremely offended by this remark and voiced her opinion. Jaleesa said that she knew a lot of girls in her family who have struggled with teenage pregnancy and argued that the other student was insensitive with her dismissal. Unfortunately, the conversation became heated and caused Jaleesa to be removed from class.

Through this scenario, I watched Michael walk Jaleesa through the conversation. The two went back and forth discussing the remarks and their place in school. Michael prompted Jaleesa toward proper behavior aligned with the school’s beliefs and rules. I watched Jaleesa interact with Michael like an adult. She displayed confidence and composure as well as any high school graduate. It was through this observation that I realized that the girls at GACC are

different. Although each staff member stressed that they are “typical girls with typical problems,” they really are different and have developed skills and attitudes that they might not possess in a coeducational environment.

This exchange illustrates building resiliency in students. Michael walked Jaleesa through a problem solving activity that will build her autonomy and self-worth (Bernard, 1993). This type of exchange will also develop Jaleesa’s self-confidence and purpose in her environment (Werner & Smith, 1992). Through this interaction, I was able to see how relationships are formed and how the girls develop resiliency by interacting with adults and authority figures. This scenario epitomized the focus that GACC has on creating an environment where its students are supported and nurtured. More importantly, it also gave me a first-hand account of their beliefs, and proved that their philosophies are put into action.

After the exchange with Michael and Jaleesa ended, I waited for what seemed like an eternity for my next interview to arrive. I could hear the Chile delegation walking around the halls, and realized that they forgot to include me. Despite my disappointment, I was stuck in this situation. Since the tour was occurring, I could not find Catherine or Michael. More importantly, I did not want to move and lose the opportunity of another interview. I guess that I could have been more forceful in my research, but I felt that I was walking a fine line between becoming a burden and completing my research; therefore, I waited patiently, and after thirty minutes, Roxanne arrived.

4.1.4 Taking a Leadership Role

Roxanne organized my visit and solicited teachers to participate. Throughout the interview, I quickly found out why she was the “go-to” person at GACC. She has been teaching

there almost since its inception, and is willing to do “anything necessary for the school.” She is a thirty-something, Latina woman, who is extremely eloquent. Currently, she teaches United States History, but was initially hired as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Her first assignment was to teach eighth graders Spanish, and spent two years in that role. She then transitioned into her undergraduate major of Political Science by teaching World History, and now is in her current position.

Since she has been at GACC almost since the beginning, I drew on her experience and knowledge of the school and its sustainability. She believes that the biggest challenge has been decreasing the teacher turnover rate. She said that in the beginning it was very difficult to get everyone on board to commit for the long haul. She believes that in some cases people may not have been happy with the city’s contract and moved. Initially, it was hard to keep staff, and that made it difficult to create an environment conducive to high expectations and continued curricula. As the leadership became more stable, so did the staff. Through that, they have been allowed to be more consistent with their expectations academically and socially. In essence, Roxanne cited that as one of the reasons for GACC’s has sustained.

At this point, turnover at GACC is minimal. Teachers leave because of life decisions. They chose to have children and not work or have to move from Central City. She feels that teaching is more flexible for changing areas than other jobs; therefore, they loose maybe two or three teachers a year. To fulfill her mentoring role, she checks in with new teachers, because she realizes that it is difficult to work in a new setting. According to Roxanne, GACC’s students are largely well behaved. She stated, “We do not have to deal with discipline issues that other urban schools deal with.” Although she added that the girls can still “smell” when a new teacher arrives. The girls still test, and try and push their buttons like other coeducational students might

do. Roxanne, however, believes that it is her duty to check in with them and see how they are doing. When she feels it is appropriate, she might even give Michael feedback. She thinks that it is important to feel supported and to get assistance in “finding your place and your voice in the classroom.” She likes to help new faculty through that process.

Since GACC is a small environment, they do not have one person assigned to mentoring with new teachers. At GACC, more experienced teachers are matched with new teachers. That process works most of the time, but on any given day, something unexpected can happen and they do not have time to plan together. She agreed that is a challenge to find the time to plan and support one another, but it is also a necessity.

Roxanne prides herself on interacting with the students in a professional manner. She speaks to them like she speaks to her colleagues and peers. She believes that this has allowed her to model leadership and appropriate interactions. It has also allowed her to be empathetic. She stated, “Schools do not function in isolation, and students have very real issues at home and on the streets as many of us do.” Being empathetic to their situation, but still maintaining high expectations is important. She is very open with her students about working with new teachers. She gives advice and works with them in front of her students. She believes that this action demonstrates her leadership and role in the school, which is deeply embedded in almost every part of the school.

Roxanne is very devoted to GACC. She plans department meetings and is involved with extracurricular activities. She also helps out with the seventh grade admissions process. This year, she worked on discipline issues that were occurring with the junior class. She believes that the students see this and see that she functions on many levels for the school.

Since the teachers at GACC have a close working relationship with their administrators, Roxanne believes that teachers are empowered to share their ideas. A few years ago, Roxanne attended a workshop on vocabulary building. She pitched her ideas to Catherine, and the school created a professional development program with a series of workshops for the entire staff to encourage vocabulary building across disciplines. Roxanne compared this example with her previous experience where the administration dictated the professional development at her school.

On the contrary, teachers at GACC are encouraged to find new programs or ideas. In the past, teachers have led study groups or discussions groups on books or topics. Roxanne led a study group on Joann Deak (2002). Other study groups have put the latest research into the classrooms or reviewed articles on working with students who have experienced trauma. Roxanne believes that this makes her feel that she counts and her opinion counts. According to Roxanne, “It is a communal feel.”

Roxanne is very committed to the school both in and out of the classroom. As a teacher, she tries to use data to guide her decision making. She acknowledged that most teachers at GACC do not rely on data, but she tries to review the students’ global assessment scores from previous years. Roxanne shared that Central City has tried to identify benchmarks and find useful data; however, she also stated that it was more helpful for middle school teachers. The benchmarks also only touched on reading and mathematics, and allowed teachers to identify struggling students or students with learning disabilities.

At the high school level, Roxanne finds it difficult to find useful data as a history teacher. In history, she teaches over 500 years of history into one school year, then the students take the

Graduation Exam. She would love to have useful data to find out if the students understand the concepts of geography or reading charts, but the data is just not available.

Roxanne has a defined role at GACC. She has volunteered to lead study groups and has taken part in workshops at the school, throughout the city, or out-of-state. She stated that she “is very committed to this school, and [has] been here along time so [she’s] willing to do anything to help it.” She is eager to do anything to help the administration or other teachers. One of the reasons that she is teaching U.S. History is because there was an opening and the administration needed someone to fill it. She decided that she was willing to do anything and she steps in as she sees fit or if someone asks for help.

One of the difficulties that Roxanne faces is talking to parents. She knows how important this communication is, but does not always find the time to do so. She finds it difficult to talk to parents of students who have tremendous gaps in their abilities and learning experiences. She said that it is difficult to talk to the parent of an eleventh grade student with the writing ability of an eighth grader. She also finds it difficult to talk to parents of students who are used to getting all A’s in elementary school because their daughter was quiet and well-behaved. At GACC, Roxanne feels that they require rigorous work and have high expectations. Sometimes the girls do not go home with the same grades that they used to have and that is difficult for their parents. She also shared that it is difficult to talk to their parents of students with learning disabilities because of the societal image of learning disabilities. She believes that it is hard for them to admit that there might be something “wrong” with their daughters, when they just learn differently.

It is also challenging for Roxanne to talk to parents about committing to their education. Many parents choose GACC because it is a safe environment, and because there are no boys.

Compared to other Central City Schools, GACC has a much lower pregnancy rate. She agreed that is true, but the teachers also want them to be prepared for college. However, GACC's belief is that simply being safe and behaving in school is not enough. For some parents it is, and that makes it difficult to communicate with them.

Roxanne does not back down from a challenge and continues to communicate with parents. She admits that she would like to say that she had time to call with positive feedback, but to date she has only done that two or three times this year. As a staff, they send out mid-marking period reports, and she follows up with phone calls. She also encourages parents to email with questions, and prefers to stay in contact that way.

One major focus of GACC is developing resiliency in the girls. The most obvious program at GACC is the student advisory groups. According to the handbook, advisory is "based on the belief that students need to develop trusting and encouraging relationships with adult professionals as they navigate the rocky pitfalls of adolescent and teenage development, particularly at a time when the culture in which we live often sends confusing, precocious, and self-destructive messages to our children."

Advisory groups are small groups of usually about 12 – 15 girls. Every teacher except for one has an advisory group. The group is allotted a 10 minute period for homeroom, where students get their homework together and get settled. In addition, their lunch period is split. They have half of the period for lunch and half for advisory. The idea for advisory is that it is a time to talk about school and outside of school or community issues. They can also get help with college or any other issues that they want to talk about.

Roxanne has had many different experiences with Advisory. She confessed that some times there is a group of students or an age where it works very well and other times it is not

very successful. Last year, she had an eighth grade advisory and it worked “wonderfully.” They were still into the fun games to build trust and their still interested in talking about serious issues. This year, she has eleventh grade, and they are more interested in getting caught up with homework. Although they experienced some interesting conversations about college and getting ready for college, and they come across some good discussions about sex education and choices around sex and alcohol, she finds it difficult to get the eleventh graders to buy into it. She does, however, believe that advisory is the best way to create those relationships and to show the students that the teachers are interested in them. She believes that it proves to them that they are supported.

Roxanne believes that it is important in this school to show the students that the adults care about their lives. Roxanne and many other teachers go to a student’s dance group or choral group party outside of school. They have also been invited to la quinceria or sweet sixteen celebrations, family parties, and funerals. She believes that it is important to recognize that the students have a life and that their teachers have one as well. She said, “They need to see you as an individual.”

Through the advisory groups, Roxanne has spoken with girls about difficult issues, such as students choosing to have abortions. She has also guided students who were afraid they were pregnant or were in abusive relationships or were being abused by parents. They also can work through academic problems and Roxanne has worked with students who were afraid that they could not go to college. She thinks that GACC has created a community through advisory where students and advisors can build relationships. She even tries to maintain these relationships with the girls who are no longer in her advisory group.

Like with most of the others that I interviewed, GACC was Roxanne's first job teaching after of graduate school. She completed a year long student teaching experience at a large coeducational high school, where she worked exclusively with an ESL population. There is a much smaller identified ESL population at GACC. In Roxanne's opinion, the city allows students to test out of ESL prematurely. She admits that GACC has a lot of students from dual language homes, whose English and Spanish are not necessarily developed in an academic sense, and because of her experience she can see that; however, it is different focus at GACC. She shared that it is different to teach all girls, especially in the younger ages. There are a lot of tears. She stated, "Truthfully, I was not prepared for that. It's a learning process."

Roxanne believes that they have a unique experience at GACC. She explained that they have enough girls who are here for the right reasons and they build that community even more than the teachers. They pressure themselves and do things because they may be the first or second woman in their family to go to college. They are offered opportunities to go to college summer programs that they might not have. The students realize that they can go to teachers to help convince their parent, who might not want them to go away for the summer, to allow them to go. By doing this, the teachers also build relationships with the families. According to Roxanne, GACC had four or five years, where it was difficult and Roxanne believes that they made it through because of committed parents as well as committed teachers and administrators.

Roxanne also discussed the students calling teachers by their first names. She learned about that on her first day of school at GACC when she introduced herself as Ms. Wright. The girls laughed, and she gave away that she knew nothing about what she was getting herself into. She explained that calling faculty members by their first names was instituted by Augusta, the first principal. Augusta believed that respect was earned, not part of an "empty ritual." Roxanne

continued by stating Augusta believed that how the girls behaved and interacted with adults was more important than calling someone by their last name.

Roxanne confessed that this practice is “unique, challenging, and wonderful,” but sometimes the lines are blurred. She explained that sometimes the students do not know where that line is and the teachers do not always know quite where that line is. She believes that there is a very delicate balance between being supportive and getting too involved in their lives. Since they do not have degrees in social work or psychology, there are problems, situations, and issues that teachers are not qualified to handle. Roxanne encourages new teachers to recognize this challenge, because she admitted that she did not recognize that at first. She stresses that teachers are doing their job by referring students to the counselor.

Despite all of those challenges, she still likes the fact that they call teachers on a first name basis. She stated, “They know a lot about our lives. We celebrate their lives and they celebrate our lives. It helps us create that sense of community. It’s very different not everyone is comfortable with it at first, but it grows on you.”

Roxanne demonstrated the importance of building leaders within the teaching staff. She has been supported to take initiative and take on a leadership role by supporting new teachers and organizing study groups (Danielson, 2007; Lambert, 1996, 2003). Through this role, she has also engaged her colleagues to lead and models this leadership for her students and other staff members (Lambert, 2003). This type of climate allows teachers to find their place in the school, and reduces teacher isolation and increases collegiality. Like Maggie, Roxanne has taken ownership of her professional development, which has been for the good of the entire GACC community.

Through Roxanne's interview, GACC's development of resiliency in its students became more apparent. Through advisory groups and in the classroom, teachers focus on building relationships through a climate of trust and caring (Noddings, 2002; Sax, 2005). As previously stated, Buhlman Barker, Basile, & Olson (2005) state that advisory groups like those created at GACC increase positive relationships between the teachers and students and is a critical component of the girls' development. Through these types of positive interactions, the teachers value creating life long relationships with their students. This also allows the teachers to show the students that they are invested in them and their futures. In essence, the students will feel supported and will want to meet their teachers' expectations and succeed (Sax, 2005). As Roxanne stated, these groups demonstrate that the girls are supported and valued.

After my interview with Roxanne, Maureen, the assistant principal found me in the office. Since the tour from Chile was over, I was able to return to the principal's office and continue my interviews there. I was extremely happy about this change, because I would have the opportunity to talk to teachers going into the office, and would be able to observe a lot more than I could see in the smaller area.

As I stepped into the office, Catherine immediately apologized for forgetting about my inclusion in the Chile delegation. She laughed it off as another senior moment and repeated that sometimes "things get crazy around here." She promised that she would arrange my own private tour, and I believed her. I was just excited to be back where the action happened. At this point, however, my interviews would be less than private. Along with Catherine, Michael would be in the office, and many others would be in and out of the area. One might argue that this might taint or bias my interviews; however, I believe that it added even more information. Actually, Catherine's input was refreshing. At times, the teachers were holding back or being modest

about their influence on GACC. Catherine was quick to point out the groups they created or the relationships they formed. The one downfall was that it was getting close to lunchtime, and I was running out of time. In an effort to gather more information, I was forced to ask fewer questions and complete group interviews when necessary.

4.1.5 Sounding Republican

Emma was my next candidate. Unfortunately, Emma had very little time, so I could only ask her a few questions. She has been at GACC for five years as an Advanced Placement English teacher. It is an understatement to describe her as articulate. She is thoughtful with each word she speaks, and I could see that she thought about what she was saying. She believes that is her role at GACC. She looks like an academician with wire-rimmed glasses and a kind of bohemian dress. She believes that she needs to show the girls a model of a powerful, articulate, academically oriented woman, who has chosen an altruistic career for her job. She talks to them about happiness being related to serving. As an English teacher, they always talk about happiness in relation to books and with characters. She believes that she needs to teach the girls that happiness is created when a person is moral and a part of something, like when there is a community. She tries to be a model in the way she talks, how she talks, and what she values.

When I asked Emma to explain what makes GACC so special. She joked that her answer would “sound really Republican.” She believes that it offers a choice. There is a choice to have single-sex education in this neighborhood and it gives people an option. She agreed that part of its success is that it is a self-chosen path. She argued that not everyone has a self-chosen path, because some of it is parent-chosen and that can provide a cultural clash. She believes that the

majority culture recognizes and feels that this is a special place and by buying into that idea of its “special-ness” they create their own self-policing culture.

Emma continued to explain that the other part of that “special-ness” is that they have high expectations with a college counselor who at the end will get them into college. Emma calls him “their ticket.” She also believes that their coursework is rigorous and college based. She believes that it is unique that in seventh grade, they come to GACC with the idea that they are going to go to college, and that part is what creates that “aura of ‘special-ness’.” She thoughtfully added, “We are different. We are directed. We are going somewhere. We are special. We are also women, who have bought into the idea that we are allowed to go somewhere.”

Emma agreed that college is the typical goal of the girls, but also creates a self-policing goal that it is “okay” that the course work is hard. She believes that it is important to explain to the girls that they are going to do hard stuff, and they support each other by and large. She admitted that it is not always supportive, but a majority of popular culture is supportive. She added that when she is having a bad day, she is supported here.

One of the reasons Emma believes that GACC is so successful is because they spend a lot of time telling them who they are and where they are going. They bring alumni back as proof of their success. They spend a lot of time discussing their successes and celebrating their successes as a group. They spend time getting them out of school to expose them to different things. She bragged that she can not tell me how many times they have returned from a field trip and the girls said that they could not believe how badly other students behaved. She believes this is a result of their environment and the maturity they are expected to display.

Emma continued to discuss that they spend a lot of time talking about who they are. She apologized by saying, “I’m sorry if I sound vague, but that’s it. That’s what we do. Defining

and stroking and celebrating being a part of this school.” Once she taught the advisory group how to knit. Another time, she did an open door drama club. These examples were based on student interest. She believes that opening the door to showing students that she is interested in them and their interests creates relationships with the girls. Like Roxanne, Emma sees the value in building relationships.

Emma wants the girls to know that they care about them and what is bothering them, challenging them, and engaging them. They spend a lot of time being people for their students like answering personal questions. She believes that one of the great things about a field trip is traveling on the subway together. Again, she cited the importance of not being a friend to the students, but being a person to them. She believes it is important to let them see their teacher as a leader so that they can try it out, too. She believes that she must emulate how to talk with an articulate person or how to behave with an adult. She believes that is leadership and argued for the nurture of it.

Emma felt that it was important to tell me that they get to teach whatever they want. She added that the teachers, who are extremely, educated educators, have created a “really accountable rigorous curricula that are deep rather than broad.” She reiterated that they have high expectations of their students, and the daily work of teaching is really quality work. She ended the interview by saying, “You know we teach them to test the limits and to just be decent human beings.”

Emma was one of two interviewees, who discussed GACC’s place in single-sex education. She cited that GACC offers girls a choice or an alternative. According to Datnow, Hubbard, and Conchas (2001), participants in single-sex education must choose to be involved in order to achieve success. In the case of GACC, the application process is a contributor to its

success because the students and their parents chose to apply. The girls willingly attend this school not only because of its single-sex environment but also because of its reputation of high expectations. Emma was the only participant, who acknowledged the importance of choice in this situation.

Emma also discussed the school's high expectations for the girls. Emma shared that the curricula at GACC is not only rigorous but also college-based. This has created a culture of consistency and collaboration between the teachers and students (Lambert, 1996, 2003). The teachers shape their curriculum based on their students' needs while still maintaining rigor. This curriculum does not necessarily focus on women's issues; however, it is often project-based, which would reflect the learning styles of girls (Sax, 2005). These high expectations not only focus on student achievement; however, they also build resiliency in the girls (Lambert, 2003). One of the characteristics of a high capacity building school is a focus on student achievement and GACC definitely fulfills and meets that goal.

4.1.6 Creating a Nurturing Environment

Catherine grabbed my next candidate, who walked into the office to see Michael. It is my first interaction with a non-teaching staff member. Catherine introduced me to Caitlin, the guidance counselor. Caitlin's role is not the same as a college bound counselor. Instead, she takes on the role of a more traditional counselor. This is her second year at GACC. She refused to be taped for this study, so I gathered little information from our interaction. Like everyone I interviewed, Caitlin continued to stress that "regular girls" attended GACC; however, she shared that by attending this school they are exposed to caring, wonderful teachers and experience things that they might not otherwise experience.

Caitlin enjoys her role at GACC, and has a tremendous respect for her position. She believes that she assists the girls with their social and emotional journeys. She receives daily affirmation that she is a valuable part of this staff by interacting with the girls. Since she is relatively new to the GACC community, she believes that she is still defining her role; however, one of her established roles is to reach out to the community to find more partnerships or to work with community organizations. She believes that is one of her most important duties.

This was one of my most difficult interviews because Caitlin was not as forthcoming with information. This may partly be due to her lack of experience at GACC, but she was just not as engaging or excited as my other interviewees. I do not think that we ever connected, and it was difficult to draw information from her; however, she was still an important part of my research.

Although Caitlin's interview was not as fruitful as the other interviews, she added to the importance of building a caring environment (Bernard, 1993). As a counselor, she supports the girls both socially and emotionally and helps to create a nurturing environment at GACC (Garmezy, 1991). At GACC, the counselor's role is to assist the faculty in staff in supporting the students. Roxanne referred to the importance of having a counselor on staff, because in this type of nurturing, close-knit environment, students share issues that teachers are not always trained to support. With a trained counselor on staff, students can be supported emotionally as well as academically.

4.1.7 Building Relationships

My next interview was with a pair of history teachers. At first I was little concerned that interviewing two people at once would not only be confusing, but might also change their

responses. They might not be as honest or would play off each other's answers; however, they both had distinct ideas about GACC and different experiences that added to my research.

Matt and Cameron gave up their lunch periods to talk to me. Matt has been at teacher at GACC since 2000. He was one of the few teachers that I interviewed with multiple years of experience outside of the school. He has taught at two other schools in Central City as well as one in Chicago. He described those schools as having very poor attendance. As a teacher, he had 150 students on his roster but only saw about 100 of them. He said that it was bizarre, but no one never really asked what happened to the other 50. At GACC, they investigate students with attendance issues and find out why the girls are late or what is wrong with them. He also likes that he gets to teach the girls for the entire year instead of just a semester. This allows him to build relationships with the girls, and find their strengths. Since he has been at the school for seven years, he has enjoyed getting to know the girls across grade levels and see their progression.

Cameron has been at GACC for two years, and had student teaching experience at a large urban high school. She stated that at her previous school it was not really about the kids; instead, it was about passing the Graduation Exams. She added that the focus was not on all of the students passing but on the concrete numbers of the exams. She explained that it came down to statistics. Because the GACC curricula is not dominated by the Graduation Exams, she believes that she has the freedom to teach what she wants, and is encouraged to be creative and innovative. She feels appreciated for what she does at the school. At the larger school, she felt overlooked or criticized once the exam scores came in. She described the students at GACC as academically motivated. She also realizes that students at the other schools do not always have a community and get lost because "no one is really worried about them."

Cameron equated GACC's success with its size. Cameron shared that the teachers really get to know the students as people and see them every day in advisory. She believes that advisory is taken pretty seriously, and is not only a place where the students are monitored but also allows the teachers to get to know the girls.

Matt agreed and said, "It is a small school." He did admit that his class sizes traditionally have started to grow over the years, because with any good school, the city has tried to "jam more kids into it." Although the rooms used to fit four students per table with six tables in the class, they have found a way to get seven at a table. Matt said that he knows that he should not to complain, because technically the contract says that class size is 32 students. He likes the smallness of GACC and that he gets to teach the entire grade of students. More importantly, he gets to know the teacher who teaches English or math and communicate about the students that they share. Although officially, they do not work in teams, in many ways they model that process. Again, Matt cited the importance of how personal GACC is for not only the students but also for the teachers.

Both Matt and Cameron described the love that the girls have for GACC. He described that there are a group of kids who stay after-school at GACC no matter what they offer. If there is not a club they are interested in, then they will create their own. He had students last year who created a Bollywood movie club, just so they could stay after-school. He believes that the girls "just like to be here." He said that it translates in the end to small core group of girls with great college applications. He gave an example of one girl who is going to Amherst next year. He said that once she sat down and listed her extracurricular activities, she had a huge list.

Cameron added that the GACC faculty is also very diverse. Like the girls, they enjoy making time to sponsor after-school clubs that go along with their interests. For example,

Cameron has sponsored intramural volleyball and the Model UN club. She also stated that they have a service club and a director's club with the assistance of their neighboring entertainment company. She believes that it is important to get the girls involved in larger issues even beyond the school.

It was through Cameron and Matt that I found out about a teacher's schedule at GACC. They have seven instructional periods per day at the school, where teachers teach four periods and have an advisory group. They both agreed that the additional time allows them to prepare rigorous lessons, and to collaborate with other teachers, but they can also be used to cover classes or perform other duties. According to the GACC Teacher's Handbook, teachers "enjoy small class size, reduced teaching periods, smaller student loads, and the active support of the Agency in exchange for a commitment to act as an Advisor through an advisory group."

To my surprise, Matt stated that he missed sharing classroom space with other teachers. At his previous school, they were forced to share space. He disclosed that he felt GACC's faculty would be hesitant to share, but would not give up his classroom to add collaboration to the mix. At this point, he contradicted himself a little bit because he stated that they really only collaborate interdepartmentally and lack department planning time. Unfortunately, lunch was over and they both had to go onto their next class, so I could not ask Matt to explain what he meant by those statements.

Both Matt and Cameron's interviews demonstrated how GACC builds resiliency in its students. Matt spoke directly about creating and maintaining relationships with his students. He explained that the teachers take a direct part in their students' lives. This type of student-teacher interaction builds a protective shield for students (Garmezy, 1991), and Matt illustrated this shield through his discussion of the girls' involvement in extracurricular activities. According to

Bernard (1993), students must be given multiple opportunities to participate in their environment beyond the school day. The girls at GACC find ways to engage with their teachers, community, and school. In essence, they look at the school as their home and will stay for almost any reason.

Cameron's interview also added insight to GACC's capacity building strategies. She explained that she feels valued and has the freedom to teach what she wants. This capacity building strategy emphasizes a teacher's role in a learning community (Lewis, 2002). More importantly, it also supports the high rates of academic success that Cameron described. As previously explained, students are four times more likely to succeed in a supportive environment than those without it. With this in mind, creating an atmosphere with this type of autonomy would be essential in a high capacity building school.

4.1.8 Meeting the Girls of GACC

As I waited for my next interview, Catherine suggested that I take my tour. She ran out of the office to find a few students to take me around the building. I talked to them informally on the tour and made the experience a part of my field notes. After a few minutes, three ninth grade Latina girls arrived. Two of the girls attended GACC since the seventh grade, and one transferred in the ninth grade this school year. She felt lucky to be at GACC, because she can focus on school and not worry about the boys interfering. She explained that at her old school, she felt like she was picked on for studying or doing her homework. She said that at GACC, she is expected to do those things.

The girls were full of energy. I immediately noticed their effortlessness with talking to adults, but more importantly, their comfort level with talking about GACC. Again, they were at ease with a visitor or researcher, and were eager to share their experiences. It is specifically

stated in the GACC handbook that GACC is a “learning lab and a part of a growing network of model schools.” Therefore, teachers and students must be prepared for visits from other educators, politicians, and media.

For the tour, they took me up and down the floors of the school. Each floor was a mirror image of the next with changes in bulletin boards and changes in the color of painted stripes. They eagerly took me into each classroom and explained its function in the building. When it was one of their classrooms, they explained the teacher and a recent assignment. It was very interesting to hear their descriptions. It was almost like they were programmed to talk about GACC and its success. It made me a little concerned to think that the girls have to act as public relations experts for the school, but when I thought about the opportunities they receive and the success they achieve that concern was quickly erased.

I learned that they are usually not allowed to use the elevators, so they loved riding up and down when we could find a teacher to put us on. When we could not find a teacher, we walked up and down the cramped stairwells. They agreed that the stairs were tight, but they did not mind going up and down them. They said it is a little difficult during lunchtime, because the cafeteria is on the top floor. When they have class on one of the lower floors, it is as one student said, “a pretty far hike up to the fourteenth floor.”

Again, the cafeteria did not look like a typical school cafeteria. It resembled more of a college eating area. It was full of round tables and chairs, where the girls could relax. It was no surprise to me that they referred to it as their “dining hall,” because it was not an ordinary high school cafeteria. It did not have the standard long tables with attached small seats like the cafeteria at my school. It was not, however, very big, which is why they run four lunch periods.

They girls joked about the taste of the food, but I compared their comments with any other American high school student not to the actual quality of the food.

Like most other buildings in Central City, every inch of space at GACC is used. They have a small library and computer lab, and an even smaller Multi-Purpose Room (MPR) that doubles as a gym. They do not have an auditorium or a large space where the entire school can meet together, but that does not matter to my tour guides. They focused on the positive aspects of their school. They know that they are cared for and love to talk about their school and their teachers. They bragged about meeting a celebrity at their last celebration, and how she talked to them about reaching for their goals.

As we made our way back to Michael's office, I focused on how the girls interacted with one another and with those they passed in the hall. They were extremely confident in their encounters and looked the person in the eye when they spoke to them. They did not hesitate to talk about how hard their school work might be, but spoke openly about going to college. They did not display catty behavior that is sometimes a part of the teenage girl psyche. On the contrary, they supported one another and bonded. It was really refreshing to meet such a self-confident group of girls. Like the rest of my day, the tour was over as quickly as it began, and they escorted me back to Michael's office.

Catherine was still there waiting and asked if I enjoyed the tour. She exclaimed, "Aren't they just fabulous?" As unbiased as I tried to stay throughout my trip, I had to agree. As I re-entered the office, I noticed another young woman sitting at the table. Catherine had arranged for me to speak with her. Since I did not have permission to record this interview, I took field notes and just focused on her sincerity. Her name was Estella, and she was a senior at GACC, who came to the school in ninth grade. She spoke with the same poise and confidence as her

peers, and I was not surprised to learn that she was the student body president. She believed that had she stayed at a coeducational high school, she would never have experienced that title. She talked about how great her school is and how she has flourished in this environment. She told me that she had to beg her mother to allow her to attend GACC, because she wanted to get away from boys who picked on her in middle school. She said it was the best move of her life and has made her into the person that she is today.

Estella told me that she wants to become a doctor and is waiting for financial aid to come through before she decides on a school. To my surprise, she said that she did not want to go to an all-girls' college, but she would prefer a small, private school environment. Besides the lack of boys, she also loved GACC for its small size. She said that it is really intimate and everyone knows each other. She confessed, however, that she was nervous about leaving GACC, but she was excited at the same time. She also shared that her mother was nervous as well, because she would be the first member of her family to go onto college. This was something that Estella and I had in common; however, I never had the confidence that she had at her age. Based on my experience with other students, I found her to be mature beyond her years.

Although this was not an official interview in my study, I allowed Estella to talk as long as she wanted. I thought it supported the “regular girl” theory that the teachers described; however, in some ways Estella had more confidence and composure than any “regular girl” whom I had met before. I could not deny that her personality and character have been influenced by GACC. I believe that represented the mission statement of GACC which states:

[GACC] was established to nurture the intellectual curiosity and creativity of young women and to address their developmental needs. We cultivate dynamic, participatory learning, enabling student to experience great success at many levels, especially in the fields of math, science and technology. Students are encouraged to achieve their personal best in and out of the classroom. [GACC] strives to work with families and instill in the students a sense of community,

responsibility, and ethical principles of behavior – characteristics that will help make them become leaders of their generation.

After meeting Estella, the mission statement, as well as all of the information I had been receiving from my interviews started to make sense. It forced me to realize that I was not just studying an all-girls' school. On the contrary, I was trying to understand what made this school a success. More importantly, how could it be replicated to help the girls that I knew in Pittsburgh?

My interaction with the girls of GACC directly supports the resiliency research that I found during my review of literature. My tour guides and Estella demonstrated Bernard's (1993) four characteristics of a resilient child: social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. All of the girls had a direct focus on their future and easily negotiated their environments. Through interactions with me, a total stranger, they demonstrated confidence and a sense of self beyond their environment (Werner & Smith, 1992).

4.1.9 Creating a Support System

After Estella returned to class, another participant showed up in Michael's office. Ariela, a Spanish teacher for the past seven years at GACC, was soft-spoken and seemed shy. She was in her late-twenties with a slight Spanish accent, but dressed in an old-fashioned style in a long-skirt and high collared shirt. She was not as outgoing as my previous interviews, but she offered some interesting insight into GACC and her role in it. She described herself as "just a teacher." She bluntly stated that whenever someone needs help that she will help, but she does not see herself as anything more than a teacher. She portrayed herself as very structured, and said that

she has established rules in her classroom. She believes in modeling good behavior and tends to talk to students about appropriate ways behaving. Beyond that, she believes that it is important to encourage the girls to help out the school community.

When I asked Ariela to talk about her advisory group, she acknowledged that was her weakest contribution to GACC. She stated she was not able to grasp it. She said that she will do whatever the administration asks of her and will have discussion groups; however, that is her least favorite part of the day. After that statement, Catherine interrupted the interview. She felt that she had to interject and stated that Ariela was being more than modest. She agreed that although she might not be one of the strongest advisors, she has the ability to reach some of the most challenging students. In fact, a lot of the girls that have left have kept in touch with her. This comment made Ariela smile, and broke down the wall of mystery that she had up. After that discussion, she seemed more eager to share and talk about her place at GACC.

Ariela connected the schools success to the fact that the girls have a support system at GACC from the principal to the secretaries to their own peers. It is a both an academic and social support system. She believes that in ways they pamper them and the girls know that, but she believes that is what makes the school unique. She argued that just because it is an all-girls school does not mean that they are any different than anyone else. On the contrary, she emphatically stated, “They’re regular girls with typical every day problems. What is different is that we have a really good support system for them.”

She continued by reiterating that GACC deals with “regular girls with regular problems like any other public school.” They have girls that would be considered excellent students to struggling students. Even though GACC is a public school, where girls wear uniforms, they

have the same issues as other public school. They have girls who are trying really hard and some who do not. She ended her interview by saying, “We have potpourri of everything.”

Resiliency and creating a supportive environment were the major topics throughout Ariela’s interview. She described the support system that has developed at all levels in the school (Bernard, 1993). Although Ariela does not find her strength in advisory groups, she does recognize their place in the school and has formed relationships with some of the most difficult girls (Buhlman Barker et al., 2005). Ariela’s interview illustrates GACC’s focus on maintaining a support system for its students with all of its stakeholders. From the teachers to the cafeteria staff, each adult is invested in the school and its students. Throughout the interview, Ariela stressed that despite GACC’s single-sex environment, it is not unlike other schools with issues and problems. In fact, she believes that the only difference is its all-girl population. This illustrates the fact that that component of the school does not need to be the focus of curricula or professional development. Instead, it is an added valued to creating a safe and welcoming environment.

4.1.10 Dedicated Faculty with High Expectations

While Ariela was quiet and shy, my next interview with Tom was anything but reserved. Although Tom was relatively soft spoken, he was full of energy. He is a forty-something, English teacher with horn-rimmed glasses and spiky gray hair. He has been at GACC for the past seven years, and has experienced multiple coeducational schools. He has a reputation for rigorous literature lessons that not only expose the girls to new ideas, but also challenge them to think beyond the text.

Tom declared that he can go deeper at GACC than he was able to at his previous schools. As a literature teacher, he can go deeper into women's issues or the human condition as a whole. He feels that he can be more open with the girls, and they are more open because there are no boys. He believes that since the girls share common experience it is easier for them to open up. He joked that they do not get many shy girls at GACC, and even the shy girls are quickly forced out of their "shell." I can tell that this excites Tom, because he believes that this is a wonderful phenomenon in a literature classroom because the girls have an opinion and they are willing to share it.

Like his colleagues, Tom believes in modeling leadership for his students. He said that he models being a good citizen. He believes that it is his moral obligation to show the girls what it means to be a good citizen. To fulfill this obligation, he does extra things with the girls. He says through these outside activities that he tries to show them what it means to be a good person.

As Tom was explaining his outside activities, Catherine felt that she needed to interrupt. Again, she was in awe of the modesty of the teachers. She was amazed that the teachers do not even know what they do for the school. Catherine shared that not only does Tom take the girls on outside activities; he also has a constant stream of role models or speakers in his classroom like actors, playwrights, authors, journalists, producers, and directors. Catherine's reaction made Tom chuckle. He admitted that he does bring in a lot of people. He believes by exposing the girls to famous playwrights, musicians, actors, and artists that he will make the classroom experience as rich as possible, so that he is not always the center of the classroom.

As we continued, Tom's modesty continued. He said, "I feel like I'm just Tom. I do a lot. I enjoy what I do. I love what I do and I think that the kids see that and know that." Part of

his role at GACC is to take the girls to theater. Since he teaches a 12th grade class, he has the ability to take the girls out in the evening. To date, they have attended more than 12 plays together. Tom shared that they attended a three-hour play last night, and did not get home until past 11 o'clock. He believes that their attendance alone is not the only lesson; however, it is learning to be a member of an audience and how to appreciate it. He shared that he was very concerned because it was a difficult play, and he thought that they probably hated it. When he arrived in class first period, he was worried about the girls' reactions. To his surprise, the girls got a lot of it. He explained that he was able to sit back and watch them discuss the play and was amazed by how much they not only understood, but appreciated it.

Tom takes pleasure in the opportunities that he has as a teacher and that the students have as students. If he wanted to do something every single day, he could do it. He believes that the girls at GACC have "amazing opportunities to meet incredible people and do incredible things." His enthusiasm turns to his colleagues. He explained that he has never worked with such a dedicated staff. He stated that they constantly talk about how they can enrich their students' lives. He reiterated that they are very concerned about the students. He believes that each and every one of the students gets individual attention in and out of the classroom. He added, "Whether I'm giving them advice or just socializing with them, they get a really good education. Not just a formal education but an informal education. They're learning about the world outside of this classroom and this school."

When I asked Tom to share his beliefs about what an outsider should know, he focused on the girls. He stressed that they have very gifted students and very intelligent young women at GACC; however, the school is not any different than any other school in any other the system.

He emphasized that a lot of work is put into this school with a lot of dedicated administrators, teachers, and students. He believes that all of the hard work is worth it.

Tom went on to discuss a recent a five week project on human rights that the girls completed. He explained that they went to the museum. They did essays. They read *Night*. They read short stories. He said that it was “very, very hard work for them.” In today’s class, they finished with a poster project in relation to the museum field trip, and one of the girls said that it was a lot of work but it was worth it. He said this completely validated his role here, and his position as a teacher.

Tom believes that the teachers at GACC work a lot harder than their colleagues at other schools. He shared that he has friends who are teachers and they ask him why he is at school so late or why he is “beating his kids with essays.” Although Tom hears what they are saying, he believes that he needs to dedicate himself to what he is doing, but he also gets a lot in return. He gets to see the kids standing up at the end of the play applauding and he sees kids that are writing who could not write before. He kept stressing that GACC is “an amazing school. It’s an amazing place. It’s an amazing place to work.”

One of the reasons that Tom loves GACC is because the teachers know the girls, many of whom they have known since seventh grade. He believes that they can watch them grow from seventh graders into seniors. Because of this, he believes that they are invested in their future. He believes that this relationship makes the teachers want the girls succeed. He feels that the teachers want to see every child succeed, even the child that gave them a hard time, and they mean it. He believes that is one of the things that make GACC special. He restated, “We want them to succeed and we want to see them all make it. Most of the time they make it.”

Finally, Tom explained that GACC is a haven for the girls. He shared stories of how graduates come back to his classroom because it feels like a home to them. When the girls return, he believes it is like a child coming home. He said that a lot of the girls come back and admit that they have struggled in college, but pull through and do well. He ended the interview by saying, “We do prepare them for the life after here. That makes us a very special.”

Like Emma, Tom spoke about the importance of modeling leadership skills for his students (Lambert, 1996, 2003). Tom does this not only through his actions, but also by bringing the community to the girls. By inviting in speakers or taking his students on a field trip, he builds trust and exposes girls to life beyond their own experiences (Bernard, 1993). GACC’s students, like most urban youth, lack life experiences and Tom’s actions directly support the girls’ emotional development. As previously stated, this speaks to building resiliency in children. Through each of the interviews, this was a major theme.

Tom also referred to the hard work and dedication of the faculty. He related this dedication to the relationships that they have built in the girls. At the same time, however, they work hard and push the girls academically. Like his colleagues, he challenges the girls to excel and supports them through the process (Lambert, 2003). As Tom stated, the school has become a “haven” for the girls and they feel protected. Because of that protection, they are willing to work hard for their futures (Krovetz, 1999). Although the school is a safe place for the girls, it also challenges them. They are expected to go to college and to become leaders in their environment. All of this is made possible by a caring and dedicated faculty. A dedicated faculty is not something that is easily attainable by implementing structure or curriculum; however, people are inherently more eager to devote their time and energies to their work when they feel

supported (Lambert, 1996, 2003). This was a major factor in supporting the dedicated faculty at GACC.

4.1.11 A Collaborative Environment

My last interview with a teacher was one of the most challenging. This time it was not because the teacher was shy or aloof. On the contrary, this teacher was extremely engaging. He is a math teacher and the sponsor of the philosophy club. It should have been no surprise to me that he answered every question with a question and challenged me to think about my role and research. It was a very intriguing interview and surprisingly, the most enjoyable.

Donald has been a member of the GACC faculty for five years. He is in his thirties and looked like a stereotypical math teacher. He completed his student teaching at a large suburban high school, but all of his professional experience has been at GACC. He believes that the close knit community that they have created is what makes the school work. He does admit that it may be due to the size. Since they are not a very big school, the administration and faculty are dedicated to working together to address the problems with students and classes on “an ongoing individual basis and on a situation by situation immediate response basis.” He said that when something comes up, it is very easy to get the parties together to discuss what needs to be done.

Donald was the first one to address GACC’s achievement on paper. He equated their high graduation and high college acceptance rates with high expectations and consistency, but those principals are realizing concrete action because they have a full time college counselor who works with the girls on an individual basis starting in the seventh grade. He agreed that it is difficult for students to fall through the cracks at GACC, because so many adults are invested in their education.

Donald believes that he models leadership by finding things in other disciplines in relation to science and math. He goes out and finds things to bring back to the school. He believes that one aspect of being a leader is having a vision and going out and making it happen. He also stated that there are a lot of teachers doing that at GACC. He stated that other schools sometimes forget about what happens outside of the classroom because they are so focused on preparing for standardized tests.

When I asked Donald to define his role at GACC, he turned his attention to his colleagues. He stated that teachers have different roles in the school. Despite all of his efforts to be certain things and to model certain things, he thinks that the examples that they set unconsciously have the most effect. He believes that it is his role to be someone who thinks all the time, always asking questions, or asking why. He divulged that this is his reputation and that sometimes the girls groan and say he does not teach philosophy. From this type of classroom rhetoric, he spawned a philosophy club. Again, he modestly shared that he is not the only one doing that, and the other teachers make the girls think as well.

During our interview, the bell rang and the assistant principal agreed to cover Donald's class. Since we were running out of time, I wanted to ask Donald's opinion on what one should know about starting a single-sex school similar to GACC. He stated that one should know that single sex education has extraordinary benefits without doing a lot to capitalize on single sex school just by being one. He went on to say that it is not necessary to constantly focus on women's issues or the differences between girls or boys; however, just by being an all-girls' school is already starting with a significant advantage. He clarified his point by saying, "I guess that I'm saying that because everything that happens beyond that is good. It's gravy."

Donald admitted that he does wonder if he makes enough out of the fact that he works in this school or if he does enough to acknowledge that, but he believes just existing is almost enough. He ended the interview by saying that the population of GACC benefits from the lack of distraction. They have freedom to learn and do not have to worry about performing for boys. In this environment, the girls lack inhibitions. He believes that would be useful for an aspiring single-sex educator to know.

Like his colleagues, Donald discussed the importance of the collaborative environment at GACC. Each teacher and staff member has defined their role in the school to support it and its students. They work together for the common good and draw on each other's strengths and weaknesses (Newmann, King, & Young, 2001; Lambert, 2003). By doing this, they have created a collegial atmosphere of support and celebration. This environment has affected the growth and well-being of teachers and students and is a direct contributor to GACC's success.

Finally, Donald discussed GACC as a single-sex environment. As Jackson and Smith (2000) found, he discussed the confidence and freedom that the girls at GACC demonstrate in their environment. In this case, the girls at GACC mirror the success at the previous study. The girls are not preoccupied with boys. Instead, they focus on their studies. According to Donald, they have an advantage just by being an all-girls school; however, their culture of high expectations and rigor has built capacity at the school and helped it sustain (Lambert 1996, 2003).

4.1.12 Changing Roles

After returning from Donald's class coverage, Maureen, the assistant principal, sat down for an interview. Since we shared job titles, I was very interested to find out Maureen's perspectives on the school and her role in it. She was a tall, blonde woman in her late-twenties. I could tell that she hustled and worked hard, because I watched her run around the office the entire day. Although it was the end of the day and I could tell that she was exhausted, she still agreed to talk to me.

The interview started with Maureen joking that she should have listened to everyone else and said something really smart. She continued by discussing GACC's uniqueness by saying that "most of the kids really want to be here and really want to work." She continued by saying that they have a lot of teachers who also "want to be here and do some really cool things in their classrooms," such as taking trips or creating partnerships with museums. There are also teachers who do after school things with the robotics team and a science teacher takes the girls to New Orleans to build with Habit for Humanity. She added that there are teachers with student council and community service clubs, and create so many opportunities that kids can experience. She stated, "That is awesome and it makes their education global and not just in the classroom."

Our conversation turned to her new role and she agreed that it is different. She loved teaching, and as Donald was talking to me, she took it as an opportunity to teach. She believes that now she does things that allow everyone else do "their stuff." She agreed that it is not quite as fun, but it has been interesting to learn. She finds her role as supportive, and in a small school with only 28 teachers, she believes that is extremely important.

Maureen shared her role in covering for absent teachers, a role that we both share. She stated that when one or two teachers are out it is difficult, and interesting to see how it works and

what needs to be covered and who needs to be where. She admitted that when she feels overwhelmed, she goes upstairs and has lunch with the kids. She enjoys those types of conversations with the girls, because many of her interactions are negative. She stated, “It’s been hard because it’s hard on your soul and makes you think that it’s all there is. But, it’s been great to see opportunities.” As an urban assistant principal, I could relate to her statement. I agreed that it is very easy to get bogged down in suspensions or the negative aspects of our jobs; however, as Maureen stated, it is important to see the positive aspects as well.

Maureen shared a story of a new ninth grader, which is different because they do not enroll many new ninth graders. Unfortunately, she had an attendance problem, but now she attends every day. Maureen made her attendance a priority and worked closely with her to prove that they do care at GACC and they want her to be there. She said, “At least for the past two months, her attendance has improved and when she misses she’s genuinely upset. So I try and remember those things to make it better.”

Maureen stated that she would like to think that what she is now doing is harder, but agrees that teaching is harder in a different way. In the classroom, the teacher has to be “on all of the time”; however, in her new role, she needs to be attuned to the whole school. She added that as a teacher she was pretty autonomous. In her new role, she and Michael collaborate and talk a lot and that makes it easier to stay in touch. She stated that the size of the school makes things challenging. It is not uncommon for Michael to deal with an issue in the morning that she might need to deal with in the afternoon. In her new role, she believes that she is forced to be more community oriented, “because in the classroom you are by yourself.” Now, she is part of the administrative team and she has to find out how to define her role.

Finally, I asked Maureen about her perception about what is written about GACC. She believes that “most times they hit the nail on the head.” She defined it as a place for girls from Central City, where they can succeed. They might have to work a little bit and fail and try a little harder. She believes that an outsider needs to know that it takes a lot of work not just from the teachers, but the kids as well.

Maureen continued by talking about the girls and their teachers. She said that they have a lot of kids who embrace things. Recently, an eighth grade teacher took kids to an Ethiopian restaurant, and the girls were willing to try it. She added that they have teachers who are willing to try new things, too. She believes that occurs because of their relationships. She thinks that it is not just a job for these teachers, but it is their life’s work.

Maureen shared that she worked in two Catholic Schools before GACC. From that experience, she has come to think that to have success in a school one has to hire teachers who care about children, even if they are not getting paid very much. In this case, they have the added bonus of having access to some money to do some “really cool things.” She also cited size as an impact on its success, because they have teachers who know their students and vice versa.

Maureen divulged this success has developed over time. She continued by discussing the need for stability and the lack of teacher turnover, and stated that schools do have to constantly reinvent themselves when they have a stable staff. She said that this school was really lucky to have Catherine. She added, “She was here for five years and came after some tough stuff went on.” She continued by saying that over the next five years, it will be critical to maintain this situation she has created. She agreed that the school will miss Catherine, because although there are a lot of great people with great ideas, Catherine held it all together. In her new role,

however, they have her continuity as a leader and her presence now with the Agency. She described her as an encyclopedia of knowledge on education and girls' education and learning.

To help define her new role, Maureen wanted to do something for the ninth grade. Since they do not experience the traditional transition into the "high school," she wanted to do something special. To do this, she solicited the Agency for a grant to take the girls camping. She believes that those little things help to make them successful. She continued her story by discussing a senior trip.

Last year, they had a tough senior class, so she took a small group camping. She defined it as "real camping." She disclosed that it was hard, but they got the process. She said that the kids pay some of the cost but the Agency pays for about 80% of it. While she agreed that the money is important, she stated that everything that goes along with it is more important. She stressed that they can not "just spend money 'willy nilly,' but we can have money to do something. At other schools, you'd have to work harder."

On that note, a young girl poked her head out of a waiting area and asked Maureen if it was time for her to leave. I found out that she was in the in-school suspension room for the entire day. Ironically, I did not even know that she was right next door. Since student discipline is confidential, I never found out why she spent the day in suspension; therefore, Maureen excused herself to escort her down to the ground floor. Again, this was proof that GACC has "regular girls with regular problems."

Like Roxanne, Maureen referred to the impact that Catherine had on the school. She inspired teachers to reach their full potential, and offered stability (Lambert, 2003; Anderson & Stiegelbauer, 1994; Fullan 1999). This type of leadership and constancy was necessary to help GACC reach its current level of success and to last as a reform model. Maureen believes that

Catherine's position with the Agency will continue to help GACC sustain itself and achieve the success it has come accustomed to.

Not unlike the teachers in the building, Maureen works hard to find her role in GACC. As a former teacher at the school, she is a prime example of building leaders from within (Moore Johnson & Donaldson, 2007). This is a necessary factor when building capacity at a school. She was supported to grow professionally and transformed from a teacher leader into an administrator at the school. Again, Maureen believes that her role is directly related to the relationships that she forms with the girls. Through camping, she engages the students in new and challenging experiences to expose them to life beyond their neighborhood (Werner & Smith, 1992).

4.1.13 Riding the Elevator Alone

It was now past 3 o'clock. My day at GACC was over. Catherine exclaimed that my visit was not so bad. She offered to take my questions and pass them onto the other schools. Roxanne came back to say good-bye, and said that I could email my questions for staff members, who I missed. I was so excited and overwhelmed by their offers. Although I believed that I had plenty of information, I would also not pass up any additional research. Unfortunately, I never had time to interview Michael or the college advisor. I believe they would have additional information to share, but I hoped that Roxanne could reach them with an email; therefore, I still hoped to get more input and research.

After I said my goodbyes, I started toward the elevator. As I walked down the hallway, I noticed that I could not even tell that the school day was over. There were so many girls and teachers running around that one would think school was still in session. I was impressed with

that fact, because in many schools, teachers and students are gone before the school bell stops ringing. That was not the case at GACC, because I waited for the elevator alone.

As I rode down the elevator, I started to reflect on my day. I realized that I just experienced an amazing adventure. I had an opportunity that many researchers would never have the chance to experience. I was able to travel to my site, and talk to its people. I also realized that I had a mammoth task ahead. I had the moral obligation to tell the story of this school and its children.

As I jumped into my taxi and crossed back over Central City's invisible line of social class, I thought about the girls who lived on the other side. I knew that they were learning and experiencing things that I never had the fortune to encounter at their age. The girls at GACC are among the lucky to have a stellar education no matter what their upbringing or background. An education that is often reserved for the wealthy; however, in this case they have defied the odds. I knew deep down that these girls would have a chance to make it, because of the time they spent at GACC with its teachers. Now, I just needed to figure out how I could, given the opportunity, replicate this experience at home.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Since my visit to GACC, a few changes have occurred. First and foremost, a new principal was appointed. This means that Michael did not retain the position after his interim post. Immediately, I wondered what happened. Michael was a teacher during Catherine's time at GACC. During my interviews, she spoke favorably about his tenure and willingness to take over the position. As Danielson (2007) found, Michael's tenure at the school outlasted

Catherine's. I believe that her cultivation of his leadership abilities would have assisted in sustaining the school. I wondered what happened during the Central City interview process that ruled out Michael as the school's permanent principal. I do not want to diminish the abilities of his successor; however, I was under the impression that he would fill the post permanently.

I found out about this change in leadership when I attempted to access the GACC website. To my surprise and disappointment, the website no longer existed. This site was full of significant information pertaining to the school and its faculty. It reflected the school's focus on its students and its nurturing culture. On the site, I had accessed the faculty handbook as well as individual teacher pages full of curriculum and insight into the teacher's classroom. Luckily, I printed some of that information prior to the website's demise; however, I still would have liked the opportunity to access it throughout my study.

After a new internet search, I found the GACC's new website. Unfortunately, it lacked the original site's information. It also lacked the school's culture. It mirrored other school's sites in Central City and did not have the creativity or originality of its predecessor. It vaguely listed facts and was not personal. Instead, it showed an ambiguous representation of the school. Regrettably, I was forced to rely on information that I had previously gathered. This seemed to be a consistent trend in my study.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will identify the characteristics that have contributed to GACC's success. These components would be a necessary factor in an all-girls public school, and could also be incorporated into a co-educational environment. This chapter also presents my recommendations for future research. In this section, I recommend possible studies not only in relation to GACC, but also to the larger field of single-sex education.

5.1 IMPLICATIONS

The Girls' Academy of Central City has been able to build capacity and sustain itself as a single-sex reform model for more than a decade. With the support of the Educational Agency, GACC has become the standard for all-girls' schools across the country. Through three leadership changes, the school has built capacity within its teaching staff by creating an atmosphere of collegiality built on leadership and high expectations. In addition, this atmosphere is focused on maintaining positive relationships and engaging the entire school community. Despite initial difficulties of retaining teachers, the school is now supported by a core group of teachers, who have taught at GACC since its second year of operation. These teachers are highly committed to their work, students, and the school. Because of these reasons,

the school has sustained and become a model of success for not only single-sex education, but also urban public schools.

From the information I gathered, I noticed four important themes in the culture and climate of GACC. I believe that these themes would be a necessary component of a school like GACC, and given the chance, I would attempt to foster these qualities in an all-girls' public school. During my analysis of data, I found the following characteristics at GACC, which basically, has built capacity and allowed the school to sustain itself.

First, GACC is a nurturing environment. One teacher specifically described the school as a "safe haven" for its students. As an all-girls' school, a nurturing environment supports the development of females (Sax, 2005). In the case of GACC, the outlying neighborhoods are full of poverty and despair; therefore, creating a nurturing environment is extremely important. Garnezy (1991) believes that schools have become a protective shield for many students, and that is true for GACC as well. Each adult takes a role in creating this environment by facilitating an advisory group or by acting as a counselor. Teachers have established their roles as both educators and nurturers. It is important to note that does not mean that the environment is overly emotional or lacks depth. Within the walls of GACC, girls are held accountable for rigorous work and held to high standards. At the same time, they are supported emotionally.

Second, the teachers and staff are committed to developing resilient, well-rounded students. Teacher turnover at GACC is low. Despite initial problems in this area, there is a core group of 18 teachers who have been at the school since at least its second year of operation. Teachers participate in the school by writing personalized curriculum, sponsoring after-school activities, and participating in staff development in both traditional (staff meetings and workshops) and non-traditional (study groups and book talks) ways. One teacher admitted that

he might work harder than his colleagues at other schools; however, he believes that he is more fulfilled by his work. I believe that the teachers are committed to GACC, because they have been supported and nurtured like the students. They are expected to take a leadership role and ownership of their place in the school. They feel valued and needed, because of that they have created a collegial atmosphere that supports life-long learning and collaboration.

Third, the teachers engage in collaboration. Teachers at GACC collaborate by observing one another, writing curriculum, and participating in professional development together. They are supported by their administrators and time is built into their daily schedule to facilitate this collaboration. According to Newmann, King, and Young (2001), a collaborative environment supports a culture of capacity building. They not only collaborate on curriculum needs; however, they also keep in touch regarding their students. Via email and weekly faculty meetings, they discuss the progress, behaviors, and concerns regarding their students. They reach out to one another for support both professionally and personally. This collegial atmosphere has de-privatized teaching at GACC and created a communal environment for its teachers and students.

Finally, the teachers have established life-long relationships with their students. Building relationships is essential to a girl's development, and they are more likely to achieve success when they have a mentor or confidant (Sax, 2005). At GACC, teachers have built relationships through their classroom interactions and extracurricular activities. Both teachers and students are willing to find areas of interest to engage one another. More importantly, they have created relationships through their established advisory groups. These advisory groups have created a climate of trust and caring, and allowed the girls to form relationships with their teachers and peers (Buhlman Barker et al., 2005; Noddings, 2002). In advisory, teachers lead girls through

planned activities like knitting or discussions about difficult topics. One teacher specifically stated that the teachers celebrate the students and the students celebrate the teachers. Such statements suggest that they genuinely care about one another and that they openly recognize the importance of mutual caring.

I believe that these characteristics are not necessarily reserved for single-sex education; however, they are necessary to ensure success of girls both academically and emotionally. At GACC, they have worked for more than a decade to establish these norms, and they are an apparent part of their school culture. While there are many reasons to support GACC's success, I think that these four themes would be the most important to emulate in a single-sex environment.

As my study came to a close, I realized that GACC is more than just an all-girls public school. At GACC, girls receive a high-quality education in an urban setting. They are also nurtured and pushed in rigorous learning activities by dedicated and caring teachers, who define excellence in their profession. Because the faculty was supported by administrators, the school has effectively built capacity. Although it might not necessarily qualify as a Quadrant 4 school (Lambert, 2003, 1996), it is still a model of excellence for both single-sex and coeducational public education.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Since single-sex public education in the United States is a relatively new phenomenon more research is necessary in this area. For the purpose of this study, I has identified six possible studies that could add additional insight and research into the field of not only single-sex

education, but also co-educational. These studies would build on the research presented in this dissertation.

Single-sex public education research in the United States is lacking, therefore, a study that examines the single-sex schools that have resulted from No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation would give further insight into single-sex schools and their place in the American public school system. To date, I could not find one study that analyzed student achievement in single-sex schools in the public sector. It would be advantageous to examine not only the schools' capacity building strategies, but also its student achievement in comparison to both coeducational and other single-sex environments. This study should include private, parochial, and public schools. It would be valuable to analyze the impact of single-sex education in the public setting since the passing of Title IX, because it is a relatively new phenomenon in the reform movement. More importantly, it would be interesting to evaluate how the public version of single-sex education compare and contrast with their parochial or private counterparts. This study would draw on previous research completed in the United States that has analyzed private and parochial schools, and would add knowledge to single-sex education in the United States.

An investigation that examines how values and beliefs guide educators in single-sex education would be an interesting area of exploration. This study would identify the influence teachers have on this environment. It would also allow me to define the commonalities and differences of the characteristics of educators in a single-sex school. This research would add insight into the field, because no one has analyzed the impact that educators have on single-sex education. Through this study, I could identify the professional needs of single-sex educators as well as their view of their place in this setting. Since teachers are the most stable group in any

school, this study would allow me to identify the teachers' needs and perceptions in relation to a single-sex school, which could possibly be transferred into any school.

Since I did not have access to the students or their data, a study analyzing a student's progression through GACC from seventh grade to graduation would give further insight into a student's perspective of single-sex education and their place in GACC. Although a previous researcher followed an original GACC student, it would be advantageous to identify the development of a current student. Since the original study showed the trials and tribulations that GACC faced at its opening, the new study would show how GACC has evolved in meeting the needs of its students. This study would add additional research to how GACC has built capacity, sustained itself, and changed over the years through the eyes of a student.

While my findings show that the previously identified characteristics are an important part of an all-girls' school, a more in depth ethnography of GACC should be completed. Since I only had access for one day, another researcher should attempt to study the school over an entire school year. This study would include direct contact with the school's founder and Educational Agency. It would also be valuable to interview the original principal and her predecessors. This study would not only be an extensive historical analysis; however, it would also trace the school's evolution over its years of existence. It would be important to analyze long-term data associated with student achievement within the school as well as post-graduate success. Along with that, the researcher must be able to gain access to the entire school community including parents and students. By including students and their families in the study, the researcher would be completely immersed in the school and its culture. Since GACC is a single-sex reform model, this study would give additional information on how the school has attained that success.

I also recommend that an analysis of the impact of the Educational Agency on GACC and its sister-schools would be beneficial. The researcher would identify the influence an outside agency has on single-sex education. Within this study, the researcher could compare the Agency supported schools with other single-sex schools in the country. Since not schools are supported by an outside agency, it would be beneficial to identify the impact an agency might have on a school. Critics have cited that GACC's success is directly tied to this outside agency that is not always available in public education; therefore, it would be pertinent to identify the effect this agency has on its schools. In this case, the involvement of an outside agency is a direct contributor to the school's success; therefore, it would be interesting to identify the importance of partnerships in relation to education reform in urban education.

Finally, throughout this study the small size of GACC was apparent. Nearly each participant mentioned the smallness of the community and its role in GACC's success. With this in mind, a future study should focus on the impact that a school's size has on student achievement and climate. Since public school district's budgets do not always support schools of GACC's size, the study could expand to include forming smaller learning communities within a large-school environment. This study would have two ends. First, it could identify how size influences a school. Second, and more realistically, it could determine how larger schools have created schools-within-schools to meet not only the students' needs but also function within the district's monetary constraints. This study would also take on capacity building strategies, and could build on the themes identified in this study.

APPENDIX A



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CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: **Building Capacity and Sustaining an All-Girls Public School**

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Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify how the Girls' Academy of Central City (GACC) has built capacity and sustained its existence in the Central City Public School System.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Thirty-five members of the GACC family including foundation members, administrators, faculty, staff, and parents will be invited to participate in this research study. Those interviewed must have at least one year experience with this school.

What are the procedures of this study?

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be interviewed for twenty-minutes on your role at GACC. If necessary, the researcher may contact you via phone or e-mail for any follow-up questions.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in participating in this study. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but we will do everything possible to protect your privacy. To reduce the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality, all researchers have been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study.

Are there any costs to me if I participate in this study?

There are no costs to you for participating in this study.

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your involvement with this study are kept strictly confidential (private) and any data that includes your identity will be stored in locked files and will be kept for a minimum of five years. Your identity will not be revealed in any description or publications of this research. Results will not be shared with members of the GACC Agency and will have no effect on your standing with this foundation.

It is possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office (including the University of Pittsburgh IRB) may review your data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study. In very unusual cases, your research records may be released in response to an order from a court of law. Also, if the investigators learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in a serious danger of potential harm, they will need to inform the appropriate agencies, as required by Pennsylvania law.

Is my participation in this study voluntary?

Yes! Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in it, or you may stop participating at any time, even after signing this form. Your decision will not affect your relationship with the GACC.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the investigators listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

SUBJECT'S CERTIFICATION

- I have read the consent form for this study and any questions I had, including explanation of all terminology, have been answered to my satisfaction. A copy of this consent form will be provided to me.
- I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that those questions will be answered by the researcher listed on the first page of this form.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to refuse to participate or to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in this study at any time without affecting my future relationship with this institution.
- I understand that this study involves the audio recording of my interview with the researcher. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape or the transcript. Only the researcher will be permitted to listen to the tapes and will be erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy.
- I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature

Date

CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual has about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in Research Study

Investigator's signature

Date

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR GIRLS' ACADEMY OF CENTRAL CITY AGENCY (GACCA) MEMBERS

- A. Broad-based, skilled participation in the work of leadership.
 - 1. How do you support teachers and administrators to model leadership skills?
 - 2. How do you share authority and resources? Explain.
- B. Shared vision results in program coherence.
 - 3. How do you develop the school's vision jointly?
 - 4. Do you revisit your vision regularly to keep it alive?
- C. Inquiry-based use of information to inform decision and practice.
 - 5. How do you support a learning cycle that involves reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and action?
 - 6. How do you use data/evidence to inform your decisions and to support teaching practices?
- D. Roles and actions reflect broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility
 - 7. How have you designed your role to include attention to classroom, school, community, and profession?
 - 8. Do you have a plan for sharing responsibilities in the implementation of decisions and agreements?
- E. Reflective practice consistently leads to innovation.
 - 9. Do you make time for ongoing reflections?
 - 10. How do you practice and support new ways of doing things?
- F. High and steadily improving student achievement and development.
 - 11. Do you work with members of the school community to establish and implement expectations and standards?
 - 12. How do you support teachers to assess and teach so that all children can learn?
 - 13. Do you talk with families about student performance and school programs?
 - 14. How have you redesigned roles and structures to develop resiliency in children?
- G. Other questions.
 - 15. How has your experience at the GACCA differed from other schools or organizations that you have worked?
 - 16. In your opinion, what makes the GACCA and GACC work and what makes it unique?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR GACC FACULTY AND STAFF

- A. Broad-based, skilled participation in the work of leadership.
 - 1. Do you perform collaborative work in large and small teams? Explain.
 - 2. How do you share authority and resources? Explain.
 - 3. How do you model leadership skills?
 - 4. Do you engage each other in opportunities to lead?
- B. Shared vision results in program coherence.
 - 5. How do you develop the school's vision jointly?
 - 6. Do you revisit your vision regularly to keep it alive?
- C. Inquiry-based use of information to inform decision and practice.
 - 7. Do you make time for reflection, dialogue, inquiry, and action to occur?
 - 8. How do you use data/evidence to inform your decisions and to support teaching practices?
- D. Roles and actions reflect broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility
 - 9. How have you designed your role to include attention to classroom, school, community, and profession?
 - 10. Do you have a plan for sharing responsibilities in the implementation of decisions and agreements?
- E. Reflective practice consistently leads to innovation.
 - 11. Do you make time for ongoing reflections?
 - 12. How do you practice and support new ways of doing things?
- F. High and steadily improving student achievement and development.
 - 13. Do you work with members of the school community to establish and implement expectations and standards?
 - 14. How do you teach and assess so that all children can learn?
 - 15. Do you talk with families about student performance and school programs?
 - 16. How have you redesigned roles and structures to develop resiliency in children?
- G. Other questions.
 - 17. How has your experience at the GACC differed from other schools or organizations that you have worked?
 - 18. In your opinion, what makes the GACC work and what makes it unique?

APPENDIX D

Characteristics of a Quadrant 4 School (Lambert, 2003, p. 110 – 112)		Completed at GACC
Broad-based skillful participation in the work of leadership.		
• Have established representative governance groups.		
• Perform collaborative work in large and small teams.		
• Model leadership skills.		
• Organized for maximum interaction among adults and children.		
• Share authority and resources.		
• Express leadership by attending to the learning of the entire school community.		
• Engage each other in opportunities to lead.		
Shared vision results in program coherence.		
• Develop school vision jointly.		
• Ask questions of each other to keep on track with vision.		
• Think together to align standards, instruction, assessment, and programs with vision.		
• Keep vision alive by reviewing it regularly.		
Inquiry-based use of information to inform decisions and practice.		
• Use a learning-cycle that involves reflection dialogue, inquiry, and action.		
• Make time available for learning to occur (e.g. faculty, meetings, ad hoc groups, teams.)		
• Focus on student learning.		
• Use data/evidence to inform decisions and teaching practices.		
• Have designed a comprehensive information system that informs and involves.		

Roles and actions reflect broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility.	
• Have designed roles to include attention to classrooms, school, community, and profession.	
• Seek to perform outside of traditional roles.	
• Have developed new ways to work together.	
• Have a developed plan for sharing responsibilities in the implementation of decisions and agreements.	
Reflective practice consistently leads to innovation	
• Make time for ongoing reflection (e.g. journaling, peer coaching, collaborative planning.)	
• Encourage individual and group initiative by providing access to resources, personnel, and time.	
• Have joined with networks of other schools and programs, both inside and outside the district, to secure feedback on work.	
• Practice and support new ways of doing things.	
• Develop own criteria for accountability regarding individual and shared work.	
High and steadily improving student achievement and development	
• Work with members of the school community to establish and implement expectations and standards.	
• Teach and assess so that all children learn.	
• Provide feedback to children and families about student progress.	
• Talk with families about student performance and school programs.	
• Have redesigned roles and structures to develop resiliency in children (e.g., teacher as coach/adviser/mentor, school wide guidance programs, community service).	

APPENDIX E

Revised Questions for GACC Teachers/Employees

1. What is your role at GACC and how long have you worked there?
2. How do you model leadership skills and engage others in the opportunity to lead?
3. How have you designed your role to include attention to classroom, school, community, and profession?
4. How have you redesigned roles and structures to develop resiliency in children (e.g., teacher as coach/advisor, mentor, school wide guidance programs, community service)?
5. How has your experience at the GACC differed from other schools you have worked?
6. In your opinion, what makes the GACC unique? What should an outsider know about your school?

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