

“THEY STILL HAVE EXPECTATIONS...”: AN ETHNOHISTORICAL STUDY OF  
EDUCATION AND REFORM IN AMERICA’S OLDEST BLACK TOWN,  
PRINCEVILLE, NC

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## **ABSTRACT**

Eldrin Lamar Deas: “They Still Have Expectations...”: An Ethnohistorical Study of  
Education and Reform in America’s Oldest Black Town, Princeville, NC  
(Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

In 1995, the General Assembly of North Carolina directed the State Board of Education (SBE) to develop a restructuring plan for public education (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2012). In response to the General Assembly’s call to make bigger strides in student achievement, the SBE adopted the ABCs of Public Education—a comprehensive plan for improving schools in the state with a focus on (a) strong accountability, (b) teaching the basics, and (c) local control (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006). In the 1996-97 school year, Princeville School was labeled as low-performing (NCDPI, 1999) and, despite a period of significant improvement in the immediate years following its initial designation, has been regularly labeled as such since 2005. Since the advent of the ABCs of Public Education, a series of reform efforts have taken place in North Carolina and in Princeville, in particular.

Using ethnohistorical methods coupled with oral histories, this study seeks to connect community experiences and perspectives with archival material in order to understand the degree to which the people of Princeville, NC—America’s oldest Black town—have experienced these education reforms. Drawing upon reality pedagogy (Emdin, 2016) and Critical Race Theory, the research explores how oral histories serve as counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to the majoritarian story (Noblit & Jay, 1993) of education reform.

For the fighters, the keepers, and the believers

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May we never forget that in the sunshine of our lives, through the storm and after the rain – it is all with God – in all ways and forever.

—John Coltrane, *A Love Supreme*, 1965

In the album liner notes for *A Love Supreme*, North Carolina native John Coltrane writes of a spiritual awakening he experienced that led him to “a richer, fuller, more productive life.” In writing this dissertation, I would often look up to a painting of Coltrane that hangs in my home office for inspiration. Whereas Coltrane “humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music,” I asked to be given the means and privilege to tell a meaningful story about education in a small, rural town in eastern North Carolina; and, to borrow another phrase from Coltrane, “I feel this has been granted through His grace. ALL PRAISE TO GOD.”

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## **PREFACE**

On July, 19, 2016 at 6:19AM, I set out from my home in Durham, NC to participate in a two-day Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) unpacking session at Princeville Elementary School in Edgecombe County, NC. My memory is certainly not keen enough to remember such a specific detail as a time of departure—now more than a year and a half removed from the event—so I am relying on the Google Maps screenshot I captured with my cell phone once I got in my truck that morning. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2010) explains that a CNA is a framework that enables “a systematic assessment of practices, processes and systems within a school district” in order to provide schools and districts with “a clear view of their strengths, areas for development, challenges and successes” (p. 1). The unpacking, then, is a way for state officials to let schools and the stakeholders involved in running the schools know how they measure up against several key indicators focusing on leadership and professional capacity, planning and operational effectiveness, family and community support, teaching and learning, and support for student achievement.

After the second day of CNA unpacking activities concluded, I set out to explore the town of Princeville further. In the days leading up to my visit, I had been reading about the rich history of the town, so I was curious to learn more. After all, it was my first time learning of what had been described as America’s oldest Black town. My first stop after leaving the school was Princeville’s town hall. As I walked around, reading various plaques and taking pictures, two men approached me and asked me if I needed help. It was clear to me from the look on their

faces that they knew I was not from the area and that I might be lost. As it turns out, one of the men was the town manager, and the other was the public works director. I told them about my business at the school and ended up talking to the town manager for about 45-50 minutes back in his office. He told me about the town's history of flooding and some of the other issues affecting the town. He also directed me to other sites around the area that I might find interesting.

One of the places to which I was directed was the town's museum. When I got to the museum, I was the only visitor at the time. There was a music-themed exhibit replete with magazines, vinyl records, and memorabilia. The museum curator explained that the museum had recently received a large donation of music on various media which helped make the exhibit possible. As I walked around flipping through the record collection, the museum curator asked me if there was anything in particular that I wanted to listen to. I found a copy of Roberta Flack & Donny Hathaway's eponymous 1972 album and handed it to her. As the first track, *I (Who Have Nothing)*, played—with the duo singing of love and longing—I continued to explore the facility. The floor was covered with shiny, lightly colored hardwood, and the walls were adorned with historical artifacts. I continued taking pictures (see Figure 1).

By the time *Be Real Black for Me* came on, which is the fourth song on the album, I felt deeply connected to the space. I felt at home. I was standing in a museum that used to be a town hall that sits near the original site of Princeville Graded Colored School. Moreover, I was standing in the oldest known town in the United States to be incorporated by African Americans. I left Princeville shortly thereafter wanting to know more and to do more. Then, a few months later, Hurricane Matthew hit the town and left Princeville flooded once again. I returned to Princeville two months after the hurricane and flooding events. The school, town hall, and museum I had visited before were all gutted due to flooding (see Figure 2). I experienced such a

heavy, crushing feeling as I drove through the town. I wondered what became of the students, teachers, and school leaders in the town. How were they dealing with this? Thus, I decided to pursue a formal study of education in Princeville.



Figure 1. Interior Princeville Museum, July 2016. Copyright 2016 by Eldrin L. Deas.



Figure 2. Interior of Princeville Museum, December 2016. Copyright 2016 by Eldrin L. Deas.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRT	Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework drawn from legal studies that uses critical theory to investigate and transform the relationship among race, racism, and power.
EOC	End-of-Course tests designed to assess the competencies defined by the Standard Course of Study for three mandated courses: NC Math I, English II and Biology. Tests are taken during the last two weeks of school for students on a traditional calendar and the last week of the course for students on a block schedule.
EOG	End-of-Grade tests in English language arts/reading and mathematics (grades 3-8) and science (grades 5 and 8) that are taken by students during the last ten days of the school year.
FEMA	The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency was established to coordinate the response to a disaster that has occurred in the United States and that overwhelms the resources of local and state authorities.
NCDPI	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The NCDPI is led by the State Superintendent and administers the policies adopted by the State Board of Education. It offers instructional, financial, technological and personnel support to all public school systems in the state.
PTO	Parent Teacher Organization is a generic term that usually refers to groups that choose to remain independent and are most often single-school or district-level groups that operate under their own bylaws and by and large concern themselves with the goings-on at their building or in their town only.
SBE	State Board of Education. The State Board of Education is charged with supervising and administering “the free public school system and the educational funds provided for its support.”
SIP	School Improvement Plan. A plan that includes strategies for improving student performance, how and when improvements will be implemented, use of state funds, requests for waivers, etc. Plans are in effect for no more than three years.
SPG	School Performance Grades. School Performance Grades are awarded to schools as defined by G.S. §115C-83.15. A-F letter grades are calculated using achievement, growth, and performance measures.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There is a high road and a low road to education in America. Travelers on the first are largely suburban, white, and middle class. Those who trudge the second are urban, usually black, and most often poor. Superficially, the two roads are well-paved routes to the good life. But they are not, in fact, the same. The high road leads from well-kept homes, through bright, well-financed schools to colleges and universities, then on to a lucrative life in the suburbs. The low road leads out of the ghettos, through dark and aging classrooms and oftentimes returns to the dismal slums from which its travelers come.

—*Ebony Pictorial History of Black America*<sup>1</sup>, 1971, p. 122

### Overview

In the summer of 2016, I began working as a Graduate Research Assistant at Education Policy Initiative at Carolina (EPIC) as part of a multi-partner research team that is evaluating how the state of North Carolina is implementing certain school and district turnaround initiatives. This project, titled *An Evaluation of Turning Around North Carolina's Lowest Performing Schools: A State Partnership Evaluation*, is funded by a grant from the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) through the National Center for Education Research (NCER). Princeville Elementary School—located in Edgecombe County, NC—is one of the sites included in the study. As I prepared for a visit to the school in July 2016, I learned a great deal about the town of Princeville and realized that there was still much to know.

While researching the town of Princeville, which was originally named Freedom Hill (Knight & Auld, 2013, p. 65), I learned that it is the oldest town incorporated by African

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Editors of Ebony. (1971). *Ebony pictorial history of Black America* (Vol. III: Civil Rights Movement to Black revolution). Nashville, TN: The Southwestern Company.

Americans in the United States. I also discovered that the area where the town sits is prone to flooding. Town records show that Princeville experienced major flooding in 1887, 1919, 1924, 1928, 1940, 1958, 1999, and, more recently, in October 2016 (Town of Princeville, Our History, 2016). The 2016 flooding occurred as a result of Hurricane Matthew, which left the town underwater for over two weeks (Blythe, 2016). I conducted my visit to Princeville prior to this flood, and, having developed an interest in the town and its history, decided to revisit the area after the flood in December 2016. When I arrived at the site of Princeville Elementary School, I saw an empty parking lot and an empty school building. The students and staff had been moved to another building. They were displaced as they had been many times before. However, I knew that these students would still be tasked with taking standardized tests, and the state would still expect some measure of growth.

### **Statement of the Problem**

My interest in Princeville lies in this charge of expected growth; specifically, insofar as schools are able to manage working in the face of a natural disaster to provide a quality education to students. As one school administrator in Princeville explains in the aftermath of the storm, “We will be teaching regular curriculum, because *they still have expectations* [emphasis added] past Hurricane Matthew” (Haviland, 2016). More broadly, I was interested to learn how the people of Princeville—as a racially isolated rural locale—view their educational experiences in light of reform efforts that have been initiated in the area since 1997, when the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) first published the ABCs of Public Education, a school-by-school performance report based on End-of-Grade (EOG) testing in reading, mathematics, and writing (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1997b).

I was particularly interested to learn how the people of Princeville have experienced these reform efforts given that the schools in their area have over time been chronically labeled as low-performing, following the adoption of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, which introduced the idea of holding schools accountable for student performance on various state assessments (Herman et al., 2008). This is an important topic because even after years of several reform efforts, there appears to be a disconnect between those efforts and meaningful, substantive student achievement gains. Learning directly from the community stakeholders about their educational experiences directly provides unique insight into why these gaps might exist. Moreover, as pointed out during the August 2017 Princeville Design Workshop—which convened to develop multiple land use scenarios for the town the town—Princeville will flood again. The question is a matter of when it will happen again, not *if* it will happen.

According to Gavin Smith, Director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Coastal Resilience Center of Excellence, the goal of the five-day design workshop was to “partner with the people of Princeville and together develop a workable plan for a community that is flood resilient, attractive, safe and welcoming” (Jarema, 2017). Yet there is no sustained, workable plan in place to deal with the effects of flooding in the school system. Moreover, there has yet be a study of how, if at all, education reform efforts in this area connects to recovery efforts after a major storm.

## **Purpose**

The initial purpose of this study as proposed was to connect community experiences and perspectives with those of other education stakeholders and archival material in order to understand the degree to which the people of Princeville have experienced education reform from 1997 through 2017. This period reflects a number of major educational and legislative

shifts—the Educate America Act of 1994, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and its related Race to the Top Fund, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015—and covers two major storm events in Princeville. The first, Hurricane Floyd, hit Princeville in 1999 and brought flood waters that crested as high as 24 feet above flood stage and reportedly “all but erased the town of Princeville” (Herring, 2000). The second, Hurricane Matthew, came in October 2016 and left Princeville, according to then-governor Pat McCrory, “basically underwater” (Kane, 2016). However, through consultation with my advisor and the rest of my committee, I realized that there was a larger story to tell beyond the 20-year period I describe.

Although there were several shifts in education policy between 1997 and 2017 as noted, there are other social, economic, and legislative shifts that occurred in the more than 13 decades prior to 1997, going back to Princeville’s founding as Freedom Hill in 1865 and incorporation 20 years later. The study, therefore, expanded to include more context about Princeville from the perspective of key informants. The key purpose, however, remains the same—to connect community members’ experiences to the broader context of education reform in Princeville—but these understandings are no longer limited to the forced 20-year period that I tried to invoke. Ultimately, the study seeks to understand how Princeville community members’ experiences of education compare to the dominant narratives of education reform.

### **Positionality**

I began my career in education as a high school math teacher in 2007. I worked in a metro Atlanta school system at a predominantly African American school where 78% of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged. I recall, among many experiences, having to pay for students’ lunches or their bus fare home. I had students in my classroom that

did not have their own beds but were instead forced to sleep on a mattress on the floor of their house. Some students worked in the evenings and were charged with taking care of their younger siblings. Other students spoke very little English and did not have adequate supports in place to help them with this language barrier. However, all of these students were responsible for their learning, and I, as their teacher, was charged with conveying the appropriate math content.

On one occasion, one of my principals approached me and asked that I join him in his office for a conversation. I say one of my principals because the school I was at had a new principal every year I was there. Administrative turnover notwithstanding, as this principal and I began talking, he expressed concerns that I was not able to fully connect with students because of the high school I attended—in the same school district but with a very different student population—and because of the way I dressed. I wore a suit to class every day even though it was not common nor was it required of me. In my mind, I was dressed professionally; but my appearance, at least to this principal, was a barrier for meaningfully connecting with students. A similar scenario is described in *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ...and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* (Emdin, 2016), as the author recounts a story of a teacher who was advised to purchase new sneakers as a way to connect to students. This teacher was initially taken aback—as I was when told that my suits were a barrier to connecting meaningfully with my students—but ultimately realized that the sneaker suggestion was not necessarily a critique of her style but rather a means of engaging students in a new way.

When I look at Princeville, I cannot help but wonder about the ways in which the state of North Carolina engages the community. What is working well? What is not working so well? I also cannot help but think about the story of the town itself. How is it that such a historic place, just over an hour away from Durham, NC, where I have been living for nearly seven years, could

be so unknown to so many people? Two months after my initial visit to Princeville, I attended the opening weekend festivities of the new Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. However, I discovered that in the “only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture” (National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2018) that there was no mention of Princeville, the oldest known town in the country to be incorporated by African Americans. Familiar thoughts of visibility from Ellison (1952/1995) come to mind:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (p. 3)

Since the time that I initially visited Princeville, I have talked about the town to a number of people who, like me, were unaware of its existence. Others were familiar with the town by name but were unaware of its historical significance. My positionality in this endeavor, therefore, is squarely situated in helping Princeville become more visible.

I am approaching this research as young Black male from the American South whose recently family history includes sharecropping and rural life. When my mother and father were born—in November 1950 and March 1951, respectively—public schools across the American South were still racially segregated. Even institutions of higher education such as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I am currently pursuing graduate work, were once off-limits to Black students (Breen, 2010). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) like Morehouse College, where I completed an undergraduate degree in mathematics, were at one time the only places in America where Black students could pursue higher education (U.S.

Department of Education, 2017a). To some educational leaders, however, HBCUs were more like school choice pioneers (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b) “[a]s if white/colored water fountains were about beverage options” (Steenkur, 2017). Such statements from top education officials disregard the limited educational experiences Black Americans were able to enjoy due to racist Jim Crow laws. Moreover, these sentiments ignore the broader historical contexts that shape educational spaces.

Unfortunately, such mischaracterizations of the educational historical record are not uncommon. As Noblit (2015) explains, “History is rewritten every day—in books and in our own lives. We run the story of today over the accumulative story and make a new history” (p. 1). However, these histories, when crafted by powerful, oppressive, and dismissive forces, all too often prove to be damaging to the powerless, oppressed, and the dismissed. In educational reform contexts, the role of history in understanding communities is crucial but is often limited.

When I began working with the UNC Center for Civil Rights on school desegregation cases in 2012, one of the first things that the lawyers at the Center had me do was dig deep into public records. I read transcripts from school board meetings and collected school demographic and assessment data across multiple decades. In short, I was tasked to learn as much as possible about the communities I would be serving before I was asked to make any decisions or recommendations about strategy. As my work turned to school turnaround efforts in other states, however, I was expected to look to best practices and implement those. In the face of community resistance on account of my position as an agent of the state, I rejected the simple adherence to so-called proven turnaround methods and instead combined the research-based decision making that was expected of me—essentially a sort of political agenda-conforming data analysis—with

the historical and legal research that I learned at the Center to build rapport with my stakeholders.

I understood, as Lagemann (2005) describes, that although education is often viewed as a vehicle to “achieve progress, prosperity, opportunity, equality, invention, and security” (p. 10), that the ways in which we study education must always be scrutinized and that they can always be improved. Given that history was a key focus of education scholarship when colleges and universities were initially establishing their education departments (Lagemann, 2005), it is imperative that this focus not be lost in contemporary studies. I come to this study believing that ethnohistory—though described as an “illegitimate product of two sometimes antagonistic disciplines” (Harkin, 2010, p. 113) and a “marriage of convenience” (p. 114) between anthropology and history—is one useful approach for studying education, especially for researchers who focus on education reforms. Yet, there are relatively few studies in education that employ ethnohistorical methodology.

I also come to this study as a former member of a multi-partner research team studying the implementation of turnaround initiatives in North Carolina. To date, I have engaged the education sector as a teacher, tutor, test developer, researcher, program evaluator, higher education administrator, education rights advocate, policy analyst, state education official, National Science Foundation grant manager/consultant, and juvenile justice education advocate. I view this project as a continuation of a trajectory of work on behalf of people whose voices are not always heard in the places I have managed to kick my way into.

## **Research Questions**

To this end, I propose two research questions to guide this study:

1. How does a Black rural school community experience education reform in North Carolina?
  - a. How do experiences vary among community members, if at all?
  - b. What shifts in education does the community recognize (over time) vis-à-vis segregation/desegregation, consolidation, reform, etc.?
  - c. How do major storm events such as hurricanes and flooding relate to reform efforts, if at all?
2. How does this community's understanding of and experiences with education reforms compare to the constructions of contemporary reform movements?

### **Research Design**

This dissertation is a ethnohistorical study. Ethnohistory is an interdisciplinary approach to studying culture and history that combines “the approaches of history, cultural anthropology, and archaeology” (Strong, 2015, p. 192). Historically, ethnohistorical studies have focused on indigenous populations but have since expanded to include other groups as debates around the concept of *ethnos* has shifted (Krech, 1991).

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

This project is motivated by concepts drawn from reality pedagogy and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Reality pedagogy is “an approach to teaching and learning that has a primary goal of meeting each student on his or her own cultural and emotional turf” (Emdin, 2016, p. 27). It is also “a mechanism for developing approaches to teaching that meet the specific needs of the students” (p. 30). This framework centers on “making the local experiences of the student visible and creating contexts where there is a role reversal of sorts that positions the student as the expert in his or her own teaching and learning, and the teacher as the learner” (p. 27). Whereas

reality pedagogy speaks to reform in individual classrooms, CRT speaks more broadly to the pace and scope of racial politics and reform in the United States.

My argument, in short, is that apply the frame of reality pedagogy can be expanded to broader community settings (i.e. outside the classroom). In a mostly Black rural town like Princeville, where the area of the town is only 1.53 square miles, there are tight community bonds. As Tuck and McKenzie (2015) explain, “research in the social sciences is always concerned with epistemologies, questions, and methods that impact place and land, and the human and natural communities that inhabit them” (p. 1). I argue that any study of Princeville and the people who inhabit it is similarly aligned with such a focus on place. These community members—based on anecdotal reports and informal conversations I have had in the area—have deep family ties to the town and the land on which it sits. They are the ones who are best able to speak to their own lived experiences.

Oral history interviews serve as a major source of data for this ethnohistorical study. Stories are important because they allow narrators to “document the significance for social action of individual subjectivity as it is constructed and reconstructed over the lifetime” (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p. 15). Moreover, they serve to confirm narrators’ experiences and “bear witness to their lived reality in the face of a dominant culture that distorts, stereotypes and marginalizes that reality” (Bell, 2003, p. 6). Here again, reality pedagogy speaks to this marginalization. Whereas reality pedagogy highlights how teachers and students co-construct classroom spaces, I theorize that a community reality pedagogy allows whole communities to co-construct a reform space, where community members can make their lived realities plainly visible to the reformers who come into their space (or place).

In this approach, community expertise is gathered from key informants in order to provide an accurate understanding (i.e. community reality) of the school or community context in which demonstrable reforms are needed. Whereas researcher expertise purportedly informs best practices in school reform work, this research will ideally be used in conjunction with a community's reality in order to develop a co-constructed reform space—an environment in which reform initiatives can be discussed, navigated, negotiated, and tailored to best suit the community. These initiatives can then be implemented with the knowledge that community members had a seat at the table when deciding what is best for their students. After these initiatives are implemented, student outcomes will, whether or not they improve, tell a more robust and complete story of where gaps exist in reform efforts. It is important to note, however, that these gaps can only be fully understood when read against the prevailing narrative, or majoritarian story, of education reform.

“In the majoritarian story of school reform,” Noblit and Jay (1993) write, “the criteria for effectiveness are steeped in White ways of assessing and valuing the world” (p. 73). The authors further argue that, like whiteness,

the definition of effectiveness is carefully monitored so that only certain programs meeting stringent criteria can reap the benefit of its value. In the White school reform model, achievement was the primary criteria and this was to be enforced by higher standards and accountability. School reform initiatives then were to be judged by how well schools met these imposed achievement standards. (pp. 73-74)

Of particular concern in this study is that education at Princeville School—the only school in the rural, mostly Black town—has been labeled poor or low quality as long as there has been terminology from the state to discuss it as such. So, I entered this study anticipating that the

stories I would hear would serve as counternarratives to typical reform stories in North Carolina; namely, those stories that inappropriately and impotently (Noblit, 1986, p. 40) depict students, teachers, and local administrators as deficient rather than critiquing the centralized accountability approaches that create standards that themselves may be deficient and rife with “fallacious definitions of quality and excellence” (p. 41).

Counternarratives, a key component of CRT, are used to “challenge, displace, or mock... pernicious narratives and beliefs” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 49) and often serve “a valid destructive function” (p. 48). The intent of this study is to learn how people in Princeville have experienced education reform and to ultimately see how these experiences line up with what the state of North Carolina intended.

This conceptual framework is a direct reflection of my diverse experiences as a teacher, test developer, civil rights intern, program evaluator, researcher, state education official, and school turnaround consultant. While I was teaching, I recognized that I saw my students differently than others may have. Yes, there were several troubling issues related to students that came up during my tenure, but there was also a lot of brilliance in those classes. Part of my hope is to help more people understand the unique gifts that students in a variety of educational settings possess. As a test developer, I sat on bias, fairness, and sensitivity committees, which helped me better understand issues of representation. These dispositions informed my work at the UNC Center for Civil Rights, where I travelled across North Carolina speaking to diverse communities in order to learn more about their realities. My background in program evaluation and research helped me understand the ways in which policymakers engage with data so that by the time I became a state official myself, I was able to make better decisions.

In essence, I became sort of an embodiment of the community reality pedagogy framework. Or, rather, it may be more precise to say that I recognize how the framework's cycle has worked through me internally and become manifest externally. As a school turnaround consultant, I learned directly from communities about their experiences while digging into rigorous research in order to improve the ways that reforms are implemented. Whereas Du Bois (1903/1994) describes double-consciousness as feeling a sense of two-ness—"two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (p. 2)—I feel a similar sense of twoness in that I often find myself trying to represent the interests of the state and those of the community. With this study, however, I hope to at least begin the work of reconciling these two very important and interdependent strivings.

In inquiring about how the people of Princeville have experienced education reforms and how they understand education quality, I am essentially engaging a line of research that centers "social adjustments" (Ogbu, 1987, p. 313) on a community scale. I want to know, specifically, this community's reality. As educational researchers and reformers continue to seek out ways to improve processes and programming, the continued evolution of ethnohistory may very well be a key to moving beyond the "dramatic failure of education reform" (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999, p. 63) that has been seen across the country where African American students are concerned. This study is designed to be able to add depth and substance to this body of knowledge and scholarship.

The stories of the various teachers, administrators, and former students recounted in the ethnohistories examined herein highlight systems of care, nurture, and support while foregrounding hope and resilience. They also provide a framework through which I can reflect on my own educational experiences. From kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I attended my local

elementary school, which was just a couple of miles away from my house. If I were being dropped off directly, it was only a 5-minute drive to the school. On the school bus, it took about 20 minutes, given the stops it had to take.

From 4<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, however, I attended schools at the opposite end of the county. I had to take two buses to get there. One bus took me to a shuttle where I would get on a second bus that would take me on to school. That process took well over an hour and a half, and there was no dropping me off there. I noticed, as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader, that I was leaving my neighborhood friends behind every day to go to what was billed as a better school. Yet, I too remember these times with fondness.

What I have often wondered, though, is how different my life would have been had I not been sent across the county for nine years. When I became a teacher, I wondered about the lives of my students outside of the classroom who, while in the classroom, would tell me about not having a bed or needing bus fare to get home or having to work late at night to be able to take care of younger siblings. When I started my graduate studies, I wanted to know more about the issues my students faced and how to better serve them. Now, as a researcher, I want to know more about the context and history of one particular town that may produce frameworks for understanding similarly situated communities across the country by building on the intellectual foundations presented in ever-growing scope of CRT.

### **Summary of Methodology**

One of the major debates among early scholars of ethnohistory is whether or not ethnohistory is a method, technique, discipline, or even simply a product of ethnohistorical study (Washburn, 1961; Leacock, 1961; Fenton, 1962; Carmack, 1972). Even now there is no clear consensus on the matter. Although I provide a thorough overview of ethnohistory and the various

ways in which it is conceived herein, for the purpose of this study, I simply note that I employ ethnohistorical methods. In short, I conduct a diachronic analysis of oral and written documents (Sturtevant, 1966), including oral history interviews and public records such as school board minutes, state report cards, demographic reports, federal and state reform legislation, and other publicly available archival material.

### **Limitations**

One of the major limitations of this study is access. Access is limited primarily on two fronts: (a) access to records, and (b) access to people. I visited Princeville in August 2017 as a member of the Culture and History sub-committee of the Resource Team at the five-day Princeville Design Workshop. While there I asked a few of the community leaders about town archives. One person directed me to one of the oldest members of the town and told me that he would be the person to talk to since he has taken upon himself to preserve much of the town's history. I drove with another municipal employee to what he believed were the remnants of the town archives, which was a shed outside of the Princeville town hall that had flooded. There were some items from the museum along with boxes and plastic bins of records and photos that had been badly damaged by the flood.

Outside the shed were maps and blueprints for buildings in the city that appeared to have been sitting there for some time, exposed to the all of the natural elements that have come along over the past several months. So, I know that I may need to rely on personal records of private citizens and the records kept by other entities such as state archives, archives at North Carolina colleges and university libraries, and other records kept by related governmental bodies such as Edgecombe County or the neighboring city of Tarboro.

Access to people was limited primarily because of one of the main drivers for me in pursuing this study; namely my interest in understanding, in part, the effects that Hurricane Matthew had on the town. According to the municipal employee with whom I visited the town hall, there were approximately 2,000 people living in Princeville prior to Hurricane Matthew, which aligns with the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau (2016) estimate of 1,964. After the 2016 flood, however, there are approximately between 450 and 490 people reportedly living in Princeville. However, during my time at the Princeville Design Workshop, I was able to connect to a variety of residents and former residents of Princeville who I anticipate following up with for this study.

Access to school and district employees is also a limiting factor in this study. Insofar as the study seeks to understand Princeville community members' experience with education reform, teachers and school administrators are excluded from the sample of key informants. As agents who are charged with carrying out the practical and tactical aspects of education reform, teachers are perhaps more likely to be familiar with specific reform initiatives and shifts. However, I was particularly interested in learning from the perspective of those who were on the other end of the efforts—former students.

Another limitation, or perhaps more precisely a concern, is the use of ethnohistory. In invoking ethnohistory, I must acknowledge the “baggage” (McGregor, 2014, p. 447) that comes with using the term *ethno*; namely, as McGregor notes, the idea that the population with which I am engaging may be perceived, simply, as an ethnic Other, marginal, less than, or perhaps as “just another ethno that belongs in the category with all the other ethnos” (p. 447). Although I am a Black male from the South with a similar background to my participants, I acknowledge my potential capacity to look onto Princeville with a colonial gaze through my academic lens. As such, I have taken great care to center the voices of the community as much as possible.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW<sup>2</sup>

### Topics, Purpose, and Methods of the Literature Review

For my study of education reform in Princeville, I am employing ethnohistorical research methods. Although ethnohistory has a broad and longstanding intellectual history, it is not particularly common approach in education research. So, I will dedicate a significant portion of the literature review to understanding ethnohistory. Additionally, as the study seeks to understand a community's experiences with education reform, this review will cover the work of legal theorist Derrick Bell as it connects the experiences of Black students and teachers with education reform legislation from the local level to the federal stage.

The purpose of this literature review is to draw upon the work of ethnohistory practitioners and research on race and education—particularly regarding the education of African Americans—in order to provide a survey of the theoretical and practical points of consonance and dissonance in these fields. The review also serves to highlight the general research methods used and the substantive findings of ethnohistorical studies of education and to explore what these studies might suggest about educational quality in the current reform era.

As Krathwohl & Smith (2005) contend, there are two primary lines of thinking among education faculty in advising students on the construction of a literature review: (a) a “very thorough review” of the field’s literature and all of the aspects involved, or (b) a “highly

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<sup>2</sup> Portions of this chapter previously appeared as an unpublished written comprehensive examination response titled *Ethnohistory and Education: A Review of Methods, Findings, and New Directions*

selective review” of literature that connects most directly to the planned study and a critique of that literature while explaining its relation to the study (pp. 197-198). Given that I am connecting the work of multiple fields, I will take methodological literature review cues from both camps. I intend to provide a thorough review of foundational ethnohistorical work while being highly selective about the works that relate to the context of a study in a rural, historically Black town in North Carolina. I also include in this review a summary of the historical landscape of the education of African Americans along with a brief history of major education reform efforts in the United States and related initiatives in North Carolina with implications for the study.

### **Understanding Ethnohistory**

From its early development in the United States, the practice of ethnohistory has focused primarily on indigenous populations. Described more as an approach as opposed to a discipline (Fenton, 1962; Martin, 1978), ethnohistorical methods have been traced as far back as Herodotus (Sturtevant, 1966) but developed more formally as a response to the work of the Indian Claims Commission—established “to hear the accumulated treaty claims of Indian tribes against the federal government” (Tanner, 1991, p. 65)—and the study of American Indians. Originating as a Department of Justice contracted project with Indiana University to investigate land records and treaty disputes, researchers Carl Voegelin and Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin, along with graduate students in history and anthropology, developed an entity that would ultimately become the American Society for Ethnohistory (Tanner, 1991). From Wheeler-Voegelin’s early leading scholarship in the use of the approach, ethnohistory has since expanded in scope and been used in various ways to document the cultures and histories of the indigenous peoples of settler societies in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and South Asia (Strong, 2015).

In an early attempt to broadly define the field, Voegelin (1954) writes—while admitting uncertainty of the origin of the term—that ethnohistory is “the study of identities, locations, contacts, movements, numbers, and cultural activities of primitive peoples from the earliest written records concerning them, onward in point of time” (p. 168). Both Voegelin’s uncertainty and broad defining characteristics are echoed in academic work that stretches across the two decades following her early writings, as the work of ethnohistorians has been described as playing it “by eye” (Lurie, 1961, p. 84) as it relates to systematic historical document analysis. Attention has also been given to the ways in which scholars waste time “quibbling about the meaningfulness of the term ‘ethnohistory’” (Washburn, 1961, p. 31) and to the “refusal of some to recognize the importance of strict definition and categorization” (p. 32). Carmack (1972) adds that ethnohistory as a field had at that time still not been defined and that “the derivation of the term itself is not known for certain, and its meaning varies widely from one context to another” (p. 230).

However, despite the lack of clarity of its intellectual genesis, ethnohistory is generally understood in the frame of three primary characteristics: (a) a focus on the past or the present of a particular culture, (b) an analysis of oral or written documents, and (c) a diachronic (over time) or synchronic (one point in time) emphasis (Sturtevant, 1966). Gunnerson (1958) notes that documents studied by ethnohistorians may also include maps and pictorial data along with “diaries, letters, journals, and official reports” (p. 49).

Although historians and anthropologists may vary in the ways that they use and analyze these various data sources, they share, according to Cohn (1998), a common subject matter—otherness—wherein “one field constructs and studies ‘otherness’ in space, the other in time” (p. 198). Cohn adds that both fields focus on text and context and aim to explicate “the meaning of

actions of people rooted in one time and place, to persons in another” where practitioners work to develop translational accounts that provide “understanding and explanation, rather than the construction of social laws and prediction” (p. 198), as in other social science fields such as economics and sociology. This notion of understanding and explanation production as an end runs counter to many themes in education reform research from its roots in the 1980s onward (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGhee, & Fernandez, 1994) that often center around ways to “answer the question ‘What works in education?’” (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). According to Giroux (2012), many of these “simplistic and polarizing” reform efforts fail to show “any understanding of the real problems and strengths of public education” (p. 17). Giroux adds that underneath much of the education reform discourse lies

the same old and discredited neoliberal policies that cheerfully serve corporate interest: privatization; downsizing; outsourcing; union busting; competition as the only mode of motivation; an obsession with measurement; a relentless attack on teacher autonomy; the weakening of tenure; educational goals stripped of public values; teacher quality defined in purely instrumental terms; an emphasis on authoritarian modes of management; and a mindless obsession with notions of pedagogy that celebrate memorization and teaching to the test. (p. 17)

Thus, when read from an ethnohistorical perspective, much of education reform work positions teachers, students, school leaders, and the communities in which they sit as an *other* yet often does not take into account the unique “social, political, and cultural constructs” (Galloway, 2006, p. 8) that shape the perceived otherness.

For the ethnohistorian these socio-political and socio-cultural constructs are understood primarily through the aforementioned documents, whether written or nonwritten. One of the

lingering debates amongst ethnohistorians that may be of particular interest to qualitative educational researchers who may be interested in this approach is the use and analysis of oral history as nonwritten text. Although Krech (1991) highlights an inclination toward documentary sources and a general aversion to the use of oral history in ethnohistorical scholarship due to skepticism of truth in oral traditions, Trigger (1982) asserts that ethnohistorians “habitually rely more than conventional historians do upon oral traditions” (p. 10). Extending critiques from other social science research literature which suggests that narrators may exaggerate events or developments of special significance while masking others (Maynes et al., 2008), Lowie (1915) argues against attaching “any historical value whatsoever under any conditions whatsoever” to oral traditions since “[w]e cannot know them to be true except on the basis of extraneous evidence” (p. 598). Alternatively, others such as High (2009) push for the expanded use of oral history, noting that “[r]elatively few have taken the opportunity to think deeply about narrative voice, memory, authority or the public’s role in the historical process” (p. 46).

Although McAdoo (1980) makes no mention of ethnohistory, she precisely identifies oral history as a tool of anthropologists and historians that can be used to “try to get a fuller, more detailed, more human view of what is going on in the educational process” (pp. 414-415) and to bridge the gap between researchers, school leaders, and policymakers. In discussing the value of oral history for educational research, McAdoo writes, “The oral history method would benefit those of us in the educational community by providing rich data. It also provides insight often impossible to obtain with standardized instruments only, and gives us a check on the validity of the test data obtained” (pp. 420-421). Bringing the matter back to ethnohistory, Vansina (1985) notes that

oral traditions are not just a source about the past, but a historiology... of the past, an account of how people have interpreted it. As such oral tradition is not only a raw source. It is a hypothesis, similar to the historian's own interpretation of the past. Therefore, oral traditions should be treated as hypotheses, and as the first hypothesis the modern scholar must test before he or she considers others. To consider them first means not to accept them literally, uncritically. It means to give them the attention they deserve, to take pains to prove or disprove them systematically for each case in its own merits. (p. 196)

The key here, Vansina adds, is that an oral history must be justified in the same sense that a historian's interpretation should be; moreover, that a historian's interpretation is not necessarily better. With this understanding of ethnohistory as a general practice and its potential to serve as an approach to educational research, we can now look to the ways in which ethnohistorical approaches have been used to study education and the intersection of race and education.

### **Ethnohistorical Approach to Studying Education**

As McGregor (2014) reminds us, the “methodological procedures of ethnohistory receive little treatment in the literature” (p. 437). However, some of the features mentioned in various studies include

validity driven by the use of historical data—evaluating sources and understanding their biases, rather than being driven by theory; taking into account sufficient evidence, including that which does not support the thesis; comparing accounts from different non-Indigenous sources which may be based upon different interests/motivations; taking a long period of time into account; and, an assumption that an ‘authoritative narrative’ can be ‘released’ from the evidence. (p. 437)

Whereas there is a dearth of education-focused studies to explore that exhibit these features, there are a few that stand out. A series of EBSCOhost searches of *Ethnohistory*—the journal of the aforementioned American Society for Ethnohistory—provides a base, albeit limited, from which to begin this inquiry. Although there are certainly other venues for researchers and scholars to publish ethnohistorical work, *Ethnohistory* is credited with filling an intellectual gap left by journals such as *American Anthropologist*, which had for years largely ignored historical studies (Harkin, 2010).

When searching articles from *Ethnohistory*'s inception in 1954 through its most current release in 2017, I used four initial search terms: (a) student, (b) teacher, (c) parent, and (d) education. The first three terms represent three different stakeholder groups with “different interests, perceptions and preoccupation” (Janmaat, McCowan, & Rao, 2016, p. 46), and the last is intended to represent the general set of systems and processes that loosely define the field. Searching for “student” produces three results: (a) an article examining assimilationist policy and the Indian School Service (Ahern, 1997); (b) an article on the experiences of Maori students at two institutions—the New Zealand Seminary and the Native Institution—in Australia (Te Punga Somerville, 2014); and (c) a book review of *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable* (Goldstein, 1986).

Consistent with general ethnohistorical practice whereby practitioners “devote less space to their methodologies within published works” (McGregor, 2014, p. 445), neither Ahern nor Te Punga Somerville outline a clear methodological approach. However, both authors exhibit characteristics identified by Sturtevant (1966) as typical of an ethnohistorical study. Specifically, both studies respectively focus on the past of American Indians and the Maori of New Zealand and make use of a variety of documents, including alumni records, employee rosters,

congressional reports, reports from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, diaries, handwritten letters, and notes. By contrast, however, Ahern's study is diachronic in nature, focusing on patterns and changes in the Indian School Service over time and the ways in which Indian peoples approached and influenced assimilationist policy; and Te Punga Somerville's study is more synchronic, focusing on narratives about the New Zealand Seminary and the Native Institution at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Using the search term “teacher” produces five results: (a) a study on the construction of ethnohistorical knowledge within white Canadian and Chipewyan Indian cultures via an analysis of a scuffle between a white teacher and a young Chipewyan male (Sharp, 1991); (b) a study of capitalism and Western domination and exploitation in Samoa as understood through the example of a Samoan mission teacher (Linnekin, 1994); (c) a brief review of the life, legacy, and scholarship of Ethan Andrew Schmidt, known for his explorations of the intersection of Native American and colonial history (Ethridge, 2016); (d) an analysis of the construction and circulation of historical memories around the 1795 slave rebellion in Coro, Venezuela (Ruelle-Orihuela & Soriano, 2016); and (e) a book review of *Essie's Story: The Life and Legacy of a Shoshone Teacher*, a life history of an anthropologist known for “encouraging her students to creatively construct positive Indian identities” (Johnson, 2004, p. 455).

Much like the studies identified using the “student” search term, Sharp, Linnekin, and Ruelle-Orihuela and Soriano use various documents—court transcripts, tax records, journals, library collections, national archives, etc.—to investigate otherwise “poorly documented peoples” (Adams, 1962, p. 181). That said, these studies vary widely in their treatment of and focus on education. Whereas Sharp focuses on the interactions between students, teachers, a school principal, diverse family communities, and the ways in which these groups navigate

social and political issues in relation to religious and legal systems, Linneken only tangentially addresses education by describing the main figure's role as a Samoan mission teacher. Ruetten-Orihuela and Soriano go a bit further—dedicating a section of the article to collective memories of Coro through schools and guerrillas—but ultimately only highlight the fact that there was a teacher who taught “a history class that included field trips to sites connected to the Coro rebellion” (2016, p. 340).

In contrast to the paucity of education foci in these studies, Parkhurst (2014) and Gram (2015) discuss a range of educational topics. Both authors acknowledge land rights issues as a driving force in early Indian scholarship, and both address the federal government's role and interest in assimilationist education practices. As Parkhurst notes, “Arguments for Indian education rested on the premise that for lasting assimilation to take place, young Indians had to be taught the values, mores, and knowledge of Christian civilization” (pp. 10-11). Gram, tracing the way these assimilationist policies played out in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico, shows how Pueblo men and women resisted assimilation and preserved “Pueblo identity, culture, and community life” (p. 174). Regarding method Parkhurst combines oral histories with archival records of campus life to explore the history of the Chemawa Indian School's musical life, whereas Gram uses student interviews, narratives of students' lives, pictures, and student information from the Albuquerque and Santa Fe Indians Schools to discuss economics, school competition, and the everyday lives of students.

These studies are extensions of the interest in the schooling experiences of indigenous populations that has been expanding since the 1980s (Marker, 2000) despite the “scarcity of ethnohistorical studies that have investigated educational themes” (p 84). With the exception of the Parkhurst and Gram texts, the studies I have covered thus far were primarily selected for

review as a result of their connection to the “student” and “teacher” search terms. Moving to the studies found when searching *Ethnohistory* using the “parent” search term reveals a shift in focus.

Two studies are produced from the “parent” search: (a) a family history of a contemporary Seminole maroon descendant of mixed race (Mulroy, 2011); and (b) an essay examining cultures of racial categorization in New England and New Zealand (Shoemaker, 2013). Although neither article is directly connected to traditional lines of educational research inquiry, this shift is notable in that the authors simultaneously highlight the complexities of racial identity and the debate amongst ethnohistorians as to whether or not the approach can be extended to nonindigenous peoples.

In an acknowledgement of the historically narrow racial and ethnic frame that some scholars use to delineate the bounds of ethnohistory, Adams (1962) notes that

it seems impossible to try to define a discipline on the basis of the processes of racial mixture, a thing even geneticists find almost impossible to trace. If ethnohistory considers ethnic groups, then surely much of North and Latin American history would fall under the rubric. (pp. 180-181)

Still, however, there appears to be relatively few ethnohistorical studies that focus on other *others* such as African Americans and even fewer that are related to education. In fact, searching *Ethnohistory* using the term “education” produces 24 results, with 13 results being book reviews, which includes reviews of Gram’s *Education at the Edge of Empire: Negotiating Pueblo Identity in New Mexico’s Indian Boarding Schools* and Parkhurst’s *To Win the Indian Heart: Music at Chemawa Indian School*. Of the 11 remaining results, only two focus on education (Coleman, 2012; Maxwell, 2015), and the rest are a combination of life histories, political biographies, and

tribal histories that focus on topics such as urban relocation, rhetorics, missionization, and factionalism. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of how ethnohistorical approaches have been used to study the education of African Americans, we must look to other studies that do not necessarily use the term ethnohistory but share common characteristics.

### **Ethnohistory and Research on the Education of African Americans**

According to Sturtevant (1966), ethnohistory has two primary interests: historical ethnography and folk history, or the historiography of non-literate cultures. Carmack (1972) offers a third area of focus, specific history, which he describes as “the writing of histories of specific societies in terms of their past events or culture traits as manifested in time, space, and concrete act” (p. 236). Folk histories, on the other hand, involve explorations of the “view a society has of its past” (p. 239). Sturtevant adds that the study of folk history is a form of ethnography that focuses on “the systematic and unsystematic knowledge of the past and the functions of historical tradition in a particular culture” (p. 22). Historical ethnography, Sturtevant writes, “is the reconstruction of a synchronic, ethnographic description of a past stage of a culture, especially a description based on written documents contemporary with that stage” (p. 7).

One prominent example of a historical ethnography is Vanessa Siddle Walker’s *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*. Walker (1996) explicitly states,

The approach to inquiry used in this recounting is termed “historical ethnography,” because it crosses the research tradition of two distinct methodologies. Like historical inquiry, it is concerned with reconstructing the sequence of activities and events throughout the period of the school’s history and with providing an understanding of why

and how certain events occurred. Consistent with historical methodology, the work aimed to convey a sense of another time and place. Simultaneously, however, the inquiry also sought to understand the meaning that school life held to its participants. Thus, the story moves beyond reconstructing events in the life of the school and seeks to understand those events' value. (p. 221)

Such an approach is distinct from more traditional histories of Black education such as James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935*, which seeks to provide "a comprehensive understanding of what actually existed in the way of elementary schools, normal schools, secondary schools, and colleges" rather than attending "excessively to the growth of intellectual currents and ideological debate" (1988, p. 3). Whereas Anderson provides "a detailed documentation of the actual structure and content" (p. 3) of different levels of black education, Walker (1996) offers "a cultural understanding of an environment from the perspective of the environment's participants" (p. 221).

Walker's study tells the story of the Caswell County Training School (CCTS) in rural North Carolina and focuses on the dedication of the school's teachers and principal. Walker begins the book by acknowledging the inequalities of public schooling for African Americans during legalized segregation—from the "meager meals, the inadequate facilities, the unequal funding of schools and teachers, the lack of bus transportation, and the failure of school boards to respond to black parents' requests" (p. 1)—but notes that recalling only these inequalities is historically incomplete. Walker argues that although Black schools were certainly commonly lacking in facilities and funding, there is evidence to suggest that "the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped

black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards” (p. 3).

Consistent with general ethnohistorical practice, Walker’s evidence comes from a variety of written and nonwritten sources, including CCTS school files, a report from the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS), reports from the principal, local newspaper accounts, school board minutes, and interviews with people who had varying relationships to the school across the four decades in which it existed. Across three rounds of data collection, Walker conducts open-ended interviews with CCTS parents, students, teachers, and administrators and collects documents from members of the school community. She uses the results of her thematic coding from the first round of data collection to construct interview guide sheets for the second round of collection, intending to understand “the parameters of a particular theme” (p. 222). The third and final round of collection “focused almost completely on specific questions and documents that would fill in the remaining holes in the story” (p. 222).

Walker’s analytical method for identifying emerging themes and constructing categorical domains in the first round is based on the work of Spradley (1979), and her matrix analysis of interviewees by themes in later phases builds on the work of Miles and Huberman (1984). From these analyses, Walker ultimately finds that institutional caring—“both the human relationships that existed between the major participants and the institutional structures created as a result of that caring” (p. 201)—is a key factor in understanding the dedication of the teachers and principal at CCTS. Additionally, parents and other community members played a significant role in the school. Despite having different approaches for addressing the school board in order to meet the school’s needs, parents were “united in their interest in the education of African American children” (p. 210).

Similar themes are explored in Sherick Hughes' *Black Hands in the Biscuits Not in the Classrooms: Unveiling Hope in a Struggle for Brown's Promise*, which is also described as a historical ethnography. Building on Walker's methodological framework, Hughes (2006) explores the meaning of educational experiences in the context of the daily lives of Black participants in the northeastern Albemarle area of North Carolina. Hughes uses three years of oral history interviews, observations, and archival research to respectively (a) "bring sustenance to the research by grounding it in well-documented, multiple accounts of events" (p. 189); (b) highlight the ways in which families socially construct "educational struggles, hopes, and the relationships that embody their struggles, hopes, and school experiences" (p. 190); and (c) "triangulate interviews and observation" (p. 190).

Analytical approaches in Hughes' work include "coding field notes, narratives and stories, searching for themes, writing, and theorizing" (p. 191) as described by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). These analyses lead to findings that lived experiences lead to "school desegregation messages replete with cultural struggle and saturated with familial streams of hope" (p. 170). Whereas Hughes views his work as "a third part, a kind of missing link in a trilogy" (p. 12) when read together with Walker's *Their Highest Potential* and David Cecelski's *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South*, Cecelski's work is distinct from the other two in that *Along Freedom Road* falls long more traditional modes of historical analysis.

Although *Along Freedom Road* uses data from numerous interviews and a variety of written and nonwritten documents commonly associated with ethnohistorical studies—including interviews, newspaper accounts; maps; pictures; school board minutes; state and federal archives; internal files from the National Education Association; and files from the Federal

Bureau of Investigation and the North Carolina State Highway Patrol—Cecelski (1994) notes that his book “is primarily the chronicle of an important untold moment in civil rights history” (p. 13). Cecelski traces the history of Hyde County, NC from the late 1800s to the Jim Crow laws and the *Brown v. Board* era in the 1950s through progress made after school segregation in the 1970s. He finds that Blacks in Hyde County were able to successfully negotiate job security for Black educators and agreements by which Black parents and students could influence local school policy through permanent advising and planning committees.

Foster (1997) explores related themes in *Black Teachers on Teaching*, which makes extensive methodological use of life history to “understand how teaching has been experienced and understood by blacks engaged in the profession” (p. xx). Life history as a method, according to Foster, brings “the experiences of blacks, including teachers, into view in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences” (pp. xx-xxi). Kelly (2010), who also prominently features teachers voices, uses the related oral history approach to provide counter-narratives “to a dominant collective memory of ‘inherently inferior’ teachers and teaching” (p. 14) at an all-Black school.

Kelly’s work is more ethnohistorical in nature—if indeed such an argument can be made amongst the aforementioned intellectual quibbling regarding the term—than Foster’s in that Kelly uses archival research to confirm and disconfirm stories from participants. Kelly connects oral history interview data with archival materials from five North Carolina HBCUs (handbooks, pictures, college bulletins, yearbooks, etc.) and materials from the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in order to cover “the full range of experiences” (p. 104). Addressing issues such as “[c]onflict over the quality and character of legally segregated schools” (p. 25) and dominant narratives maintaining that “segregated schools for

black were inferior” (p. 44), Kelly argues that Black teachers in the Jim Crow South dealt with inequalities by employing educational capital.

Educational capital, according to Kelly, “can be useful for exploring how black teachers in segregated schools prepared and motivated disadvantaged black children to achieve academically and to aspire for occupational and social mobility” (2010, p. 68). These teachers were able to “penetrate the power structure” (p. 68) of state-mandated curricula by equipping black students with educational capital that could be used to access social, cultural, and economic capital. Unfortunately, as other school desegregation literature suggests, this access came at a cost. As Cecelski (1994) notes, “Blacks lost important symbols of their educational heritage in this process. When black schools closed, their names, mascots, mottos, holidays, and traditions were sacrificed with them, while the students were transferred to historically white schools that retained those markers of cultural and racial identity” (p. 9).

Although these sacrifices did not happen everywhere post-desegregation, as in the case of the all-Black Hillside High School in Durham, NC, where school leaders remained in place and school culture remained intact (Patterson, 2015), ethnohistorical studies such as those mentioned here highlight “what was lost and gained” as a result of desegregation (Noblit, 2015, p. 16; Patterson, Niles, Carlson, & Kelley, 2007). These studies also highlight another concern for many Black communities at the advent of desegregation; namely, the quality of education that Black students would receive.

### **Ethnohistorical Connections: Derrick Bell and the Fight for Quality Education**

Whereas many scholars agree that the desegregation of public schools was “an effort to equalize the quality of schooling” (Henderson, Greenberg, Schneider, Uribe, & Verdugo, 1996), research suggests that “the fundamental essence of how schooling was carried out was never

really addressed” (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 293). Moreover, demands for access to a quality education from Black parents and community leaders were often met with intimidation from White community leaders and public officials (Baker, 2006). Quality education was also a concern for legal scholar and theorist Derrick Bell, who is credited as the “intellectual father figure” of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 5). In the 1970s Bell argued that civil rights lawyers were misguided in their push for racial balance in schools’ student population as the measure of compliance with *Brown* and the guarantee of effective schooling (Bell, 1976). Years later, in reflecting on his prediction that quality education for most Black children would not be achieved by racial balance-centric school desegregation strategies, Bell (1992a) writes, “In short, while the rhetoric of integration promised much, court orders to ensure that black youngsters received the education they needed to progress would have achieved more” (p. 2).

My work at the UNC Center for Civil Rights was directly aligned to Bell’s position. In addition to traveling with Center attorneys across North Carolina to learn about the contextual issues facing so many diverse communities, I advised the attorneys on language and policy interpretation that would ultimately be used in lawsuits filed against boards of education and municipalities considered to be infringing on a range of civil rights. The summer prior to my arrival, the Center produced a report titled “*Unless Our Children Begin to Learn Together...*”: *The State of Education in Halifax County*, a comprehensive analysis of “the history, educational impacts and legal implications of maintaining three separate school districts” in Halifax County, North Carolina (Dorosin, Haddix, Jones, & Trice, 2011, p. iii). Although the report clearly represents legal thought, the research approach used is highly ethnohistorical in nature.

Dorosin et al. combine elements of case study, historical research, and legal research to highlight various educational issues that face Halifax County. These elements connect to make a

strong case for an ethnohistorical study. The study is diachronic, covering educational shifts in the community from as early as 1903 to as late as 2011. In terms of method, Center attorneys spent over a year listening to various communities across Halifax County through nonwritten records vis-à-vis interviews. Like other studies reviewed here, the authors also make use of written documents such as school board minutes, reports from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, county property records, municipal maps, student test data, and school demographics. Finding that the stigma of racial inferiority continues to plague students, parents, teachers, and administrators in Halifax County Public Schools, the authors note, “By endorsing and maintaining this segregated system, Halifax County and the state are complicit in exacerbating the substantive harms of what should be a by-gone era of racial oppression” (p. 41). Center attorneys further argue that Halifax County’s schools remain segregated and unequal as a result the creation of a “White refuge” that has permitted a neighboring district, Roanoke Rapids Graded School District, to remain racially exclusive.

Borrowing from feminist theory (hooks, 1984), Bell (1992b) might describe the creation of a White refuge from Dorosin et al.’s report as a form of racial bonding in which “black rights and interests are always vulnerable to diminishment if not to outright destruction” (p. 9). These vulnerabilities are evident in court decisions such as *Roberts v. City of Boston* in 1850, which rejected arguments that (a) Black schools were inferior to White schools in equipment and staffing, (b) Black schools were inconvenient for students who lived closer to White schools, and (c) neither state nor federal law supported racially segregated schools. Bell (2004) contends that decisions like these were “not based on law or logic, but on public sentiment” (p. 92). Echoes of these arguments can be found in the Center’s work. Almost as if their study were conducted in 1850 as a parallel to the *Roberts* decision, Dorosin et al. find that (a) Halifax County schools are

generally staffed with more inexperienced teachers and have a high rate of teacher turnover, (b) Black students are disproportionately subjected to long bus rides to school when a majority White school is more convenient, and (c) Halifax County schools maintain racially segregated schools despite federal legislation outlawing the practice.

When read as a product of ethnohistorical inquiry, “*Unless Our Children Begin to Learn Together...*” extends the debate about what exactly ethnohistory is and what the product of an ethnohistorical study should be (Trigger, 2014). Are the Black students of Halifax County to be considered an *other* (Cohn, 1998)? Do the community members who were interviewed by Center attorneys make revisionist meaning of the past (Krech, 1991)? Are certain events exaggerated while others are masked (Maynes et al., 2008)? Do the loose methodological connections to ethnohistory in the study render the use of the term *ethnohistory* obsolete or instead further define and articulate “what ethnohistory could mean, and what ethnohistorians could do” (McGregor, 2014, p. 439)? While these questions remain open for debate, the studies on race and education covered through this paper do offer some suggestions about conceptions of educational quality in the current education reform era.

### **Implications for Contemporary Education Reform**

In *Their Highest Potential*, Walker (1996) remarks on the increase of stories in public media that positively characterize the learning environments of historically segregated Black schools. Former students of these segregated schools have described their teachers as “extraordinary” and recall a “nurturing combination of school, community, and church” (p. 218). Through Hughes (2006) we find hope in the “merging of resiliency, future orientation, and enlightened self-interest” (p. 139). From Kelly (2010) we learn through “hidden transcripts” of the “remarkably good” memories that former students of segregated schools carry (p. 93). Taken

together, these ethnohistorical studies challenge common, lingering, and incomplete (Walker, 1996) conceptions of education in Black communities as hopelessly beyond intervention regardless of how much funding is allocated or however many special programs are designed to address the complex issues facing these populations (Fenwick, 2013).

For anyone in the business of education reform, what these studies also suggest is a need for engagement. Much of the rich understandings we get from the authors are from the voices of the subjects being studied. Yes, standardized test data is informative, and researcher and policymaker interest in value-added models cannot be understated (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003), but tests and models must be put in context. One of the best ways to understand context is to make a commitment to “honest and comprehensive engagement by reaching out to all segments of the community” (Langberg, Qureshi, & Deas, 2013, p. 10). This engagement should include voices across a variety of geographic, age, socioeconomic, and age groups and must involve students, parents, school leaders, and any other key stakeholders.

Now, there are of course a number of factors that may limit a researcher’s ability or even interest to connect with these groups such as access to people and sites, time, financial resources, feasibility, and the scope of the study (Creswell, 2012). If, however, we are indeed interested in meaningful reform, then our efforts may be well served by taking cues from the ethnohistories examined here. Perhaps it is in fact time, as Noblit and Dempsey (1996) argue, to “face the inescapable conclusion” that “[w]e are unable to reform American education” (p. 1)—time to look carefully at the history of education and recognize that we have been subject to mostly conservative, recycled reforms that have led to marginal improvements at best. Or, perhaps we should turn to ethnohistory and dig deeper into the voices of the community to learn as much as we can for as long as we can.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Ethnohistory Revisited**

This study uses ethnohistory as guiding methodological foundation. As Strong (2015) notes, one of the recurring themes around ethnohistory is the differing methodological approaches used by anthropologists and historians. Historians, Strong argues, often rely on critical analyses of colonial documents, whereas anthropologists lean more on oral history and “informed speculation” about the past (p. 3). Although some authors contend that ethnohistory can make no claim to unique or special methodological techniques independent of historical methods (Carmack, 1972) or folklore studies and Africanist anthropology (Harkin 2010), Sturtevant (1966) highlights three key features that make ethnohistory a fitting approach for the study I intend to pursue: (a) concentration on the past or the present, (b) the use of written or non-written “documents,” and (c) a diachronic or a synchronic emphasis.

For me it is important to focus on the past because of the rich history of Princeville. The town has a unique claim to be officially recognized as the oldest town in America that was founded by African Americans. Yet, this history seems to be relatively unknown. Another part of the town’s history is its apparently constant relegation to the margins of the state’s educational reform agenda. Anecdotal evidence reveals that local teachers feel that the state does not adequately understand the context of the schools in Princeville and the issues that they have to deal with on an ongoing basis.

Documents are an important part of analysis because schools are regularly tasked with providing a variety of written documents including but not limited to School Improvement Plans (SIPs), Strategic Operating Plans (SOPs), and student handbooks. Together, these documents tell a story of a school's mission, goals, and how they may or may not have changed over time (diachronically) and provides a snapshot of a school at any one point in time (synchronically). It is worth noting here that I am not making any particular distinction between documents and records, as others have done (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hodder, 2003), as no such distinction is typically made in ethnohistorical traditions.

Oral histories, on the other hand, are important non-written documents in that they help people “make sense of their lives through story” and allow for the exploration of “the private dimension of public life and events, to add new voices to the historical record, to track the creation and re-creation of historical memory, to build bridges between generations” and, ultimately between researchers and the community (Southern Oral History Program, 2014, p. 4). Mackay (2016) describes oral history as “a method for documenting recent history through recorded personal accounts of those who lived it” (p. 19). The Oral History Association, which defines oral history as “the recording in interview form of personal narratives from people with first-hand knowledge of historical events or current events” (2014, p. 1), outlines three phases of oral history projects: (a) pre-interview, (b) interview, and (c) post-interview.

During the pre-interview stage, researchers should establish the purpose of the interview, make considerations for the dissemination process, determine the length and scope of the interviews, compose a preliminary list of interview questions, and make assessments of equipment and the capacity to preserve and store the recorded interview. For the interview phase, researchers should be sure to show due respect for narrators, listen carefully, stay focused, and

anticipate that an interview may not go as planned. In the post-interview phase, it is important to be organized by documenting the process, including “the preparation and methods used for archival purposes and project development” (p. 3). It is also important in this phase to reflect and revisit the original project objectives in order to determine “whether and how the project’s purpose was met and how the methods might be refined” (p. 3) for future interviews.

Following the process outlined by the Oral History Association, I developed an interview guide (see Appendix A) and interviewed eight key informants and transcribed their interviews. The interviews took place in Princeville, the adjacent town of Tarboro, and by phone. As part of the post-interview phase, I imported the transcripts into ATLAS.ti version 8.1.3 and used *in vivo* coding to derive themes from participants’ narratives (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 32). I then followed Jones’ (2004) method for constructing narratives from oral history interviews, which involves “extensive condensing and manipulation of the text” while trying to “retain some idiosyncrasies of speech and where possible reproduced the lilt and cadence of the participants’ speech” (p. 27). For example, much of Milton’s interviews included discussions of his travels with The Platters but were not necessarily germane to the education story nor the story of Princeville. After constructing the eight narratives, I recoded them to refine my previous categories.

As noted previously, there are relatively few educational studies that employ ethnohistory as a methodological approach. Walker (1996), who uses the term “historical ethnography” (p. 221) to describe her methodology, explains that her work reconstructs the sequence of events throughout schools’ histories and provides understandings of why and how certain events occurred while conveying a sense of another time and place. This is consistent with Marker’s (2000) focus on the “importance of land and sense of place as the template for discussing events

in space and time” (p. 80). Given Princeville’s history of flooding and residents’ unwillingness to be displaced, this approach will provide a better understanding of how the land is connected to the sense community evident in the town.

## **Sample**

For this study, I interviewed a cross-section of African American Princeville community members. Interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes long, and each participant was interviewed only once. This is an important departure from traditional ethnohistorical practice as groups under study are not typically able to tell their own story. Participants range in age from the early 30s to the late 70s and work in a variety of fields, including government, technology, entertainment, healthcare, communications, and legal studies (See Appendix B for more key informant details). Four participants live in Princeville; two live in the adjacent towns of Tarboro and East Tarboro; one lives in the metropolitan area known as Research Triangle Park (NC), and one lives in the northeastern region of the United States. All of the key informants attended Princeville School. Princeville School has In order to preserve the anonymity of participants, I use pseudonyms in all but one narrative. One participant specifically requested that his name be associated with his narrative. The pseudonyms used connect to Black figures in fields related to participants (see Appendix C for more information on the pseudonyms used). This technique is unusual for the project I am pursuing in that ethnohistorical research typically focuses on documents already created rather than live informants (Sturtevant, 1966). Thus, I am blending elements from traditional ethnohistory and broader qualitative research methods such as the interview.

## **Data Collection**

Consistent with ethnohistorical practices, I mined archives and heard testimony (Galloway, 2006) for this study. Following Strong's (2015) suggestions for ethnohistorical data, I collected and reviewed (a) *institutional documents* such as school district administrative records, school report cards, and school turnaround plans; (b) *collections* such as photographs and town maps; and (c) *oral histories* as mentioned previously. I triangulated the data based on an initial review of documents and successive rounds of interviews. I used both convenience and snowball sampling to recruit participants for oral history interviews. In addition to reaching out to community members I met at the design workshop, I drove around Princeville, stopping intermittently to ask pedestrians about the town and where I could find information. I also used the opportunity to recruit participants. Of the 14 community members I stopped to talk to, three agreed to an oral history interview with me, and two agreed to be included in the final study. Three of the other participants came from a list of contacts provided by a town employee. After realizing that I had only been successful in interviewing older community members, I reached out to Fighters for Freedom Hill, whose representative connected me to the three younger participants.

## **Analytic/Interpretive Tradition**

As McGregor (2014) notes, the methodological procedures employed by practitioners of ethnohistory "receive little treatment in the literature" (p. 437), yet there are some common features including but not limited to (a) validity driven by the use of historical data, (b) taking into account sufficient evidence, (c) comparing accounts from different sources, and (d) taking a long period of time into account. When taking all of this into consideration during data analysis, however, a practitioner of ethnohistory must consider the desired outcome of a proposed study;

namely, whether or not a narrative history is to be produced and, if not, what that outcome should be. This study has indeed led to a narrative history of education reform in Princeville.

### **Member Checking**

An important aspect of an oral history interview is that it is “an inquiry in depth. It is not a casual or serendipitous conversation but a planned and scheduled, serious and searching exchange, one that seeks a detailed, expansive, and reflective account of the past” (Shopes, 2013, p. 120). As such researchers must actively collaborate with participants in order to “collect extensive information” about participants and “have a clear understanding of the context of the individual’s life” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Therefore, member checking occurred in two distinct rounds.

In the first round, I compiled public data related to the town of Princeville as it relates to education. This data includes but is not limited to statements issued by the Edgecombe County Schools superintendents, proceedings of the local board of education, and press reports on the town of Princeville and Princeville School. After completing an initial round of analysis and writing, I checked in with a convenience sample of town and school officials to see if the themes that emerged from my analysis rang true with their perceptions and experiences. In the second round of member checking, I followed up with my interlocutors after completing the construction of their respective narratives. This helped me triangulate data and connect understandings learned from the initial round of coding, ensuring that I was able to paint as accurate a picture as possible of the community’s experiences with education reform. The second round confirmed major themes such as community, family, normality, discipline, and teacher care.

## CHAPTER 4: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### **“What shall we do with the Negro?”: Roots of African American Education**

Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the abolitionists, “What shall we do with the Negro?” I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! (p. 39)

—Frederick Douglass, *What the Black Man Wants*, 1865

By the time noted abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass addressed the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in April 1865 on the topic of equality for all men under the law—during what would ultimately be the waning days of the American Civil War—enslaved Africans had been present in what we now know as the United States for more than 300 years. Having successfully mounted a rebellion against Spanish colonizer Lucas Vásquez de Allyón in 1526, approximately 100 Black rebels became the first known non-native settlers after taking refuge amongst nearby Guale Indians (Guitar, 2006; Pickett & Pickett, 2011; Schneider & Schneider, 2007). In the years that followed, European countries including Spain, Portugal, France, England, the Netherlands, Denmark-Norway, and Brandenburg-Prussia all sought wealth on the backs of enslaved Africans who were captured and sold in the Atlantic slave trade (Franklin & Higginbotham, 2010).

Christopher (2006) estimates that between approximately 300,000 and 350,000 sailors set out for Africa “on slave ships from Britain, British territories, and later the independent United States of America between 1750 and 1807” (p. 9), transporting an estimated 11 million African

men, women, and children—with about 9.6 million surviving to be sold in the Americas (p. 6). During this same period, education “emerged as an essential consideration in the minds of those who faced the momentous task of establishing” the then newly formed United States, including “Founding Father” Thomas Jefferson (Urban & Wagoner, p. 60). As Anderson (1988) notes, “it was Thomas Jefferson who first articulated the inseparable relationships between popular education and a free society. If a nation expected to be ignorant and free, he argued, it expected the impossible” (p. 1).

However, Anderson contends, it is important to understand that America’s educational history is set against a backdrop of oppression and that the two opposing traditions of “schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education” rather than “aberrations or isolated alternatives” (p. 1). Anderson adds,

To the legislature of Virginia in 1787 Jefferson proposed a popular educational system that would offer three years of public schooling to every white child of the commonwealth and then send the brightest male youngsters on to grammar school and college at public expense. But what of the enslaved children who constituted about 40 percent of the total number of Virginia’s children and who along with enslaved adults formed the basis of wealth for Jefferson, as well as for the state of Virginia? (p. 1)

The essence of this question is woven into the fabric of the intellectual history of the education of African Americans; that is, what about us, the others?

For example, legislation in northern colonies such as the Massachusetts Education Law of 1642, which was “aimed at not only promoting literacy but also strengthening the social order” (Webb, 20006, p. 29), is made to explicitly exclude African Americans in the form of antiliteracy legislation in places like Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (Williams, 2005). As George Thompson, who was formerly enslaved in Kentucky, reflects during a 1937 interview,

I have no education, I can neither read nor write, as a slave I was not allowed to have books. On Sundays I would go into the woods and gather ginseng which I would sell to the doctors for from 10¢ to 15¢ a pound and with this money I would buy a book that was called the Blue Back Speller. Our master would not allow us to have any books and when we were lucky enough to own a book we would have to keep it hid, for if our master would find us with a book he would whip us and take the book from us. After receiving three severe whippings I gave up and never again tried for any learning, and to this day I can neither read nor write. (National Humanities Center, 2007, p. 1)

Unfortunately, however, African Americans who were born free did not fare much better educationally. In an 1855 interview, Thomas Hedgepeth, who was free-born in North Carolina, notes,

I cannot read or write. A free-born man in North Carolina is as much oppressed, in one sense, as the slave: I was not allowed to go to school. I recollect when I was a boy, a colored man came from Ohio, and opened a school, but it was broken up. I was in the field ploughing with my father, —he said he wished we could go and learn. I think it an outrageous sin and shame, that a free colored man could not be taught. My ignorance has a very injurious effect on my prospects and success. I blame the State of North Carolina —the white people of that State—for it. I am now engaged in a troublesome lawsuit, about the title to my estate, which I would not have got into, had I known how to read and write. (National Humanities Center, 2007, p. 3)

Indeed, the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, during the 1830-31 session, passed legislation “to prevent all persons from slaves to read or write, the use of figures excepted” (Williams, 2005, p. 206). Under the new law, the penalty for teaching any slave to read or write for White men and women was a fine between \$100 and \$200 or imprisonment; the penalty for a free person of color, at the discretion of the court, was a fine, imprisonment, or up to 39 lashes. For any slave found attempting to teach another slave to read or write, the penalty was 39 lashes on his or her bare back. “Notably,” Williams writes, “North Carolina’s antiliteracy law permitted teaching slaves arithmetic, likely because mathematical skill was necessary for trades such as carpentry and would therefore inure to the benefit of slave owners” (p. 15).

Woodson (1919), however, presents a different perspective on education in North Carolina. Contrasting the limited educational opportunities that Negroes had in Virginia in the

1830s, Woodson writes, “North Carolina, not unlike the border States in their good treatment of free persons of color, placed such little restriction on the improvement of the colored people that they early attained rank among the most enlightened ante-bellum Negroes” (p. 113). This was due in great part to the work of anti-slavery leaders and Quakers. As Urban and Wagoner (2014) contend, “Probably no group equaled the Quakers in their zeal to promote the education and freedom of African Americans. When financially able, Quakers purchased slaves and then released them as free people” (p. 116). Pro-slavery forces in North Carolina, who had grown wary of this Quaker practice, managed to secure a state supreme court ruling in 1827 so that Quakers could no longer purchase and release slaves. Despite this ruling, “neither law nor social convention dampened Quaker enthusiasm for doing whatever could be done to improve life for African Americans” (p. 116).

As Frederick Douglass (1865) explains, “No class of men can, without insulting their own nature, be content with any deprivation of their rights” (p. 37). Woodson (1919) highlights the work of John Chavis as one shining example of discontent with educational rights. Woodson describes Chavis, who was likely born near Oxford, NC, as an “exceptionally bright Negro” who “was serving as a teacher not of his own race but of the most aristocratic white people of North Carolina” (pp. 115-116). “Early attracting the attention of his white neighbors,” Woodson writes, Chavis was sent to Princeton “to see if a Negro would take a collegiate education” (p. 116). After leaving Princeton, Chavis eventually made his way back down to Raleigh, NC, where he taught White students during the day and free Black students in the evening. Still, in North Carolina as well as in other states, public opinion was against the teaching of Black students, whether they were free or not (Reese 2011).

Insofar as schooling for Blacks in the late 1800s sought to “provide the masses of ex-slaves with basic literacy skills” and develop “a responsible leadership class that would organize the masses and lead them into freedom and quality (Anderson, 1988, p. 31), these efforts faced a great deal of public opposition, which often manifested in the ways that public funds were expended (Woodson, 1919). Although North Carolina started a local system of publicly funded schools in 1839 (Altenbaugh, 2003), the School Law of 1840-41 only made provisions for White children under the age of 21 to receive a publicly funded education (Noble, 1930). Moreover, Noble writes,

It will be remembered that by an act of Congress in 1836 the surplus in the United States treasury was distributed to the states on the basis of their representation in Congress, which was nothing more nor less than on the basis of their federal population. North Carolina, at the time, had a white population of 484,870, a Negro population of 268, 549, and a federal population of 753, 419. Hence our state, in receiving money from the United States treasury, received its share on the basis of its federal population, part of which was Negro slaves, not one of whom would ever have one cent of public money spent on him for any kind of education. (p. 71)

“By 1850,” Justesen and Matthews (2006) note, “2,657 common schools employing approximately 1,500 teachers offered primary education to more than 100,000 white schoolchildren in North Carolina.” The first school for freed Blacks in North Carolina would later be established on July 23, 1863 by Vincent Colyer, a chaplain for the Union army (Renfer & Sandifer, 1997).

### **Possible Futures (Part I): Establishing Black Schools in the Early to Mid-1900s**

I opened the previous section with a quote from Frederick Douglass, but I have so far left his lines mostly thematically unanalyzed. As a reminder, Douglass responds to the question asked of the abolitionists about what is to be done with the Negro by saying “Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us!” One might rightly assume that Douglass, here, is expressing disdain for how American society writ large has

treated African Americans; that is to say, *America, I see how you have dealt with my people in the past, and if your past treatment is any indication of how you might treat us in the future, I prefer that you not treat us at all. Leave us be.* However, Douglass' remarks do not only speak to the past conditions he experienced. They speak to possible futures; namely, those that center African Americans as the architects of their own educational experiences. One of the ways that African Americans became these metaphorical architects is through the establishment of their own schools.

Acknowledging the educational needs of African Americans in the aftermath of the Civil War, North Carolina governor Zebulon Vance pushed for the establishment of a state colored normal school in 1877 (Huddle, 1997). This is particularly noteworthy in that this call was being made at the same time that the first normal school for training White teachers was being established as a summer course at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Although the NC state legislature was skeptical, they eventually passed an act that set aside \$2,000 for the colored normal school and set it up in Fayetteville, NC (see Figure 3), one of North Carolina's most important commercial centers in the antebellum period and the center of the state's "nascent textile industry" (p. 136).



Figure 3. State Normal School Administration Building, Fayetteville, NC, 1926.<sup>3</sup>  
 Forty years later, in 1917, Black parents from two contiguous North Carolina towns,

Chapel Hill and Carrboro, “being desirous of better school facilities for their children” (Noble, 1919), consulted with educational leaders at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and established Orange County Training School for Negroes. The school aimed “to fit competent teachers for the work of the schools of the county” and “to give such instruction as will be of practical value in the future home-life of the pupil” (Noble, p. 142). In 1925 North Carolina housed “the nation’s first state-supported liberal arts college for black students” with a mission to prepare Black teachers and principals (North Carolina Central University, 2018). However, across the South, Black children were still largely being denied equal access to educational opportunities.

Anderson (1988) shows how in 1915, that among 23 southern cities with a population of 20,000 or more, although Black children accounted for 39% of the total secondary school age

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<sup>3</sup> *Photographs from Sesquicentennial International Exposition 1926; State Normal School, Fayetteville, North Carolina; State Archives of North Carolina*. Retrieved from State Archives of North Carolina, Public Instruction Records, Division of Negro Education.

population, they comprised 0% of the enrollment in public high schools. Here again, the question arises: What about us, the others? In the decades that followed the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which “allowed states to establish racial segregation only if the accommodations and facilities in public institutions were equal” (p. 192), inequalities like these led to major educational shifts in the country.

One of these shifts is the move for African Americans to establish their own schools. In the early 1900s, Black southerners voluntarily taxed themselves on top of their normal tax in order to secure school buildings, equipment, and teachers for themselves, since they were still being routinely excluded from the system of public education that had been set up for White students. As Anderson notes, many state school officials in the South encouraged this practice of double taxation, with some suggesting that it was a “necessary and just burden to be borne by black citizens” (p. 183). In North Carolina, for example, the state’s “first agent of Negro rural schools” (p. 183), N.C. Newbold, publicly espoused the idea that it was fair for Black citizens to pay a school tax, which was used primarily to fund public schools for White students, and a separate tax to fund schools for Black children (p. 183).

In the 1910s, philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, upon learning of the detestable state of education for African Americans in the rural South, established a fund in consultation with Booker T. Washington that was designed to offer matching grants to rural communities that were interested in building schools for African American students (Brown, 2016; North Carolina Museum of History, n.d.). After the North Carolina General Assembly formally created the Division of Negro Education in 1921, the Rosenwald program continued to partner with NCDPI through the closing of the fund’s construction program in 1932. Of the 813 total Rosenwald

buildings constructed in North Carolina, 26 were located in Edgecombe County (Knight & Auld, 2012, p. 19).

Although access to high schools would increase in America through the late 1920s and early 1930s, racism and poverty limited that access for African Americans (Reese, 2011, p. 211). By the 1950s, the U.S. Supreme Court had been hearing a series of segregation cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*. In 1954, the Court unanimously struck down “the use of race as a constitutionally impermissible... mechanism to segregate black and white children” (Smrekar & Goldring, 2009, p. xiii). In the years that followed, schools, districts, and states would tackle the complex issues of school desegregation.

### **Possible Futures (Part II): Gains and Losses of School Desegregation**

The possible futures Douglass calls to mind are examined at length in literature on the benefits and consequences—whether intended or not—of school desegregation (Adams & Adams, 2015; Hughes, Noblit, & Cleveland, 2013; Cecelski, 1994; Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013; Shircliffe, 2015; Tillman, 2004; Willie, 1989). Described by education professor George Noblit as “what was lost studies” (personal communication, November 16, 2016), this mix of legal investigation, ethnographic study, and historical analysis highlights the ways in which the “public transcript of school desegregation” (Noblit, 2015, p. 5) has been used to rewrite desegregation narratives and how omissions from dominant narratives have historically “failed to tell the complete story of segregated schools (Walker, 1996, p. 5).

According to Cecelski (1994), “Blacks lost important symbols of their educational heritage” (p. 9) in the school desegregation process. These symbols included school names, mascots, mottos, holidays, and traditions. Black students whose school were closed ended up in historically White schools that “retained those markers of cultural and racial identity” (p. 9).

Cecelski also argues that school desegregation had a negative effect on Black educational leadership and Black teachers, noting that from 1963 to 1970 in North Carolina, the number of Black elementary school principals in the state decreased from 620 to 170.

At the secondary level, during the same time period, the number of Black principals decreased from 209 to 10 and, by 1973, decreased even further to three. Cecelski estimates that by 1972, approximately 3,051 Black teachers lost their jobs due the merging of Black and White schools. Tillman (2004), who describes this displacement of Black educators as “an extraordinary injustice” (p. 280), argues that the “wholesale firing of Black educators threatened the economic, social, and cultural structure of the Black community, and ultimately the social, emotional, and academic success of Black children” (p. 280). Some scholars argue that desegregation was a net benefit for African Americans but note that there is often resistance to the ways in which it has been implemented (Willie, 1987). Others highlight how desegregation strategies often leave African American students to bear the burden of that desegregation (Bell, 1975; Dorosin, Haddix, Jones, & Trice, 2011; Yeakey, 1993).

In exploring the aforementioned possible futures, Bell (1989), wonders “what might have been” (p. 137) in Milwaukee, WI had Milwaukee Public Schools not forced Black students to bear the burden of desegregation and integration. In *The Case for a Separate Black School System*, Bell discusses how activist Dr. Howard Fuller led a group of Black parents, educators, and legislators in 1987 to propose *A Manifesto for New Directions in the Education of Black Children in the City of Milwaukee*. The Fuller-led group developed the proposal as a way to “express disenchantment with proponents of integration from both races who continue to view ‘the body shuffling of black children’ as a viable means of achieving academic excellence” (pp. 136-137).

The overall purpose of the manifesto was to advocate for quality schools rather than schools that were either segregated or integrated. In his exploration, Bell wonders,

If civil rights groups and black parents had known in advance that the courts would not order schools desegregated for ten years, what might have they done? Surely, the possibility exists that they would have become discouraged by the delay in student desegregation and simply done nothing until the Court was willing to issue such orders. More likely, they would have done what was eventually needed in each community where a desegregation decision was issued: to organize both parents and the community to effectively implement the court-ordered equal money and control mandates within still all-black schools. (p. 138)

Bell resolves that it may sound impossible at first blush, but also posits in this possible future that a Court order of *no segregation* “might have caused civil rights lawyers to focus on the primary goal of black parents: the effective schooling of their children” (p. 138). The next section highlights how this goal has been pursued by parents in other southern sites and connects more of my personal story to the larger work.

### **Contemporary School Desegregation Issues**

On July 11, 2012, members of the Pitt County Coalition for Educating Black Children gathered to discuss the state of education in Pitt County Schools (NC). The district, which had been under desegregation orders since 1970 until its release in 2015 (Pitt County Schools, 2018), implemented a student assignment plan for the 2011-2012 school year that critics maintained increased segregation and racial isolation in its schools (Dewitt, 2013). In January 2012 the UNC Center for Civil Rights argued that the plan violated the school board’s “affirmative legal duty to remedy the vestiges of race discrimination” (Dorosz, 2012a) before the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. In May 2012 the Fourth Circuit Court found that the Pitt County Board of Education bears the burden to prove that its student assignment plan moves the district toward unitary status

(Dorosin, 2012b). This case brings to mind my own experiences in a school system that has grappled with desegregation.

I grew up in DeKalb County, GA. I spent 13 years as a student in the DeKalb County School System (DCSS) and taught there for 3 years. By the time I entered DCSS in 1989, it had been under desegregation orders for over 20 years—following a class action lawsuit filed against Superintendent Jim Cherry and DCSS. The suit alleged that DCSS failed to integrate the school system and did not comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prevents discrimination by government agencies that receive federal funding (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit).

In an effort to keep federal funding, DCSS implemented an “equalization plan” in which additional funding was allocated to poorer Black schools so they could be on par with the White schools in the district. Reminiscent of the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, DCSS held that maintaining separate but allegedly equal schools was the right move. However, with the legal implications of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, DCSS was forced to rethink its approach.

Records show that when the 1969 lawsuit was filed against DCSS, the African American student population in DeKalb County was only about 5.9% (Patton, 2015). The few Black schools in operation at the time were closed and the students were sent to integrate the majority white schools. Now, according to the most recent data available, African Americans make up 63.9% of the student population in the district (DeKalb County School District, 2017). Notably, as demographics changed, so did housing patterns. Black families typically settled in the south part of DeKalb, and white families typically settled in the north (Marcus, 1991).

In 1972 DCSS implemented the Majority to Minority (M-to-M) program in conjunction with federal desegregation orders (Patton, 2015). With the M-to-M program, DeKalb students who were in a majority race at their school could apply to attend a different school at which they would be the minority. In theory the program would integrate schools across the district. In practice, however, the Black students from the south part of DeKalb—like me and my friends—bore the burden of integration and were bused to the traditionally White schools in the north. “Between 1975 and 1980,” Ballard-Thrower (2010) notes, “approximately 64,000 African Americans had moved into southern DeKalb County, while approximately 37,000 Whites had moved out” (p. 273).

I was not in the M-to-M program, but I was still bused to the north end of the county since I was in a magnet program. Every morning—for 9 years—I would take two buses to school. One bus picked me up from my neighborhood and took me to a shuttle. Another bus took me from the shuttle to my school. Every morning—for 5 of those years—my first bus took me directly to what I had self-surveyed to be a sort of Mason-Dixon Line, Memorial Drive, which cuts horizontally through DeKalb County. It was always easy for me to know when I was approaching the Line; I just had to look for the massive DeKalb County Jail that sits on Memorial Drive, less than two miles from my shuttle. The jail was a constant, disturbing reminder of the burden my friends and I had to integrate our county’s schools.

When I first went to register at my high school, I walked up to one of the registration booths. Before I could even get a word out, one of the White parent volunteers looked at me up and down and said, “Oh, you must be one of those M-to-M students. Your registration line is over there.” I couldn’t believe it. Not only were the M-to-M students tasked to bring diversity to DeKalb County schools in the north, but once they got there, they had to wear a scarlet letter

“M” on their chests. I had to correct the volunteer and let her know that I was a magnet student. I actually had to *prove* to her that I was in the high achievers program. It felt horrible.

Students in Pitt County have experienced similar horror. Although Pitt County Schools have been released from federal desegregation orders, many residents and critics still hold that their district’s schools are racially segregated, asserting that school board decisions are “directly and predictably creating racially isolated, high poverty schools, and relegating students to separate and unequal educational opportunities. Such discriminatory actions cannot go unchallenged” (Marsh, 2015). Cases like these are not, however, isolated to Pitt County or even North Carolina. Out of the more than 14,000 school districts across the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), there are still 176 school districts under federal desegregation orders as of September 2017, most of which are located in the Deep South (Felton, 2017), which includes Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

More recent cases like that of the Cleveland School District in Mississippi, echo many of the issues encountered in the immediate years that followed the *Brown v. Board* decision. In 2016, U.S. District Judge Debra Brown ordered the Cleveland School District its middle and high schools (Brown, 2016), following a suit that had been filed more than 50 years earlier, on July 24, 1965 (Cowan v. Bolivar County Board of Education). Originally filed against the Bolivar County Board of Education on behalf of 131 students, the suit alleged that the district’s schools were racially segregated. Much like the desegregation processes of the 1960s and 1970s, the Cleveland School District, which sits in Bolivar County, struggled to merge school cultures as the 2017-18 school year—the first year of school under the new desegregation order. Reporting for *Mississippi Today*, Davis and Wright (2018) note,

East Side was known as the predominantly African-American high school, whereas

Cleveland High was about 60 percent African-American and 40 percent white. When the schools consolidated, the Cleveland High building became the new home for the new high school, bringing East Side students to an unfamiliar environment. That unfamiliarity became emphasized during homecoming week, when students were excited to add new traditions while holding onto a few old ones, too. But students from East Side felt their old traditions – pep rallies, coronations, and not extending the homecoming parade to the East Side of town, were neglected, they said.

In addition to the cultural issues, the Cleveland School District now faces declining enrollment and an estimated \$500,000 shortfall for the 2018-19 academic year (Davis, 2018). As a result, the district is considering layoffs, not unlike those described in the aforementioned school desegregation literature.

In a case study of a desegregated high school in Memphis, TN, Noblit and Collins (1978) highlight a seeming incompatibility between desegregation and public education, which may account for ongoing legal social and legal battles like those in Pitt County and the Cleveland School District four decades later. Lamenting the prospects of desegregation efforts, Noblit and Collins resign, “It seems inevitable that desegregation cannot be embraced as a goal for public school since it violates the historical purpose and function of the institution to discriminate between and control young people” (1978, p. 3). Said differently, if one of the chief aims of schools is to promote stratification, how is it possible to shape the system in a way that promotes equity? This is a concept commonly explored in CRT, which holds that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7).

Author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates extends the idea of structural discriminatory aims beyond schools. In *Why Do So Few Blacks Study the Civil War?* Coates (2012) implicates the function of the country in relegating Black Americans to the margins, remarking, “Our alienation was neither achieved in independence, nor stumbled upon by accident, but produced by

American design.” Here, Coates simultaneously holds America accountable and addresses the *public transcript* of the Civil War, writing,

The belief that the Civil War wasn’t for us was the result of the country’s long search for a narrative that could reconcile white people with each other, one that avoided what professional historians now know to be true: that one group of Americans attempted to raise a country wholly premised on property in Negroes, and that another group of Americans, including many Negroes, stopped them. In the popular mind, that demonstrable truth has been evaded in favor of a more comforting story of tragedy, failed compromise, and individual gallantry. For that more ennobling narrative, as for so much of American history, the fact of black people is a problem.

These ennobling narratives can be found throughout the education historical record. One movement that exemplifies the conflict between narrative and the reconciliation of that narrative is the educational excellence movement of the 1980s.

### **The Educational Excellence Movement**

In a world where countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, the future belongs to the nation that best educates its people. Period. We know this.

—President Barack Obama, *Remarks at the U.S. Department of Education*, July 24, 2009

As McCarthy (2007) explains, “The power of the presidency to shape national dialogue and social action is indubitably strong” (p. v). What is perhaps more powerful, however, is fear. In this section, I will highlight how the dual national dialogue shapers of the U.S. presidency and fear lead to unprecedented educational reforms in America. This section begins with a note on early presidential writings on education, moves through the ideological frames of subsequent presidents before and after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, and concludes with remarks on contemporary presidential rhetoric.

From the infancy of the United States, presidents have shown concern and interest in education as a policy matter. Their philosophies and related agendas have been wide-ranging. The first in this line of country leaders, George Washington, believed that the “best means of

forming a manly, virtuous, and happy people will be found in the right education of youth” (Lucas, 1999, p. 28), encouraged the study of the science of government, literature and the arts as a duty of good citizenry (Condie, 1813, p. 91; Manca, 2012, p. 176), and even expressed regret that American youth had to seek education in foreign countries (Sparks, 1836, p. 14).

In a letter dated April 25, 1788, Washington addresses education funding and the politics that surround it, writing “In a country like this... if there cannot be money found to answer the common purposes of education... it is evident that there is something amiss in the ruling political power” (Lucas, p. 29). Over time, as the economy of the country changed, so too would the discourse around education, leading to a series of reform efforts kicked off by the ennobling narrative of the educational excellence movement.

As Berube (1991) explains, from the time of Washington’s presidency through the early 1990s, the country’s economy changed significantly, signaling calls “to make education a crucial national responsibility” (p. 7). The author notes, “America went from an agricultural nation to a manufacturing nation, to a postindustrial nation, to a technological society. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century, Americans needed more and more education to be able to accomplish their economic tasks” (p. 7). As mentioned previously, millions of enslaved Africans provided much of the labor that supported this American enterprise. Following the Civil War and leading into World War II, industrial capitalism in America “entered an advanced stage: technology” (p. 8).

Just over a decade after World War II concluded, America—being led by President Dwight D. Eisenhower—looked on as the Soviet Union launched a satellite, Sputnik, into space. As Garber (2007) puts it,

The Sputnik launch changed everything. As a technical achievement, Sputnik caught the world’s attention and the American public off-guard... [t]he public feared that the

Soviets' ability to launch satellites also translated into the capability to launch ballistic missiles that could carry nuclear weapons from Europe to the U.S. (para. 4)

Having announced plans to launch an Earth-orbiting satellite two year earlier (U.S. Department of State), the United States government felt a need to overcome “[n]ational insecurity, wounded national pride, infighting, political grandstanding, clandestine plots, and ruthless media frenzy” (Dickson, 2001, p. 7).

As blame fell on schools for “America’s inferior position in space” (Berube, p. 39), funding for education reforms increased with the adoption of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (Rhodes, pp. 29-32). As Japan and West Germany became economic superpowers leading into the 1980s—with America facing increased global economic competition—the education excellence reform movement began to take form after the 1983 release of a report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Berube & Berube, 2007).

*A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) claimed that America’s educational system was failing in that schools were not preparing students to be competitive globally. Appearing just before the body of the main text, the report begins with a statement of commitment to equality:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself” (p. 4)

Playing on rising fear in the country, the report opens,

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.... What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. If an

unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. (p. 5)

The report—prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in education—calls for a move “toward reform and excellence throughout education” with excellence being defined at three levels: (a) the individual learner, (b) schools and colleges, and (c) society (p. 12). The authors ask that individual learners push their personal limits at school and ask that schools and colleges set high expectations, thereby preparing society to be able to “respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world” (p. 12).

In the first few years following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, critics of the excellence movement argued that although reform in public education had “become synonymous with ‘excellence.’” the national dialogue on excellence in education had not paid much attention to the question of what it would take “to guarantee that all students have a fair chance to meet the new standards now being imposed on them” (Toch, 1984, p. 174). As educators faced “the crucial task of translating general ideas of excellence into widespread improvements in the of quality instruction and student performance” (Honig, 1985, p. 675), they were also being charged with meeting the expectations imposed upon them by a “changing and diverse society” (Jones-Wilson, 1986, p. 32). For scholars like Jones-Wilson, *excellence* was becoming a “new code word for exclusion” (p. 33).

Despite “disagreements about what the education excellence movement is” and concerns that the focus on excellence “might undermine a previous 20-year focus on equity,” the movement continued on “with great vigor” (Odden, 1989, p. 377) into the late 1980s. In a 1988 report titled *Up from Excellence: The Impact of the Excellence Movement on Schools*, Wayson, Mitchell, Pinnell, and Landis discuss the heavy pressure school district officials faced to “get on board the bandwagon” of excellence-themed reforms, else they might “face a public whose

curiosity, if not animosity, had been aroused by a blitz of news about the need for excellence” (pp. 126-127). Many scholars see a direct thread to the federal pressures that come since.

On June 13, 1989, during a Senate subcommittee hearing on the Educational Excellence Act of 1989, then-Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos continued to highlight national education deficits brought to bear by *A Nation at Risk*. Secretary Cavazos remarks,

You’ve heard me talk about our education deficit in this country. The fact that we now outspend the rest of the world in education does not, in any way, make up for the fact that when it comes to solid results, our students and our schools simply aren’t getting the job done. (*Educational Excellence Act of 1989*, 1989, p. 2)

Although the Educational Excellence Act was designed to, among other things, provide financial awards to effective schools and teachers, expand Federal aid to magnet schools, provide college math and science scholarships, and provide endowment grants for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Steadman & Riddle, 1989, p. 3), many expressed concern about the prospect of increased school segregation since the Act granted parents and students a great degree of choice in choosing their schools (p. 3). As it has been stated previously, Black families tended to bear the burden of desegregation while White families have historically sought to keep Black families and families of low-wealth out of their schools.

In a 52-second campaign clip, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump drives an even deeper stake into the stratification by design Noblit & Collins (1978) lament, echoing a sentiment quite similar to Secretary Cavazos:

So, Common Core is a total disaster. We can’t let it continue. We are rated 28 in the world, the United States--think of it--28 in the world. And, frankly, we spend far more per pupil than any other country in the world, by far. It’s not even a close second. So, here we are: we spend more money, and we’re rated 28. Third world countries are ahead of us. We’re going to end Common Core. We’re going to have education—an absolute priority. (Donald J. Trump for President, 2016)

Although Trump uses different words, the idea is the same as that of President Barack Obama message about being out-educated and out-competed from the epigraph that opened this section.

Critics of Obama's educational agenda say that his plan was "based on the same rhetoric (fear mongering) and reasoning" (Gibson & Ross, 2011, p. 236) that gave rise to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Moreover, detractors assert that the American education budget is a "war budget" (Gibson & Ross, p. 37) and that Obama, his predecessors, and those that are to come after him "have chosen sides in the class war, the international war of the rich on the poor, which the rich recognize, and the poor, at least in the United States, do not—yet" (p. 37). From the proposed creation of national academic standards under George H.W. Bush in the early 1990s to Bill Clinton's move to shift the development of standards to the states in the mid to late 1990s, the cycle of reform continued with President George W. Bush and No Child Left Behind (Jennings, 2015, pp. 66-72).

### **"A Model for the Nation": Excellence becomes Accountability**

Although George W. Bush signed NCLB into law in 2002, much of the work began with the Clinton presidential administration. Lipman (2004) asserts that Clinton's vision of education reform was influenced by what was going on in the Chicago Public School District at the time. Clinton remarked that the system was "a model for the nation" (p. 2) in its use of standards, high-stakes testing, and accountability; sentiments which are expressed directly in the language of NCLB. Kumashiro (2008) summarizes these sentiments as four central frames:

1. *Standards*: We need to have high standards for students, teachers, and schools.

2. *Accountability*: We need to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable for reaching those standards and demonstrating that they did so on such measures as standardized tests.
3. *Sanctions*: There will be sanctions for not meeting those standards and rewards for doing so.
4. *Choice*: In schools that do not meet standards, parents should have the choice to move their children elsewhere. (p. 28)

Lipman, adding that Chicago had also become “a standard bearer... for centralized regulation of teachers and schools, and, less publicly, for stratified school experiences” (p. 2), draws a direct line from the Chicago-inspired reform work to NCLB and U.S. education policy as a conflict of power relations at beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (pp. 2-17).

Critics of school accountability argue that too much emphasis is put on high-stakes test results, contending that no single assessment can effectively serve both accountability and classroom instruction goals simultaneously (Moon, 2009). Some critics cite bias in assessments as a reason to de-emphasize standardized test results (Meier, 2002) while others go further and argue that the high-stakes testing is chronically racist and classist (Johnson, Johnson, Farenga, & Ness, 2008, pp. 31-70). Given my experience in developing state mathematics tests, I found Meier’s take on bias to be quite refined. Usually, when I hear arguments against tests by virtue of bias, an argument is made for cultural bias. Whereas this may be true to an extent, Meier (2002) expands this notion and remarks that class differences account for a great deal of bias in assessments (p. 47). Meier (2002) writes, “The bias is in the nature of the tool. Any standardized tool in which neither the test taker nor his teacher is allowed to exercise human judgment—to

explain, justify, adapt for this or that kid's particular background knowledge—carries such bias” (p. 111).

Gluckman (2002) argues that standardized testing potentially compromises classroom instruction since teachers put their regular curricula aside in order to prepare for tests (p. 37). Some opponents of the accountability rhetoric inherent in NCLB contend that reforms involving raising test scores may serve their purpose, but the reforms are short-lived. Additionally, such reforms typically consist of schools purchasing reform packages from vendors who claim to have proven systems (Jennings, Noblit, Brayboy, & Cozart, 2007) but fail to deliver (Payne & Kaba, 2007). The concept of sanctions has been a point of contention in many schools and school districts and is largely responsible for reform efforts since school and school district funding is often tied to high-stakes test results (Rose, 2010; Texley, 2010). Many school choice critics hold that allowing parents to move their children out of a low-performing school into a better-performing school creates a socio-economic divide between students who can enjoy the privilege and those who remain at their respective home schools (Sacks, 2007).

Noting that NCLB is an act heavily based on testing, Lakoff (2004) questions its true intent, arguing, “Once the testing frame applies not just to students but also to *schools*, then schools can, metaphorically, fail—and be punished for failing by having their allowance cut. Less funding in turn makes it harder for the schools to improve, which leads to a cycle of failure and ultimately elimination for many public schools” (p. 32), leading to the eventual privatization of public schooling. So, in an effort to stay afloat, many school districts with low-performing schools turn to moderate and often extreme measures to ensure fiscal stability and academic progress. These measures are based on the premise that if test scores look good, then schools will look good. If the

school looks good, then the benefits of being a “good” school will surely come (Niesz, 2010).

For a school like Princeville Elementary, which has historically been labeled low performing, I wonder what this process looks like. Despite students missing 19 school days due to hurricane damage, flooding, and having to relocate, the school decisively met growth targets in the 2016-17 school year (Harper, 2017a). However, the school still received an F rating from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2017). This begs the question, what does reform actually look like in Princeville? More specifically, how do people in Princeville experience that reform? What possible futures do the people of Princeville imagine? What do they make of the “doing” that has been done? These are key motivations for pursuing this study.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONTEXTUALIZING EDUCATION REFORM IN NORTH CAROLINA**

According to M.C.S. Noble (1930), educator and former dean of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the subject of the earliest public record mention of education in the province of North Carolina relates to indigent orphans being trained to read and write. Commenting on the economic motivations for this move, Noble writes, “By providing for the proper rearing of the destitute orphans it was made certain that they would never become a public charge” and, “with a trade and the ability to read and write, be not only self-supporting but also more useful members of society” (p. 6). Other mentions of education relate to chartered private schools supported by funding from the province to encourage patronage. The two practices of educating indigent orphans and encouraging private schools “expanded slowly with the years until they met each other, merged, and blended into a single system of free public schools supported by taxation for the children of all classes, rich and poor alike” (p. v). The threading together of a system of public of education that stretches across class and economic divides and the apparent unwinding of that cord are central foci in this study.

Race further complicates the system in that African Americans in North Carolina “found themselves encircled by a number of laws and practices that forced upon them an extremely limited compass in which to live” (Franklin, 1995, p. 163) in the early to late 1800s and still face manifold inequalities in public education today. Data show inequalities in North Carolina along racial and economic lines in assignment to gifted programs, assignment to special education programs, access to advanced courses, access to highly qualified teachers, student suspension

rates, school closures and consolidations, and segregative student assignment plans (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2013; Hui, 2018; Foxx, 2013; McMillian, Fuller, Hill, Duch, & Darity, 2015; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2017). This chapter highlights major shifts in North Carolina education that have shaped the current system and summarizes the majoritarian narrative (Noblit & Jay, 2010) of education reform. The chapter concludes with a review of educational trends in Princeville and a discussion of the ways in which the majoritarian story has played out in the town.

### **Major Moves in North Carolina Education Reform**

According to the North Carolina State Constitution, “The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right” (North Carolina General Assembly, p. 2). Yet, debates about what this right looks like have lingered for decades. As mentioned previously, the first normal school for African Americans in North Carolina was established in Fayetteville in 1877. Other such schools continued to open through the early 1900s, yet scholars of the time acknowledged that they were still “unequal to the needs” (Noble, 1930, p. 427). Despite these shortcomings, the North Carolina was still viewed as “first in education reform” (Coble, 2000, p. 66) for its nation-leading efforts in building rural consolidated schools, offering state-supported training and retraining for workers in new and expanding industries in the 1960s, and even opening the first state-established and state-supported performing arts school in the nation in 1965. However, according to Coble, the state began to lead “a volatile existence with education programs funded one minute but disbanded the next” (p. 66) from the 1980s through the 1990s.

Characterizing North Carolina’s education policy of the time as “random acts of reform,” Drew (1997) writes, “If any state could be faulted for trying too hard to improve schools, it’s

North Carolina. Over the past dozen years, whenever education reformers have hatched a new idea, Tarheel [*sic*] leaders have stepped up to give it a test spin” (p. 177). These reforms were fueled by “growing concern with America’s educational system” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1993, p. 20) and educational inadequacies highlighted in *A Nation at Risk*. In 1985, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education (SBE) to adopt a basic education program. The program, simply titled The Basic Education Program, centered on “a curriculum in the areas of the arts, communication, media and computer skills, second languages, healthful living, mathematics, science, social studies, and vocational education” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1993, p. 21) and brought end-of-course testing to North Carolina’s schools.

In 1989, the General Assembly adopted the School Improvement Accountability Act (SIAA), which charged local schools and local school systems with “creating local school improvement plans, including measurable milestones and goals” (p. 22). The original SIAA was amended in 1992 and shifted the accountability focus to teachers and school building level plans. These three-year school level plans had to be reviewed by NCDPI and needed approval from the SBE. School districts were held accountable for student achievement through a State Report Card, which began in 1990. These reports provided “information on student achievement, local school systems characteristics and how well each local system’s achievement compares with similar systems throughout North Carolina” (p. 23). This shift also marked the beginning of end-of-grade testing for students in grades three through eight, which began in 1993.

Borrowing language from *A Nation at Risk*—and echoing the fear of a potentially diminished economic competitiveness caused by it—the General Assembly, in 1995, “recognized the need for a new phase of educational reform” (North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction, 1999, p. 13). “Community and business leaders,” according to NCDPI, “recognized that too many high school students were graduating from public school without the skills and knowledge necessary to become successful workers and productive citizens” (p. 13). This revelation led to a legislative directive to the SBE to develop a plan to make better progress in student achievement and called for even higher accountability. As a result, the SBE launched the ABCs of Public Education—a comprehensive plan for improving schools in the state with a focus on (a) strong accountability, (b) teaching the basics, and (c) local control (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2006). As Hughes (2006) notes, this reform attached high stakes to student testing, with one possible outcome being that students could be held back in a grade for failing a one-shot test (p. 28). Moreover, this reform also brought financial and social incentives to schools.

In terms of financial incentives, certified staff became eligible for bonuses up to \$1,500 and teacher assistants could receive up to \$500 for student test outcomes. From a social perspective, top-performing schools—as measured by student performance and growth metrics—began receiving public recognition from the state through annually published lists. Conversely, schools and districts also became subject to sanctions and public shaming, a practice that continues now. At Allen Middle School in Greensboro, NC, for example, all of the staff—including teachers and custodial staff—had to reapply for their jobs in 2013 because of poor student test performance (Khrais, 2015). Following 2013 legislation that requires School Performance Grades to be included in the North Carolina School Report Cards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015), all traditional and public charter schools began receiving grades of A-F. Although Allen Middle School Principal Sheila Gorham rated her

school as a B in an interview with nprEd, the school received a grade of D that year (Khrais, 2015).

### **Defining the Majoritarian Story of Education Reform**

Hughes (2006) notes that these accountability and high-stakes measures were “part of the ‘excellence’ backlash to school desegregation” (p. 28) and that rural Blacks were, as they are now, are “still largely unwanted, misunderstood, silenced, and miseducated” (p. 28). Others contend that these reforms were more than a backlash, arguing that they were an updated declaration that schools are meant to serve corporate interests and, by extension, the economy (Philipsen & Noblit, 1993). These are the moves that herald the majoritarian messaging of school reform in North Carolina; that the “cure” for the ailment of mediocrity is “a full dose of ‘excellence’” (Jones-Wilson, 1986, p. 9) and to this end the school must be turned around (Thompson, Brown, Townsend, Henry, & Fortner, 2011). Moreover, if you are deemed not excellent, we will keep testing you, require more accountability from you, and publicly shame you. Do this, as the message goes, because the economy needs you. Princeville has been subject to this messaging for as long as there has been language to describe it.

### **Contextualizing the Princeville School**

In 1997, the Supreme Court of North Carolina held that all children in the state had a right to a “sound basic education” (*Leandro v. State of North Carolina*, 1997, p. 2) and that state of North Carolina is ultimately responsible for actively protecting that right, as opposed to local school districts. The Court defines a “sound basic education” as one that provides students with at least:

- (1) sufficient ability to read, write, and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society;
- (2) sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices with regard to issues that affect the student personally or affect the student's community, state, and nation;
- (3) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to successfully engage in post-secondary education or vocational training; and
- (4) sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in further formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society. (p. 5)

Embedded here, again, is the majoritarian message of education reform. If the message is not clear from this definition, the Court provides further clarity, asserting, "An education that does not serve the purpose of preparing students to participate and compete in the society in which they live and work is devoid of substance and is constitutionally inadequate" (p. 2).

In the same year that this ruling came down, Princeville Montessori appeared on North Carolina's first list of low-performing schools along with 121 schools across the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1997a). In fact, Princeville ranked 119<sup>th</sup> out of the 122 schools on that list with a performance composite score of 16.67 out of a possible 100. "Low-Performing Schools," according to NCDPI, "are those that fail to meet their expected growth standard and have less than 50% of their students performing at or above grade level." In addition to the growth and performance standards, schools must meet certain testing

requirements. At least 98% of the students who are eligible to take the test must be tested. Schools that violate the testing requirements are not eligible for incentive awards.

For the 15 lowest performing schools on the list, North Carolina devoted financial resources and personnel in the form of Assistance Teams to conduct needs assessments. The teams identified seven common challenges across the sites: (a) low academic achievement, (b) ineffective instructional programs, (c) low academic expectations, (d) lack of parental or community involvement, (e) insufficient staff development, (f) lack of communication, and (g) a need to develop a positive school culture (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1999, pp. 33-36). The Assistance Team in Princeville implemented a new schedule that made provisions for uninterrupted blocks of instructional time, conducted parent workshops and information sessions on assessments, trained teachers on how to disaggregate assessment data, and developed student reading and math assessments for to be administered every six weeks (pp. 40-43). In summary, the solutions amount to making sure students spend more time preparing for tests, making sure parents understand the importance of tests, making sure teachers understand the data produced by the tests, and giving students more tests. The majoritarian narrative, if nothing else, is focused and persistent.

The focused and persistent attention to tests did pay off, however. In the subsequent school year, 1997-98, Princeville's composite score nearly tripled to 46.7, and the school's status changed from Low-Performing to Exemplary. The following year, then-governor James B. Hunt issued a challenge to the state, "Let's commit ourselves to this ambitious goal: By the year 2010, North Carolina will build the best system of public schools of any state in America. By the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we will be the first in education" (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2018). As Figure \$ shows, Princeville appeared poised to take up the

challenge as its composite scores would continue to rise through 2000. However, the scores would drop significantly in 2005-06 and 2007-08 after the introduction, respectively, of more rigorous math and reading standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014, p. 66). Princeville remained in a Low-Performing or Priority status through 2012 (see Appendix D).

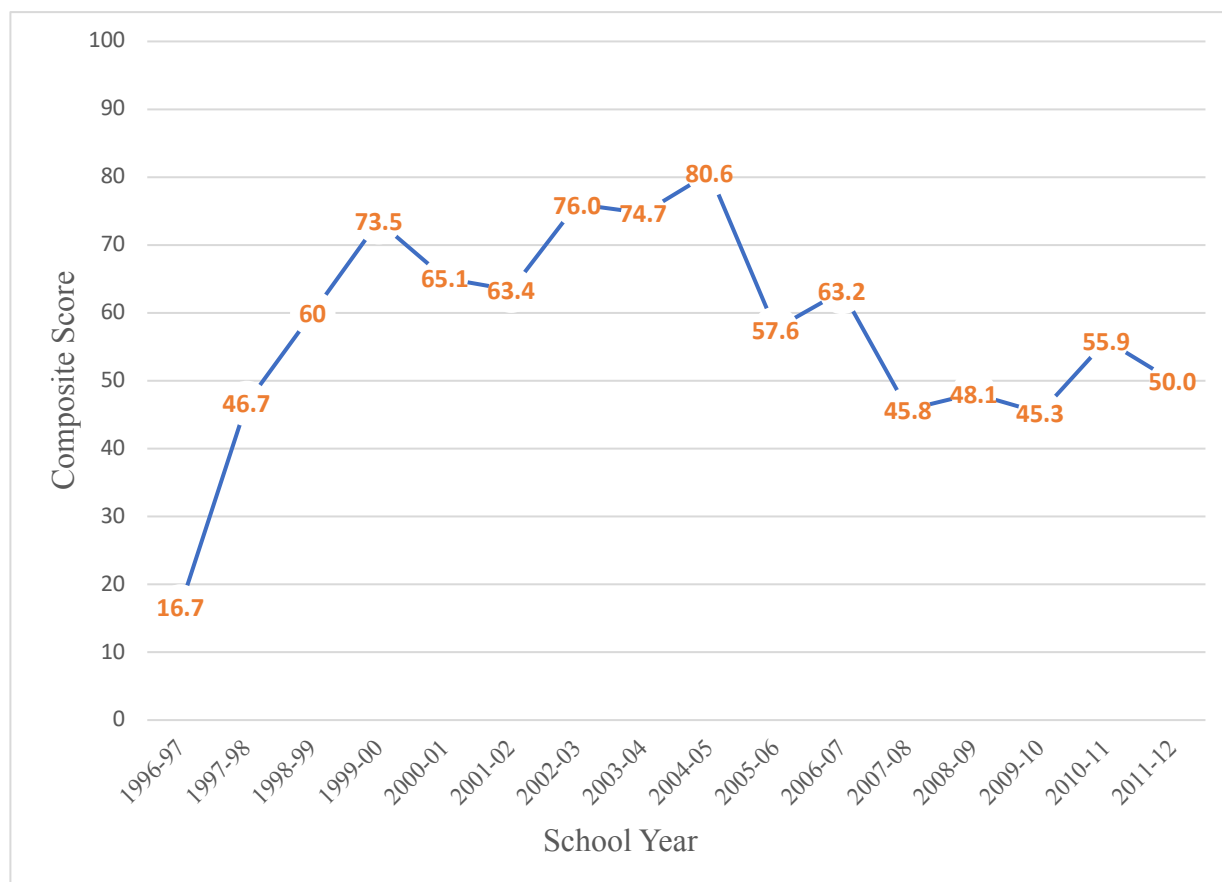


Figure 4. Princeville School ABCs of Public Education Composite Scores, 1997-2012. Data compiled from ABCs of Public Education Historical Data, retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/>

In 2010, North Carolina adopted the Common Core State Standards, which shifted the reform focus to the development of resources and training for teachers on the new content standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014, p. 3). For other content areas, the state developed the North Carolina Essential

Standards, which, together with the Common Core, formed the new North Carolina Standard Course of Study. This process was informed in part by (a) the North Carolina Business Committee on Education, which “collaborates with public schools’ decision makers to encourage the implementation of policies and programs that will result in higher student achievement and greater economic competitiveness” (p. 20); and (b) ACT, a nonprofit group that provided the framework for North Carolina’s college- and career-ready standards (ACT, 2013), further supporting the majoritarian story of corporate interest in education.

As part of the Appropriations Act of 2013, the North Carolina General Assembly (2013) passed the Excellent Public Schools Act, which calls for the annual awarding of individual A-F school performance grades (p. 86). For elementary schools, the grades are based 80% on end-of-grade and end-of-course test results and 20% on school growth as measured by EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System). As Table 1 shows, Princeville has been “awarded” a grade of F every year since the implementation of this system (see Appendix E for reading, math, and science performance grade detail).

Table 1

*Princeville Elementary School Performance Grades, 2013-2017*

Year	School SPG		Reading SPG		Math SPG		Performance Composite	
	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	Grade	Score	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient
2013	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15.2
2014	F	31	F	32	F	35	13.5	21.8
2015	F	33	F	33	F	37	16.0	23.2
2016	F	30	F	25	F	31	12.7	20.2
2017	F	33	F	28	F	38	13.9	20.3

*Note.* SPG – School Performance Grade. Data compiled from ABCs of Public Education Historical Data, retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability>

Almost as if the specter of the first Low Performing designation in 1997 has lingered, Princeville's 2017-18 school improvement plan (SIP) calls back language from the report of its original Assistance Team, "The Princeville Elementary School community will collaborate to help all students reach their potential by maintaining high expectations and a safe nurturing school environment while respecting and valuing diversity" (Princeville Elementary School, 2018, p. 1). This wave of reform is guided by NCDPI's District and School Transformation (DST) division. DST purports to, "through a collaborative effort across multiple divisions," focus on "building the capacity of all staff serving in the lowest performing districts and schools across the state to support the improvement of the school performance grade and EVAAS growth score" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018a). So, in addition to its focus and persistence, the majoritarian narrative is replicative of itself.

For this study, the relevant question now is about how effective the majoritarian narrative is at its replication and the degree to which this replication substantively manifests in the educational ecosystems it was designed to transform. The narratives presented in the next chapter highlight how a sample of the Princeville community have experienced education reform. The narrators collectively reflect on an approximate span of 50 years of Princeville School history and reform. Their varied experiences provide insight into what educational shifts are recognized over time in the rural community writ large and the degree to which major storm events such as hurricanes and flooding relate to reform efforts. Moreover, these narratives provide a base from which to compare the community's understanding of education reform with the constructions of contemporary reform movements.

## CHAPTER 6: PRINCEVILLE COMMUNITY NARRATIVES

We been through it all, but we won't move.  
Thought we would fall, but we won't lose.  
Live from Princeville; heard the name? Gotta watch us.  
Live from Princeville; hurricanes couldn't stop us.

We had our own dreams, so we made our own thing.  
We made our own rules and made our own schools.

—L.E.G.A.C.Y., Cesar Comanche, and Median, *This Side of the River*, 2006

As mentioned previously, stories are important because they allow narrators to “document the significance for social action of individual subjectivity as it is constructed and reconstructed over the lifetime” (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p. 15). Moreover, they serve to confirm narrators’ experiences and “bear witness to their lived reality in the face of a dominant culture that distorts, stereotypes and marginalizes that reality” (Bell, 2003, p. 6). Ethnohistorians, however, have traditionally had limited access to stories from the perspectives of the groups under their study (Galloway, 2006). Instead, these stories typically come from a colonizer’s perspective. In an attempt to valorize the key informants (G. Noblit, personal communication, March 21, 2018) and reduce to the extent possible the “colonial gaze on black bodies” (Logan, 2010, p. 37) commonly found in education research, I constructed eight narratives from the oral histories I conducted with key informants.

These narratives serve as counternarratives to the majoritarian story of education reform and “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). These eight narratives describe life in Princeville,

shed light on the Princeville School, and provide an understanding of how people in Princeville have experienced education reform. Since each story is unique, the subsections noted are not necessarily parallel across the narratives. For example, a subsection may be titled *History of Education* in one narrative and in another may simply read *Education* or even *Princeville School*. Each narrative is preceded by an introductory note about the key informant and is followed by a summary of the respective narrative and highlights what is spoken and what is unspoken about education reform.

### **Samuel's Story**

*On one of my visits to Princeville, I decided to stop by the temporary town hall, which had been set up in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. I asked one of the employees there if she knew of anyone who had attended Princeville Elementary School that might be available for me to interview. The kind and warm employee, whom I had met in Princeville previously, pulled out a sheet of notebook paper and began to jot down a list of names and numbers, written in purple ink. She provided me with a list of seven names. After looking over the list for about a minute, I reached out to the first person on the list, Samuel. Samuel was born in the early 1960s and has lived in Princeville all his life. He is married and has three children, the eldest of which also attended Princeville School. Through rounds of laughter and tears, Samuel walked me through growing up in Princeville and his vision for the future of the school and the broader community.*

#### **Growing up in Princeville.**

I have been a lifelong resident of Princeville. My parents moved to Princeville around 1959. They moved on Church Street and that's where I was born. I wasn't born in the house, but we lived on Church Street. I live outside the extra territorial jurisdiction right now. Growing up, I

always felt like Princeville was just like any other town. As a child, you don't realize where you're growing up, whether you're in New York or Princeville.

We had a lot of fun in Princeville. The neighbors were always friendly. We always had plenty of activities. There were a lot of kids in the neighborhood. As for me, our house was one of the places where a lot of the kids came and played. There was a lot of camaraderie and a lot of love. As I look back on it, it was outstanding. You couldn't ask for a better place. When we were kids, we would walk down the street, and when we saw an elderly person—whatever we were doing—we'd stop and speak and then start back new to whatever we were doing after we passed that house. It was just an amazing time for me.

We made up our own games. There was a game we called "Switches," where we would go to a tree and get a branch off, which is what our mom would use to whip us. In our game we had about two or three people who were the switcher, and the rest of the people had to run. We would run all over the neighborhood so we wouldn't get hit by the switch. We played hide-and-go-seek. We played marbles, basketball. We did something all year round. Football, baseball. We were outside all the time and we enjoyed it.

Our neighborhood—as far as the housing was concerned—the conditions were very, very bad. I can imagine now that some of those houses were built by former slaves. That's how bad the houses were, but they were affordable for our people. I remember some houses were called shotgun because you could look in the front door and look straight out the back. Those houses were still up when I was growing up as a little boy. The condition of the houses was terrible, but we didn't realize how bad it was. The streets were terrible. Anybody who had any type of car during that time, they would not drive on the roads in Princeville because it would cause

alignment problems. My family was one of the few who had cars in the neighborhood. Both my mom and dad had cars. I didn't know how blessed we were at the time.

I would never look down on anybody, though. I was always humble, but my neighbors didn't have anything. The majority didn't have anything. They were single parents. We had mom and dad. My mom is originally from Speed, NC. It's about 10 miles from Princeville, and my dad originally came from Enfield, NC. It's probably about 20 miles from here. When they got married, they moved from place to place, and then they settled in Princeville.

My guess is that they moved in order to find affordable housing. Plus, the family started growing. I'm the third child, and my grandma and my granddad used to live with them. The family started getting bigger, so they needed a bigger house. I moved into the oldest Black town in America, and nobody talked about that. They didn't even know it until I probably became a teenager, when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For me, the pride started growing then. That's when I started attending town meetings. I would say, "Hey, we need some basketball courts" and stuff like that. At those meetings, I was getting fed Princeville history then and I didn't realize it.

However, Princeville didn't have a great reputation. When I went into military service, when people asked us where we lived, we automatically said Tarboro. That was for two reasons: one of them was because we were so close to Tarboro and Princeville doesn't have its own zip code, and the other reason was that for many people, Princeville was not a good place to be from. The people from Tarboro called us who were across the river the river rats. That was because we were infested by mosquitoes. The reason why we had those types of problems was because of the repeated floods. Every time the water would leave, it left puddles of water everywhere. So, that's an infested place for mosquitoes and rats to grow. But right about the end of my military career, I

think the lightbulb hit me. I'm from Princeville. The oldest Black town in America, that's where I'm from.

The older you get, the more value you have of your past, and you look back on it and you say things like, "Oh man, that was my best friend, and now I see why I hung around him" because you gain that knowledge as you get older. I couldn't have imagined the things that I was doing back then and how it was going to shape me to the person I am now.

I don't like to talk about myself, though. I'd rather someone else say things about me, but if somebody twisted my arm and made me say something about me, or if I was standing outside the door and I wanted them to say something, it would be something like "That guy over there, he's okay. He's humble. He'll give you the shirt off his back. He'll listen to you. He don't care who you are, what you are or what color you are. He will help you. He will be there for you." I've got to give credit to my grandma and my mom and dad for that. They instilled that in me, and my community shaped it for me. It made me that type of person. They said, "This is how you're supposed to act."

### **Staying in, leaving from, and returning to Princeville.**

I'll always be honest, I think people stay in Princeville because of the affordable housing. They can't go anywhere else. That's one of the reasons people stay. The other reason is the ones like my mom, they could have gone somewhere else, but when they went looking for houses, it just so happened that they found another one in Princeville. They could have gone outside of Princeville. Did they have that thought of wanting to get out of Princeville? No, we didn't have that. We stayed in that house for a long time, and the condition there was not that good. The whole town didn't install water and sewer until about 1976 or 1977. Can you imagine that?

I think people leave Princeville for the same reason they leave New York: it's not for everybody. The people who were born in Princeville, when they come back home, they ride around and say "That's where I used to live at. This is Princeville." Some of them have even done what I didn't do when I was in the military. They say "Hey, where are you from?" "I'm from Princeville, NC." Especially now since the 1999 flood, it really pushed them up. It gave them a little bit of light. Some people would like to come home to Princeville, but the opportunities are not right for them to come. If they are used to living a certain kind of life—wherever they may be—when they come here, they're looking, and they want to, but they can't. There aren't as many economic and social opportunities here.

When I came home from service, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to be home—and not home because this is Princeville. I wanted to be home because it was close to my mom and dad, and any time they needed anything, I'm just five minutes away. I could go to the nearest store, and I could see my friend. When I go to Walmart now, I'm going to see someone I know. That's why I said I'm going home. In Oklahoma, you go out to the store, and you come back home because you don't know anybody. When I go to Walmart here, my wife says, "What took you so long?" "Well, you know, I saw so-and-so, and I hadn't seen him in a long time." That's what I wanted to do. That's the life I like living.

My oldest son, who also attended Princeville School, is in California. He's the opposite of me. He said he's getting up out of here. He's a go-getter in a way. Princeville is not big enough for him. He stayed in Raleigh for a little while. He's a glamorous guy. He's young right now. He wants to be out with people and have places to go. Princeville is nothing to him. He said that early on. I was like "Yes!" in the back of my mind. "I want you to leave, but at the same time, don't forget where you come from." He had big dreams. We were living in a single-wide

trolley at the time, and I would take him to Rocky Mount to see houses that cost a million, two million dollars, and he said, “That’s what I want to do, dad.” I said, “Okay.”

I want him to live and have a better life than I did. The lightbulb didn’t turn on quick enough for me. I was probably 28 or 29 when I figured out, “Aww man, I could do this?” I wanted that lightbulb to switch on quicker for him than it did for me, and it did. If it had clicked for me, would I have stayed in Princeville? I don’t know, but if I had stayed in Princeville instead of going to the military right out of high school, I still would be a better person; not that I was a bad person. There’s nothing wrong with living in a single-wide trolley home. I kept it nice. That’s what I wanted at the time. You know what I didn’t know? I could have bought a house. I was not taught that. I could have bought a house. Out of the service, I lived with my mom for a little while when I was 25-26 years old. Then, I got married and the hot thing that was out was mobile homes. I had great credit, I had a car, and I was living with my mom. The first thing I went and looked for was a nice single-wide trolley.

### **Beginnings of education in Princeville.**

I could go a little bit back to the 1800s when the slaves came over. The slaves may not have known what was what, but they wanted to be educated. They went and they talked to this guy, I don’t know who it was, but they said, “We’re going to get a young lady to come down.” Other people said, “No, this guy from Jamaica; let’s get him. He’s good.” I can’t recall his name, but he came, and when he came, he educated the slaves. He was one of the ones that helped write the Princeville town charter.

Later on, another one came, and they just kept coming. Sometime in 1912, they built the place where the museum is now. That particular school may have started in the late 1800s or

something, but that particular building was built in the 1900s. That's what we called the old school, but they called it the graded school.

### **Remembering the Princeville School.**

My time at Princeville Elementary School—or just the Princeville School—were my golden years. It shaped me. The reason why I like seeing women now with long hair is because my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, she was light-skinned, and she had long hair. She was the prettiest lady I had ever seen. Light-skin women with long hair is what I liked.

I didn't know it at the time, but the school was a safe haven for us to go. We went there, and there was no animosity going on. Of course, there were no Whites there. I didn't know what was going on. The only thing I knew was that I went to school, I saw my buddies, and I went home and the next day, you go back and do it again.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, which is when integration came to the district, I was excited because I always wanted to go to Pattillo because my brother was there. Pattillo was a Black school in Tarboro. Princeville went from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, but we had the option to go to Pattillo if we wanted to at a certain grade. I didn't get that chance to go to Pattillo when they integrated because another school between them and that was Bridgers.

I was at Princeville School from kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. We had a White kindergarten teacher. The only thing I noticed is that she was my teacher. My next White teacher was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, at Bridgers School. When I went to Bridgers School, I cannot think of an incident where I just looked at someone of the opposite color and just said, "Hey, there's a White guy." I can't think of an incident. Only thing I know was that we moved to another school, and I didn't know why.

After 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I went to Pattillo for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Then, I left there and went to C. B. Martin Middle School. At the time, it was 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>. Then after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I went to Tarboro High School. That's at the old Tarboro building at the time, then we shifted over when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade to the new Tarboro High School building where it's at now. I have never, that I know of, had a racial incident in school.

I didn't know anything else. We were innocent then. My mom and dad told me to treat everyone right. I've never known any racial incidents that were discussed by my mom and dad to this day. Someone might come in and say, "So-and-so did this," but I'm just like, "Okay." I don't know if I don't remember or if it wasn't discussed.

During the time that I recognized that Princeville was the oldest Black town in America, though, that's when I said it out loud, "I'm Black, and I'm proud." But when they were singing that song, it was just a song to me. I didn't realize it. It had a good beat to it. "Black power," I didn't understand that stuff.

We did have one incident outside the school, I don't know the year. If you look it up, it's called the "Tarboro 3." These 3 guys from Tarboro got accused of raping a White girl, and they sentenced them to death, and they almost got it, but some prominent lawyer came down and took over the case and got them out of the situation. During that time, these guys would come and say, "Don't go to Tarboro and shop. Don't go to the White man's shop." I remember that part. I still didn't understand what they were talking about. The KKK is coming to Princeville, so I'm like, "Just close the door; I'm scared." They had marches, and they came to the churches and things like that. Of course, I didn't go because I was too small, but that was the most racial thing that I ever heard, and I still didn't understand.

What I liked most about Princeville School was just being with my friends. When you're in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, you don't think about much of anything. Maybe in hindsight, looking at my teacher was pretty good. I remember looking at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he was shot in 1968, but I can't recall anything in particular that happened. I was eight or nine years old at the time. I just remember is everybody in the school sitting down looking and seeing the way it was so quiet. Even though we were in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, we knew the magnitude of what happened. Or, maybe something came over us to make us know the magnitude. It might just have been something that God willed on us that said, "Hey, everybody keep quiet on this, because this is going to be important one of these days."

#### **From paddle boards to school boards.**

I've noticed, just helping my daughter with homework, that I can't do the math. There are some different formulas. I was sitting up there one day, and I almost got mad. She asked me how to do something, and it was a simple problem to me, and I can't remember what it was. I'll give you an example: like  $10 + 10 = 20$ , and she said, "Dad, you don't do that like that." I said, "What are you talking about?" I'm getting all upset with her. That's how you do so-and-so. She said, "Dad, you're not supposed to do it like that." She started crying. Then, I backed up, and I said, "Show me." And she ended up having a different formula. I said, "I'm sorry. Wow."

Other than that, to me, I think the teachers were more caring back then. The children were more respectful. We were scared of our teachers in a respectful way. They had to look after all of our children. I remember a guy who always was bad, and the teacher was understanding. She told us, "You better stop. Don't do that." And she would always go up to him. I never picked at those guys like that. I always find myself going towards those guys when people weren't looking and saying, "Hey, I want to be your friend."

Of course, where I was going, spanking was in the school. They don't allow that anymore. In 2018, the thought of that is not even allowed. Corporal punishment is over. Those are the types of reforms that first come to my mind. I just can't think of any that really come to my mind right now.

I worked at a newspaper, and school board meetings was the most boring thing that I could attend, and I still feel that way. Going to a school board meeting was just like watching paint dry, so no I would never want to go to the school board meetings. I'm trying to think of something that changed, and I can't think of any.

### **Needs of the children of Princeville.**

The children of Princeville need everything that I didn't get. Now, was it my fault for not getting it or was it the school's fault? Just like I didn't know about home ownership versus having a trailer, some of that has to reflect back on your parents, too. I had the best parents in the world. Nobody can convince me that my dad dropped out of school in 10th grade. My mom graduated from school. They taught me something more valuable than education: moral values and good work ethics. If you have those two things, you can go places. The school can't teach that. That's got to come from home.

I'll tell you where I went with my good moral values and good work ethic. When I was in the service, I was quiet. I didn't say anything. I did exactly what they told me to do. Before my three years in the military was up, I went to the soldier of the month board, and I passed it went for E-5. I passed that, but before they put it on the E-5, I went out. I wish I had stayed just to see how far I could have gotten. The only thing I wanted was to get out and go to work. I found a job in a factory. There's nothing wrong with working in a factory. I would do it again. I didn't know

how to get out. I loved taking pictures. I loved sports. It just so happened that they needed a stringer for *The Daily Southerner* newspaper, so I started taking pictures.

A stringer is a person who is a part-time employee for a newspaper who just goes on certain assignments. I started taking pictures, and I think after about a month, they said, “How about writing?” I was terrible in English. I said, “No, you’ve got the wrong one.” So, they convinced me to start writing. Next thing you know, a job opened up: photographer/reporter. It was for the cops and courts, I started helping them up. I jumped right on it. While I was at the newspaper, I treated everybody like I want to be treated, even when I had to write a bad story. I went to work on time. My employer never had a problem with me. That was because of the moral values and good work ethics I learned from my parents.

### **Bridging the school and the community.**

Parents should be more involved in their children’s activities. Don’t wait until you get a report that your child is going to fail, then you go to the school and say, “Hey, what’s wrong here?” Also, being more informed is helpful. Your child is not bringing a book bag home every day? Look in that book bag. You’re going to see whether your child is passing or failing. Every once in a while, go there and surprise the teacher. If you surprise the teacher, and maybe the teacher is slacking, he’s going to say, “Well I don’t know. I’ve got to treat his son right because he might come up here. If Joe’s dad is not coming up there, then the teacher can just say, “Joe, go sit down, shut up!”

I also think the school should provide more activities involving their community. They don’t have the Parent-Teacher Organizations like they used to. We need more fun events for the community. What I think that would do, especially for the parents, is that they will see a different type of interaction with the teacher, and the teacher will see different type of interactions with

the parent. When the children see the teacher and the parents interacting in a good way, then, hopefully, that will spread out into the classroom. If you've got a parent always talking about "That teacher ain't worth nothing" and so on, and a teacher that's implying it about a parent but not saying it, then you've got a recipe for disaster for that kid, because that kid is going to play off one person or the other.

The school also needs to be transparent to the whole community. If you've got low test scores, don't beat around the bush. Try to fix the problem. When a school is about to close down, then the communities will get together and say, "We need to do something about it." But the transparency needs to be there before getting to that point. If there's a state test that a lot of students didn't do well on, then the school should be transparent in communicating that to the community and say, "This is what's going on."

They have a tough job, though, because if I got a bad kid, and I send him to school every day just to get him out of the house and he's disrupting class and they can't teach class because of him and then you've got 10-15 other students failing because of that one person, you're going to blame him. You're going to blame that teacher and the system is going to blame the superintendent because of that one kid.

### **Vision for the future of education in Princeville.**

Ideally, I'd like for all kids to be able to go to school not hungry and dressed properly. That may not be the right answer, but that's my answer. When you see a kid that goes to school hungry and without any food, when they're going to school just to eat, and the first thing they ask for is going to the men's room—that's puzzling to me. We shouldn't have that in America or anywhere.

That is something I've seen all over Edgecombe County. It's saddening when I go see my daughter in school—the best way that I know how to send her, pretty little girl—then beside her, there's someone that may be just as pretty, but not kept up, it bothers me. There are programs out there where they provide breakfasts and lunches for these kids that can't do too much about their parents, so I think the schools are doing the best they can with that.

But the system is broken. It's not just Princeville, it's all over, any rural area or any disadvantaged area or poor economic area like this—the system is not fit for them because it's a two-sided thing. When the parent doesn't do what needs to be done, it's all up for the teachers and principals to do what they need to do to get the students on the right path.

For a lot of our people—the ones that could run fast and jump high—they're starting to slip out. But you know what? For every one that goes in the NBA or the NFL or plays tennis, there's another one that has equal or as much talent that doesn't even make it. It causes low self-esteem in students who feel like they never reached their potential, and that's why I cry when I see these kids like that. There is another Obama here in Princeville, and there's another Martin Luther King. They could still reach high. They think it's not going to happen, though. But I'm a realist; I know they can't save the world. I know all those pretty little children because I look beyond their weaknesses and I see greatness, but I know not all of them are going to be able to reach it for whatever reason.

For the children of Princeville, I would hope for them to be little Obamas and Martin Luther Kings. We've got to bring up another generation of those type of people. Frederick Douglasses. We've got to write our own chapter, and for one of these kinds of people to come out of Princeville, I would love that. People would say, "This guy came from the first Black town in America, and now he's done greater things than Obama." Just think of where Obama came

from. Everybody would know that Princeville is the first Black town in America. The economics would change here quickly. Now, when I said MLK and Obama, that doesn't necessarily mean they have to become American heroes or someone great. I'm really just talking about doing something for their community to place their mark on society.

I also hope the parents will get more involved because I blame the community for not making the history of Princeville known. If they do that, then they will educate Princeville's children not only about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln but also about the oldest Black town in America. So, when these students leave here, they will know that. Don't just do it in February during Black History month. You've got to drill this in people's head. You name one kid that is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade who doesn't know who the first president of the United States is. When they get in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, if they are asked, "What is the first Black town in America?" It should be an easy question.

**It's not just Princeville: Economic depression in America.**

When you really look down and try to see exactly what has happened around education in Princeville, you could really go to any area in the US that is economically deprived like Princeville is, and you will have the exact same problem. It's not just a Princeville problem. It's an economic depression problem, and I don't know the answer. There is an answer out there, and I think it's going to take a group of children to come up with it. They're going to say, "This is what I want. This is what we're going to do." That's when the newspapers and people are going to say, "Hey, we need to go to Princeville and check out these schools and see what's going on with these guys. They're doing something right." Until then, I just hope the educators don't give up.

## **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part I)**

Samuel refers to his time at Princeville School as his *golden years*. His most vivid memories are of his teacher and of the “safe haven” that the school environment provided. He notes that there weren’t any White students but that there was one White teacher. In terms of education reform, however, he mentions that the math looks different than what he remembers. He also mentions integration but only to the extent that it served as a means by which he could attend the same school as his brother. However, he still didn’t get a chance to attend the same school as his brother after integration because another school, Bridgers, was closer in proximity.

The only other policy reform Samuel mentions has to do with discipline. When he was attending Princeville School, the teachers had the authority to use corporal punishment, with the apparent support of the broader Princeville community. He does, however, take particular note of how caring the teachers were. In fact, he mentions how much more caring and understanding he feels like teachers were than they are now. Whereas some scholars believe that creating a “climate in which caring relations can flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers” (Noddings, 2012, p. 777), this focus is not found in the majoritarian story of education reform, which prioritizes things like accountability and career readiness (U. S. Department of Education, 2014).

When I asked directly about any other educational policies or reforms he might be aware of, he told me that those were the only things that came to mind. For Samuel, school board meetings were boring. This is the setting where, in my experience as a state education official, community members are most likely to get information about reforms outside of direct communication from schools. Yet, even when assigned to cover education issues by his employer, Samuel did not find it particularly interesting nor did he pick up anything that stood

out as reform. He does mention testing in passing but not as a reform. For him, testing is a problem to be fixed. More precisely, the tests themselves are not at issue but rather the school's response to low scores on those tests. However, there are some things that he would like to see change.

Samuel believes that parents should be more involved in their children's education and that the schools should provide more activities for the community. He would also like to see an end come to children going to school hungry. In 2011, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted a resolution acknowledging that the state "ranked second in the nation in children who suffer from hunger food insecurity" and encouraged school districts to "seek multiple and innovative ways of increasing school breakfast participation" such as providing breakfast in classrooms "during appropriate instructional and educational activities" (p. 1). Indeed, programs like the School Breakfast Program, which was established in 1966 as a pilot program (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2018), do represent changes that have happened in the education system, but they do not speak to general school reform rhetoric. In short, when Samuel speaks of reform, he speaks of the physical and social well-being of students rather than their ability to perform better on standardized tests.

### **Gwendolyn's Story**

*While visiting Princeville in February 2018, I decided to just drive around Princeville for a while. I was curious to see how the town looked since my previous visit. I began to notice a few people walking down some of the streets. So, in an effort to strike up conversation and possibly recruit participants for my study, I pulled over a few times and introduced myself. Some of the people I talked to were residents of Princeville, and some were not. I talked to six pedestrians*

*before deciding to try my luck with individual homes. I had experience with political campaign canvassing, so I knew the risks and possible benefits of knocking on people's doors, but I was willing to take the chance.*

*One of the houses I stopped at was Gwendolyn's. I saw two cars parked in the driveway, so I assumed that someone must have been home. After knocking twice on the door of the house, I didn't get a response. So, I thought it best to leave and try another home. However, as I was about to drive away, the door opened, and out came Gwendolyn. After talking for a while, I set up an interview time with her. When I returned to her home for the interview, she was cooking for her mother, who was in a different room watch Jeopardy! during the interview. Gwendolyn was born in the late 1950s, and all of her siblings—one brother and two sisters—also attended Princeville School.*

### **Connection.**

I was born and raised here in Princeville. I've lived here all my life. This is my connection, my heritage, this is all that I know. My parents weren't born in Princeville, but my mother has been here almost 80 years. My mother's family is originally from Pitt County, and they migrated to Princeville. With me being the youngest, I don't remember my grandmother discussing her reasons for coming to Princeville.

Growing up here was normal. As kids, we didn't have the luxuries of what kids have today, but we jumped rope, we did Pitty Pat and Rick-Rack. Rick-Rack, it's like a piece of wood. It's a board. It has a shape like a pear, and it has a ball hooked to it. It's like a rubber ball, like a paddle. We also skated. We had fun with what was created for us to use. We played with dolls. We were just kids trying to find our way, trying to find things to do.

There wasn't a lot of time to be creative because back then, things were still slow. A lot of things that our parents didn't know, we didn't know. We just grew up. We played. Growing up, there was no favorite. As a child, there was no favoritism in me. I knew this was my place, and this is my environment. This is home. This is all that I know. We loved each other, cousins, family. Your peers, we just loved each other. It was nothing special.

There were no dislikes about living in Princeville growing up. From what I can see now, though, those times were different. Things were different. If I was that child in this century, I'd probably say something different, but because of the time, I can't. Technology, there's so much technology-wise. There are just so many things that kids have that are advantages, things that are in schools like computers, we didn't have those. We had music, we had drums, and I guess the cello and accordion. We had things like that, but now they have the different types of Saxophones, xylophones, organs. We just had a regular piano, but we were grateful; we were happy. We still were able to sing.

If I compare in a way, I think things are pressed and pushed too forward now. Back then, it was like you received, and you learned from it, and it was instilled in you. It taught you values—values like striving to do better, to want better. As you grow, you have a vision. You start seeing what you want; how am I going to do this, how do I get. If I don't step out of this, or if I don't leave here, then I can't do this. We had TV, but TV then was not like now, where you've got 500 channels. We probably had 4 channels, if that.

Growing up, we all had a lot of love for each other. We looked out for each other. It was a caring place then. It's nothing like that now. Now, it's just a place to live. Love is limited. It's limited to families, the few that are here, that's it. The community aspect is not as strong as it used to be. It's a lot of individual houses. That's it. As one neighbor said, "This is a strange

place. I don't even know the people that walk through the neighborhood." Right in here, in this area, everyone knows each other. We've been in this little section right here forever. We're the old school.

The old school is just about the children that went to Princeville School. We came from the old school. After the late 1960s, that was it. I think that was old school. The younger folks don't really use the term "old school"; it's mainly the ones from old school. You might hear in a conversation, on Labor Day, or going to old school cookout. This may be the third time I've said it out loud, because I never really thought of it. I guess it's everyone who went to Princeville School around my time. I guess we're caught up in that old school. Then, the school changed to Princeville Montessori. Once Princeville Montessori became a thing, that was the end of it.

### **History and heritage vs. economics and opportunities.**

Some people stay in Princeville for the history. It's what they know. They've been here forever. Most of the people—my generation or people when I was coming up as a child—I've seen most of them deceased. For the few that are still here, this is their heritage. This is what they know. They don't want to leave it. As for what has been good to them or bad, I can only speak for me. But I can speak for my family; my mom, she doesn't want to leave.

It's sad to say, but there are some that stay because they look forward to flooding. It's weird to say that. There is a possible monetary gain, I think. But your life is worth more than money. There are people that receive assistance from their insurance, but it was little compared to what the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, gave to those who didn't have homeowners insurance. I'm looking back from 1999 to 2016; it's like a different place from '99 to 2016 because a lot of people just passed away and it's just a few families still here now. Most

of the people that are here are from another generation. They migrated here. A lot of them have come because they were like, “I want some of that money.”

They’re living here right now. You can see some places around here are vacant. A lot of them are not coming back. Most of this is in the apartment complexes. The homeowners don’t feel like that, but when you’ve got realtors who have rental properties, you get migrants that migrate in. There’s nothing wrong if you want to stay, but find a valid reason to want to live in this town, not hoping for another flood to come through.

Outside of that, with the core homeowner group that chose to stay in Princeville, it’s the cost. Our land was \$3000, but if you buy a lot now, you’re going to spend \$10,000. Over here now, someone had a lot for sale, it’s \$12 000. If you want to get an acre, you may spend \$20,000. That’s even after the flood. People say, “I think I better stay put.” It’s the affordability. A lot of them that *could* move, they look at their age and say, “I’ll never pay for it, so I may as well stay put where I am.” I don’t like to see someone saying they’re making themselves comfortable because I can see that within my heritage. I don’t want to do this, I’m just going to make myself happy, stay put because of age. It’s not just about the age, but the age is a big factor.

As for people who leave Princeville, most of the people that have left have left on career choices, and a lot of them go to college and don’t return. They saw a better way. The income base of your job, the stability, there’s nothing here. There’s nothing to offer. You’ve got the town, the town hall, which really doesn’t require the number of employees that it has. We do need maintenance, the clerk, the town manager, but this is a small place, with about 2000 people, maybe less, and you’re paying all these people to do all this for cheap. What are you maintaining when a portion of the citizens aren’t even coming back? You’ve got all these vacant properties. I always said it was a retirement place, for when you don’t want to do anything, but you just need

a place to eat and sleep. You want to go away and visit? That's fine. Go out of town. But this is a retirement place. There is no growth here. That also goes for the Edgecombe County school system. I don't see any growth. I don't see any changing, even going back to the time when I was in school.

When we were in school, you had to have so many credits, like 26 credits to graduate. And now I'm hearing about kids who don't know about their credits. They can ask questions, but they're only given a perception, and that's the end. You're doing good and then your junior year is halfway and, "Wow, you need this, this, and this in order to graduate." "I have four to five classes, how in the world am I going to do this my senior year?" It's too much. We don't have true counseling. We have all these superintendents and principals, but to me, the kids are not getting what they need out of the school system. When we were in school, you had a counselor sit down and talk with you and say, "Okay, you need this, this, and this to graduate" or "You need this, this, and this to go to North Carolina A&T." We don't have that anymore. Children can go in, and it's do it for yourself. Figure it out.

That's why I mentioned the guidance earlier, because that's what the children need. They don't know which way to go and how to handle it if no one is putting them on the right track. I've seen so many at the end, at graduation, with their heads hung because they look forward to going to a university, but they can't go to the university until the latter part of the year or the next year because they have to go to community college and pick up a credit. If the system was keeping up with them, that child would have known what they needed before the biggest part of that school year was over, but by that time, they can't pick it up and finish. That's how that is.

**Princeville heritage through oral tradition.**

Growing up, I heard things about the history of Princeville, but those things were never documented as a child where I could read them. But we would hear the history from the old timers. This person was the first brick mason, this was the first midwife. We would hear things, but it wasn't in black and white, so we could tell each other or talk about it and laugh about it. They would say things like "Well, you know so-and-so used to deliver babies. Mr. X used to be the brick mason and was the first man to build a house for the railroad." The year 1999 was actually when I started hearing a lot. That's when I first heard that this was the oldest Black town in America. Going to school at Princeville School, you would have thought that the teachers would have said it, but no.

I was formally introduced to the history with a small biography of other towns and cities, and Princeville was in this book written by Turner Prince Mars, the grandson of one of the founders. He gave me a book, and that's when I really knew. I knew it from my grandma about the slaves and when they found the land over here. I could hear that from her and that this was just a wet place. It was a landfill, and they cleaned it up.

### **Typical day at Princeville School.**

We would go in, and you were expected to learn whatever was being taught, whether it was to learn to count, to draw, or color, and stay within the boundaries. We worked with wood to make little cars with a string on it, and we had building blocks. Even back then, they had the little balls, different shapes, diagonal, triangle, and they would have those and put them inside. We learned history.

We had one teacher for the entire school day, but there was time when other teachers would come in and involve themselves in our class, so that was another way of learning. We had a music teacher for a music class, and then we had a special time of day for 30 minutes to go to

the library and browse the racks of books and ask questions to the librarian, check out a book, learn to stay in the library. “It’s a quiet place; this is where you read.” Those are things they taught. I still see that today when I go to the public library. They said, “Be quiet.” We learned that. We also learned to do math, we did spelling, and we had spelling bees, and I loved to do that. History, art, English. We had our time out, it was to play on the playground. You got 40 minutes or so to go out and climb the monkey bars and just exercise. And we had PE, which was separate from the recess we had, so we had them all. We had one teacher that did it all for us. Then we had lunch time.

I can remember in kindergarten, you weren’t even allowed to take a nap because it was all about learning. Kids now get nap time; we had no nap time. Keep on learning. Until 3:00. I don’t remember us leaving at 2:30 p.m., it was 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### **Caring at Princeville School.**

For those values that I mentioned earlier, we had encouragers in the school. When we were in school, we had a truancy officer. We had people that cared. When I compare schools now to school then, back then, we had someone on us if we didn’t show up for school. The phone would ring. That day, not after one time, that day. Someone could hear the neighbors when the truancy officer was saying, “Why didn’t you come to school today?” That truancy officer got in her car and she knocked on our door to find out from my parents why didn’t this child come to school today. It was someone that cared. I don’t see that in the school system now. It’s automatically done, where some automation calls, and the kid can get the phone and erase the call. But back then, if your parent left you at home with the siblings and all of you were sick, someone had to speak and say why you were home.

All teachers then were encouragers, and they acknowledged your growth and your learning skills, and they always had a focus of guiding you to do better; that you're better and that you could keep doing better. You can keep growing. You can be and do whatever you want to do, be whoever you want to be. You've just got to stay focused. When I was in school, it was like, if my mom that was working, those teachers were our parents again, because they nurtured us. Maybe it was wrong to nurture us, but they showed us that they cared as if we were their children or child. "This is what I'm going to do for my child, this is what I'm going to do for these children."

That nurturing came mostly in the form of guidance. Our teachers in those days could see when you were straying. If you weren't on the same path, you were straying, or you were getting off track, they would say, "Let me get back over here and talk to you and nurture you, give you guidance, talk to you with understanding, find out what the problem is. Let's work on it so that you can keep growing and going forward and stepping up instead of stepping back." Those teachers that we had then at Princeville School, I see them now when I go into the post office and other places. They didn't forget, they still call your name out. No matter where we were or what we've become in life, they're still proud of us. They called us good kids.

As they began to desegregate the schools, this is what those teachers were like. They nurtured us. They prepared us to be able to be ready to go into another world that we'd never been to. There were things that they knew that we might not expect to happen, but they could see it, so they prepared us. They talked to us and let us know that we'd be moving on and it's for the best and it should get better. They'd say, "We want you to continue to do better and if you continue to do this, you can continue to step on up the ladder." Nothing is easy, but those teachers from Princeville School played a mother role in preparing us just like if my mom would

leave me with a babysitter. She left me with those teachers. That's what they did. They nurtured us like we were their children even though maybe 15 of us were in the room. But all of us were treated special. None any more special than the other. All of us were treated special.

### **Integration.**

In 1965, I was at Princeville Elementary School, and we were there from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. We didn't have kindergarten. When I grew up, when I started school, there was no such thing as kindergarten. You went directly to the first grade. After the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we transitioned to Pattillo, which was located in Tarboro. We went there for two years. Once we left Pattillo, the integration was going on, and we were then going to C. B. Martin Middle School for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. That was 1969 to 1971. C. B. Martin had been integrated, so we were all together. Then, we transitioned to Tarboro High School for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This was in about 1974. The school board was going to transition us back because they weren't certain about C. B. Martin and Tarboro HS as to what those two grades at the middle school and those years at the high school should be. After leaving to live in Hillsborough, NC one year, I came back and graduated from Tarboro High School.

I don't remember much about the integration process. It's kind of weird because you would think that you would remember that from being one of the students. But the students, we adjusted. Both the Blacks and the Whites adjusted, and any other race that we had. We had a few Asians that lived in our community. There were just one or two teachers that weren't ready for that new chapter, for the adjustment or the change of African American students coming into their classrooms.

Discipline was a major issue. I know discipline is discipline, but it depends on *who* disciplines you and *how* they discipline you. Discipline starts at home, and you can discipline

your child one way and you can't expect to just discipline someone else's child because they didn't sit in a chair right or their posture's not right, or they don't look like that other student over there, or they don't have that gentle voice. Some of the White teachers just weren't ready for us.

I can remember one White male teacher who was not happy about something that had happened in the classroom in a math class. He was not able to identify which student, and he didn't ask which child, but he grabbed a child and he escorted that child out in the hallway and he forgot to close the door. He told that child, "I will take my hands and I will slap you 50 times, whatever it takes to make you do right." But of course, that child wasn't the child that had did anything wrong, but that child suffered, and I can remember hearing, "You're going to see my parents, my mom and dad are coming." The student told that teacher that. So, the mother came. I'm glad that the daddy didn't go, but the mother came, and she had her words with the teacher. As students, we couldn't hear it all, but we knew that student, so we knew that mom was looking out for her bitty. That's what my mom would always would tell us. "You gotta look after your bitties [babies]."

The teacher apologized. That was it, because he also spanked that student about 15 times with the wooden paddle. That teacher had stepped out of his boundaries. With students trying to go through an adjustment because everyone was Princeville or Pattillo, that was it. Once you finished at Princeville, you were then at Pattillo and you graduated. There wasn't any integrating.

There weren't really any particular messages shared with us about integrated schools. None. No more than preparing us to go. Not saying, "You're going to go over here and it's going to be this kind of teacher." Just letting us know that it's going to be a different. Times are changing. Things are changing, and your surroundings are going to be different, so you're going

to have to accept and follow through so you can get through. Those messages come from teachers and our parents. Mostly, it was the teachers, though, because they wanted us to excel and move on.

**Limitations changed, but change was limited.**

I haven't really seen a lot change over the years in terms of education. However, what you can be is no longer limited. It's more than just a teacher, doctor, lawyer. You get really deep with names and titles of what you can be. It's no longer limited. It's great, it's bigger. When we were going to school, it was doctor, lawyer, judge, teacher, nurse. As I got up in years, I started hearing about nurses, radiology, sonographer, but when we were growing up, we didn't hear those things. News reporter, accounting. There was someone to handle the money, finances, but you heard very little about anything else.

You had those teachers that were saying, "You're good, and I want you to continue to do good. You're a smart child, you're very bright." There weren't many that were going to tell you that you were smart. But we had groups. Teachers would say, "You're in group 1, why do you want to be in group 13 when you're in group 1? I really just wanted to be with my friends playing. But for those groups, we had levels; level one through 13. One being the highest; 2 you're close to 1; 3, you're not too far from 2. After 5, it started going down and when you got to 9, it was really bad. Those kids just weren't interested in school. The school system back then made up the leveling. They categorized us because of our learning and standards of learning.

They did it based on testing. When we did our tests, it wasn't a placement test, but they would test us to see like how now they have things like Myers-Briggs. When we were in school, they would give us a paper and we were supposed to read it, and by the end of the day, they might give a pop quiz. So, you just quiz me all through the week, I'm supposed to be prepared

because whenever you give me something to read over, I should read over it instead of cramming it in my book and not looking at it and then when you test me, I fail.

Ninth grade was a rough year to really see where you were. I had some White teachers and most of them said, “You could do good, girl!” I wasn’t thinking about that. I wanted to be out there with my friends playing. But they taught us, “You’ve gotta keep it up.” It was hard. I don’t think my years in school were bad. I had maybe one or two incidents, but I don’t really think anything was bad.

I can’t think of the names of the tests that the kids take now as much as my little niece says it to me. The difference now and then is they give them this particular test—I think it’s part 1 and part 2—and the kids have to make a certain score on this in order to see if they can excel to the next grade. We didn’t have that when I was in school. It’s like the End of Grade test, EOG. When we were in school, we didn’t have anything like that. We were promoted and went to the next level or grade based on our grade averages for the entire year, from each six week period. At the end of the year, it was averaged up and this was to determine whether you would go to the next grade. I haven’t really noticed any education other reforms in Princeville; not other than that. I hear my little niece talk about that EOG test. We had nothing like that. We just had to maintain certain a grade average in order to be promoted to the next grade.

### **Hope for the community.**

I think the children of Princeville need role models. There are a few good teachers that I know. I can count one or two that are good role models, but more patience, more guidance; keeping the child on a path; using methods to keep a child on a path without inflicting mental pain to them. We need techniques to keep them going. I don’t know how because I’m not a teacher, but I feel like that caring part is important. When you show kids that you care about how

they're learning and what they're learning, then they work and they strive to do well. But some children in the room are just there to make it through the day.

I just want to see that there's growth within the school, within the children that are transitioning from one grade to another. Let us see growth. Let the community see that things are happening within the school system. For instance, like I said about caring. All schools should have a truancy officer still instead of a guidance counselor. The counselors are good, but you still should have a truancy officer, not an automation. When the kids are not coming to school, someone should come out and knock on the door and say, "Why didn't so-and-so come to school today?" Everything is machines now, and it's not good anymore. That has a lot to do with the dropout rate.

If you start letting the parents know that you care and that the school system cares as well as they want this child to achieve, it will be better, but this is why we have such a big dropout rate, because as I explained at the beginning about that automation, I've been in a house and I've seen it happen. I was trying to mentor a child. A call for the parent, and the call said the child didn't come to school today. The system just left a message on the answering machine. The child just deleted it. It would be good for someone to knock on the door. If not a knock on the door, you find that parent. If they're at the job, you go to them. You have to find out what's going on, but growth, commitment and caring about those kids.

Committing yourself as a teacher so that you want that child to advance and achieve and do good things for themselves instead of just being a paycheck. To me, I can come and sit in someone's classroom and if nothing's instilled in him, he can't learn anything. The kids can learn from the community. There are people who make soap, weld, cook....take them out and let them see things. We have a man that makes money in the community, let them learn things.

You're keeping them centered in a room and they may come out, a lot of time, you don't even see them exercising anymore. It's 7-8 hours inside a building, doing what? Let them run out and play on the monkey bars. Have teachers gotten too good to come outside and let them exercise? That's what I don't see anymore.

### **Hope for quality education.**

I would hope that when the kids come back that the tools they need to help them learn will be there. That the teachers with experience and knowledge and wisdom will be there to help them learn and guide them. Right now, the school is shut down because of the flood. Once they repair it and they open the doors, everything be different. Let the school be a learning tool, let it be a place for them to come to learn and to grow and just have all the necessary tools that are needed. All this unnecessary stuff now is not needed in the school.

They have computers, that's enough. Why do they have to have tablets and computers? We didn't have either, but we learned. They can still grow and learn; they don't have to have all this technology all around them. Books, stop taking them away and give them back. Stop taking away the quality of education, the things that help a child learn. They've been taking a lot away of the school system.

When you have quality of education, it's when you know that the child has been to school, and in a 7 hour day, that child can come home and tell you what he's learned and he can tell you how much more he wants to learn and how intrigued he is by going to school and letting you know what he looks forward to the next day, because everything that he wants, he knows it's there. He's been put on a path, and as that child gets older—each day, each year—he's learning and his curiosity is showing him that you're going to get better, you can do better, you can keep

growing. What you want, you can go for it. You've just got to keep striving. The more you work at this, the better it's going to be. I don't see any other way. I think about it every day. I've got to keep working hard. I hear people say, "When is there a time that you want to stop going to school?" Never. As long as you can learn something and it helps you, then you go.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part II)**

In much the same way as Samuel did in the previous section, Gwendolyn addresses desegregation/integration and discipline as reforms in education. Regarding the former, she says that her teachers prepared her and her Black peers for what was to come with integration. As for the latter, one of the major differences she noted is that teachers used to spank students, which is no longer the case in Princeville Elementary School today. By state statute, however, the practice of corporal punishment—the “intentional infliction of physical pain upon the body of a student as a disciplinary measure” (North Carolina General Assembly, 2011, p. 1)—is still allowed in North Carolina. Gwendolyn also speaks on the basic nature of the subjects at the time: English, math, history, art, music, spelling, lunch, and, in particular, exercising. In her view, reform has pushed out that essential part of the school day.

One of the other reform areas Gwendolyn mentions is testing. Specifically, she highlights North Carolina's End-of-Grade (EOG) tests, which are given to students yearly from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in mathematics and reading comprehension and in 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in science (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018c). She mentions that when she was in school, they were only required to keep a certain grade average in order to advance to the next grade. However, her and her peers were classified and ranked into “levels” based on the testing they did do, which is a form of tracking. Besides that, Gwendolyn does not recognize much change or, by proxy, growth over time in terms of education reform or policy.

Gwendolyn does, however, recognize that there are other things that have changed; namely, that (a) elementary students in early grades get nap time now, (b) truancy officers played a big role in connecting with community members, and (c) school counseling is not as in-depth as it once was. All said, she hopes that Princeville students will have the resources they need—personnel, computers, books, etc.—to help them learn in school. When Gwendolyn speaks of reform, she speaks more of the lack of change than anything else.

### **Milton's Story**

*I first met Milton at the Princeville Design Workshop in 2017. He serves as a Commissioner for the Town of Princeville. Although I talked to him about my efforts to protect his privacy as a participant in my study, he was adamant about not using a pseudonym in the reporting of this study. When we talked to set up an interview day and time, he asked me, “Do you know who I am?” He was asking if I knew about his personality and his outspoken nature. I did know, but I would learn a lot more. Milton wants to be sure that his words are connected directly to him. In 2006, he was inducted into the Twin County Hall of Fame<sup>4</sup>, which celebrates the history, culture, people, and accomplishments of people of Edgecombe and Nash counties in eastern North Carolina.*

*Milton is also a vocalist and actor, having performed with The Platters for five years and appearing in films such as Home Alone 2, Prelude to a Kiss, Straight Talk, Gladiator, Folks and Angel Street. Milton continues to perform under “The Golden Platter” moniker and established the “Do it for the Children Foundation” as a way to help children in need. Both of Milton’s*

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.tchhof.org/> for more information about the Twin County Museum & Hall of Fame.

*parents also attended Princeville School. Milton was born on February 13, 1940 and grew up in Princeville before leaving with his father, mother, and three brothers to Newport News, VA in 1956. His father worked on a shipyard there and, after 27 years of commuting to work from North Carolina, decided to move closer.*

### **Growing up in Princeville.**

Growing up in Princeville was the happiest time of my life. My great-great-grandparents on my mother's side were the first to move into Princeville. When the newly freed men and women couldn't migrate west or north after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, a lot of them settled over in the Freedom Hill area to use the skills they had developed over at the plantation. I started learning about the rich history of Princeville right before my dad decided to leave in 1956. So, I was about 16 years old. It wasn't in any history book. You'd just hear things from old folks. People in the community would talk about it. I just listened and observed.

We were in a family of love and security. Even though we were poor, we had no idea. At that time, Princeville was a very cohesive family-oriented community city-wide. All the friends that I knew, their parents grew up together and knew my parents. It was a continuum of generations and generations. Everybody had nice homes because we took pride in stuff. Some houses were built close to the river; these were slave houses. They were never torn down, and some people were moved into them. These were the shotgun houses. Across the street from the shotgun houses, there were houses on stilts because the river would flood. The folks in Tarboro would see it but turn a blind eye to it.

Women from Princeville would walk over to Tarboro to doing housework; washing dishes, scrubbing floors, wiping butts. One day, my mother came home crying. We asked her

what was wrong. She said, “Little so-and-so broke my heart today.” She used to tell us he was the cutest little thing. She always spoiled him. One day he learned the word “nigger” and called her a nigger and spit in her face, too. That broke her heart. That little boy turned out to be a lawyer.

To me, I liked my life because everyone had the authority to reprimand, chastise, talk, love, and treat you like their own child. As a matter fact, I was just sharing the other day, everyone had a back path where you could start from my grandmother’s house and go to their yard and their yard where all of my buddies were; and if you were to go down this path and one of the residents was sitting on their back porch, they would holler out at you and ask you, “Hey Milton, what’s on your mind?” And if you tried to pass without saying anything, you had to apologize. “I’m sorry, how are you doing today?” In other words, it was their prerogative to get into your mind and get into your business.

On TV there was a group called “Our Gang”—Alfalfa, Buckwheat. They were in the movies on Saturdays. Well, we had a group too. We had a couple of White guys in there, but they lived up close to the bridge, and they would come down to get involved in what we were doing because we didn’t have the playgrounds or the amenities that they have now to keep young folks out of trouble. So, we made our own excitement. We would run the river, swim it, go out in the sand bar, set up camp, cook right in the middle of the river. You would think you were in another country to go down there and to see it. Even today, you can see the roots of some of those same trees that were eroding and uprooted that are getting ready to fall into the river.

I don’t know what school the White guys went to. I imagine they didn’t want to mix, though. That was another way of keeping us as Blacks in Princeville inferior; by making sure we got that secondhand school book that they used for the last 15 years. As soon as you open the

book, you see the names of the White kids that had these books dating 15 years back. That's what we were given to read. I think that has contributed to the slow growth in our thinking and our development. This was by specific design. We used to ask our parents, "Why didn't you all do something about it?" And they said, "Well, we couldn't because they did it to us too."

The *they* I'm talking about are the policymakers—the White folks who controlled this area, just like they were doing all over the country. As a matter of fact, my great-grandfather, Henry Turner Bass, was Caucasian. He was a doctor. He moved in from Halifax County and set up in office in Tarboro. His son, Spencer Bass, was the superintendent of the Edgecombe County school system. This was my grandmother's brother. She didn't know what he was doing, though. I didn't know it, either. Nobody knew. All we knew is that somebody was making decisions to appease a certain segment of society in the community. He pushed the issue. He released a document about his position on the education of Black children. He said that there was nothing wrong with giving us those dated books and that we were fortunate to be able to get the education we were getting and that there weren't going to be any changes. This may have been in the 1940s. I was born in 1940, but the system that was established was still in place until the 1950s, whenever they integrated the schools. Some of the state schools shut down before they would yield and allow integration.

### **Significance of the bridge.**

The fun times were when I couldn't wait to get with my buddies after school. We only had up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade at the school over there where the museum is standing now. This was an annexation of the school that my mother and father went to. I think it had 8 grades in it at that time. Eventually, they would condense it and make it into a big four-room building. Once you

left the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, you walked across the bridge, and a bus brought you to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Pattillo Elementary.

I didn't like the idea that we didn't have the things that normal communities had such as a pool and playgrounds. We ran head to head with snakes, lizards, and all types of things living in the bushes. The closest swimming pool we had was in Rocky Mount, and you had to belong to a church or a special organization that could take you over there. They had maybe a couple of swimming pools over on this side of the river in Tarboro, and you couldn't go near that.

I identify the bridge as being a place close in proximity to Tarboro, and once the slaves were freed, they needed a place of refuge and safe harbor. When the Union soldiers came in here, the community surrendered because they didn't want to risk the damage of fire or being burned down. During the Civil War, General Grant and General Sherman were known to be firebugs. The closest place they got to here to destroy it was Snow Hill and Goldsboro. They were looking at the train tracks that were bringing supplies from Richmond, from the Confederacy, down there. They came here to destroy that, and if they were going to meet resistance, they would have burned this place up. So, the leaders at that time told the confederates, "We want you to leave town. Get out of here. There will be no conflict here." That's why they never fought in here.

The river was known as a demarcation line across there because the Union soldiers stayed over there and then made it a little bit safer for the freed slaves. The general that came over here took one big house for his headquarters, but after a while, it looked like everything was going to be semi-normal once they picked up and left. Speaking of the Union soldiers, there were enough freedmen over there to have security that if the Klan came over there, it wasn't going to be business as usual. So, they never encountered any conflict with the Klan; but once you left the neighborhood and went looking for jobs, you might have run into some friction and some racism.

### **June German.**

During the summer, we had a hot festival, June German. I went every year. All of the big bands out of Harlem, New York, and Chicago rushed to the east coast and come down to Florida. They had other places where they would do it every year annually, and big spot here was down in Rocky Mount. They used to perform in tobacco warehouses. You could smell the aroma of the tobacco in there. They would have a big hemp rope to separate the Blacks and the Whites.

We also had another club, the Bullock Brother's Club; my uncle John, the oldest; daddy, James II; and Ellsworth. One time, Count Basie and Duke Ellington were touring with Ella Fitzgerald who's from Newport News, VA. When they finished playing, they said they were looking for a place to park their bus and a hotel—somewhere they could relax before they take off. At that time, nobody would let them stay anywhere. Dad told them, "We have a club over there in Princeville. We'd be glad to go in the kitchen, bust some eggs, and cook up some bacon. We can get whatever you need. We've got some rooms in there too where you can sleep."

We would see the bus. We would wake up when my parents came home from the club. We couldn't go there because it was for adults, so we would peep out the window and try to figure it out, man. The next morning, mom and dad would fix up breakfast in the restaurant and then the bus would leave. They did this for about three years. They knew that when they came down south and they were in Rocky Mount, there was a refuge in Princeville where they could come over. Years later, I would re-introduce my dad to Duke Ellington at Hampton Institute at the Cool Jazz Festival.

### **Staying in Princeville.**

I think people stay in Princeville because they don't have anywhere else to go. Princeville has always been an impoverished, poor town. People made it that way so that there was always a supplement of free labor or low-paid labor, even after they signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Moving on up into the Reconstruction period, a lot of Blacks became involved in government and politics. This area was known as the Second [Congressional] District. The Blacks were very strong in voting Republican. The Republican Party got its jump start down here on the strength of some delegates from Princeville.

At that time, our ancestors were still feeling the brunt of racism, and they had to divide themselves. The farmers had a Black alliance and you had the regular farmers association, which was made up of White farmers. They didn't want to have them in the same union, so there was two. This way it was easier for the powers that be to ostracize, demonize, and cut them short as far as loans to get stuff to work the fields. So, there was an exodus. The first one was when they started moving out, going north—to Chicago, New York, Newport News—trying to find jobs where they could get the essentials for their families cause there still were no breaks down here. they weren't getting their fair share of the farming industry due to the big boys, so they were putting pressure on them. We have a historical marker downtown showing you the footprint the Black Farmers Association had.

There was a lot of animosity among Whites in the South, knowing that they had lost the war. They still had that bitter hatred in their hearts. They even made legislation that if they caught Black people at the train station leaving, there would be a \$1,000 fine or either some time in jail. That was just to keep you from leaving. But at the same time, they weren't interested in making life any better here for you.

**Leaving Princeville for family, friendships, and opportunities.**

There are those that establish families and friendships in other places where the economy and the chance for jobs are better. They leave because if you don't have a business of your own, you'll end up working in a field or in a factory; working for somebody else at a low minimum wage. You'll be the last hired, first fired. That's no way to live. For the sacrifice that our ancestors have paid to make this country the wealthiest country on the planet through the harvesting of the fields—the cotton, the corn, the tobacco. One time, this county was comprised of 8 counties. As far as you could see, from Nash County over to the state line of North Carolina and Virginia; nothing but cotton as far as you could see. When they decided to cut the counties up. Edgecombe County was the county seat in this area, controlling everything. The Confederacy had more money in its treasury off of cotton, corn, tobacco, sweet potatoes, and peanuts, than the North had all together.

### **Education in Princeville.**

Education in Princeville has always been very limited. If it was a balanced community of Whites and Blacks, they would have figured out a way to still do that demarcation line and isolate the groups. It was the theme of that time. In order to keep them under control, you must give them an inferior feeling about themselves. Education—that was their way of controlling us without actually killing us.

### **Attending the Princeville School.**

I attended the Princeville School for four years, from 1946 to 1950. The school building was built on the framework of a Rosenwald School. They just used the blueprint. My favorite things about Princeville School were some of my teachers. My 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher was Ms. Bridgers; 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Matthewson; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher Ms. Walston; 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Ms. Bennett. They were very nice and strict and could be your parent. If you messed up, they

were going to deal with you and then you're going to bring home a note. Then your mom and dad are going to deal with you.

There was nothing that I didn't like because I understood what we didn't have and why we didn't have it. We had some play things in the back of the school that were made out of metal. We had a couple of merry-go-rounds and some monkey bars. I didn't like the bathroom, though. It wasn't kept up well. It wasn't even inside. They had about four or five holes, and nobody would ever sit on them. You'd jump up on them with your feet because you were always scared someone was going to reach up and get you. We don't know what the girls did. Then, when you came over here to the bathrooms at Pattillo, that's where you saw running water and white porcelain and you'd say, "Wow. They could make ice cream in here."

#### **Changes over the years in education in Princeville.**

They got a new school called Princeville Elementary School. Things have changed. It's like night and day from when I was growing up. Now, there's integration. The law says they have to give all kids the same things. So, the children in Princeville are reading all the same books as the kids in Tarboro. There are some White kids being brought in to Princeville Elementary, which is good. That makes the powers keep the school up.

Some of these kids are getting involved in programs where they're being asked some questions like "What do you see in Princeville that you like? What do you fear in Princeville? What frightens you?" They always say it's the crime. We don't have a police department, so these children are byproducts of a society that doesn't watch. The powers have a way of allowing things to manifest in our community that they wouldn't tolerate in theirs. Our children are victims of it.

### **Vision for the education of children in Princeville.**

The children of Princeville need to hear what's going on. They need to hear it themselves at a very young age that they are in a flood zone. They shouldn't be counting on the history of staying in Princeville just because somebody that can't move nowhere is telling them, "This is your home, this is history." I don't care if it is history, it's like sitting on a railroad track and you know the train is coming, but you like the train so much, you want to sit right there. One of these days, it's going to get you. This river is going to come back again.

Nobody's talking about global warming. Ice caps from the north and the south are melting and that water's going to go somewhere. Folks in other areas are trying to get on the highest hill possible. That's how I'm thinking. I love Princeville too, but my mom and dad and the rest of my ancestors didn't raise no fool. I've got options. We need to be educating our children before the river comes again. The kids need to know this so that if the mom and dad get locked on ignorance, the children can tell them, "It's raining. The river is rising."

### **Effects of flood events on education in Princeville.**

The flooding has affected education in Princeville because when people decide to pack up and move, they go to a better place. The school needs relocate, because it's traumatic and drama for those kids to be displaced. The school needs to be moved. It's in our plans. We have plans to move the school, the fire department, and the senior citizens home. We were eager to relocate the municipal buildings as well as some homes and build shopping centers and things like that, but now we're getting the word from FEMA that there's no money coming down the pipe to do this. FEMA is tired of coming to the rescue, and nothing is done to keep it from flooding. They're telling us there's no bright light at the end of the tunnel. We've bought the land now, but we've got to see.

There's an element that the children are locked in. They don't get to see role models and images that they can emulate. I was fortunate to have had men like the Tuskegee Airmen when I was growing up. We had two of them come from around here. Mr. Willie Fuller was a Red Tail pilot, and my uncle, Lafayette Brown, drove for Mr. Benjamin Davis after they brought the troops back stateside.

So, right now, we're at a standstill regarding education. The children are ready to come back, but there is some more work that needs to be done to the school building. But now they're saying that there ain't no financial rainbow coming down. So, we'll see.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part III)**

For Milton, integration brought about an important change for education in Princeville; namely, that laws were put in place to “give all kids the same things,” which is language drawn and adapted from the *Brown v. Board* decision. According to Milton, integration made the “powers that be” maintain the school facilities, something that scholars have shown had not been done adequately for segregated Black schools, as mentioned in the literature review. A related change is that students used to have to go “in a hole” outside to use the restroom but now generally are able to use appropriate indoor facilities. Integration also brought attention to outdated textbooks, which is something that, along with textbook shortages, North Carolina schools are still grappling with as calls are being made to move to digital texts versus printed materials (Brown, 2017).

What is particularly noteworthy here, though, is that Milton claims that the superintendent released a statement that the Black students should just be grateful that they were getting the education they had. Sentiments like these have a long history. I recall one instance where I sat in a class at UNC-Chapel Hill—not in the School of Education, thankfully—and a

student talked about the benefits of slavery and oppression; namely that we wouldn't have so much great music in America were it not for the oppression suffering endured by African Americans. I disagreed.

A more well-known example came in 2008, when former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan wondered, in response to then-presidential candidate Barack Obama, where the gratitude was for all that White Americans had done for Black people. Buchanan (2008), writes,

America has been the best country on earth for black folks. It was here that 600,000 black people, brought from Africa in slave ships, grew into a community of 40 million, were introduced to Christian salvation, and reached the greatest levels of freedom and prosperity blacks have ever known.... no people anywhere has done more to lift up blacks than white Americans. Untold trillions have been spent since the '60s on welfare, food stamps, rent supplements, Section 8 housing, Pell grants, student loans, legal services, Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credits and poverty programs designed to bring the African-American community into the mainstream. (para. 17-19)

What figures like Buchanan does not acknowledge, from Milton's perspective, is that there were powers in place that intentionally created the conditions that cause for programmatic remedies for Black Americans. Milton believes that education was one of the ways that White policymakers controlled Black communities "without actually killing us."

Just like Samuel and Gwendolyn, Milton also discusses discipline in the Princeville School, noting that his teachers were nice but strict. The bigger issue for him, however, is the future of the Princeville School. According to Milton, "The school needs relocate, because it's traumatic and drama for those kids to be displaced," but FEMA funding may not be available to make this move happen, despite the fact that land on which the school would sit has already been

purchased. Milton believes that issues like this cause students to feel locked in. He wants students to be move beyond the “standstill” he sees in education in Princeville. One way to do this is by exposing students to role models, sentiments echoed by Gwendolyn. When Milton speaks of reform, he speaks of community power, equitable access to educational resources, and the emotional well-being of students.

### **Shirley’s Story**

*Shirley was one of the other names that was on the list provided to me by the kind employee from Princeville’s town hall. I interviewed her at the Edgecombe County Memorial Library Central Library. She was born in the early 1950s after her parents came to Princeville in the late 1940s. She attended Princeville School in the late 1950s and is a former Princeville elected official. She talked to me about politics in Princeville in the late 1980s through the early 2000s and losing valuable historical town records due to flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew.*

### **Connection.**

I was born and raised in Princeville and still was living there until last year. I just relocated to a home over in Tarboro. As a matter of fact, I moved my parents in with me because they were living out in a mobile unit in one area, and I was living in a mobile unit in another area. My dad actually came to Princeville because he had a job at the sawmill in Tarboro. Growing up, I didn’t know I was poor. I don’t ever remember being hungry or not having some clothes. We didn’t have the fanciest clothes, but then again, who did? We didn’t know we were poor growing up in Princeville. It was just a way of life and we accepted that and we went on.

Princeville was a very close-knit community, because everybody knew everybody. We played together, we fought together, then we came back and played together again. We all went to school together. During that time, the parents of whoever's house you were at disciplined you. They talked to you if you did something wrong as if you were their children, which is something that is unusual now. You always hear people say, "It takes a community to raise a child." Princeville was that community.

The neighborhood was my favorite part about Princeville. We played together a lot. We did jump rope, tag. There was a little field over where I lived, so we played softball a lot. When it was time to eat, everybody went their way. Just walking up and down the street was fun.

We used to love for snow days to come. All of us would get together and we'd find the steepest hill we could find and slide down that hill on a piece of tin. We didn't have any sleds or anything like that. We made our own. We would go back, and after we finished playing for a while, we'd go back to our individual homes and get ready for school and whatever we had to do the next day. Or, we'd come back and play in the snow the next day.

The only thing that I really disliked about Princeville was the fact that the things that I grew up with began to change. I think it was because as the older people moved out and different families moved in, there was a different atmosphere as far as the togetherness. It really didn't have to do with the people individually; it was just that we did not know the people that were moving in as well as we knew the people that we had grown up with.

A lot of people that moved into Princeville didn't realize the significance of Princeville. To them it was just somewhere to stay and that was it. When I was nine years old, we had a teacher. She was my 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. She taught us a lot about the history of Princeville. We had Ms. Bennett, Ms. Bridgers, and Ms. Matthewson. Ms. Matthewson lived two doors down

from the school, and Ms. Bridgers and Ms. Bennett lived over here in Tarboro, but they were next door to each other and they just knew a lot about the history.

At that time, we only had 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Princeville School, and that history was really taught to those that would listen, and we did listen because if you didn't, you could get punished in school. You didn't want to get punished in school, because you got punished when you got home, too. We listened and for some people, it sunk in; for others, it didn't. I was one of them that let it sink in.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of gangs now. I feel like a lot of that was introduced to ours kids who had parents that moved up north; the kids that got involved in gangs up there brought it back down with them when their parents sent them to stay with grandma. So, they brought their little mess with them and it spread across the area.

### **Stay in and leaving Princeville.**

For me, Princeville is home. My grandfather and his brother got together and they bought property in Princeville, and they divided it among their children. As a matter of fact, I'm thinking that my dad and one of his cousins that lives in New York now are the only siblings living that still own that same property that was given to them by their fathers. The rest of them drifted away or sold the property and moved away. I'm still living on the property and my dad was as well. I think that's why other people stay in Princeville, too; just because it's home. They always say home is where the heart is. For a lot of people, their heart has always been there.

I think people leave Princeville mainly because of the flooding. We don't have modern things like a lot of other communities have. We don't have a lot of housing. We don't have our own police officers like we used to have. The mom and pop stores that used to be in Princeville are gone. All of that has just about drifted away. When I came up, there were some kids that had

never been over to Tarboro to shop because there were stores and everything in the area. We only have two or three now compared to when we used to have one on just about every corner. The economy is not as great as it used to be. We used to have a lot of different companies and knitting mills. The manufacturing companies are no longer in existence, so people are moving away because of jobs. Some people are going to school and never coming back because there's really not a lot that is offered here in Edgecombe County. It's not just Princeville.

### **History of education in Princeville.**

The education in Princeville to me was great. I attended Princeville ES, which is now the Princeville Museum. Believe it or not, my dad attended that school as well. He'll be 93 soon. The only thing he really talked about is the fact that he had to walk a long way to get to the school. We've had lots of teachers, lawyers, professors, doctors, and engineers. All those people have done their education in Princeville. I think it was great because when I came up, the teachers cared about what they were doing. I think they really loved their position. They made sure that we learned before we went on to another class. We did a lot of testing, but we did it in a way where if you had to study something, the teacher would ask you question and challenge you and make you think about your answers before you responded to the question.

Once you make a child really use their mind and make them think, that's makes education exciting; at least it did for me. It was a challenge, but it was an exciting challenge to just see how much you could really learn in doing the things that they were challenging you to do. I was really excited about learning in school. It was a challenge for me because the more they challenged me, the more I had to get my books out and read, but it was fun doing that. I loved my teachers. I respected my teachers. When I came along, you respected adults, period; no matter what their profession was, you respected your elders.

All teachers were professionals. They dressed professionally. In other words, you knew your teachers from your students. You definitely knew that. They dressed their parts. When I was in school, young ladies could not wear pants to school. You wore a dress or a skirt or a jumper. In the winter time, you could wear the pants, but you had to wear them under your dress or skirt, and you had to take them off when you got to school, and you could put them back on when you got ready to leave. Most of us in Princeville walked to school. The guys did not wear their pants hanging off. You were constantly reminded. If you had to be reminded too many times, you went to the principal's office. When you were at school, you had your shirt in your pants, you had your belt on, and you were dressed nice and neat.

I didn't like the fact that I had to bring my lunch from home, though. I enjoyed it when we were actually able to get a hot lunch. We didn't have a cafeteria. We had the store, and if you had a nickel or a dime, you could go to the store if you wanted to. You could also bring your lunch from home, but the store next door had cookies and bubble gum and potato chips for 5 cents a bag and that kind of thing. When I came along, sodas were five and six cents. That was lunch. What was really exciting, though, was that we did get fresh milk every day in the glass bottle.

I went over to Pattillo in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade for a half year because by that time, they had completed the new Princeville Elementary School. It was 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the time, and they added a kindergarten later on; sometime around 1963 or 1964. When they built the new school, there still wasn't a cafeteria there. Those of us that wanted to get hot lunch every week got the opportunity to ride the bus. We paid by the week. They'd have our names, and a bus would come pick us up and take us over to Pattillo School. We ate our lunch there, and we would take the bus back to school. One time, we got to pushing and shoving on the bus, and we got sent

home. We were put off the bus for a week. My mom and dad had a good time on us when we got home. We had to take our lunch that week; but after that, we never had any more problems.

### **Changes in education in Princeville over the years.**

At one time, Princeville became a Montessori school. That was a change because it was up to the kids how well they learned and the way they learned. I was one of those where I like for someone to be standing in front of me, teaching me. These kids now are so smart with the computers, they're doing most things over the computers and doing their own thing more than the teachers standing in front of them teaching. Don't get me wrong, they still teach them some things, but it's not the way we were being taught. I'm not really sure how did the decision to form the Montessori school come about, to be perfectly honest. However, they eventually took it away because I think they were saying that some of the test scores were a little lower than what they wanted them to be for a Montessori school.

### **School integration.**

One of the big changes I've seen is that schools became integrated. When I was in school, they were not. That process was interesting. It was different. They completely integrated the schools in 1970. I had already graduated. In the beginning, it was integrated and segregated at the same time. At Tarboro High School, from what I understand, the Black kids were still associating with the Black kids, and the Whites were still with the Whites. As time went on, people started realizing that nothing was going to change. Once they started doing the sports and things like that, everybody gradually tried to work together.

Then Black kids started to have more White teachers. When I was in high school, we had one White man to come in and actually teach, but there weren't any White teachers at Princeville

School at the time. I didn't really have White teachers until I got into community college.

However, once schools were integrated, then we had more White teachers than Black teachers.

People in the community started wondering why so many more White teachers were teaching our kids. I think people were reluctant to really say anything out loud, because our kids still had to go to school. But gradually, it started to change; just like anything else, it takes time to adjust, and that's what they did.

**What the children of Princeville need most from the schools.**

Our kids are doing really good in school now. They are really learning. Edgecombe County has different systems where kids are learning now. We've got Martin Millennium Academy; we've got the Early College and the prep school. Students have the option to attend school wherever they want to now, and it's up to the parents where they want to send their kids.

At the Martin Millennium Academy, they teach students two or three languages, and they seem to like it. That gives them the opportunity to go to the prep school or they could go to Early College. When they graduate from Early College, they already got two years of college. We didn't have those things when I was coming along. That's a plus for this area, and it doesn't matter if you're Black or White. It's just how well you do in your classes.

**What the community needs most from the schools.**

I think the community needs more participation from the school system, period. Teachers should not only just be coming over to teach every day; but they should to come out in the community and make themselves known. I think it would be better if the teachers could come out and meet the parents of some of the students, because the parents are not going to come to them, unfortunately. We've got too many kids raising kids; but that's another problem.

The school in Princeville is doing some great things now, though. They're integrating different languages and exposing students to different cultures. I think as that continues kids will learn to get along better at an early age. With Princeville being an elementary school, if they are introduced to these things at an early age, it will grow with them. That's a lot better than just throwing them into something after they've already formed most of their opinions about the world. In the long-term, I think students will grow to have more respect for one another. They'll be able to work together better.

That said, I hope that there *is* a future for the children in Princeville. Once they go to college, I'd like to see them come back here and try the new things that they have learned instead of taking them to somewhere else where people have already done these things and just get a job and work. I would love for them to come back home. I just hope and pray that Princeville continues to be the oldest town chartered by Blacks in America.

People are being asked to relocate from the town because the government is saying it's dangerous. We may flood again or we may not. Only God knows that. No matter where you go, there's one thing that people fail to realize; that God is still in charge. We are not. They can predict one thing, but He can do something different. If you look at Houston, who could have imagined that kind of water would fall in Houston? They're not asking *them* to relocate. I feel that being a Black person living in this man's world, there are still people out there who feel that we don't deserve to have the same things as Caucasians do in America. I feel that some people, even today, feel that Black people are a threat to the other races. They feel like we are supposed to be inferior to them, but we're not.

Even though Princeville has flooded many times, the worst being Matthew and Floyd, I think Princeville is just as safe as anywhere else as far as living here. A lot of people are talking

as if Princeville doesn't need to be here anymore. I feel like that would be a great waste, not only to me as a person who lives here, but to our kids, our kids' kids, and what our forefathers have built up for us. I want to see us rebuild. I would love to have better shops in Princeville. I would love to have gated residences for families to live in, places where kids can play, nice parks, and that kind of thing. So, let's keep it going. As Jesse Jackson used to say, "Let's keep hope alive." Let's keep Princeville alive.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part IV)**

Inasmuch as integration has become a common point of reflection for the key informants thus far, Shirley noted the process affecting education in Princeville but notes that it happened after she graduated from high school. She did, however, mention that Black students began to have more White teachers after integration. Some members of the community even wondered why there were so many White teachers teaching Black students, but the community adjusted just like they would for any other change.

Shirley reflects on a range of topics, from how caring and professional her teachers were—even in their challenging questions to prepare them for tests—to having to ride the bus to a different school to a different school to eat lunch, because Princeville School did not have a cafeteria. Current Princeville students do have access to their own school cafeteria. As for other educational shifts, Shirley mentions that Princeville Elementary became a Montessori school. Minutes from the Edgecombe County Public Schools Board of Education (1995) show that the district received magnet school grant funding to address racial isolation, allow greater choice, and provide expanded curricula that includes hands-on use of modern technology (p. 2). One of the newly planned schools was Princeville Montessori Academy.

Shirley says that the move to the Montessori model put the onus on students for “how well they learned and what they learned.” In the early years of the school, Princeville parents and community members said that they were fortunate to have the program and praised the Montessori teaching methods and structure, urging the Edgecombe County BOE to support the school with local funding if it became apparent that the grant funding supporting it became unavailable (Edgecombe County Public Schools Board of Education, 1998, p. 2). However, in 2011, the school no longer employed the required minimum number of Montessori trained staff nor had it been using the appropriate curriculum (Edgecombe County Public Schools Board of Education, 2011, p. 4), so the school reverted back to Princeville Elementary School by unanimous BOE approval.

Shirley also mentions three other schools: Edgecombe Early College High School, North East Carolina Preparatory School, and Martin Millennium Academy. The early college school, which opened in the 2005-06 school year, is part of a broader initiative in the state intended “to achieve the twin goals of improved outcomes for students and a better-trained workforce for the state’s economy” (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011, p. 3). The prep school opened in 2012 as the only charter school in Edgecombe County with a mission to challenge students with a curriculum that “integrates technology, experiential learning and critical thinking skills, promotes diversity, emphasizes involvement of students, parents and a highly trained staff and create student leaders, all in preparation for post-secondary success” (North East Carolina Preparatory School, 2018). Martin Millennium Academy was founded in 2014 and is the only K-8 global school in North Carolina, offering a full Spanish Immersion program in elementary school and focusing on different regions of the world at each grade level (Martin Millennium Academy, 2018).

Messaging from both the early college school and the prep school share much of the majoritarian education reform rhetoric in that they focus on preparing students to be competitive and to become productive contributors to the state's economy. However, this is not what Shirley focuses on. She thinks that teachers need to build better relationships with Princeville students and the community. She also expresses concerns that the school may not come back to Princeville due to the prospect of future flooding. When I asked, "Are there any specific reforms in education that you've noticed in Princeville?" she plainly said, "Not really." When Shirley speaks of reform, she speaks of relationships.

### **Sarah's Story**

*Sarah is a lifelong resident of Princeville. She attended Princeville Elementary School in the mid to late 1960s. I met her as I was driving around one day in Princeville. I noticed her walking in front of her house and decided to pull over. I told her about my project, and she agreed to participate. However, at our initial meeting, she was preparing to take her mother to the hairdresser. So, we decided to set another day and time for our oral history interview session. On the morning that we were scheduled to meet, I got word from one of her friends that she was involved in an accident. She made it out of the accident just fine, but she was a bit shaken up. We were able to reconnect about a month and a half later, however, and she was in good spirits as we talked about Princeville's history. As she talked about the love people have for Princeville, she began to talk through tears brought on by a deep sense of nostalgia.*

### **Growing up in Princeville.**

We didn't have access to running water, so we had to get our water from a pump. We didn't have inside bathrooms, so we had toilets on the outside. We didn't have buses, so we had

to walk to school. I was about 3 to 5 miles away from the Princeville School. They have renamed it to Princeville Montessori School, but back when I was going, it was Princeville Elementary School. Our principal was Ms. Mary Matthewson, and she was a real nice lady. She came around the rooms and would talk with the students. In class I remember we were writing on beige, brown, or tan looking paper; it had a long line on top, broken lines in the middle, and a long line at the bottom. We had those real thick pencils, and we had to write our alphabets, like the lower letter *b*, under the broken line. The top of the *b* would be on the top line, and the curve of the *b* would be under the broken line. That's how I learned how to keep my letters straight.

Even though we didn't have the modern things that the children have now, we were still happy with the things that we did have. Back then, your neighbor could spank you and there was no child abuse done. If you went to your neighbor's house and you did something you didn't have any business doing, she would get switches or a belt and whoop you; and by the time you got home, she'd have called and told your mom and dad. Then, you'd get another whooping. The neighbors just wanted the children to be in line. It's nothing like this generation now. The neighbor was able to raise your child and their children. The same thing happened at my house. My father would whoop you and call your mom and dad; and by the time you got home, you would get another whooping. That can't go on today, because they call it child abuse. But, I'll tell you, there were no children going to jail back then because they were really afraid of their parent. Some of these kids now, they're not afraid of their parents.

Back then, we were able to play together. We didn't have the inside games, so we made our own toys. If you wanted to play "horsie" you'd get a long branch from a tree, and you'd tie some twine on it. Then, you'd just get on it like you're riding a horse. We made our little pop pistols and get little green cherries off trees. We didn't shoot anyone in the eye or anything; we

just shot it up in the air. We had banana bikes—that's what I called them—I guess because the seats were made like a banana. We got them for Christmas. That was the thing we were into then, bikes.

When we were going to school, we had little socials. There was music and we danced and we bobbed for apples. We loved it. That was the thing then. Our parents came out with us, but still, we had a nice time even with our parents. We did the cakewalk. We did little activities at school, because back then in my day, you couldn't be out in the streets late at night; 9 p.m. was your limit. With my father, when it started getting dark, I knew that I had better head home. I could be playing, but whatever I was doing, when I saw that sun going down, I had to get home. I didn't want a whooping when I got home. There was a lot of discipline in those days, but I'm older now, and I've never been behind a jail bar. I've never been in trouble because my parents did a good job of raising me, and I thank God for that every day. My friends, they didn't get in any trouble. When they graduated from school, some of them went to the army. People always said, "What good could come out of Princeville?" Then, they would look around at us.

A lot of people would say that about us people across the river. One of our principals used to call us "river rats" because he used to live on the other side in Tarboro. So, the Princeville folks were the river rats. This was a Black male principal at Princeville Elementary. A friend of mine had graduated from Elizabeth City, and she wanted to come back to Princeville and teach. She said as soon as she walked through those doors, he made that statement, "Oh, here comes one of them river rats." She said she turned around and walked right back out the door. But I'm different. I told her I would have showed him, "I'm not going to let you put me down like that because I finished high school, I went to college, and I'm a teacher. You think I'm going to let you talk to me that way?" No. Even when our schools integrated, people would call

us that. “Oh, you live in Princeville. Oh, there goes one of those river rats.” When we got integrated, the Whites were saying it.

The Blacks and the Whites were fighting—and I was fighting too—but the principal told me not to say a word because I was already going home. I was so scared because I knew what was waiting for me when I got home, but I tried to be bad in front of them. They were calling us names, but the principal wasn’t listening to what the Black folks were trying to tell him. He was mostly on the White side. Lots of Black people got suspended. That was our first year of being integrated. That had to be 1970, because I only went to Pattillo one year. It was rough. We were angry because we didn’t want to go over there with the White people, and the White people were angry because they didn’t want us over there. So, we just started fighting—fist-fighting—whether we knew the person or not.

### **The Integration Process.**

Princeville Elementary and Pattillo were the Black only schools. When you get to Martin Middle and Tarboro High, they were all White schools. Being grown now, I think that what we did back then was childish. The Whites didn’t want to share the bathrooms with us, but we didn’t want to share the bathroom with them. We had to end up sharing, because we had to go.

After that group got suspended, the principal let them know that we’re not going to do that here. He talked to us and told us that if we didn’t want to share, then we could go home. So, we just ended up just sharing. After the years progressed, we all got together. By the time I got to Tarboro High School, it was a lot better, and we began to get along with each other.

### **Staying and Leaving Princeville.**

You have to live in Princeville to know why people stay. There’s just a love for Princeville. It’s the community. It’s the people as a whole, the love. It makes me want to cry just

thinking about it. It's the love that we have for one another, and it's just a great town to live in. We had Hurricane Floyd in 1999, and it crushed my heart. I even went into a semi-depression behind Floyd. I just love my hometown. I just love it. There are people you've grown up with all your life. One lady said, "If you live in Princeville, we are all related." Princeville is just a big happy family, and that's the only way I could describe it. Now, with the gangs happening in Princeville, I go back to Turner Prince and I say, "You did not buy Princeville for this stuff to be going on today."

I have a friend whose house got shot up. She went to work early that morning, and if she hadn't gone to work, they would have killed her, because they shot up her bedroom thinking it was her son's bedroom. She decided to go to work early that morning, but if she had stayed there, she would have been dead. The gang activity start happening right after the flood in 1999. It wasn't as bad as it is now. I think it's worse because people left, and there were just opportunities for other people to come in.

I talked to a lady last Saturday, and she said, "You know what? I'm taking the buyout, because I'm tired of running." She'd been in both of the floods, and then they were shooting at her house. She was tired of running, and she was not returning back to Princeville. But, see, she wasn't born and raised in Princeville. She moved to Princeville later. She's an older lady and she lives by herself, so I can't blame her.

But, there is a big difference between people who were born in Princeville and people who moved to Princeville later in life by how they view Princeville. Some were saying not to even let Princeville come back. The ones saying not to let it come back, those were the ones who weren't born and raised in Princeville. Of course, the ones that were born in Princeville, they said, "No, we want to fight for this, and we want Princeville to come back."

### **Memories of Princeville School.**

I loved to go to school. I don't remember kindergarten. I remember the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. I don't think we had kindergarten back then. We started off in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. But, we did math classes. A lot of our teachers were up in age, but they knew how to teach. That was great because some teachers, they see some children who don't want to work, and they just don't care. But the teachers we had would sit down with you, and they would really teach you stuff. Even when you couldn't quite comprehend what they're saying, they'd let you come in after or before class in the morning, and they wouldn't give up on you. They'd keep pushing and pushing until you got that problem right.

Some teachers now, they don't really sit down and try to teach the kids stuff. If they see a child that doesn't want to learn, they're not going to waste their time. We don't have as many older teachers now. They really primed and pumped until you got it. I was a child in school who didn't talk—they actually had to call my parents to see if I was mentally ill or something and why I didn't talk. Of course, my dad said, "Well if they don't talk, we'll whoop them." When my teacher asked me a question the next day, I sure enough gave her the answer.

Besides that, I really liked the outdoor activities at the school. We just enjoyed doing that. We also had one special teacher, Ms. Reed. She was a sweetheart. And like I said, she pumped and primed and helped us. She always said, "You can do it." She would sit down and take time out with the classes to help them to learn. That was great. I didn't really like all the discipline, though. Back then, they could use those paddle on you. You can't use them now, though, but they could use those on you when you got out of hand. Sometimes, they'd listen to somebody who said, "She did it." Then, I'd say, "No, I didn't do that." The teacher would just whoop both of us because she knew that one of us did it.

### **Changes in education in Princeville over the years.**

Really, I don't visit the school, so I'm not sure about any changes that have happened over the years. I don't know of any specific reforms that have happened in terms of education, either. I'm sure there have been, but I can't think of any that I've heard about or read about over the years. Maybe the playgrounds have changed. There are some changes I would like to see, though. I think there are too many children in some of the classrooms. I think one teacher has 35 kids. To me, somebody's going to be lacking in some learning. You have to break the classes down more. I know they also took away some of the teacher assistants, so we need to add more teacher assistants.

I also pray that they keep Princeville School in the same area that it was before. It had been in the same area almost 60 years. They're thinking about remodeling it. The kids right now are going to school across town in Tarboro, but I want them to come back to Princeville. If the kids don't come back to Princeville, then there's no need to remodel the school. It's such a historical building, even though it's been flooded two times. If you get the kids back into Princeville, then families will come back to the three [government housing] projects we've got; well, it would be four if you include the senior citizens' home. Then, there will be more money coming into Princeville. More money coming into Princeville means that the town can regrow and beautify the school. They used to have little plants and flowers out there. I want to see that again.

The children need an education so they can graduate and go to college and get a good job, instead of hanging out on these streets, getting in trouble. I know there aren't a lot of jobs in Princeville, but before Princeville got flooded, they had afternoon and evening programs at the school, because there are a lot of parents that work late. The Boys & Girls Club were very

instrumental as well. They were good at letting the children have fun, but they also helped them out with their homework. I wish they could bring that back to Princeville.

Basically, I just hope that the children of Princeville get a good education. I don't want them to be hanging out on the block. I want them to go to college or the Army or something like that and just make something good out of their lives. When they do that, they can come and give back to the community. They could start all kinds of projects that Princeville could benefit from. They could start a business in Princeville. That's what I hope.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part V)**

For Sarah, memories of integration bring to mind physical confrontations between Black and White students. As she recalls, "We were angry because we didn't want to go over there with the White people, and the White people were angry because they didn't want us over there." Eventually, however, the students adjusted and got along with each other. In terms of other reform, Sarah acknowledges that there are certainly reforms that have happened, but she is unable to think of any specifically that have happened over the years.

Sarah did, however, express some concerns. She feels like there are too many students in some classrooms and that some teachers now "don't really sit down and try to teach the kids stuff." This is juxtaposed with her own memories of school and the teachers she had that took great care in making sure students comprehended material. Although Sarah wants the children of Princeville to get a great education "so they can graduate and go to college and get a good job," she does not associate this desire with any particular reform initiative. Instead, she believes that when students get that great education that "they can come and give back to the community." When Sarah speaks of reform, she speaks of community reciprocity.

## **Alice's Story**

*I also met Alice at the Princeville Design Workshop in August 2017. She came for one of the evening community input sessions. She traveled from out of state because she did not want to miss the opportunity to support her hometown. After speaking formally and informally with several Princeville community members, I realized that I was only hearing from older residents. In an effort to hear the voices of some of the younger people in the Princeville community, I reached out to Alice. In addition to agreeing to participate in my study, she connected me to several of her peers who also attended Princeville School. Alice was born in the mid-1980s and is originally from Princeville. She currently lives in the northeastern United States. Her ancestry includes a former Princeville mayor, and she attended Princeville School from kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade.*

### **Growing up in Princeville.**

I grew up in Princeville. My whole family pretty much grew up there, going back as far as I can remember—both my grandmother and my grandfather's side. My great grandmother owned a ton of land in Princeville, and we still have the original house where she lived around the corner. Some of the land is still in the family, some of it belongs to a church where most of my family goes. So, Princeville is pretty much home for me. My mom was a single mother, so I spent a lot of time at my grandparents' house, and that's where I went to Princeville Elementary from.

Growing up, for me, it was about family, because most of the people there *are* family. We're all connected in some form or fashion. I lived right next door to my grandparents, and right next door was our cousins. To the other side of us were my grandfather's nieces and nephews; those were his siblings' homes. We could walk over next door to our family's house,

riding our bikes. But you had to be in by a certain time. It was kind of an old school atmosphere where everybody knew each other. It was a village.

I think the community aspect was the most memorable part for me. I grew up playing basketball outside, and we created our own games. It was great having kids your age saying, “Hey, I’m going to so-and-so’s house” and being able to walk from school and being able to build those bonds. Even though I live out of state, I’m home all the time. I’m a homebody, so I always get back home.

We’re family oriented, but I have seen a shift. But it’s not just in Princeville; it’s a national thing, where no parents will let their children in the streets outside for such long periods of time. Around Pioneer Court, where my family is, you kind of still get that feel because it was enclosed, and everybody knew each other. Pioneer Court is government housing; a fair housing place for affordable living for some families. As a kid, I’ve always known it to be there. I think it has changed management quite a bit, so I think it’s more affordable housing rather than just regular apartments, but from what I remember, everybody has somebody in their family who has lived in Pioneer Court at some point. It was maybe 50 apartments or so, so you could go to another apartment across the way. We know each other. As far as roaming around town like we used to do during the day, I think there’s a shift more so because there’s been more gang violence in the local area. In the Wilson, NC area, you hear a lot about human trafficking and those things, so people are just a little bit more afraid.

### **Downsides of living in Princeville.**

I didn’t like that we didn’t have a gym in Princeville because I played basketball. So, we would always have to go to Tarboro for any type of recreational activity; and then when you go to Tarboro, you’re charged the extra fees because you’re not a resident. That’s the thing that I

hated the most and actually one of the things I'm researching and trying to talk to some local people about. We really want to bring back a recreational facility in Princeville.

Aside from that, we had corner stores, but now we don't have as many. That's one thing I don't like about Princeville now. Growing up, it was really the recreational piece. Now, there aren't as many activities outside of church for the kids to do.

### **Staying.**

I think people stay in Princeville because it's home. I think it's different for different people. For our older generation, they understand it. For our younger generation, it's important for them to know it's the historical product that we have there. Where we come from—who we are—our ancestors didn't just pick up and run. The older generations, a lot of them own their houses and own their own land. In the African American community, that's something we don't have a ton of. I think they take great pride in that, as they should. I think the middle and younger generations don't really understand home ownership, and I think for them, it's much easier to just pick up and go. When you own something, I think it's different.

I think the people who leave do it just because it's easier. You're in a flood plain. I think people have been convinced that people don't care about our town anyway, and if they don't care, it's not going to get better, so why should I stay?

I think it's the government that have been sending those messages, no doubt. Every time there is a flood, they say, "Let's just buy these people out." Don't get me wrong; I get it. I'm a very logical person, so I get both sides of the coin; but the government is also saying we're not producing anything economically, so why should they keep pouring money into the town? On the other hand, if you give us the resources so that we can rebuild and do the things that we need to do, we already have a plan and a design set out; come out and help us fix the infrastructure,

which is a national thing. But right here at home, just think about when it was just put into place. That was before all of the global warming and climate change with more severe storms. So, the more severe storms have come, and now there's more technology.

To give you an example of why I say the government—both local government and federal now—there is already research that has been done on what needs to be fixed; however, the last governor of North Carolina, he pushed it back. For what? It's already done. He did that right before he left office. But we're the poorest of the poor, and the governor's comments suggest, "If you're the poorest of the poor, why am I pouring these millions of dollars into your account?" That's how I feel about it, but the historical reference of Princeville means nothing to people whose major concern is more so on money. It means more to them than heritage, especially when it comes to Black heritage.

The majority of the local government responses has been, "We need to rebuild." That's one of the reasons why our organization got ourselves out there and we were at the design meetings. We're always saying, "What are you thinking? What are you doing." We are the up and coming generation. I want to rebuild Princeville, so we're not all tired and saying, "I want to go back home." I don't want my kids to go someplace and have nowhere to play. I want my family to know their heritage, their history, and where they come from; but we have to rebuild it first. There's nothing there. That's why you see people my age leave, but we have to try to figure that out. Locally, I feel the majority of the mayor and council is all about rebuilding Princeville. There is some split on how we do that, but it's great to know that the consensus is on rebuilding. Where to rebuild and how to rebuild is still up for debate for some; but for the majority, we want to preserve historical downtown Princeville and expand to the new acreage that the state is proposing that they would give us on higher ground.

### **Learning about the history of Princeville.**

I never heard about the heritage of Princeville in school, unfortunately. That's the unfortunate piece for me. I think that's ridiculous. I think that's horrible. It's a great disservice that we're doing to our local youth because they need to know where they come from to have some pride. I think we have a lot of great young people who take pride as soon as they hear more about it, but the first time I really remember hearing about it was when I was in college probably, and then more so now that I'm older and I'm doing more activism. Now I've started to do my own research and going back into the town. I've put myself out there to learn more. It was probably more recently, in the last two to three years that I've really gotten the understanding of what Princeville is. I think the first time I heard about it was maybe five years ago or so. I actually started to look more into it because I heard something on PBS, and I'd love to get in touch with Dr. Henry Louis Gates to get some details. Now that I've started to learn more about it, I'm wondering why people aren't here. Why don't they know more about our town?

### **History of education in Princeville.**

The old town hall, where the museum is now, is actually in the area where the first school in Princeville was built. Education-wise, our ancestors started pulling educators from Yale and other universities and colleges like North Carolina A&T and North Carolina Central to come back and start a school in Princeville. That's what I think we need to get back to, because right now, our public school education in North Carolina is not where it used to be years ago when I was in school. When I was growing up, North Carolina education was probably one of the top in the country. Now, I think, I forget where we're ranking, but we're ranking at the lower half, and we see that.

A lot of our towns, especially in rural eastern North Carolina, are struggling hard with that. It's sad to see that they were thinking of not bringing Princeville School back to Princeville. I'm glad that decision didn't go through, but the Montessori that was there changed things a lot. I was still around when it became the Montessori. That was in the late 90s or early 2000s, because I left the school in the early 90s—between 1994 and 1995—and it was some years after that. What I really liked about the Montessori school is how different the curriculum was. It was different than what we had. I had my exams in student counseling so I understand the Montessori philosophy.

Some of the other changes were pretty cool when I was growing up. It was still the whole paddle system, so you could still get paddled if you didn't know certain things or you acted out; but still, you knew everybody in that town. Most of the teachers lived right there in Princeville, so I think the rapport that was built with students was different. There was a different kind of care about your students because you actually knew your students. I know one of the teachers who's still there. She's from Princeville, her family is from Princeville, and just watching her and what she does for her students, it's different from people who didn't grow up there.

#### **Favorite things about Princeville Elementary.**

I'm a little biased, but I really loved math class. The only teacher that I really remember was Ms. Mary<sup>5</sup>, and that's because she was a tough one. We had extracurricular activities like music class. One of the most memorable things is that I knew a lot of my teachers already outside of school. Those teachers knew my grandmother, who was also a teacher. That was the fun part to me, and going to school was mostly about my family and my close friends. There was

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym used here; "Mary" is a reference used to honor Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator and activist known for starting a private school for African American students in Florida. That school later developed into what is now known as Bethune-Cookman University.

more time to spend together and get to know each other. A lot of the teachers that were there were from Princeville, and so were the people working in the cafeteria and the bus drivers, all of those things.

### **Downsides of Princeville Elementary.**

As for things I didn't like so much, I think it's going to be most typical stuff; but lunch, which I know has nothing to do with the school or Princeville. They had to make what was given. Also, I didn't like the fact that we didn't get a chance to know people from the other side of town as much. We all grew up going to school with the people we grew up with right around Princeville. That's maybe what I didn't like the most.

The bridge is literally the dividing mechanism. The understanding that I know is that over the bridge where Princeville is—Shiloh's Landing, the low-lying area—that was the area that was given to the first residents to build their land; but right over the bridge was Confederate territory, which if you go to the commons, there's still Confederate soldier statues now, and that's where the slave auction blocks were. So, they literally walked through Princeville, which is significant. They walked through there, down the riverbank to Tarboro. So, I'm not sure when the bridge was built, but for us, when you cross the bridge, you're in Tarboro. I don't know what it signified other than the difference between Tarboro and Princeville and the separation of it.

One thing that I definitely want to include is that right over the bridge, there is actually a trail, somewhat down the riverbank where there's a smaller bridge that goes up through the river that leads into East Tarboro. Some people call it the Greater Princeville, because that's where a lot of the African Americans from Princeville went after the first flood. Those people actually moved to Tarboro, but Tarboro is still very segregated, so they had a smaller area, which we now call East Tarboro. If you go over and look and you can tell East Tarboro from the rest of

Tarboro, because Tarboro has these fancy grey street signs, but East Tarboro has the regular green signs. Now that I'm older, I only just noticed these things.

For me personally, it bothers me. Why is that the case? That land they were given was also plantation land or former plantation land, and it's low-lying area; so, when Princeville floods, East Tarboro also floods. African Americans and lower minorities were given the worst land, so that's what we still have; so, I try to mention East Tarboro as much as I can when I talk about Princeville, because it's the greater Princeville. It's still really connected, because we come from the same kind of people and the same thing, but they moved across the bridge so they could get to work and help build Tarboro.

As for Princeville Elementary, it was definitely majority African American/Black. There might have been a few White students there, but not more than a handful. Martin Middle School was definitely more diverse. That's in Tarboro. That's where all the other schools pool into. All elementary schools pool there. We only had one middle school back then.

### **Changes in education over the years in Princeville.**

I think that we've kind of stayed the same. I can't speak in terms of curriculum because I don't know, but one thing that I can say is that I do think that there are more people in terms of teachers who aren't from the area from when I grew up. I don't know what role that really plays. For me, personally, I think it plays a role with how well you know your students culturally. If we don't understand our students culturally, then we can really offend or not understand some things and take the kid the wrong way. That's the main thing I've seen. Across town, I don't really know what's happening or what's going on. I haven't dug deep in that, but we have charter schools popping up in Edgecombe County.

I don't know too much about the charter schools, but they can take some of the student pools away from Princeville. You know what you hear in terms of disorganization from some schools, but the things that they are learning are great. It's just that when you have teachers who are underpaid and overworked, you tend to have them not know the students and their culture as well, and that can cause a problem.

**What the students of Princeville need most from the school.**

I think that the children of Princeville need more STEM; no, more art—STEAM: science, technology, engineering, art, and math—because that's where our future is heading, and we definitely need them. They're looking for women who are African American. We put our students at a great advantage to take those opportunities if they are not able to go out in the workforce after middle and high school with some knowledge of STEAM. We have a ton of arts programs, and I think some of the current presidential administration is cutting down on those, but we have a ton of gifted people in the arts realm, and that's from drawing to singing, piano lessons, or any type of instrument. That's one thing that I see that has been drastically cut. Those types of things need to be introduced to Princeville. We need more leadership and understanding for our students at a young age. We need our middle and high schools to click. There really needs to be an academy where we can really train our students to go out, get an education, and come back and give back to the local Princeville community.

It's all about the connection. We want to be able to have people know they can cross over the bridge, and that's where we are right now. Princeville is viewed as second-class to Tarboro because we don't have anything, and I don't think that's how it should be. People have to go all the way to Tarboro or Greenville. We can show younger students that this is where some of our

ancestors came from; this is what we've grown from through all these years. This is the resilience we have. We have a responsibility to really give you a choice as you go out.

They're in a great location in terms of expansion, and there's so much with the engineering mindset. There's no doubt in my mind that there's so much that can be done in terms of the train. The train system is something that the NC State design team proposed; getting it to work and being able to go from historical downtown Princeville to the expanded area all the way down to Little Washington, which is like the seafood capital of North Carolina. We need to be able to go to these places and learn different things. We don't know what's out there. Education-wise, we're confined to this small little area. That means we don't have that awareness; and if your awareness is limited, then your ability to learn is limited.

I think the second-class feeling has always been, from the time that Princeville was Freedom Hill. Anytime we have a Black community who is not some prestigious community with high economic status, you're going to be second-class citizens. Even if it's just the minorities, say Latino Americans, it would be the same thing. I think that's a thing in America; and not just America, it's globally. People don't have the same care or passion about the things that you do when it's personal for you. To them, it doesn't matter. "Why don't you give up the town, it's going to flood again anyway." If we had fixed it last time, it wouldn't have flooded as bad this time. These are the things people aren't considering or don't know. It really frustrates me.

### **What the community needs most from the school.**

I really think the dedication to the youth and giving them other options of things to do is the most important thing for the community. We need that connection and ways to really integrate the parents into their child's education. If possible, we need a way to educate the

parents as well. For me personally, I don't know if that should be the school's responsibility. I think the school's responsibility should be the youth, but a part of it is integrating the parents so that they have that support, especially when you come from a town where parents have to work sometimes two or three jobs just to make ends meet.

I feel like we need school programs that would help support these parents who are working hard, who maybe can't come to a PTO meeting or help their child as much as they would like because they have to work. There needs to be an understanding of that and some things in place to support those parents who are working hard who really want to be invested in their child's education but are on time constraints because of things like work.

I also hope that at some point, we can instill pride in the students about who they are and where they come from on the land they are on now and help them think about what that means for them. They need to see other people who come from here and are successful. We need that type of mentorship; we need that imagery. They may know people from here who are athletes, but when we have other people like someone with a law degree—people like that—they need to see more of that. Then, we can say, “Here are other options for you in terms of your future. You don't have to just go play sports. Here are some other things for you to do, and here are people who have done it.” We really need passionate people and passionate administrators who really care and understand the challenges that the students in Princeville have. That's where I want to see our priorities go. We need people who are dedicated to the students.

I guess the thing I really want to share about Princeville is that we aren't going anywhere. I know people don't understand it. I would really like people to become more educated about it, so when people like yourself come along and want to do research and want to get the word out, I really take that to heart, and I'm really honored that you're doing that, and I really appreciate you

for doing so. I think the more exposure that our town has, the more people will feel the same way and will want to get involved. I think a lot of people don't get involved because either they don't know how. We're really trying to bring in a core group of people in our age group who really believe in where Princeville can be overall.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part VI)**

When I asked Alice about education reform in Princeville, she responded, "I think that we've kind of stayed the same." She discusses changes that came along with the Montessori school and mentions that new charter schools in the area take students away from traditional public schools like Princeville Elementary, but she sees possible good in a charter-like model. She proposes an academy that would train students to learn the necessary dispositions to be able to come back and give to the local Princeville community, sentiments she shares with Shirley.

One of the major issues Alice highlights is that rural communities in eastern North Carolina are struggling in general economically. To this end, Alice argues that the children of Princeville need more focus on science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) because "that's where our future is heading." Not doing so in her mind, puts Princeville students at a great disadvantage in the workforce. Alice also believes that role models can play an important role in this process in that students simply need to know that they have options. She hopes "that at some point, we can instill pride in the students about who they are... and help them think about what that means for them. They need to see other people who come from here and are successful." When Alice speaks of reform, she speaks of relationships.

## **Rebecca's Story**

*One of the people that Alice connected me to is Rebecca. Interestingly enough, someone else had already recommended that I talk to Rebecca, but I did not have a way to contact her. Alice helped bridge that gap. Rebecca was born and raised in Princeville but since moved away and is currently residing in the Research Triangle region of North Carolina, which refers to the combined metropolitan areas of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. She was born in the early 1980s and can trace her Princeville roots back at least four generations. Some of her family left Princeville in the aftermath of the flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew.*

### **Connection.**

Growing up in Princeville, wow. I'm trying to go down memory lane. I grew up in a community where you could easily be raised not only by your immediately family but also by your neighbors. It was very common, so if I were to do something that was out of line and my parents weren't in sight, there wasn't an issue about me being disciplined by the elders in the community. It was expected that you weren't going to take offense to it. If you were to do something like that today, you'd be in a world of trouble. But my childhood, I remember it very vividly. It pretty much took a village to raise a child. I was grateful to have my grandmother in my life along with my step-grandmother, who played a very influential role in my upbringing.

Everyone was pretty much like family in this community. When we would get together and talk, we always talked about the different grandmothers in the neighborhood and how all of our grandmothers functioned as sisters. I guess you could say and there are a lot of us in my age group who pretty much treat each other as family members because of the closeness of our families, based on the relationship of our grandparents.

### **Leaving Princeville.**

It's sad, but there aren't many opportunities in Edgecombe County. It is a community that used to be full of manufacturing positions, and several of those companies are no longer with us. They've closed. That's why the unemployment rate is so high here. We have been conditioned to go out to college. You know how the older people say, "Make something of yourself." I guess the definition of making something of yourself means leaving Princeville to go and do something great. Some of us come back, and then some of us don't. I'm not sure why they don't. Even if you don't desire to live here or live there, it's okay to visit. It's okay to give back. But again, there are not a lot of opportunities for employment in Princeville, so people go to where they can make a difference, and they don't come back.

### **Staying in Princeville.**

My mom stays in Princeville because, in her mind, it's all she has. The property that we have was inherited. My grandfather passed and left it to his children, so my mom has the property now. To her, that's the only thing that she has left of my grandfather, and no matter how hard I fight to try to convince her, "Let's consider keeping the land and relocate," she feels that she has to stay there. A lot of people feel that Princeville is their home, and it's all they know. They can't abandon this place. That's why there are so many people that fight for it to come back. Even though they know there's an opportunity that it could flood again, they're not considering leaving. I know there are some that feel that way and my mother is one of them. It's all she knows; and, because of the connection to my grandfather, she's not trying to leave.

### **Favorite things about living in Princeville.**

I can honestly say, one of my favorite things about living in Princeville was my church family at the time. I didn't go to church as much as I should have as a child, but my grandmother

was a strong and faithful servant of God. She goes to one of the most permanent churches in the area. Most of my childhood memories stem from that church. They played a great role in the community as far as kids are concerned. They used to have a lot of activities for kids either during the school year or at the end of the school year. There was a lot of community involvement. Most of my childhood friends that I actually still have a relationship with, all of us grew up in the same churches. When I think about my childhood, that's one of the first things I think about—all the relationships that I developed just by being a church member there, just by participating in events that they provided to kids in our community.

### **Learning about the history of Princeville.**

One of the other things that I loved about Princeville is that I knew there was something unique about it; but I didn't realize, as a child, just how much history there was behind the town of Princeville. It wasn't until maybe middle school or high school that I realized just how much of a rich heritage we have in this small town. I have to be honest with you, though. This angers me. I did not learn about the heritage and history of Princeville in school. I learned about it through the elders in our community; which, by the way, I love. I used to love to sit around my grandmother and her friends, and it wasn't until I started listening to their conversations that I realized what Princeville was all about. It wasn't a part of our curriculum. I think that the conversation may have stemmed from one of the historical marker signs that I saw in the community. When you first enter the community, there's a silver sign about Freedom Hill.

The conversation started around that time because I always wondered what was this about, and I started paying attention to little markers that were around the community. I would ask, "What does this mean grandma? Who is this person?" Another thing that started that conversation is that I always wondered what the marker on the church was that's located on

Church Street. For years, I played on the porch of that church. I had never paid attention to the marker that's placed on the front step. I think I was probably in middle school going to high school when I asked my grandmother about that marker. She started telling me about that church, and the history of Princeville. All of that is to say, this isn't anything that we learned in school.

While I'm on that discussion, if you take a trip to DC to the new Smithsonian—the African American one that recently opened—there is no mention of Princeville in that museum either. It's definitely been a battle there in Princeville. I actually went to the grand opening of the museum, and I asked one of the employees, “Why is Princeville not mentioned here” and they looked at me as if I was a deer in headlights. They were in shock. They had never heard of us, and I pretty much gave them the information. I told them I would be going back to talk to the managers because I was just very shocked. There was nothing about Princeville listed in that entire museum.

### **Cohesiveness.**

Another thing that I really liked about it was the sense of cohesiveness. I felt as if most of the families that I grew up with in Princeville were my family. That's pretty much the way that we were raised. I didn't look at those friends as friends; I looked to them as family. If was going through something or if my immediate family is going through something, I could easily call on our neighbors, and they would there. Even to this day, the closeness in our community still shows. If something were to go wrong today, there isn't really anything that we would have to worry about, because we take care of the community. We make sure that we're comforting the family. That is one thing that I can say that I'm actually proud about as far as Princeville is concerned. We always look out for each other. We always come together when there is a time of

need or even just to have a great time. Even the after the flood, we pulled ourselves together. We shared resources and we made sure that we shared things.

### **Princeville School.**

The third thing is Princeville School. How can I forget that one? I was there from kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and then I was at Pattillo from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades. There is something so unique to me about the Princeville School that I remember. The Princeville School that is there now is a beautiful school. They have good teachers. But at the Princeville School that I remember, we had some of the toughest teachers. I didn't understand why they were so hard on us then, but I can honestly say that I respect it now. You can put us that attended Princeville School in a room together, and I can promise you that out of that group of people, probably 99% of us that have gone to college or have received a professional degree. That's how impressionable our teachers were on us.

They were very hard on us, expecting nothing but the best from us. We like to credit our success not only to our parents but also to our teachers. They pushed us to go the extra mile. There are not very many of us that I can think of that have come out of that small elementary school that haven't taken strides to be the best.

Most but not all of my teachers were African American. If I think through my elementary years, I know that each one of them had a profound impact on who I am today. They realized something that we didn't because we were so young, that the odds would be against us as we were growing up; not only as African American kids, but as African American kids from what is considered a pretty low-income community. They really pushed us.

Now, they didn't take a lot of nonsense. You also have to understand that during this time, we were allowed to be disciplined by our teachers. That's not something that teachers can

really do now. So, it was pretty much like the discipline that was instilled in you at home pretty much followed you to the school. It was just pretty much another layer to what you were already being taught. The “Yes sir,” “No ma’am” that you used at home was expected to be carried into the school. They didn’t accept excuses. I can remember as far back as the 1<sup>st</sup> grade that I had a very difficult teacher that stayed on me. She saw my potential, I guess I tried to give her the bare minimum; but every single one of those teachers, they were really hard on us. They disciplined us. They wanted to see us be successful. They wanted the best for us.

I brag about my teachers all the time. I still see them today when I’m out and about at home visiting for the weekend, and I always make sure that I thank them. I thank them for every single thing that they did when I was in elementary school. I also apologize if I gave them a hard time. I thank them for every single thing that they did to add to my growth and development, because it means more to me than they will ever know; whether it was for the discipline or the extra push that they gave me to help me understand a given subject matter.

A lot of us from Princeville Elementary often talk about the teachers and how they pushed us and how they tried to get more out of us. They would actually tell us that they were preparing us for when we become adults. They’d say, “When it’s time for you to step out in the real world, people aren’t going to accept any excuses.” Therefore, they were not going to accept any excuses. This is what they expected of us. We learned about responsibility early on at the school.

### **Typical day at Princeville School.**

So, a typical day for me was waking up and walking across the street or across the field. I always lived within a block from the school. The house that my parents own is very close to Princeville Elementary. I often use that as a marker to describe to people how to get to my house.

A typical day for me would be to wake up and walk across the street to school. I knew better than to misbehave because if my mom was home, the teacher could just simply call her up, and I could watch her walk up to the school. As you can imagine, every day I was afraid of talking in class and getting in trouble. I was afraid that I would get out of line and have a teacher threaten to call my mom. It would take her 30 seconds to walk across the street to the school.

But a typical day, I would start off with breakfast, I don't really remember much. I can't remember if it was free at the time or if my parents had some program where they had to pay for my breakfast. We would start off with breakfast first thing in the morning. Every child had meals. I don't remember kids not eating when I was in school. I probably never really paid attention to it. Then we would have class. I have very, very, very wonderful memories of being at Princeville School. I had fun in every class or grade that I can think of, but I also learned a lot, and it also felt as if the teachers took into consideration what their students' learning styles were. Not everyone learned the same way, so I remember us having some very unique ways that we would play games or memorize the ABCs with flashcards or at play centers. That would be how my day went. We would all come together and do an activity to help us remember whatever it was that we were being taught that day.

One of my favorite pastimes is recess. We had the absolutely best recess. I'm looking at our actual playground in my mind now. We had the simplest equipment on our playground, and we made the best of it; and now that I think about it, that's normal. We had something like these monkey bars and we had these huge tires. That's what our playground consisted of. We had a basketball court. I actually don't remember playing on the basketball court, but that's what I played around. I remember playing around these huge tires, probably something that would be on a monster truck. They were filled with sand, so we would gather around that and play. There was

always a sliding board that was always hot because it was made of metal. I remember that like it was yesterday, as if I'm touching it. Those were the simple things. Kids have access to all kinds of things now—the cute little houses and I don't even know what they put on playgrounds now—but even with those simple things we had, we made the best of it, and we absolutely looked forward to recess.

I can't think of one thing I didn't like about Princeville School, to be honest with you. I can't. I will say this, though, that is why some of my classmates and I that are from Princeville decided that, in 2016, we wanted to get together and give back. It is because of the memories that we have and the memories that we shared at this school. We wanted to find some type of way to give back to our community, because that school meant that much to us. I could honestly say to you that I can't think of one bad thing that I disliked about this school. I'm talking about from the principal down to the custodian because I was always taught to treat everyone the same. I have not one bad memory that I can think of when I think about this school.

### **Principals.**

I actually had two principals. I still keep in contact with one of them. The first principal was Mr. Thackeray<sup>6</sup>. We compare him to Joe Clark from *Lean on Me*. He was one of the people that was very tough on us. If you talk to any other people in my age group, you will learn that we had the pleasure of having Thackeray as our principal at Princeville Elementary and then he followed us to Pattillo and then Martin Middle. For me, that's where the journey ends; however, my little brother also had the pleasure of having him as a principal. He also was the one who

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym used here; "Thackeray" is the surname of actor Sidney Poitier's character in the 1967 film *To Sir, with Love*, which is about an inner-city school in the East End of London. Poitier is the first Black actor to win an Academy Award for Best Actor.

gave him his diploma when he graduated from college. That's how much history he has with our family and our community in general.

He was one of the individuals that I spoke of earlier who expected the best of us. There was no excuse with him. When he would see us in the hallway, he'd say, "Pull your pants up," "Yes sir; no ma'am." He'd make direct eye contact when he was talking to you. He had very little patience for disrespect. He wanted the best of us. We were a representation of him and vice versa. As I mentioned before, I keep in contact with him. He has a very close relationship with my family. He was actually responsible for helping my little brother have a successful journey in college. He was a very tough principal. We did not understand it then because we were kids. We thought everyone was mean and out to get us; but this man, he's a game changer. There are so many different people in our community that admire him and give him the utmost respect because of all the years that he invested in education and in our community and in our kids. He was the first principal that I had the pleasure of having at Princeville School.

Then the second was Mr. Chavis<sup>7</sup>. I still see him in passing from time to time. He was another great leader in our community and with our kids. I think Mr. Chavis knows my mom. I think he may have taught her at some point. I'm not exactly sure, but I think he was her teacher at one point as well. He was a pretty cool principal. He would come into the classrooms and talk with the teachers to see how we were progressing with the lesson plans. They were very hands-on. I remember vividly that they were very hands-on. Sometimes, you think of a principal and they're kind of removed from the classroom. They held more of the administrative side of things, the operational side of running the elementary school or whatever school it may be; but I

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<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym used here; "Chavis" refers to John Chavis, a free Black educator and Presbyterian minister who established a private school in Raleigh, NC for Black and White students in 1808.

remember these two principals were being very hands-on by coming to the classrooms, observing, and participating in activities with us. So, when I think of those two, those are the memories that come to mind.

### **Coming together after the flood.**

In 2016, the kids were devastated when they lost the school. I happened to be in town the weekend of the flood, trying to make sure that my parents were safe. I spent about two weeks living together with them in a hotel, trying to make sure they had a roof over their head. During that process, we would watch the news every single day. Whenever I would watch the news during the coverage of the flood, I would always look for Princeville School. When you see a green rooftop of a pretty decent size, that should be your first indicator that's the school; and that's how I was able to determine from the news just how bad of a shape Princeville was in based on what I could see from the sky view.

The kids were out for a couple of days, and they finally decided to settle on a location, which is now where Bridgers School used to be. The kids had very limited resources, and I'm pretty sure that the state did all that they could do to try and help at the time, but we felt it was our responsibility to make sure that these kids weren't lacking. After all, they are going to be representing Princeville in the future, so we wanted to make sure that they had simple things like puzzles or flashcards, or anything that could help with their motor skills. You name it; we came up with a list. When I say we, I'm referring to the class of 2001.

There were a select few of us who pitched in. We did fundraisers and we worked with our respective work organizations to get donations. Unfortunately, we couldn't buy for the whole school, so what we voted on was to purchase items for the pre-K class. We worked with the teacher and asked her what some of the key resources were that she no longer had access to that

would be a deal breaker for her for her to teach her plans. These kids were just starting school. They'd only been in school for two months before the school flooded. We didn't want the quality of education to be affected because they were lacking. So, together we got LeapFrog, things to help with their motor skills, the flashcards I mentioned earlier, and different activities—things she could use during reading time. You name it: kitchen sets, books, anything that we thought would help, whether it be something where they could role play careers or something of that nature. We came together and we purchased that.

We also had a fundraiser at Pizza Inn, which is our local pizza parlor, and asked members from the community to come out and support. They did a really good job at doing that. Then, whatever we didn't get through the fundraiser, we pretty much came out of pocket and had our different organizations that we work for sponsor. Thankfully, we were able to get these things to the kids. They were in awe as we delivered the things to their classrooms because they had things, but they weren't things that they were used to prior to the flood.

I do believe in God, so I think we wouldn't have been able to do that without the support of the teacher working with us and communicating the needs of the children as well as the principal. She was a blessing. She worked with us. She rolled her sleeves up when we delivered the supplies to the kids, and she was actually unpacking the boxes and placing things in the classrooms for the teachers while they were carrying on with class. That was something that we wanted to do. Again, we hate that we couldn't do it on a grander scheme for the whole school, but we said we'd start with a step. We can do this first and as time progresses, we can take on another project and hopefully bless another teacher or the whole school.

### **The role of the PTO.**

Even though I don't have kids in school, I would like to see more parents involved. I know growing up that Parent Teacher Organizations were a huge deal. That was the time for us to show off to our parents. We would have festivals at the school, workshops. I can't really remember the grander details, but maybe once a month, they would have the PTO nights where the parents would be invited to the school. It was essentially like an open house each month, and you would go to your child's class, see their work, talk to the teacher, make sure that they're progressing. "What is it that I can do to volunteer? I see that you have EOG testing coming up; what is it that I can do? Maybe I can donate X, Y, Z."

I think they don't have that as much now, but that was pretty much a time for parents to get to the school after work hours. You have to understand, not every parent could take off work and go up to the schools between 8:00 and 3:00. Because most of the jobs in the area were industrial during the time that we grew up, you couldn't just easily get off your job and pop up to your child's school and surprise them and see what they're doing in class. So, the PTO was designed for those parents who may not have been able to leave work and come and check on their child or their teacher and see how things are going.

Usually, the PTO events were held around 6:30 or 7:00 in the evening. They would have some type of program like a choral presentation. I think that played a huge role in our community; and, from what I remember, there were so many parents out there. The parking lot would be packed, because that was a great time for them to come together as a community to see what their kids are doing at the schools. Parents also got a chance to see what the school had to offer and what the latest updates were about the next program or initiative. I think it played a huge role in community involvement.

### **Importance of volunteering and community involvement.**

Aside from the PTOs, actually being in the classroom was important. Volunteer with your child and check in with the teachers to make sure that your child is progressing and just check in to see if there's something you can do to help; even if it's something as simple as pulling the child to the side and reading a book to them. Help a teacher during their time of need because as we know, it's much more difficult to teach children now than when we were brought up. We have to teach kids about challenges they're facing that we didn't even know about when we were growing up.

I would like to see a lot more community involvement. That's not to say that there isn't any, but just based on my observation, I feel that the parents of these kids that are currently at Princeville Elementary could step up to the plate a little bit more. I compare it to how I grew up versus what I'm seeing now. Education doesn't just stop at the door of the school; you need to be practicing at home, doing some type of review, even during the summer time. Take the children to the library and get books; make them read during the summer. Read *with* them. Print out some type of guide that they could work on.

I just feel like as a parent, there should be more invested interest in actually treating your child's education as if it's a job. Don't let them have the summers off. Yes, let them have some time where they do recreational activities. But then print out some worksheets and let them get to work. I think so many kids now, they just roll through the summer, and it's like they check out of school. I feel like that's what changed, because when I grew up, my mom made us do all that. We went to the library; we had assignments. We had assignments that we actually worked on during the summer, so we didn't just run around playing and just having fun. We were still

learning, so that's something that I would like to talk to our parents about. It has changed a lot over the past couple of generations.

**What the children of Princeville need most from Princeville School.**

In my opinion, I think the children of Princeville need to realize that they are part of a very rich heritage. Like I mentioned earlier, I didn't know what all Princeville had to offer until either middle school or high school. I think they need to understand the rich history behind the place in which they grew up and where their family came from. I think that we need to get our community back involved and again. It's not that they aren't, but it's needed. These kids are our future, so they have to know that they can come back and volunteer their time and services for some of our other graduates. They can pretty much see where we are in life and that any goal that they set their mind to is obtainable. I think they need to see more of that.

We also need more community involvement; more people coming back to volunteer. The children need to see more of us returning home and showing a vested interest in them. Again, that's something that my classmates and I talk about. We try to get back into the classroom to work with some of the teachers and maybe help at a career day. That gives the students an opportunity to ask about us and learn about what we've done, which helps them learn about some options they have. They need to see that these adults are a product of Princeville; and they did it, so I can do it too. There are so many kids that can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, so if you don't relate—if you can't break your story down to them—they may not understand that they may be going through some obstacles now, but “If Rebecca did it, then I can do it too.” We need to teach them the importance of taking school seriously at a young age so that once they get older, they can do whatever they set their mind to.

### **What the community needs most from Princeville School.**

It would be nice if Princeville Elementary could incorporate the town's history into the lessons. They teach these kids everything else. Why don't they know about Princeville School and how this town was founded? I know they are pretty young, but at what time will this be introduced in the lesson plan? When will they learn the history about our town? I just personally feel that we learn about everything else in class, but we never touched on that. So, that's what I think the community needs from Princeville School.

Maybe it could be something as simple as a Princeville Day. Who knows? They could probably do something else, but just simply teach the kids about where they come from. I feel as if a lot of the teachers are not from Princeville, but it would be nice to see the teachers take a vested interest in the rebuilding process and help us fight to get Princeville back, because the very school that they work for comes from that town.

I'm just so afraid that the town is going to fall by the wayside and people are going to forget who we are. I don't want to put that whole burden on them because it's not their responsibility; but it would be nice to see some of them take an active interest in where the town is going to go from here. Some of them are just punching the clock to come to work for the school and go home. It's a pretty huge deal for us, and I hope it's a huge deal for them as well.

### **Hope for the children of Princeville.**

I want the children of Princeville to know that the sky is the limit. I know that sounds cliché. I feel that so many kids—because I was once there—feel like they are confined in this box, so you only know what you know. I want them to understand that there's a whole new world outside of Princeville and that they can do anything that they set their mind to. I like feel they might not know that right now. Again, we're working with limited resources. Some kids

haven't had the opportunity to explore life outside of the area because of their circumstances or something that they can't help, but I want them to know that there are limitless possibilities. I want them to know that we are here to help them. I know that I am. There are several of us that would lend a helping hand.

Following the flooding, I think they've had a tremendous amount of love shown to them, but more importantly, I want them to know and understand that they're getting back into the swing of things. I teach kids that their time starts now. You may think that the kindergarten or maybe the 8th grade is not that serious, but the actions that you are taking now are actually preparing you for the next step in life. So, try to take those seriously. Try to make the most of every experience that you have. You just never know. I always tell the kids that I mentor that it's okay to enjoy life's journey. It's okay to joke and have fun sometimes; but with every action that you make, there are consequences. I lead them with that. The ball is in your court. If you want to take your education seriously, then now is the time to do so. It's never too late, but don't get to a point where you play so much that once you get to high school and get ready to go to college, it's hard to make up for that lost time. That's something that I always teach the kids.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part VII)**

Much like Alice, Rebecca was not able to identify any particular reform effort by name. However, she discusses many of the same changes as other key informants such as discipline through corporal punishment and the tough yet caring nature of the teachers. She reflects on how her teachers taught responsibility and respect and has strong memories of her two principals. She would like to see current students develop a strong relationship with the school and community and highlights the strong role that PTOs played in bridging the school-community gap through festivals.

Rebecca also has high hopes for the children of Princeville. She wants them to know that “the sky is the limit.” She also wants to make sure that students have access to whatever materials they need to have the best educational experience. To this end, her and a group of her peers organized a fundraiser to get supplies for the pre-K class at Princeville Elementary in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. They used their own personal work connections and personal finances to support the effort. In this capacity, she serves as the kind of role model that other key informants speak of. Her hope is to help the children of Princeville realize that they are part of a rich history so that the town does not become a distant memory and “fall by the wayside.” When Rebecca speaks of reform, she speaks of connecting resources to students and teachers in hopes of preserving Princeville’s heritage.

### **Charlotte’s Story**

*I also met Charlotte at the design workshop. However, I did not have a way to get back in touch with her until Alice helped reconnect us. After she heard about the research I was doing in and around Princeville, she emailed me to express her interest in participating. We were initially unable to set up a time to do an oral history interview, so I forwarded her the interview guide I developed. I was able to follow-up with her later on to make sure that the narrative I constructed from her responses was an accurate representation of her thoughts. I regret, however, that I was not able to faithfully include her “Lol”s in the narrative. Charlotte was born in the mid 1980s and grew up in Princeville but currently lives in East Tarboro, NC.*

### **Connection.**

I used to live in Freedom Hill, an apartment complex now known as Asbury Park. My maternal grandfather and his siblings were raised in Princeville on Beasley Street, and their

mother also lived there until her death. Other family members include a great aunt who lived on Church Street across from Freedom Hill; the land that was inherited and is still owned by her daughter and many other cousins who were raised in Princeville and are still residents. I also have an aunt who is a long-time resident of Princeville.

I now reside in East Tarboro, NC, which is what I like to call a spinoff of Princeville. In the early 1900s, there were floods that prevented Blacks from being able to cross the bridge to get to work in Tarboro. This encouraged those that “ran” Tarboro to allow Blacks to buy/rent land on the Tarboro side of the bridge so that they would not have the trouble of trying to cross the bridge to get to work. The land that was available ran alongside the river and is considered to be in the flood zone.

### **Growing up in Princeville.**

I lived in Princeville the first ten years of my life. Those that were in the community then were more like family. I can remember many of the elders sitting on their porches while the children played outside. I often reminisce about the times when the children, including myself, would ride our bikes by the house at the front of the Freedom Hill apartment complex and take plums off of the tree that leaned against the fence. As a youth, I remember walking with my sister to Ms. Lollie Bell’s store, Spotlight, to get a dollar worth of penny candy and to Bridgers Store to buy Now and Later candy. There were many Black businesses in Princeville at the time that I was growing up there. That allowed me to live without limits and to know that I too could and would be successful. The only thing that I disliked in Princeville was that you could not do anything without one of the elders telling your parent.

### **Staying and leaving.**

People stay in Princeville because it is their home, and although it is prone to flooding, many decide to persevere through the devastation of having to rebuild. Princeville is a place where many families are rooted and to leave the land behind would be like walking away from and/or burying their family's history. Many people leave Princeville because they are discouraged and are afraid of future flooding, which wouldn't be a problem if the levy were fixed properly. Many believe that federal and state governments have failed them when it comes to protecting their land and their homes.

### **Education.**

The history of education in Princeville stretches back to the 1800s, when freed Blacks first acquired the land after the Civil War. Education was one of the community's main priorities. Black scholars from Ivy League schools such as Yale and Harvard were recruited to come to Princeville to educate Black students and others in the surrounding communities. The number of pupils that attended the school began to grow, which led to the creation of Pattillo Elementary School in East Tarboro, NC.

I attended Princeville Elementary School for three years, from [the late 1980s to the early 1990s]. The school only had kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and I attended each grade level there. For me, as a student at Princeville Elementary School, some of my favorite things were the fact that most of the students and teachers looked like me. We only had five White students in my grade. Our teachers made sure that each of their students received an adequate education that prepared them for the next level.

My 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher introduced me to opportunities outside of school that I may not have been privy to such as The Ebonette Pageant. I had never been a part of it, and it allowed me

to recognize that there was more to life than what I had been exposed to. I also loved the carnivals that Princeville held every year in the fall and the plays that almost every student had to participate in. I think almost everyone remembers *Pizza Pizza Daddy-O*. The only thing that I disliked at Princeville Elementary was the fact that students were still getting paddled, although for some it was necessary.

### **Changes.**

Over the years, I have seen a lack of passion from the teachers in educating the students. When I was an elementary student, many of my teachers were older and actually cared about the students and wanted each of us to reach our fullest potential. Now when students act out, they are automatically counted out instead of being motivated to excel.

Princeville in particular has changed drastically, as it went from an elementary school to a Montessori and back to an elementary school, which caused a change in the school's curriculum. The student body is also more diverse along with the faculty. The school also has more grade levels than it did when I was a student, which allows students to have an extended stay at the school.

### **Community Needs, Hope for the Future.**

Overall, I think students at Princeville Elementary School need consistency and teachers that are passionate about teaching them. The community needs Princeville Elementary School to be in Princeville. And the community also needs to be able to participate in school events, such as the carnivals and plays that took place when I was an elementary student. If the children see that the community wants to invest in them, then it will be easier for them to invest back into their communities.

Education may serve the children in Princeville best if they are taught that their dreams are realistic, which would include seeing successful individuals that look like them who were raised in the same or similar neighborhoods, coming back to teach in Princeville. I would hope that the children in Princeville would gain an adequate education and become successful so they continue to build on the legacy of those that came before them.

### **Reform: The Spoken and Unspoken (Part VIII)**

Charlotte highlights two areas of educational change in Princeville: diversity and the shift to the Montessori school. Whereas Charlotte remembers approximately five White students at the school while she was there, the most recent data available from NCDPI shows that only 10 White students attended Princeville Elementary in 2017 out of 231 total students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2018b). However, the school also had 35 students listed as Hispanic and three students identified as belonging to two or more races. As for the Montessori school, Charlotte mentions that (a) the curriculum changed, (b) the length of the school day was extended, and (c) the school reverted back to a traditional elementary school at some point.

Charlotte expresses concern over what she describes as a lack of passion she has noticed in some teachers. She argues, “When I was an elementary student, many of my teachers were older and actually cared about the students and wanted each of us to reach our fullest potential. Now when students act out, they are automatically counted out instead of being motivated to excel.” She notes that consistent passion from teachers is what the children of Princeville need most. She connects this passion to the same kinds of community events that Rebecca mentions. Where Rebecca mentions festivals, Charlotte mentions carnivals and school plays. Charlotte resolves, “If the children see that the community wants to invest in them, then it will be easier for

them to invest back into their communities.” When Charlotte speaks of reform, she speaks of community investment.

### **Summary of Narratives**

As the eight narrators reflect on Princeville and Princeville School, they discuss several themes. However, I shall not attempt to explore each theme in depth. As literature on the practice of ethnohistory reminds us,

Ethnohistorians have little access to colonized peoples’ own view of their history; they are usually limited to European views of the extraordinary events that characterized the inevitable social change brought on by the shocks of culture contact. Consequently, ethnohistorians... are compelled to focus importantly on long-term historical trends and the evidence for them that can be deduced from archaeological remains. (Galloway, 2006, p. 163)

I count myself fortunate to bear witness to the Princeville community’s view of their own history, so I shall instead summarize the most common and salient themes and insert relevant analogous archaeological remains—mostly school and district data in this case—and allow the cumulative narrative to stand as the dominant voice rather than my own. By NCDPI’s own admission, when schools receive news like they are low-performing, it often comes as a shock to many people working in the schools (1999, p. 28); so, it is fitting to discuss these narratives in terms of how they address coming into contact with the cultural shock of education reform. While centering the voices of the community, I will highlight the ways in which the narrators speak to the two research questions. The first research question can be summarized as *How Princeville Has Experienced Education Reform*, and the second question as *Majoritarian Story vs. Community Story*.

## Major Themes in the Princeville Community Narratives

In truth, there is one theme that could rightfully reflect the entirety of the narrators' collective reflections: community and family. I say community *and* family here because each narrator described Princeville in some variation of this combination. The narrators describe Princeville as follows:

1. Samuel: "This is all that I know. We loved each other, cousins, family. Your peers, we just loved each other."
2. Gwendolyn: "Growing up, we all had a lot of love for each other. We looked out for each other. It was a caring place then."
3. Milton: "Princeville was a very cohesive family-oriented community city-wide."
4. Shirley: "Princeville was a very close-knit community because everybody knew everybody. We played together, we fought together, then we came back and played together again. We all went to school together."
5. Sarah: "Princeville is just a big happy family, and that's the only way I could describe it."
6. Alice: "Growing up, for me, it was about family, because most of the people there *are* family. We're all connected in some form or fashion."
7. Rebecca: "Everyone was pretty much like family in this community. When we would get together and talk, we always talked about the different grandmothers in the neighborhood and how all of our grandmothers functioned as sisters.... I felt as if most of the families that I grew up with in Princeville were my family. That's pretty much the way that we were raised. I didn't look at those friends as friends; I looked to them as family."

8. Charlotte: “I lived in Princeville the first ten years of my life. Those that were in the community then were more like family. I can remember many of the elders sitting on their porches while the children played outside.”

This a theme that also comes through in other research on Princeville. In her thesis “*Ain’t Nothing Like Home*”: *Place, Identity, and Social Memory in Princeville, North Carolina*, Moga (2001) writes that the participants in her study “often referred to Princeville as if the town were their family, and referred to their family as a part of the town. Many participants did not distinguish between the town and family” (p. 103). In this study, the participants also describe the tight-knit Princeville community as being “on this side of the river” relative to Tarboro. This designation is a strong marker of identity that relates to the historical separation of White residents in Tarboro and the Black residents in Princeville, which still largely exists today (see Appendix F).

The narrators each also discuss discipline in some way. Each narrator expressed the idea that discipline was a communal effort. As Rebecca explains, “It pretty much took a village to raise a child.” Narrators across the generations viewed discipline at the school as an extension of this community effort, with a central theme being that if you got in trouble at school, you were likely going to get in trouble at home too. Teachers were tough but caring, much like those Walker (1996) describes in *Their Highest Potential*. They wanted students to do well, so they pushed students hard. They were preparing students for life and exposing them to things they may not have otherwise known about. Teachers, in short, provided an extension of the values that parents taught at home.

Community *as* family might be a more concise framing, but it is important to note that the narrators also connect different issues and memories to community and to family. For example, some narrators discuss community in terms of activities and games:

1. Samuel: "We made up our own games."
2. Milton: "...we made our own excitement"
3. Shirley: "We didn't have any sleds or anything like that. We made our own."
4. Sarah: "We didn't have the inside games, so we made our own toys."
5. Alice: "I think the community aspect was the most memorable part for me. I grew up playing basketball outside, and we created our own games."

Some narrators discuss family in terms of staying or leaving Princeville:

1. Rebecca: "My mom stays in Princeville because, in her mind, it's all she has. The property that we have was inherited. My grandfather passed and left it to his children, so my mom has the property now."
2. Milton: "There are those that establish families and friendships in other places where the economy and the chance for jobs are better. They leave because if you don't have a business of your own, you'll end up working in a field or in a factory; working for somebody else at a low minimum wage."
3. Charlotte: "Princeville is a place where many families are rooted and to leave the land behind would be like walking away from and/or burying their family's history."

Other themes such as the economics of rural towns like Princeville, the need for role models, and even the role of history and heritage all relate back to community and family. As Samuel explains, there aren't a lot of economic and social opportunities in Princeville, so the community tends to disperse and younger generations move away. People like Milton and Gwendolyn want

to see those who have moved away come back to the community as role models. These role models, like Alice, Rebecca, and Charlotte, can then show children in the Princeville community that “the sky is the limit.”

However, embedded in this message of “cultural belief in possibility” (G . Noblit, personal communication, March 27, 2018) is the crux of the education reform experience in Princeville. As Rebecca explains,

It’s sad, but there aren’t many opportunities in Edgecombe County. It is a community that used to be full of manufacturing positions, and several of those companies are no longer with us. They’ve closed. That’s why the unemployment rate is so high here. We have been conditioned to go out to college. You know how the older people say, “Make something of yourself.” I guess the definition of making something of yourself means leaving Princeville to go and do something great.

Herein lies the majoritarian message that greatness is inextricably tied to one’s ability to secure gainful employment, which brings us back to the research questions.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

“They realize at last that change does not mean reform, that change does not mean improvement.”

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961

The purpose of this study is to connect community experiences and perspectives with archival material in order to understand the degree to which the people of Princeville have experienced education reform and to see how these perspectives compare to messages espoused by education reform movements. Princeville is the oldest Black town in America, founded on marshy land in eastern North Carolina. It remains rural community to this day and is comprised mostly of Black residents. The eight key informants do recognize that changes have happened but do not necessarily attribute these changes to actual reform or substantive improvements in education. The cross-section of the Princeville community who participated in this study provide the base for a framework of co-constructed reform space by highlighting the ways in which the majoritarian narrative of school reform is disconnected from their reality, as evidence from the two research questions suggests.

### **How Princeville Has Experienced Education Reform**

Research question 1: How does a Black rural school community experience education reform in North Carolina?

- a. How do experiences vary among community members, if at all?

- b. What shifts in education does the community recognize (over time) vis-à-vis segregation/desegregation, consolidation, reform, etc.?
- c. How do major storm events such as hurricanes and flooding relate to reform efforts, if at all?

The key informants mostly experience education reform as a departure from what was great about their own educational experience. Samuel and Alice, for example, highlight the major role PTOs played in connecting the community to the school and lament the departure of these activities and festivals. Gwendolyn discusses the nonexistence of standardized testing versus the EOGs she sees her niece take now. Alice speaks of how charter schools take away resources from traditional public schools like Princeville Elementary. The greatest departure for the informants, however, is the sense of caring amongst the teachers. Noddings (1988) supports this claim, suggesting that this dearth of care in schools is also evident in society and is a “crisis” that manifests in two ways: (a) students often feel that no one cares for them, and (b) students are not learning how to be careers themselves (p. 32).

For the older generation—those born between the 1940s and 1960s—school desegregation and integration was a major point of reform. For Samuel, it was an exciting time because there was a chance that he might have been able to attend school with his brother. It was not particularly memorable for Gwendolyn, however, who notes, “I don’t remember much about the integration process. It’s kind of weird because you would think that you would remember that from being one of the students. But the students, we adjusted. Both the Blacks and the Whites adjusted.” She describes the process in matter-of-fact terms:

There weren’t really any particular messages shared with us about integrated schools.

None. No more than preparing us to go. Not saying, “You’re going to go over here and

it's going to be this kind of teacher.” Just letting us know that it's going to be a different. Times are changing. Things are changing, and your surroundings are going to be different, so you're going to have to accept and follow through so you can get through. For Milton, however, integration ushered in a new era of equity and access for Black students. He notes that laws were put into place to make sure that all students get the same materials such as textbooks, which is like “night and day” from when he grew up.

Although integration happened after she had already graduated from high school, Shirley notes that after the process happened, there were more White teachers than Black teachers. Although integration happened in 1970, the NC Statistical Profiles providing race and gender data for teachers are not released until 1975. As Figure 5 shows, there were 23 Black male, 139 Black female, 25 White male, and 159 White female teachers in Edgecombe County in 1975. So, Black teachers comprised approximately 46.8% of the teaching force, and White teachers comprised approximately 53.2%. Figure 6 shows that over the past 14 years, Black teachers only comprise an average of approximately 28.4% of the workforce in the district.

INSTRUCTIONAL AND NON-INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL														
Instructional and Non-Instructional Personnel By Sex and Race														
	M A L E							F E M A L E						
	WHITE	BLACK	SPANISH SURNAME AMERICAN	ASIAN AMERICAN	AMERICAN INDIAN	OTHER	TOTAL	WHITE	BLACK	SPANISH SURNAME AMERICAN	ASIAN AMERICAN	AMERICAN INDIAN	OTHER	TOTAL
INSTRUCTIONAL	25	23					48	159	139		1			299
NON-INSTRUCTIONAL		14					14	37	73					110
														347
														124

Figure 5. Instructional and Non-Instructional Personnel by Sex and Race

Sarah's integration story, however, focused on the fights between Black and White students. As she recalls, “The Whites didn't want to share the bathrooms with us, but we didn't

want to share the bathroom with them. We had to end up sharing, because we had to go.” This sense of resolution is common in the narratives and speaks to a central reform theme: adjustment. Echoing Shirley’s matter-of-factness, Gwendolyn simply states, “Both the Blacks and the Whites adjusted.”

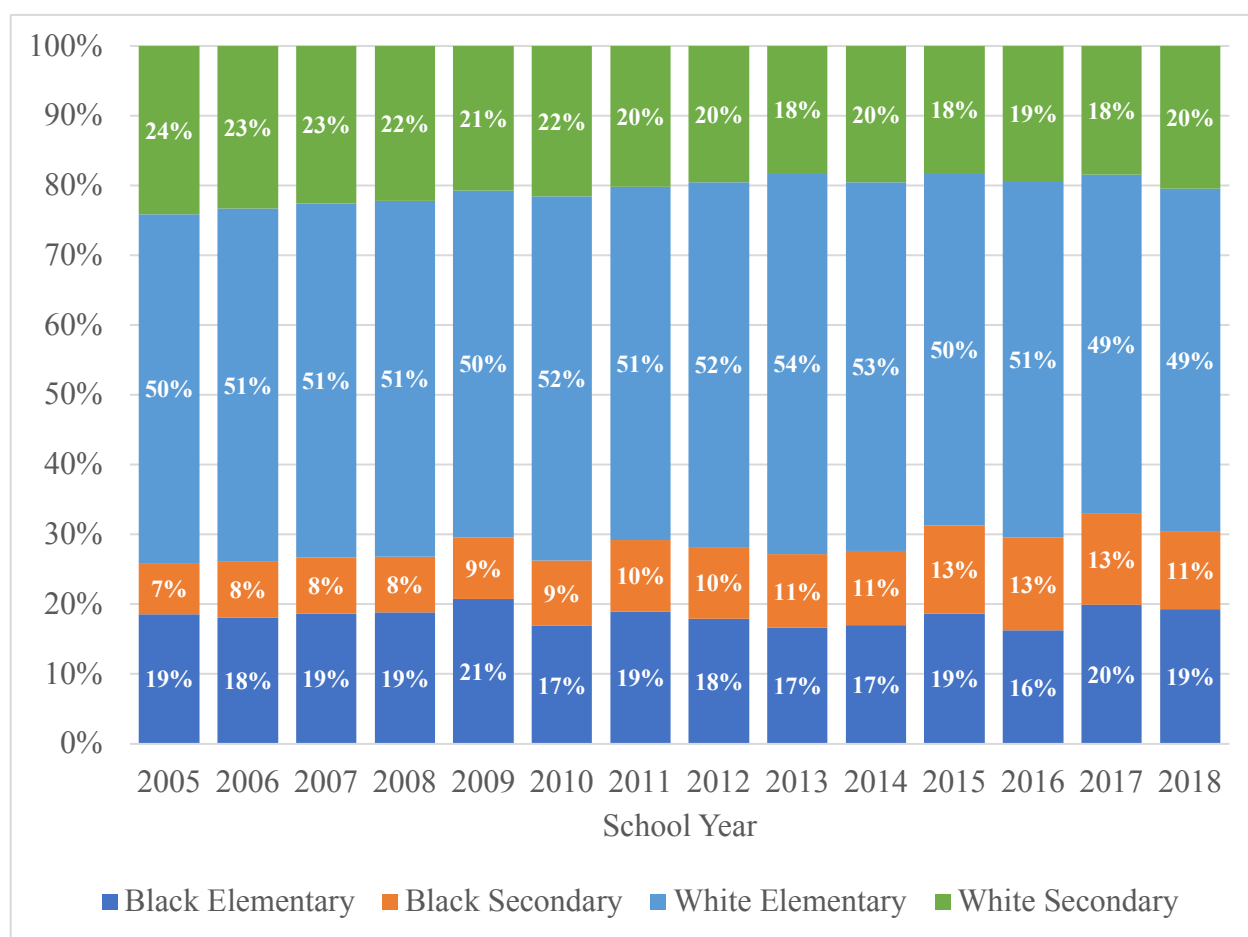


Figure 6. Racial Balance of Teachers in Edgecombe County Public Schools, 2005-2018. Data compiled from NC Statistical Profiles, retrieved from <http://apps.schools.nc.gov/statisticalprofile>

Overall, the key informants, when asked directly about specific educational reforms, initiatives, or policies they may be familiar with or have noticed over the years, indicated that they could not think of any particular reforms. However, they were aware of numerous changes

such as the federal School Breakfast Program, curriculum shifts, school structures (e.g. extended school day, Montessori model, etc.), tracking, new assessments (e.g. EOGs), charter schools, and allocation of resources (e.g. cuts to arts programming). So, even though the narrators may not have called these policies out by name, it is evident that they are not blind to the shifts. However, school reform is not highlighted their collective story. The traces of the majoritarian narrative that *is* found in their story presents as a vestige of years of enduring calls to “make something of yourself” and do something great—elsewhere.

The “elsewhere” relates specifically to part (c) of research question 1. Informants expressed a great deal of concern over whether or not Princeville Elementary would be able to return to Princeville due to flooding concerns. Although the Edgecombe County BOE’s November 2017 vote to rebuild the school was met with “[s]houts, claps, tears and amens” (Harper, 2017b), the district was planning to use \$270,000 in FEMA funding to make hazard mitigation improvements to the site. As Milton explains in his capacity as Commissioner, “there ain’t no financial rainbow coming down” from FEMA. So, the future of the school remains an unanswered question. However, when the narrators do address the flood, they do not discuss it in terms of reform. It is simply, as Samuel notes of low test scores, a problem to be solved. The younger informants, all born in the 1980s, speak of organizing efforts to make sure teacher and students—the youngest students especially—have what they need to learn. They spoke neither of state or federal policy or intervention measures. Everything for them returned to the community and family theme. In their eyes, building up strong students will help build a stronger Princeville.

## Majoritarian Story vs. Community Story

Research question 2: How does this community's understanding of and experiences with education reforms compare to the constructions of contemporary reform movements?

Whereas the key informants speak broadly about a range of education topics and issues, each person presents a narrative that in some way speaks against or through the majoritarian message of school reform. Speaking *against* the majoritarian narrative, in my conception, implies that narrators highlight points of direct dissonance. I argue that the narrators who speak *through* the majoritarian narrative use a combination of their own non-majoritarian strategy and premise to achieve a majoritarian goal. Table 2 shows a summary of how each key informant's narrative compares to the majoritarian narrative of education reform.

The majoritarian narrative of education positions college and career readiness as the ideal aim of reform based on the premise that a more educated populace makes a more educated and competitive workforce, which in turn leads to an improved economy. The strategy laid out to achieve the corporate competitiveness goals are based on increased accountability from teachers, schools, and school systems. This accountability takes the form of increased standardized testing of students and more rigorous curriculum and content standards, which CRT sees as "a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Sarah and Alice share college and career readiness as a goal of education reform, but instead of economics, they see this preparation as a way to give back to the Princeville community. They speak through the majoritarian narrative by highlighting programs like the Boys & Girls Club and using role models to achieve the college and career ready goals. They support these strategies by acknowledging the role that receiving support outside of school plays in helping students see what is possible for them.

Table 2

*Majoritarian vs. Community Education Reform Narrative Comparison*

<b>Narrative</b>	Majoritarian	Samuel	Gwendolyn	Milton	Shirley	Sarah	Alice	Rebecca	Charlotte
<b>Goal</b>	College and career readiness as the ideal	Students clothed and well-nourished as the ideal	School embedded in the fiber of the community as the ideal	Equity and access to resources as the ideal	School system outreach as the ideal	College and career readiness as the ideal	College and career readiness as the ideal	Community involvement as the ideal	Improved school culture as the ideal
<b>Premise</b>	Good for the economy	Physical and social well-being of students	Strong school-community relationships	Emotional well-being of students	Strong teacher-student relationships	Way to give back to the community	Way to give back to the community	Strong school-community relationships	Strong school-community relationships
<b>Strategy</b>	Standards, accountability, and testing	More parental and community involvement	Truancy officers and well-trained guidance counselors	Secure funding to fix/rebuild school and purchase instructional materials	Teachers going out into the community to meet parents	After-school programming (e.g. Boys & Girls Club)	Role models showing students what is possible	PTO community outreach, school festivals, career day	School carnivals plays, pageants, etc.

Although Gwendolyn, Shirley, Rebecca, and Charlotte have differing views on what the goal of education reform should be, they all agree that the premise of any reform should be the building of strong school-community relationships. As Gwendolyn reflects on how truancy officers would come to the homes of students who were absent, she notes how some outreach process now are automated, which inhibits possibly rapport building in the community. Shirley's call to have teachers go out into the community to meet parents is a call to make teachers more understanding of the issues that students and their parents deal with. Both Rebecca and Charlotte speak about the school festivals, plays, and pageants of yesteryear as ways for building these relationships, which speaks against the testing and accountability majoritarian narrative.

Milton also speaks against the majoritarian narrative. Instead of focusing on corporate interests, he is more concerned about the emotional well-being of students and sees equity to access and resources as the ideal goal of reform. He discusses the trauma students endure in the face of flood events like Hurricane Matthew. As Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, "equal opportunity" (p. 17) has been a recurring theme in school and civil rights legal battles; specifically, the notion that students of color should have access to the same curriculum, instruction, funding, and facilities as White students. Milton believes that reform should take the form of making sure that Princeville's students have any and all appropriate instructional materials and a school building that is as protected as possible from future flood damage.

Whereas Milton focuses on students' emotional well-being, Samuel focuses on their physical and social well-being. He does not want to see students go to school hungry or without adequate clothing. He sees parental and community involvement as a key lever for education reform. Although it is evident that many school reforms in North Carolina have included

strategies for increasing community involvement, these strategies are not seen as valuable in the majoritarian narrative.

### **Why Reform is Not Acknowledged**

As noted previously, the key informants acknowledge a number of policy changes, but they speak very little of reform. One possible reason for this is that they view the form of school as permanent and that whatever the reformers are doing do not meaningfully change the essence of schools. For them reform happens on the margins. Tyack and Tobin (1994) describe this stability of school as an institutional form as a lack of change in the “grammar” of schooling, which refers to “the regular structures and rules that organize the work of instruction” (p.454). As the authors explain,

Practices like graded classrooms structure schools in a manner analogous to the way grammar organizes meaning in language. Neither the grammar of schooling nor the grammar of speech needs to be consciously understood to operate smoothly. Indeed, much of the grammar of schooling has become so well established that it is typically taken for granted as just the way schools are. (p. 454)

Tyack and Cuban (1995) argue that the grammar of schooling persists because “Little has changed in the ways that schools divide time and space, classify students and allocate them into classrooms, splinter knowledge into ‘subjects,’ and award grades and ‘credits’ as evidence of learning” (p. 85). Indeed, although grade levels have changed at Princeville school—not having kindergarten upon its founding then eventually expanding to include Pre-K and up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade—the arrangements of students into these grades has remained fairly constant.

Another possible explanation for this gap is that there was simply too much reform to keep track of. As Drew (1997) explains, perhaps North Carolina was trying too hard to do too much. According to a 2017 survey from the Education Week Research Center, 58% of the teachers surveyed perceive that they are experiencing too much reform (p. 12), and 84% feel like once they “get a handle” on new reforms, things then change (p. 13). So, it stands to reason that reforms in Princeville are simply lumped together as an amorphous, ever-changing confederation of policies rather than discrete, well-defined reform efforts.

A third possibility is that North Carolina’s reforms were not actually reforms at all but rather just heightened pressure coupled with public shaming. Teachers and students in schools that have been labeled low-performing often operate in “demoralizing environments” (Payne, 2008, pp. 17-47) and a “culture of cruelty and a politics of humiliation” that institutionalizes “a set of values, policies, and symbolic practices that legitimate forms of organized violence against human beings and lead inexorably to hardship, suffering, and despair” (Giroux, 2012, p. 14). These practice, Giroux writes, are “accompanied by forms of humiliation in which the character, dignity, and bodies of targeted individuals and groups are under attack” (p. 14). These are the type of practices to lead some like former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to say things like “I think the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina” (Martin, 2010). No one I have talked to in Princeville believes that hurricanes have been an asset to education in their community.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings suggest that there is an even richer story to tell about education in Princeville. What started out as a study of education reform ended up being more about one

particular school and its legacy. Princeville School has played a major part in all of the participants' lives. Although there are great resources on the history of education in Edgecombe County that include Princeville (Knight, 2014; Knight & Auld, 2012), there is no volume dedicated to specifically to Princeville School. I humbly submit that this project might serve as an addition to the body of research on Princeville in support of such an effort. However, any future work must also include voices from within the school. Teachers, administrators, and current students are certainly an important part of Princeville but were not included in this study because I somewhat expect them to be more familiar with education reform.

Going to parents and former students allowed me to hear from a group that is able to reflect back on reform rather than speak about their current views from inside the system. Potential points of consideration for this study might be (a) how do the experiences of current teachers, administrators, and students compare to former students and, perhaps, former teachers? (b) what current reform initiatives are taking place in Princeville School and how does school staff perceive them? or (c) given that Princeville School has been relocated to Tarboro, what effect has the move had on students and teachers?

### **Personal Reflections**

For me, this project has been a deeply meaningful experience. Going to Princeville reminds me of my maternal grandparents' home in Riceboro, GA. Although the moss that hangs from the southern Georgia trees in Riceboro do not hang from the trees in Princeville, the tightness of the community is evident. For most of my childhood, the Riceboro, GA city hall where my grandparents lived was just across the railroad tracks from their house down a short, dusty country road. Riceboro is where I learned how to crack pecans, cut sugarcane, and shuck corn. It's where I watched my grandfather feed hogs and fix lawnmowers. It's where I listened to

him ask me if I had seen the *new* stoplight that had been installed—a joke that ran for the better part of a decade. Like Princeville, Riceboro is a small city with less than 1,000 residents; most of those residents are Black. It seemed that my grandfather knew half the town; or rather, that half the town knew him. This has led me to wonder what such a research project might look like there.

It is also not lost on me that Riceboro sits in Liberty County. To study Freedom Hill while claiming ancestry in Liberty County is to reflect deeply on the meaning of freedom and liberty and how these ideals are reflected in education. I do not claim to know the answers to complex questions of how to develop truly liberating education systems, but I believe that the answers must begin with conversations steeped in community dialogue. My hope is that this research will help facilitate such a dialogue.

### **Fighting for Freedom Hill**

When I began this study, all I really knew is that I wanted to learn more about Princeville and to tell as many people about the town as possible. Now, on the other end of two years of reading articles about Princeville, reading through years of school board minutes, driving around taking pictures, and asking people I met randomly on the street to talk with me for an hour and a half, I realize that Princeville is a town of fighters. Ethnohistory has provided a way for the Princeville community to speak about their experiences with education and reform across time. Reality pedagogy has provided a from through which they could also speak about broader community issues. Many residents faced a horrible reality in 1999 and again in 2016 that they might not be able to return home. Others wondered if their town would even still exist, as calls were being made to evacuate everyone from Princeville indefinitely. This has been a reality in

Princeville for a long time. However, as Princeville Mayor Bobbie Jones says, “The flood took away some of our mojo, but we are coming back – bigger, better and bolder than before.”

This spirit of defiance came through strong in the time that I spent with each participant. Alice perhaps sums it up best, “I guess the thing I really want to share about Princeville is that we aren’t going anywhere.” This brings me back to the quote that sparked this study, that “they still have expectations.” As I reflect on the quote, I am not entirely sure if the *they* refers to students or to the purveyors of accountability in education reform, although I presumed the former. Either way, I know that the people of Princeville will continue to fight. I will be right there fighting with them.

## **APPENDIX A: ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Interview Guide for Study of Education in Princeville, NC**

I am conducting a historical study of education in Princeville, NC. As the country's oldest town incorporated by African Americans, the people who comprise the community of Princeville have a unique story to tell. The following prompts will help guide this study and will help to tell the story better.

This oral history interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes to complete.

#### Prompts

1. Walk me through growing up in Princeville.
2. What are [or were] some of your favorite things about living in Princeville?
3. What are [or were] some things about you dislike(d) about living in Princeville?
4. Why do people stay in Princeville?
5. Why do people leave Princeville?
6. Tell me about the history of education in Princeville.
7. What are [or were] some of your favorite things about school in Princeville?
8. What are [or were] some things about you dislike(d) about school in Princeville?
9. What changes have you seen in education over the years?
10. Are there any specific reforms in education that you have noticed in Princeville?
11. What do the children of Princeville need most from the schools?
12. What does the community need most from the schools?
13. How might education serve the children of Princeville best?
14. What would you hope for the children of Princeville?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX B: KEY INFORMANT INFORMATION

Name	Birth Range	Location of Interview	Current residency	Occupation
Samuel	Early 1960s	Office	Princeville, NC	Government
Gwendolyn	Late 1950s	Home	Princeville, NC	Technology
Milton	Early 1940s	Library	Princeville, NC	Government/Entertainment
Shirley	Early 1950s	Library	Tarboro, NC	Communications, retired
Sarah	Late 1950s	Library/Phone	Princeville, NC	Undisclosed
Alice	Mid 1980s	Phone	Northeastern United States	Athletics
Rebecca	Early 1980s	Phone	Research Triangle region, NC	Healthcare
Charlotte	Mid 1980s	Email/Phone	East Tarboro, NC	Legal studies

## APPENDIX C: PSEUDONYM INDEX

### Samuel Cornish (1795 – 1858)

Founded on March 16, 1827 as a four-page, four-column standard-sized weekly, *Freedom's Journal* was the first black-owned and operated newspaper in the United States and was established the same year that slavery was abolished in New York State. Begun by a group of free black men in New York City, the paper served to counter racist commentary published in the mainstream press. Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm served, respectively, as its senior and junior editors. *Freedom's Journal* was similar to other ante-bellum reform papers in that its pages consisted of news of current events, anecdotes, and editorials and was used to address contemporary issues such as slavery and "colonization," a concept which was conceived by members of The American Colonization Society, a mostly white pro-emigration organization founded in 1816 to repatriate free black people to Africa. Initially opposed to colonization efforts, *Freedom's Journal* denounced slavery and advocated for black people's political rights, the right to vote, and spoke out against lynchings.

PBS Newspapers. (n. d.). *Freedom's Journal*. Retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/newbios/nwsppr/freedom/freedom.html](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/newbios/nwsppr/freedom/freedom.html)

### Gwendolyn Harrison (unknown – 2017)

When Gwendolyn Harrison decided to come to UNC to pursue a Ph.D. in Spanish, she went through the usual process: she applied and was accepted, and she was assigned a room in one of the women's dormitories. She arrived on campus in June 1951, checked into her dorm, and went to begin the registration process. When she returned to her dorm, a university employee told her that there had been a mistake: Harrison's registration was cancelled and should would not be allowed to attend UNC that term. The reason? They had not realized that Harrison was an African American. UNC denied entry to African American students until forced by a federal court to admit African American graduate students in 1951. The lawsuit was initiated by four African American law students, who would enroll in the first summer session of 1951. Believing that the ruling applied to all of the graduate programs at UNC, Harrison, who was from Kinston, assumed that she would finally be able to attend her home state university. In a letter to a local newspaper, Harrison wrote, "I was proud because I thought that North Carolina at least was about to live up to the democratic ideals which are a part of the heritage of our great land."

Graham, N. (2017, April 17). Remembering Gwendolyn Harrison, the first African American woman to attend UNC [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://blogs.lib.unc.edu/uarms/index.php/2017/04/remembering-gwendolyn-harrison-the-first-african-american-woman-to-attend-unc/>

### **Shirley Chisholm (1924 – 2005)**

Born in Brooklyn, NY of West Indian parents, [Chisholm] was the first black woman to sit in Congress. Prior to her election in 1968 she had served in the New York Assembly for four years, following a professional career in child care and early childhood education. To be elected from her mostly black Brooklyn district, she had defied what was left of the Brooklyn Democratic machine. “Unbossed and unbought” was her slogan.

Freeman, J. (2005). Shirley Chisholm’s 1972 presidential campaign. *University of Illinois at Chicago Women’s History Project*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20141111182057/http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/jofreeman/polhistory/chisholm.htm>

### **Sarah E. Goode (1850 – 1905)**

Born into slavery in 1850, inventor and entrepreneur Sarah E. Goode went on to become the first African-American woman to be granted a patent by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, for her invention of a folding cabinet bed in 1885. After receiving her freedom at the end of the Civil War, Goode moved to Chicago and eventually became an entrepreneur. Along with her husband Archibald, a carpenter, she owned a furniture store. Many of her customers, who were mostly working-class, lived in small apartments and didn’t have much space for furniture, including beds. As a solution to the problem, Goode invented a cabinet bed, which she described as a “folding bed,” similar to what nowadays would be called a Murphy bed. When the bed was not being used, it could also serve as a roll-top desk, complete with compartments for stationery and other writing supplies. Goode received a patent for her invention on July 14, 1885.

Biography.com. (2018, January 19). Sarah E. Goode biography. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/sarah-e-goode-21054639>

### **Alice Coachman (1923 – 2014)**

Alice Coachman, a star track and field athlete at Tuskegee Institute, became the first black woman to win Olympic gold, setting records with her high jump at the 1948 Olympics in London. Coachman, who dominated her sport, would likely have won more medals if the 1940 and 1944 Olympics had not been canceled due to World War II.

History.com Staff. (2010). Black women in sports. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-women-in-sports>

### **Rebecca Lee Crumpler (1831 – 1895)**

Crumpler, a Delaware native, is widely acknowledged as the first African-American woman physician in the U.S. She was born in 1831 and worked as a nurse in Massachusetts before applying to the New England Female Medical College in 1860. She graduated in 1864, becoming the first and only African-American graduate of that institution, which closed in 1873. For many years, Crumpler's status as the first African-American woman to become a physician was not known; that distinction was mistakenly given to Rebecca Cole, who graduated from Women's Medical College in Pennsylvania three years after Crumpler's graduation.

USF Health Online. (2017). African-American trailblazers in medicine & medical research. Retrieved from <https://www.usfhealthonline.com/resources/healthcare/african-american-trailblazers-in-medicine-medical-research/>

### **Charlotte E. Ray (1850 – 1911)**

Born in New York City on January 13, 1850, Charlotte E. Ray is best known as the first female African-American lawyer in the United States. Decades before she would win that distinction, however, Ray grew up in a large family as one of seven children. Her father, Charles, was a minister and an activist in the abolitionist movement. He edited the *Colored American*, an abolitionist publication, and helped in the underground railroad, which aided escaped slaves in their efforts to find freedom in the North. Education was very important to Ray's family. During the 1860s, Ray attended the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth in Washington, D.C. The institution was one of only a handful of places that offered a quality education to young, African-American women. By the end of the 1860s, she had become a teacher at the preparatory school associated with Howard University. Ray then applied to the university's law program as C.E. Ray, using only her initials. Some thought that she used her initials as a way of disguising her gender since the university did not accept women into the program, but her exact intentions remain unknown.

Biography.com. (2014, April 1). Charlotte E. Ray biography. Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/people/charlotte-e-ray-11380>

# APPENDIX D: PRINCEVILLE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY DATA, 1996-2012

School Year	Met Expected	Met Exemplary or High Growth	Performance Composite	ABC Status	AYP
1996-97	No	No	16.7	LP	—
1997-98	Yes	Yes	46.7	Exm	—
1998-99	No	No	60	NR	—
1999-00	Yes	No	73.5	Exp	—
2000-01	No	No	65.1	NR	—
2001-02	No	No	63.4	NR	—
2002-03	Yes	Yes	76.0	Pro Hgh	Yes
2003-04	Yes	Yes	74.7	Pro Hgh	Yes
2004-05	Yes	No	80.6	Dst Exp	Yes
2005-06	No	No	57.6	Pri	Yes
2006-07	No	No	63.2	NR	No
2007-08	Yes	Yes	45.8	Pri Hgh	No
2008-09	Yes	No	48.1	Pri Exp	Yes
2009-10	No	No	45.3	LP	No
2010-11	No	No	55.9	Pri	Yes
2011-12	No	No	50.0	Pri	No

*Note.* The grade span at Princeville Montessori School was PK-3 from 1996-2000, PK-4 from 2000-2001, and became PK-5 in 2001 and has remained at that span since the transition back to Princeville Elementary School. Also, “High Growth” replaced “Met Exemplary” in the 2002-2003 school year, and AYP status designations began to be included in school reports. Status codes: Exp - Expected Growth/Gain; Exm - Exemplary Growth/Gain; Dst - School of Distinction; LP - Low-performing; NR - No Recognition; Pri - Priority School; Pro - School of Progress

**APPENDIX E: PRINCEVILLE SCHOOL PERFORMANCE GRADE DETAIL BY  
SUBJECT, 2013-2017**

Table 3. Reading, Grades 3-5

Year	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5	
	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient
2013	—	14.3	—	19.2	—	8.2
2014	12.2	14.3	13.3	26.7	6.5	19.6
2015	9.4	21.9	16.2	18.9	12.1	24.2
2016	7.3	14.6	5.9	11.8	5.1	12.8
2017	16.7	19.0	6.7	6.7	<5	17.2

Table 4. Math, Grades 3-5

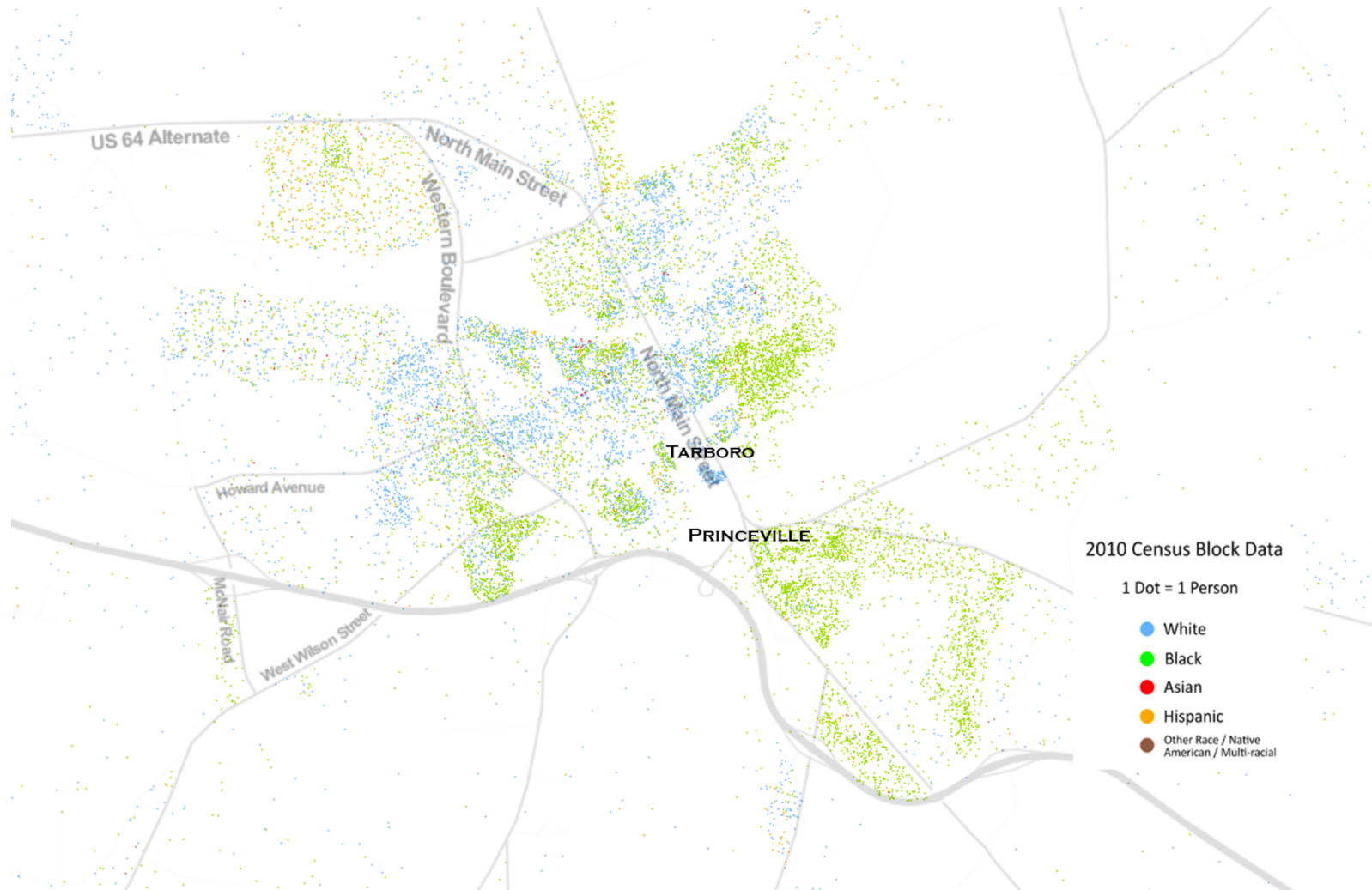
Year	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5	
	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient	% College/ Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient
2013	—	24.5	28.8	—	—	8.2
2014	28.6	40.8	11.1	17.8	15.2	21.7
2015	21.9	34.4	16.2	21.6	24.2	24.2
2016	9.8	22.0	8.8	11.8	25.6	28.2
2017	14.3	31.0	<5	6.7	31.0	37.9

Table 5. Grade 5 Science

Year	% College/Career Ready	% Grade Level Proficient
2013	—	<5
2014	6.5	10.9
2015	12.1	18.2
2016	25.6	38.5
2017	20.7	20.7

Note. Data compiled from ABCs of Public Education Historical Data, retrieved from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability>

## APPENDIX F: RACIAL DOT MAP OF PRINCEVILLE AND TARBORO, NC



*Note.* This image is a composite of two images with superimposed “Tarboro” and “Princeville” text: (a) Racial Dot Map – Copyright 2013 by Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator); and (b) Map of Princeville, NC and Tarboro, NC – Copyright 2018 by Google Maps

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