“It Matters Who You Sit Next To”

Perspectives on Integration Policy in Middletown, CT

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which widespread assumptions about the purposes of integration inform the creation and implementation of integration policy, with a focus on Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown, CT. The project examines the ways in which these assumptions have influenced Board decisions about policies like the Connecticut Racial Imbalance Law, which have led to a contentious history with communities of color in Middletown, particularly in the North End. I have acted as a participant observer for this project, and have volunteered my time with the North End Action Team as part of my research. Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical basis for this work, with an emphasis on Jonathan Kozol and Irving Joyner in particular. Joyner makes the case for black schools as centers for community and empowerment, and laments the destruction of these institutions and the loss of black trust in education as a result of white retribution for forced integration. In contrast, Kozol is a strong believer in integration at all costs, and his work demonstrates many of the assumptions outlined in this thesis. Chapter 2 outlines the historical basis of the Racial Imbalance Law, as well as the current stipulations of the law. Chapter 3 is an exploration of the history of Macdonough and the Middletown School District in the context of the Racial Imbalance Law and other racial factors. In Chapter 4, I discuss the events surrounding the threat from school officials to close Macdonough, including community action that I participated in. I have tried to include as many first-hand community voices as I could in this section so that people can tell their own stories.

Keywords: racial imbalance, Macdonough, North End, Middletown, integration
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Introduction

“Hi, my name is Anna Flurry, and I am a volunteer with the North End Action Team.” It is a Saturday afternoon, one of the last warm days in October, and I am addressing an older white man with as genuine a smile as I can muster as he looks at me dubiously through his half open screen door. Of the four doorbells I have pressed, his is the only response I have received from the building. “I was wondering if you knew about the threat to close Macdonough?”

“They’re going to close Macdonough?”

“They are talking about it. The Board of Education is having a meeting on October 18th to decide whether or not to close it.” By this point in the afternoon, I don’t have to look at my notes to double-check the date.

The man opens his door a little wider. “That’s a shame. They tried to do this when my kids went there too.”

“Yeah, it’s definitely happened a lot, unfortunately,” I sigh. He is not the first person today to have mentioned the repeating pattern.

“Why is it this time?”

“They’re saying it’s because of budgetary reasons, but who knows?” This is my first week working with the North End Action Team, and I will soon realize that the reasons to close Macdonough Elementary School are much more complex than simple budgetary reasons. “If you would like, you can sign the petition asking the Board not to close Macdonough.”

“Sure, I’d be happy to.”

I first found out about the threat to close Macdonough through my work at Green Street Teaching and Learning Center, an after-school arts program in the North End of Middletown, CT that enrolls many students from said elementary school. The parents and Green Street staff spoke about it with shaking heads, and the students
with anxiety thinly masked by the familiar dramatic quality of elementary school
gossip. I knew that there had been a redistricting threat the year before, but as I talked
to more people about the Board of Education’s threat to close the school, I quickly
realized that these were not isolated incidents. Macdonough had been “on the
chopping block” for as long as most people could remember.

A strong requirement that I had decided on when I was picking a thesis topic
was that it had to be located in the immediate community, and that I had to find a way
to volunteer my time for that community in some way, as well. It was through this
second stipulation that I actually stumbled into my thesis topic. I had known about the
North End Action Team (NEAT) previously as being vaguely connected to Green
Street (in fact, they were a strong catalyst for founding the arts center), but as I looked
into ways that I could “give back,” it became increasingly clear that it would make
sense to do so through an established organization, and NEAT seemed to be the
perfect candidate. Founded in 1997, NEAT is an organization that aims to “empower
residents and stakeholders to participate in and advocate for the interests of the North
End neighborhood.”\footnote{“Our Mission,” \textit{North End Action Team}, 15 Apr 2017.} Located in the North End of Middletown, CT, they run youth
programs, help with neighborhood advocacy, and help run a community garden.

Precious Price, the newly-hired community organizer who was almost as new to the
organization as I was in October of 2016, described it as the “back-burner” to
activities going on in the North End, as more of a resource and a tool than anything
else. Their purpose was essentially to empower those around them to act. I began to
volunteer my time there and started picking up the pieces for my thesis as I went
along.
I originally intended for my thesis to be about social action and community organizing (and in many ways it still is), so I began to attend events held by NEAT and the Board of Education. I wanted to learn more about how the North End was working with the community to try to keep Macdonough from shutting down. As I attended these events and started some tentative research into the matter, I learned that most of these repeated redistricting and school closure threats to Macdonough came as a result of a 1969 piece of legislature called the Racial Imbalance Law. This law required all schools in a district to maintain a percentage of students of color somewhere between 25% less and 25% more than the district average. For a place like the Middletown school district, which is now made up of about 50% students of color across the district, what this means is that each elementary school has to enroll between 25% and 75% students of color. Macdonough has hovered around the high end of this range for many years. Although there were many other factors at play, this law fascinated me because it was supposed to encourage integration, which many understood as a good thing for people of color, but in the case of Macdonough, the law affectively encouraged school board action that either closed or redistricted the school due to the high percentage of students of color, which would negatively impact the community. My centralizing question became: How can it be that a law that is supposed to help students of color actually hinders them in the case of Macdonough?

As I pondered this question over the following months, I began to realize that the most persistent pattern that school officials followed in discussions about Macdonough and racial imbalance was that they did not include community members from the North End in the decision process. Additionally, all the work that was done
to comply with the law and reduce “racial imbalance” was portrayed to Middletown residents as something that was beneficial to students of color. This perplexed me, since Macdonough families, most of them families of color, were consistently opposed to redistricting and closing the school. However, school officials persisted in the idea that implementing the Racial Imbalance Law was good for communities of color, even as they broke up these same communities by busing their students across town or threatened to take their school away. As I began to look back at the history of the past few decades of racial imbalance measures in Middletown, several distinct patterns emerged:

1. The assumption, both on the part of school officials and more generally among communities less affected by integration policy, that integration in and of itself means the same thing as school quality.
2. The assumption that students of color will benefit from being around white students, or even just from being away from other students of color.
3. The unspoken popular understanding that the difficulties of integration (i.e. busing and redistricting) should be a burden borne primarily by people of color rather than by white people, even as decisions being made about integration are not usually placed in the hands of those most affected by these burdens.
4. When it impacts white schools, integration, or “diversity,” is often sold to white people as a way to “open their horizons” and benefit from the existence of people of color.
5. If “reverse busing” of white students to schools with more students of color cannot be avoided, educational or enrichment programs are added to those schools to attract these white children, thus diverting away funds and resources that could instead have been used by students of color.
6. Throughout the district, there is a consistent lack in the percentage of teachers of color compared to percentages of students of color.

In American culture in the years since Brown, there has grown a popular understanding of schools and race that conflates quality education with integrated
education. While integration undoubtedly has many merits, integration for students of color does not by definition mean the same thing as a quality education for students of color. Conflating the two is the same thing as saying that if a black student is put in a white school, they will do better simply by merit of being around white students. This logic is not the same as saying that putting students of color in white schools that have more funding, better teachers, and better facilities because of racial and sociopolitical divides will make a difference in their education. That is an entirely different discussion, and not one that I have the space to explore in its entirety for this project. The assumption that I am challenging here is the claim that all these factors aside, students of color will do better in white schools just by merit of being around white students.

Given the assumption that the reward of integration is the chance for students of color to study with white students, integration policy is often formed and carried out in a way that places the burden of the law on the shoulders of people of color. In most cases, all that white students are asked to do is exist within their schools and allow the students of color who are bused to their schools to walk through the front door. Once they are there, the school is not required to provide them with the tools and support they need to succeed in school, nor are the white students required to be their friends, nor is the school even required to hire teachers of color. (Although, of course, the school may choose to celebrate the ways that its white students have grown from its “diversity.”) Rather than commit to providing quality education to all students, integration logic holds that it is enough for students of color to simply exist in the same spaces as white students. For the most part, white students are not even
required to attend schools with a majority of students of color without sweetening the pot with promises of better educational programs than what they can access at their own schools.

Attitudes towards students of color are also exemplified through linguistic patterns, such as the use of the word “minority.” In my research for this project, almost every government document, newspaper, and school report referred to people of color as “minorities.” As I read about schools like Macdonough, which for the past two decades has consisted of more than 50% “minority” students, the term began to feel like a misnomer. I began to realize the absurdity of saying that these schools had a “majority of minority students,” and I started to ask myself why this term was used in the first place. It almost felt as though the word was used as an intentional attempt to belittle students of color and justify keeping schools mostly white. The word harkened back to Joyner’s comment that student of color were “divided up… and distributed to several different majority White schools… where they constituted a distinct and visible minority.”

In my research, I found that at least in Middletown, the strongest measures taken to address the two schools consistently approaching racial imbalance in recent years have been against Macdonough, rather than Moody, which has historically had a majority of

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Figure 1: The North End

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white students. There seemed to be an underlying sense of discomfort with the idea of “too many” students of color in one place, and the use of the word “minority” to describe students of color started to feel like a reassuring refrain that made white people feel less threatened. However, both in Middletown and nationwide, students of color now make up the majority of students in schools.\(^3\) It is now not only linguistically odd, but also statistically inaccurate to refer to students of color as “minorities” in the context of schools, and if anything, the use of the word has become a misleading way to justify a system that does not benefit a group that now makes up the majority of its participants. The word “minority” also helps to propagate the myth that integration is the burden of people of color (since the “majority” of white people do not need it), and yet decisions being made are not usually in the hands of people of color. Examples of this are plentiful in the politics of the Racial Imbalance Law in Middletown, CT, especially in regards to Macdonough. Given these reservations about the word and its implications, I have attempted to avoid using the word “minority” to refer to students of color in this paper, except when quoting other authors.

In order to orient the reader, it is important to establish a basic understanding of Middletown’s layout. The North End (\textit{Figure I}) is located just north of downtown Middletown, and around the middle of the city as a whole.\(^4\) It is a low-income neighborhood with a high population of people of color compared to the rest of the city. The North End Action Team is located in the southeast of the neighborhood, as is Green Street Teaching and Learning Center. The entire neighborhood is about a

square mile in size, and is very walkable. Geographically, Commodore Macdonough School is located on Spring Street in the center of the North End. It is one of the smallest elementary schools in Middletown, and it houses the highest percentage of students of color in the area. In terms of the other elementary schools in the area, Moody School currently and in past years has had the highest percentage of white students, and it is one of the larger schools in the area. Both schools have been cited multiple times for racial imbalance by the state under the Racial Imbalance Law, but Moody has never been seriously threatened with closure, whereas Macdonough has been several times. The other six elementary schools are Farm Hill School, Bielefield

![Figure 2: Middletown School District 2015-16](image-url)
School, Spencer School, Wesley School, Snow School, and Lawrence School. The location of these schools is such that they do not correlate well with centers of population. Farm Hill and Bielefield’s proximity in particular lends itself to awkward districting issues, as can be seen in Figure 2.\(^5\)

It is also worthwhile to note that Middletown is, in fact, an anomaly. Most school districts in Connecticut are made up of almost all white students or almost all students of color, and there are very few that meet somewhere in the middle. Between 2005-2009 120 out of 167 school districts were in an area with a population of 90% or more white people.\(^6\) Although a city’s overall population may not represent its school-age population, particularly as students of color are on the rise, it is unlikely that populations of students of color approached the state-wide 40.5% average in these areas. Although schools have been diversifying more in recent years, as of 2012, only 351 out of 1,135 schools listed had between 20% - 60% students of color (roughly 20% on either end of the 40.5% state-wide average). This means that only 30.9% of schools have an average of students that approaches the state-wide average.\(^7\)

Therefore, the state’s push for integration with the Racial Imbalance Law has very little effect on the most segregated districts, since de facto segregation in the state has less to do with schools \textit{within} the districts than it does with the districts themselves. Nonetheless, the repercussions of this law within a district like Middletown, which \textit{does} have a mix of students, has implications for integration laws aimed at more regional desegregation. The issues are often similar, just on a macro level.

My role in this thesis has been one of a participant observer. As I mentioned previously, I felt that it was important to offer my time and services to the community in some way during this process, even if indirectly. Therefore, I have worked with NEAT in a volunteering position over the past six months, and I plan to continue to do so until I graduate. During my time there, I have canvassed for petition signatures, translated documents and leaflets into Spanish, handed out flyers to North End residents inviting them to community meetings, attended said community meetings, helped design and work on the website, and made my thesis work available to Precious Price and other community members when it could be helpful. Additionally, I work with students from Macdonough several times per week at Green Street, and although I have not had conversations with them about my thesis, it is difficult to imagine a situation where, even were I not working with NEAT, I would not be personally involved in the issues at stake in one way or another. I do not believe in the “neutral” observer, because I believe that it is impossible for any rational being to enter a situation without their previous experiences and beliefs influencing their perception of and reaction to the situation. I believe it is much more worthwhile to attempt to examine one’s personal biases and bases for understanding than to pretend that one is not influenced by these at all when entering the position of an observer.

As such, I would like to briefly acknowledge my own background in the context of this project, as I have tried to do throughout this study. Since childhood, I have maintained a fervent interest in teaching and social justice, and I have a strong attachment to the students of Middletown, particularly those from the North End, given that I teach and tutor many of them several days a week. I am a middle-class,
college-educated, 21-year-old white woman from Arizona, and I attended public and charter schools that were almost all white, so I am not basing much of my research off of first-hand knowledge. I have therefore tried to focus on community voices, history, and theoretical pieces to inform my thesis. Additionally, I have developed a great relationship with Cookie Quinones, community leader and AfterSchool supervisor for Green Street, over the past four years, and Precious Price over the past six months. I respect both of them deeply, and they are both community leaders that inspire me to go on and pursue community organizing in the years beyond college. Additionally, my degree in sociology and my time at Wesleyan has helped me to view social structures in a particular way that links local events to larger social power structures. None of this is a “disclaimer,” per say; on the contrary, it is a chance for the reader to understand the ways in which I am approaching the issues at hand and to develop their own interpretations of my work based off of those understandings.

I would like to note that, while I used as many primary sources as I could, there remain some gaps in my research. First, indexing for the Middletown Press was inconsistent. The only years between 1969-2000 that were indexed were 1987-1996. Hence, it was difficult to assess exactly how the Connecticut Racial Imbalance Law affected Middletown in its early stages, both when it was initially established in 1969, and when it actually went into practice in 1980. Based on the configurations of the schools in the 1987 articles that I found, it seems that students from the primary Middletown housing projects at that time, Long River Village and Maplewood Hill, were bused to many primarily white schools in order to achieve racial balance, and
that Macdonough was not yet being targeted. However, it is unclear how segregated Middletown schools were or were not in 1980 when racial balance was required for the first time by law. There is an additional gap for the years 1997, 1998, and 1999, after the microfilm index ends, and before the online database begins for the Middletown Press. I was able to find some information in the Hartford Courant about these years, but it does not include as much detail as I would like. Additionally, were I to continue this project, I would like to conduct more interviews with families directly impacted by redistricting, closure threats, the Connecticut Racial Imbalance Law, and integration policy more generally. As it stands, I tried to include as many community voices as I could from community meetings, board of education meetings, and personal conversations, but decided not to include formal interviews in my project for the time being.

In the following chapters, I will try to establish a basis for an understanding of the racial politics of education in Middletown as they relate to the Connecticut Racial Imbalance Law. In Chapter 1, I will establish the theoretical basis for my work, with an emphasis on Jonathan Kozol and Irving Joyner in particular. Joyner writes about the effects of Brown v. Board of Education in the South, with an emphasis on integration in North Carolina, where he grew up. He makes the case for black schools as centers for community and empowerment, and laments the destruction of these institutions and the loss of black trust in education as a result of white retribution for forced integration. In contrast, Kozol is a strong believer in integration at all costs, and his work demonstrates many of the six assumptions outlined previously. Chapter 2 outlines the historical basis of the Racial Imbalance Law, as well as the current

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stipulations of the law. Chapter 3 is an exploration of the history of Macdonough and the Middletown School District in the context of the Racial Imbalance Law and other racial factors. In Chapter 4, I discuss the events surrounding the threat from school officials to close Macdonough, including community action that I participated in. I have tried to include as many first-hand community voices as I could in this section so that people can tell their own stories, and I have included the full transcripts of what I wrote down in the Appendices.

As a final note, I would like to point out that there are many factors that influence the decision to redistrict or close a school, not all of them related to racial imbalance, and not all of them in the Board’s control, or even in the state’s control. In the past few decades, American public schools have found themselves in increasingly difficult positions as test scores tell them they are failing and funds are cut from their budgets at the local, state, and federal level. Private and charter schools are increasingly appealing for parents who are able and willing to make the transition, even as many of these schools operate largely without government regulation. Across the nation, schools, boards of education, and city councils are forced to make difficult decisions about their schools and their students, and often there is no easy answer. For the purposes of this project, I am primarily focused on the issues of students of color in Middletown, CT, which is a very narrow focus compared to the expanse of issues in education, but it is part and parcel of the larger educational patterns in the United States. Popular understandings about integration and racial politics in schools have an enormous role in these national tendencies, especially since in recent years, students of color have crossed the threshold to make up a higher percentage of students in
schools than whites. While I do not focus heavily on budgetary issues and the push for charter schools in this project, they are an important part to developing a full understanding of racial politics in education and vice versa. My hope is that this thesis will encourage readers to explore how the ideas and popular assumptions presented here can create a jumping-off point to examine larger political, economic, and social structures of education. They certainly have for me.
Chapter 1

Theory

Integration must be understood, not as the mingling of bodies in school and neighborhood, but as participation in and shared control over the major institutional spheres of American life. And that is a question of developing communal associations that can be bases for power – not of dispersing a community that is powerless.
- Piven & Cloward, 1967

Jonathan Kozol: Integration versus Equalization

In the years after Brown v. Board of Education, when the Supreme Court struck down the legal basis for “separate but equal,” many communities pushed school officials to guarantee a quality education for poor students and students of color that equaled the public education that their white and wealthy counterparts were receiving. However, in 1973, the case for equal funding for students in both poor and rich districts went to the Supreme Court and got turned down. In San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, a nearby predominantly white school district spent more than twice as much on each student than the school district attended by Demetrio Rodriguez. A district court in Texas “had found the inequalities of education finance in that state to be unconstitutional,” but the case proceeded to the

Supreme Court, where a different decision was reached.\textsuperscript{10} During that case, the argument was made by Justice Lewis Powell that “In cases where wealth is involved… ‘the Equal Protection Clause does not require absolute equality…”\textsuperscript{11} Thurgood Marshall countered that it was “‘an inescapable fact that if one district has more funds available per pupil than another district,’ it ‘will have greater choice’ in what is offers to its children.”\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless, the case was overturned, thus leaving “legal efforts to reduce or to abolish inequalities in education” to the states.\textsuperscript{13}

According to Jonathan Kozol, author of *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, to this day, “most Americans are unaware that children have no constitutional protection where equality of education is at stake.”\textsuperscript{14} Unsurprisingly, this has meant that poor students routinely receive less funding for school than do rich students. Additionally, in several states, the “funding gap for children of color is a great deal larger than the gap for children of low income.”\textsuperscript{15}

Perhaps the most difficult result of this decision is that when arguing for more funds for a poor district, “attorneys are unable to incorporate within their pleadings legal claims deriving from the U.S. Constitution,” thus making it much more difficult to win cases, and forcing them to depend on state constitutions to argue their cases.\textsuperscript{16}

As a result, lawyers are often placed in positions where it is not realistic for them to ask for equal funding for poorer districts, and are left fighting for *adequate* funding for poorer school districts. Kozol says that as a result, a national problem is treated

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 242.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 254.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 246.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 249.
like a local issue. According to him, “the most important disadvantage advocates for equal education or for adequate education have to face is that attorneys are unable to incorporate within their pleadings legal claims deriving from the U.S. Constitution.”

Changes to unfair funding structures have been incremental and hard-fought, with very little progress made in the past four and a half decades.

While Kozol supports the victories that have been won in regards to equalizing education, he emphasizes that integration is more important to focus on than equalizing education. From his perspective, equalizing funding is something of a lost cause, given that “It might be another century before the promise made by Plessy may at last be realized in all 50 states,” and that integration is what will make the real difference in the lives of students of color. Kozol quotes Brown v. Board of Education in order to support his claim:

Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal opportunities? We believe that it does.... In the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place.

He adds that lawyers who call for equal education are essentially accepting the state of the educational system as it is, and are playing into the ideal of “separate but equal” espoused by Plessy v. Ferguson. According to Kozol, “Whether [attorneys] ask for equal, adequate, high adequate, or basic minimal provision, they are asking for post-modern versions of the promise of Plessy made and the next 60 years of

17 Ibid., p. 241.
18 Ibid., p. 249.
19 Ibid., p. 262.
20 Ibid., p. 260.
history betrayed.”

He even takes his argument as far as criticizing parents who would rather have an “old-fashioned sense of community, in which their children walk to school together, learn together and play together,” instead of sending them across town to attend white schools. He also laments that people from neighborhoods that used to be “bastions of progressive thinking” during the civil rights era have changed their approach towards integration.

However, when one looks at the realities of integration policy, as this thesis attempts to do, it seems that legislature that adequately addresses segregation issues is as difficult to pass and implement as is equalizing legislature. The difference is that while legislature that works to equalize funding, equipment, buildings, and teachers would directly impact the lives of poor students and students of color, integration policy only works to place students of color in the same classroom as white students. While this may indirectly place students of color in schools with better facilities, it does not guarantee access to a good education, and in fact might sometimes work against students of color, since historically they and their families have been the ones asked to bear the brunt of integration efforts, as we shall see in later chapters.

Additionally, in the rare situations where white students are transferred to schools with a majority of students of color, this is often accomplished by offering enrichment opportunities to said white students. Since the late 1960’s, when the busing of students of color to majority-white schools became more common, white people have been adverse to the idea of “reverse busing.” Given assumptions that students of color need to be around white students in order to have a chance at

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21 Ibid., p. 260.
22 Ibid., p. 31.
23 Ibid., p. 31.
success, and that even allowing them to exist in white schools was something of a favor to them, it was reasoned that busing white students into schools with a majority of students of color would accomplish nothing, and would only result in a worse education for white students.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, white students are often encouraged to attend schools with majority students of color by offering enrichment programs not available elsewhere. This is a national pattern, but has also been relevant to the Middletown School District many times in the past several decades, as will be evidenced in future chapters. The result of this practice is that enrichment programs are disproportionately offered to white students when those opportunities could instead be directed towards people of color, thus channeling much-needed resources away from students of color in the name of integration.

Kozol also never addresses the concept of teachers of color as role models. In his book, when he mentions the race of the staff that he speaks to, he is often referring to black teachers and black principals who work in the schools. However, statistically, only 42\% of teachers in “high-minority schools,” schools with 75\% or more students of color, are people of color.\textsuperscript{25} While this is much higher than the 18\% average for all schools nation-wide, the fact remains that even in schools with many students of color, these students are disproportionately taught by white teachers.\textsuperscript{26} For someone so interested in integration, Kozol does not appear to take issue with the lack of teachers of color in the lives of students of color. This further illustrates the fact that his argument for integration is based in the idea that students of color will

\textsuperscript{24} Driscoll, Theodore, “School Imbalance Changes Unlikely,” \textit{The Hartford Courant}, 14 Dec 1969, p. 3B.
benefit from being around white people, and will not succeed if they are left with other people of color.

Additionally, Kozol claims that students of color in de facto segregated schools have low self-esteem, because they are segregated, which was the same argument used in Brown while speaking about students’ “feeling of inferiority.”\textsuperscript{27} However, given the evidence presented by Joyner, it seems difficult to claim that those students would face the same when surrounded by white students. One Middletown parent of color whose kids went to a mostly-white schools said that they were “miserable” there and that her daughter was “told by a lot of the children that they were told not to play with her because of her skin color.”\textsuperscript{28} What’s more, there seems to be something inherently racist in the assumption that these students would immediately feel better about themselves were they to attend a white school, just by merit of being around white students. That is not to say that it is not important to discuss issues of self-esteem, but Kozol uses evidence such as the expressions on students' faces, or parts of their conversations that he picks out support his claim. This evidence is far less compelling than quantifiable differences in funding that goes to schools.

The basis for Kozol’s argument is built off of his assumption that beyond equality, integration is good simply because it places students of color next to white students. He seems to think students of color face a sort of victimization simply by merit of being around other students of color. He says that “Segregated schools like Martin Luther King are often tense, disorderly, and socially unhappy places, and

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{28} “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 18 Oct 2016, 1:13:00.
when episodes of student violence occur, the inclination of the parents of white children to avoid such schools is obviously reinforced.”\(^{29}\) Given the context of his arguments about integration, calling these schools “tense, disorderly, and socially unhappy places” implies that they are that way because there are simply too many people of color in one place at one time. If these schools are indeed “tense” and “disorderly,” then he seems to imply that students of color are naturally uncivilized and that if they were only to spend some time with white people, they might be able to learn how to behave correctly. Kozol may never outright make this claim, but when he goes on to lament that white parents’ fears are “obviously reinforced” by the actions of these supposedly dangerous students of color and that this fear then leads them to want to avoid these students of color, it is clear that he considers their whiteness an asset that could be used to subdue these violent, “disorderly” students. Kozol’s paternalistic desires for students of color to be civilized are further exemplified by his insistence that they must spend more time with white students in order to develop “ease around white people” and “function effectively in that environment,” as former assistance attorney general Roger Wilkins says on page 239.\(^{30}\) Kozol’s sense of the white man’s burden comes to a head when he quotes Martha Overall, a pastor at St. Ann’s, who says, “When I take them with me sometimes to Manhattan... and they find themselves surrounded by a lot of white kids, many of the younger ones get very scared. It's an utterly different world for them. In racial terms, they're almost totally cut off.”\(^{31}\) It is as though he is saying that by being “cut off” from white people, these students will never have a chance at

\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 26.  
\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 239.  
\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 16.
becoming more than scared children. However, the schools that Joyner and other authors described seemed to have prepared black students just fine, aside from a lack of resources, so why should they require the presence of white people in order to succeed? Kozol clearly feels that it should be the responsibility of students of color to conform to what he considers white culture and expectations, and does not problematize this attitude by questioning why he values this culture in the first place. Kozol believes that integration will liberate students of color, but only if they become more like his conception of white people.
Irving Joyner: The Impact of Brown v. BOE

In order to fully grasp contemporary debates about integration, it is crucial to appreciate the background and consequences of the case from which much of modern-day understandings stem: Brown v. Board of Education. The repercussions of this monumental decision in the South can assist the reader in understanding the theory behind decisions made in the North.

Before Brown, schools were severely segregated in the South, and while this divide caused many social, economic, and political problems for African-American communities, black schools also provided a source of empowerment and solidarity. In his 2013 article, “Pimping Brown v. Board of Education: The Destruction of African-American Schools and the Mis-Education of African-American Students,” Irving Joyner says that “schools played a ‘central role… in the formation and growth of black communities during the century following emancipation.’”

According to Joyner:

Before school desegregation, Black culture was synonymous with school culture. There was no disconnect or need for Black students to assimilate into the majority culture. School, home, and community were familiar and comfortable places where racial identity was not a challenge to be overcome. Moreover, school stakeholders gave explicit lessons on how to be a minority and succeed within the dominant culture.

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Schools were a space to prepare students to succeed in the real world, both educationally and socially, in the context of a racist and segregated society. He adds that there were four main principles that governed these schools:

1. The schools were dedicated to maximizing the potential of every student who was enrolled in or assigned to that institution…
2. Parents were strong, active supporters of the teachers and administrators because they had faith in and respect for their leadership and trusted them to prepare the students for life after graduation…
3. The African-American community was a prime stakeholder in the educational institution because it was able to progress through the leadership and knowledge which were provided to its children…
4. African-American teachers were dedicated to providing the very best educational course of study for every student who came into the school and they served as extended family members to their communities.34

The education of African-American students was a collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community, and schools served as a core faction of the community. Schools also had a history of connecting strongly to the church, another unifying institution in the community. In the late 1800’s, the church had often served as the school building as well. As a result, both teachers and preachers continued to play a role as community leaders into the mid-20th century, often making schools centers for community action, as well.35 Given this strong community support, in the 1961-62 school year, African American dropouts in North Carolina were down to 3.9% as compared to the white percentage of 4.1%.36 Many students graduating from these schools were highly successful, and often moved to the North where they could have

34 Ibid., p. 19.
35 Fairclough, op. cit., p. 48-50.
36 Joyner, op. cit., p. 7.
fruitful careers with comparatively fewer struggles than they would have had in the segregated South.\(^{37}\)

Black teachers and principals were an integral part of this system, and they were regarded with deep respect by their communities. Shortly after emancipation, black communities demanded that only black teachers be appointed to teach in African-American public schools.\(^{38}\) As a result, they became pillars of African-American communities. Given their high involvement in these communities, “teachers knew the students, their families and special circumstances or experiences that impacted their ability to become good students.”\(^{39}\) Teachers made many sacrifices for their students and communities, including contributing “their own funds and conduct[ing] fund-raising efforts to supplement the deliberately inadequate budgets and resources that were provided.”\(^{40}\) Additionally, teachers were highly educated, often to a greater level than their white counterparts. In North Carolina during the 1961-62 school year, 11,145 out of 11,149 black teachers had at least a four-year college degree.\(^{41}\) These teachers also employed strict discipline in the classrooms, with strong support from black parents.\(^{42}\) In the 1930’s, Ambrose Caliver, a representative for blacks in the U.S. Office of Education, stated, “In the hands of the Negro teachers rests the destiny of the race.”\(^{43}\)

Counter to popular belief, there was a fair amount of resistance to desegregation within these communities due to the strength of black schools, and

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\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 10
\(^{38}\) Fairclough, op. cit., p. 47.
\(^{39}\) Joyner, op. cit., p. 3.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 4
\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 6.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 16.
\(^{43}\) Fairclough, op. cit., p. 50.
black teachers in particular were often opposed to it. From the mid-1930’s to the late 1940’s, the NAACP had been pushing litigation to improve the quality of the schools’ buildings, textbooks, teachers’ salaries, and overall funding, and black teachers were very much in favor of this equalizing strategy. However, during the civil rights movement, the NAACP changed its focus to push for integration rather than equalization, much to the dismay of many black teachers and communities. The main justification for the NAACP’s focus on integration rather than equality had to do with the bigger picture of trying to eliminate segregation in general, since public schools “presented a far more compelling symbol of the evils of segregation and a far more vulnerable target than segregated railroad cars, restaurants, or restrooms.”

However, unlike beaches, restaurants, and other centers of segregation, where people of color were fighting for access and not necessarily integration, in the case of school desegregation, “the actual presence of white children is said to be essential to the right in both its philosophical and pragmatic dimensions.” The NAACP “knew full well that integration would jeopardize the livelihoods of black teachers,” but had the attitude that “the elimination of segregated schools ‘should outweigh in importance the loss of teaching positions.’” In 1953, a study found that three-fourths of black teachers wanted to keep black schools segregated, and although most did not openly criticize the NAACP, many were passive about the organization’s goals, and some were even resistant to them. That being said, it is important to note that part of the

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44 Ibid., p. 50.
46 Ibid., p. 477-78.
47 Fairclough, op. cit., p. 50, 51.
48 Ibid., p. 52.
reason that North Carolina’s African-American schools had access to better facilities and teachers’ salaries was because the state government was employing a political strategy to try to stay ahead of the desegregation push by offering better services. This led to schools that “enjoyed and achieved a level of academic quality that equaled or exceeded that of most of the White schools in the state.”

Nonetheless, in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* led the Supreme Court to unanimously strike down the legal basis of “separate but equal” established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Not only did pro-integration lawyers argue that separate schools could not be equal, but they heavily based their arguments on the idea that black students felt inferior because they were forced to go black schools. In the final decision, the Court decided that

To separate black children from white children of their age and qualifications on the basis of their race… “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone…. In the field of public education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place…. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

Although it was briefly mentioned in the resolution of the case that “most of the schools in the challenged school district, although segregated, were virtually equal with respect to the quantifiable factors used by the Court at that time,” this was not the main takeaway from the case. The decision was “not designed to praise and explain the value of African-American schools, their history, culture and outstanding

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achievements.” Instead, the idea that black students felt inferior and the implication that therefore black schools were inferior has gone on to inform popular opinion and integration policy for the past six decades. Because of this popular understanding, many now believe that a better education for students of color will come about through integration efforts rather than by pushing for school equality. This reading of Brown has had lasting effects on the politics of unequal education.

Initially, the results of Brown had very little impact on segregated schools. According to Joyner, “Although the desegregation decree announced in Brown I had national implications, the remedy portion affected only the four school districts identified as defendants in the litigation since the Court did not have jurisdiction over other school systems.” Since it did not have direct control over all U.S. school districts in the South, the Court decided that “school authorities have the primary responsibility for elucidating, assessing and solving these problems [and] courts will have to consider whether the action of school authorities constitutes good faith implementation of the governing constitutional principles.” Unsurprisingly, this led to states and school boards resisting the decision in any way possible. From 1954 through 1971, state resistance and a strong reluctance on both white and black communities’ parts to integrate (albeit for very different reasons) meant that segregation remained more or less untouched, with the exception of a handful of cases where black students attempted to enroll in white schools. While “Whites engaged in angry resistance and local school boards used every device they could

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52 Ibid., p. 2.
53 Ibid., p. 8.
54 Ibid., p. 8.
55 Ibid., p. 9.
create to attempt to maintain segregated schools,” “most African-Americans did not mount a campaign to force compliance with Brown I because of widespread satisfaction with their schools.”

For the black students who did try to enter white schools, whether or not they were successful, in all cases, the experience proved to be incredibly trying and often “traumatic” with “deep and lasting wounds” for students of color. One black student who was admitted to a white school after a long court battle later had to withdraw when her family was “informed by school officials and local police that they could not guarantee Counts's safety if she remained in school.” Another student was so harassed by students and adults alike that he “begged his parents to remove him from the school, but was forced to endure the torment for three years until his graduation.” The enrollment in white schools left students of color “without a person of their race who was close by in order to advise and protect them from the many dangers that lurched within those all-White schools.” For court cases involving desegregation, “it was generally made clear to potential plaintiffs that the NAACP was not interested in settling the litigation in return for school board promises to provide better segregated schools.” For them, integration was the absolute end goal. In North Carolina, where Joiner grew up, no white student ever attempted to enroll in segregated black schools.

56 Ibid., p. 9.
57 Ibid., p. 11.
58 Ibid., p. 11.
59 Ibid., p. 12.
60 Ibid., p. 12.
61 Bell, op. cit., p. 476.
Around 1970, North Carolina ran out of options and was forced to integrate their schools. In return for being required to accept students of color into their schools, whites acted out their revenge on the establishment of the black school. The Court stated that “the appropriate resolution of the desegregation policies and practices would be left to the ‘good faith’ determinations of the very same political forces, law-makers and administrators who were previously responsible for keeping the schools segregated,” with tragic results for the African-American communities and their schools. A black teacher called it “the biggest trauma the South has known since Reconstruction” which was carried out in “a chaotic, unplanned, and discriminatory fashion.” According to Joyner, there was an “intentional and abhorrent strategy of totally destroying virtually everything connected to the existence of previously segregated African-American schools. With rare exceptions, the African-American school designations along with the school's history and culture were totally destroyed and replaced with a new name, logo, student bodies and educational purposes.” Trophy cabinets were emptied and the symbols of achievements thrown away, yearbooks were discarded, the names of schools were changed, and schools’ recorded histories were destroyed. Teachers and principals were fired or demoted, and whites took over the school buildings or completely destroyed them. African American educational achievements were strewn aside or ignored as though they had never existed in the first place during the “widespread and

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63 Ibid., p. 12  
64 Ibid., p. 9.  
65 Fairclough, op. cit., p. 47.  
67 Ibid., p. 13-14.
systematic strategy by White political leaders to totally dismantle any traces of the history, culture, accomplishments and existence of the African-American schools.\(^6\)

The consequences for black teachers and principals were equally appalling. Since “teaching [was] a position of authority, and segregation was all about maintaining power and privilege for whites, including white children,” white parents were strongly opposed to the idea of black teachers overseeing their children and also very much “doubt[ed] the competency of African-American teachers.”\(^6\) As a result, many black teachers were fired or demoted, despite most of them holding equal or higher levels of education and training as white teachers. African-American principals, mostly male at that time, were all but eliminated from the educational system, since whites did not like the idea of a black man having direct authority over white teachers, most of whom were female.\(^7\) In the 17 states required to desegregate, an estimated 38,000 black teachers were fired or demoted.\(^7\) Thus, “In approving the wholesale racial re-distribution and rationing of African-American teachers into the several majority White schools, the Court sanctioned the destruction of a dedicated teaching core of African-American who had successfully guided and elevated thousands of children into productive professional futures.”\(^7\) To this day, very few teachers are people of color, in comparison with trends in student populations. In 2012, nationwide only 18% of teachers were made up of people of color, in

\(^{6}\) Ibid., p. 14.
\(^{6}\) Ibid., p. 15.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., p. 15.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., p. 15.
\(^{7}\) Ibid., p. 16.
comparison to 49% students of color in the school systems.\textsuperscript{73} In Middletown as of the 2015-16 school year, only 6.7% of teachers were people of color, as compared to 48.4% students of color.\textsuperscript{74}

What’s more, when black students enrolled in white schools during integration efforts, they found that their troubles were just beginning. A District Court ordered that “no school (should) be operated with an all-Black or predominantly Black student body, (and) (t)hat pupils of all grades (should) be assigned in such a way that as nearly as practicable the various schools at various grade levels have about the same proportion of Black and White students.”\textsuperscript{75} This resulted in extensive busing of African American students in the South. According to Joyner:

In every school district or jurisdiction, those students who lived in African-American communities or attended racially segregated schools were divided up pursuant to an \textit{arbitrary mathematical formula} and distributed to several different majority White schools, at every educational level, where they constituted a \textit{distinct and visible minority}. To satisfy this distribution formula, buses were used to transport African-American children to schools in outlying white neighborhoods. In many instances, these children were \textit{bused past the closest school} and forced to be transported an inordinate long distance for the sake of achieving racial desegregation. Busing had been previously used when the schools were segregated except students were bused to the closest African-American school. Under this newly developed desegregation model, \textit{buses transported African-American students away from their local communities} into a previously all-White school unlike similarly situated White students who were only bused short distances to attend school if they were bused at all.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} Joyner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12, emphasis mine.
The busing of students of color away from their communities in order to fill an “arbitrary mathematical formula” is exactly what has happened in Middletown as well. According to Joyner, due to the arbitrary distribution of students of color to fit mandated quotas, many students found themselves ostracized and picked on in schools, both by other students and by teachers.\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.} In contrast to black schools, white schools were allowed to retain their history and “markers of cultural and racial identity,” thus alienating black students even further.\footnote{Ibid., p. 14.} Although the schools themselves was technically desegregated, within the schools, students found themselves adversely affected by structural racism. Schools made it very difficult for students to do well in class, which then excluded them from participating in extracurricular activities like sports and arts program, as well as enrichment programs, due to inflated grade requirements.\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.} Students of color were also disproportionately placed in special needs classes and tested in ways that labeled them as slower learners, which demonstrated an intentional attempt on the part of schools and school officials to “fetter Black talents and aspirations within the desegregated institutions.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 19.} When students attempted to protest these changes, they were punished or expelled.\footnote{Ibid., p. 16.} The result of these changes was that “Trust, a basic proposition that African-Americans had in their schools, was destroyed.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 14.} According to Joyner, “\textit{Brown v. Board of Education} became an empty victory for North Carolina's African-American communities, children, teachers and principals.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 14.}
adds, “this process of racial change concluded the destruction of African-American schools and began the non-education of African-American students.” As of 2014, the black and Hispanic dropout rate was 7.4% and 10.6% respectively, compared to the white rate of 5.2%.

None of this goes to say that we ought to return to the dark times of the Jim Crow era of segregation, and the question of whether Brown was “worth it” for communities of color is a topic that I will leave for others to address. However, the intention of this section is to a) challenge the assumptions made by people that black schools were inferior in quality simply by merit of being made up of students of color; b) highlight the ways that school as communities can in fact work to empower people of color; and c) challenge the assumption that attending white schools guaranteed students of color access to a better education. As Joyner put it:

The immediate assumption when the decision was announced - which remains the assumption today - was that segregated African-American schools were inferior in the quality of the education provided to their students and that these students were functional illiterates or sub-par… The remedial premise, which developed from this thinking, was that African-American children could only receive a quality education or have a chance to succeed in America if they were educated in the same facilities that White children attended.

This remains the widespread assumption today, as is exemplified by Jonathan Kozol later in the chapter. Given the difficulties and the “achievement gap” that students of color have encountered since Brown, Derrick Bell concludes that,

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84 Ibid., p. 17.
85 “Percentage of high school dropouts among persons 16 to 24 years old (status dropout rate), by sex and race/ethnicity: Selected years, 1960 through 2014,” Table 219.70, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015.
86 Joyner, op. cit., p. 2.
Neither the NAACP nor the court-fashioned remedies are sufficiently directed at the real evil of pre-\textit{Brown} public schools: the state-supported subordination of blacks in every aspect of the educational process... Providing unequal and inadequate school resources and excluding black parents from meaningful participation in school policymaking are at least as damaging to black children as enforced separation.”\textsuperscript{87}

Perhaps most important to take away from discussions about education for students of color is the question about what the ultimate goal should be. Given historical patterns of inequality, the obvious answer seems to be that we as a nation should focus on bettering the education of students of color to achieve equality for all. With this goal in mind, one must ask oneself what the best way is to achieve this higher-quality education. Since \textit{Brown}, the answer to that question has predominantly been to push for and enforce integration policy. However, there are many who value equal funding and support over integration. Equality and integration are not necessarily in opposition to each other. Nonetheless, there are times when seeking equality comes at the cost of integrating schools, and that is a trade-off where affected communities of color must decide which option is most beneficial to them and their children. Regardless of their decisions, school officials at all levels of office would do well to respect and represent the preferences of these communities.

\textsuperscript{87} Bell, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 487-8.
Chapter Two

The Racial Imbalance Law

The Racial Imbalance Law in Connecticut aims to establish and maintain integrated schools within CT school districts. It requires that public schools maintain a minority population in each of their schools that is within 25% of the district’s average minority population. That means that in a district like the Middletown School District, which hovers around 50% minority students, all public schools must maintain between 25% and 75% minority students. If the school falls “more than 25 percentage points above or below that of the district as a whole,” then it is considered “racially imbalanced.” 88 The law defines a “minority” student or teacher as “any person whose race is defined as ‘other than white’ or whose ethnicity is defined as Hispanic or Latino for purposes of the U.S. Census.” 89 This idea of “other than white” permeates the language of the law, which is defined almost entirely in terms of people of color, thus establishing “white” as the norm as well as placing the implicit responsibility for carrying out the law on the shoulders of people of color. The law also requires districts to report their percentage of low-income students as well as its percentage of minority teachers to the state. However, there is no legal basis to act on these numbers.

89 Ibid.
The law requires four things:

1. The school districts must report their percentage of minority students and teachers and low-income students to the SBE [State Board of Education].
2. The SBE must tell the district if there is a school that falls “substantially” outside of the permitted minority population.
3. If an imbalance is found, then it is required that “(a) the district submit a plan to correct the imbalance, (b) the plan contain certain elements, (c) SBE review and approve the district plan, and (d) the district report annually on the plan's implementation.”
4. The SBE has the authority and the responsibility to carry out these regulations.

The SBE may also determine it necessary to include information about how many minority students who have free or reduced lunches attend the schools. Furthermore, the school district must be informed if they have “impending racial imbalance” in a school, which is defined as 15% more or less than the school district average.

Additionally, the law “expressly allows the local board to submit a plan limited to the affected school and specifies that the plan need not be district-wide or require district-wide student reassignments.” However, due to the nature of the attendance lines and overcrowding at many of Middletown’s schools, this has rarely been the case, and changes in one school have often caused a domino affect across the whole district, at times displacing hundreds of students. Also important to Macdonough’s case: “If the number of students causing the imbalance is fewer than five at a school, the school district may ask for an extension of time,” although this

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
extension can be no longer than 90 days. Since Macdonough is a small enough school that 5 students accounts for about 2% of the student demographics, they have taken advantage of this extension in the past.

Additionally, the plan must:

1. describe the board's process in preparing the plan;
2. provide relevant data and analysis, including (a) a projection of the racial composition of the schools for the next five years under the proposed plan, (b) an analysis of any conditions causing or contributing to the racial imbalance, and (c) an analysis of student achievement in the cited school compared to other schools in the district;
3. propose ways to eliminate the racial imbalance and prevent it from recurring, which can include voluntary inter- and intra-district enrollment plans acceptable to SBE as an alternative to mandatory student re-assignment, as long as the voluntary plan addresses ways to increase student achievement;
4. describe any proposed school construction and closings and explain their impact on the plan;
5. make specific proposals for minimizing any disruptive effects of implementing the plan;
6. provide for monitoring and evaluating the plan's results including provisions to revise and update it, if necessary;
7. include a timetable for completing each step and the plan as a whole;
8. demonstrate equitable allocation of school district resources among all schools in the district; and
9. demonstrate that any disparities in student achievement are being addressed and in what ways.

I find 2b of this list very interesting because it does not specify what it defines as “conditions causing or contributing to the racial imbalance.” Does the law attempt to address discriminatory housing practices that confine people of color to a certain area of town and therefore a certain school? Or for that matter, what kinds of incomes and

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94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
jobs are available to people of color that define what kinds of housing are affordable to them? Certainly in the case of Middletown, this has not been the case. 2c is also interesting because it is an attempt to link student achievement to the overall race patterns in the school. I wonder what is done with this information, and what implications this information has for integration. Additionall, in #3, the law mentions that the plan should aim to “eliminate the racial imbalance and prevent it from recurring,” which can include working with other school districts to reassign students as long as it “addresses ways to increase student achievement.” The implicit assumption here is that moving students out of their schools for the purposes of reducing “racial imbalance” will help them succeed in school. Nowhere in the law does it say that if a school is not doing well, more resources should be provided to the school. Everything is instead placed in demographic terms. In terms of “minimizing any disruptive effects” as described in #5, it is difficult to know whether the law means for students of color or district-wide. Certainly, closing Macdonough would seem to have a “disruptive effect” on students, as would wide-scale redistrictings, both on Macdonough and district-wide. The question of “equitable allocations” is talked about in #8, near the end of the list, almost as an afterthought. The law’s primary focus is clearly on distribution of students of color, rather than on funds and resources. Nonetheless, the inclusion of this requirement demonstrates that the law was written with some concept of equity in mind. However, were the law truly interested in this, it would create provisions for equality of resources on an inter-district level. Given the make-up of Middletown schools, it seems to make sense to find an equilibrium with numbers like that.
Perhaps the most interesting requirements for the plan are the very last ones, which state that the plan should guarantee that:

1. any inconvenience from plan implementation not be bourne disproportionately by minority students,
2. the plan not result in segregation within schools or within or among programs,
3. any substantially disproportionate minority representation within classes or programs (a) be justified solely by educational need and (b) occur less than a majority of the time during the school day except for students enrolled in a bilingual education program; and
4. the plan not include reassignment of students with a non-English dominant language or whose English proficiency is limited if the reassignment denies them existing participation in a bilingual education program.

The regulations allow a board, when it submits its plan, to ask for an exception to these requirements. SBE (1) may grant an exception if it determines it otherwise contributes to the goals of the law and (2) must grant it if the plan complies with a state or federal court order addressing the racial imbalance.96

These stipulations would be admirable were it not for the fact that districts may “ask for an exception” if the SBE “determines it otherwise contributes to the goals of the law,” which allows the district to avoid fulfilling these requirements. In the case of Middletown, “inconveniences” caused by attempting to avoid “racial imbalance” have historically been “bourne disproportionately by minority students,” since the most intense requirements of the plans, such as busing and school closures, have been bourne almost *exclusively* by students of color. In recent years, the school most consistently threatened has been Macdonough, not Moody. Additionally, the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program implemented at Macdonough in 2015 to attract more white students appears to break the stipulation in #2 that “the

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plan not result in segregation within schools… or among programs.” While the STEM program is made up of both white students and students of color, there is a higher percentage of white students in the program than there are at Macdonough overall, and this was done intentionally in order to help the school meet the mandates for the Racial Imbalance Law. The discrepancies in the percentage of white students between this program and the school are not “justified solely by educational need,” as #3b calls for, but given that it otherwise meets the racial imbalance requirements, the STEM plan was approved by the SBE. The stipulation in #4, which states that a student should not be moved if they depend on a bilingual program at a school, posits the question about whether any other programs should guarantee enrolled students that they will not be moved. For example, Macdonough offers a Health Center and Family Resource Center which many parents surveyed said they and their child depended on. If the school was to close or students were to be redistricted, these services would not be guaranteed. However, the law does not protect access to these types of programs.

The law also defines “diverse schools” as institutions that exist in districts with 50% or more of “minority” students, which Middletown became in 2015. The use of the term “diverse” here is interesting in much the same way that the use of the term “minority” is. “Diversity,” in the most literal interpretation of the word, signifies a mixture of different things, and yet in the context of integration, “adding diversity” to a school usually means adding students of color to a mostly-white school. I cannot recall a time when I have heard it used to signify adding white

97 Charles, Patricia, “3rd Revision to Plan to Address Racial Imbalance,” Middletown Public Schools, Middletown, CT, 4 Oct 2013, p. 4.
students to a school with a majority of students of color. In this case, a “diverse”
school district is one where students of color have crossed the line to become the
majority of a district’s makeup. Using the word “diversity” in this manner
linguistically establishes whiteness as the norm, and students of color as the “Other,”
as the perpetual minority, the ones who add variety to a space.
History of the Law

The Racial Imbalance Law as it stands today is significantly different from the one that was enacted in 1969. The Connecticut Congress passed the original law after a two-year study about segregation in the state. However, after substantial debate and dissent in both the House and the Senate, the original bill based on the study, SB 415, was completely scrapped and replaced with SB 1588. As a result, this 1969 version did not include provisions for how to actually enforce the law, so it did not truly go into effect until 1980, when the provisions were added in. The law was in action for 15 years before it was suspended for three years between 1995-1998, while significant changes were made to it. Since 1998, the law has not changed significantly."99

In 1967, the General Assembly created a “legislative commission on human rights and opportunities” to examine the realities of segregation in Connecticut. It consisted of 10 senators and 20 representatives and was headed by Senator Joseph Fauliso from Hartford.100 Many of the senators and representatives involved in the legislative commission went on to serve on the Committee on Human Rights and Opportunities, which presented a proposed law based on the findings of the legislative commission at the 1969 General Assembly. This bill was called SB 415, and it was the first manifestation of what is now commonly referred to as the Racial Imbalance Law.

100 Ibid.
SB 415 called for “educational parks,” or schools that accommodate a wide geographic area of students, to solve the segregation problem. However, this law was met with strong opposition at its public hearing on February 9th, 1969, with Education Commissioner Sanders in particular arguing that the law undermined the authority of the State Board of Education, was “cumbersome and unworkable,” would cost too much money, and was “an unwarranted encroachment by state authority on local school districts.”  

SB 415 was ultimately unanimously voted out by the Committee on Human Rights and Opportunities.

Later that year, on May 29th, a different bill was put together at the last minute and presented to the Senate. SB 1588, “An Act Concerning Racial Imbalance in the Public Schools,” was introduced by Senator Fauliso, who was the original head of the legislative commission, and it “gave SBE definite authority and responsibility to achieve racial balance in schools.” The bill “contained all the provisions of the racial imbalance law that eventually became law, except SBE's authority to adopt implementing regulations.” In other words, the bill had most of the same rules as the current law, except that it was virtually impossible to enforce it, since there was no way to force schools to comply. Senator Schaffer called the bill an “intelligent and moderate approach toward a very burning issue,” and held that the lack of ability to enforce it would allow local schools and the state to work together in a “spirit of cooperation.” The bill passed through the Senate with almost no debate.

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
However, in the House there was much more contention about the bill. Representative Otha Brown of Norwalk in particular found the bill to be “a nothing bill” which “does nothing which cannot be done now.” According to Brown, it would be “a cold day in July” before the commissioner ever notified a local board that one of its schools was racially unbalanced. In response to the argument from another representative that people had to change their “hearts, minds, and souls” before any real change could happen in the schools, Brown retorted, “I can only say that the law might not make one happy but it can certainly make sure of equality of opportunity in education.” As a result, Brown presented three amendments to the bill.

The first amendment was to “add some of the provisions of SB 415, particularly the deadlines,” which would allow the SBE to better enforce the law. Representative Povinelli of New Milford said that the amendment “strikes at the rights of all of the people of the State of Connecticut and all of their children.” From his perspective, it gave the state too much power because, “If we are to integrate for the mere sake of integration in our schools then we lose all concept of bettering the education of all our children for we become caught up in a socialistic form that defies imagination.” Given that he called the movement for the bill “a socialistic form that defies imagination,” it is unlikely that Povinelli was interested in taking any governmental action to assist students of color. However, had the Senate

\[\footnotesize{\begin{align*}
105 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
106 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
107 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
108 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
109 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
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and House pushed for concrete actions to help equalize education for students of color not only within districts, but regionally, instead of “[integrating] for the mere sake of integration,” one can imagine a resulting law which could have created a more equal education system for students of color in Connecticut. In any case, Brown’s first amendment ultimately failed on a voice vote.

His second proposed amendment would have “required that the plans submitted by local school boards contain interim strategies for eliminating racial imbalance while longer range solutions were pending” and that all “interim or final plans for ending imbalance be implemented not later than the opening of school in September 1970.” Like the first amendment, this would have giver the law some enforceability. Representative O’Neill spoke in favor of the amendment, saying, “We can prove that it is not mere words and not mere hypocrisy and we say yes, we want to help the cities, we don't believe in segregation.” Nonetheless, the second amendment also failed in an 85-68 vote against it.

Finally, Brown’s third amendment would “[authorize] SBE to adopt regulations to set standards for what constitutes racial imbalance,” which would allow the bill to be more exact in its definitions about which schools were and were not in compliance with the law. Unlike the other two failed amendments to SB 1588 (which would have actually given the SBE the power to enforce the law), Brown’s third amendment did pass in the House with a favorable vote of 81-65. The amended SB 1588 was then officially passed in both the House and the Senate and signed into law.

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
In 1969, Public Act 773 was established, which dictated specificities about how the law was to be implemented. A November article in *The Hartford Courant* listed the definitions for racial imbalance as the following:

- Racial minorities in a school exceed the percentage in the town by 25 per cent…
- Racial minorities exceed 50 per cent of the enrollment in a school…
- Racial minorities in a town exceed 50 per cent and a school has less than 15 per cent minority enrollment.\(^{113}\)

Although they changed over time, these requirements demonstrated the ways in which people understood the concept of integration at that time. The second requirement was quickly eliminated, since it was pointed out that Hartford’s school district was made up of 62% students of color at that time, and the city was not interested in exploring regional solutions as the state had hoped.\(^{114}\) However, it is important to note this requirement, since it would have prohibited students of color from ever comprising a majority in a school. Additionally, although students of color could not exceed the district average by 25%, there was no rule for white students. In other words, in most districts, there was no reason why white students could not make up 100% of a school’s population. The exception was for districts that were made up of more than 50% students of color. In those areas, majority-white schools had to have at least 15% students of color. Even so, for a district like Harford which had 62% students of color and 38% white students at the time, this meant that majority-white schools could have up to 47% more white students than the district average,

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whereas schools with more students of color were out of compliance if they had 25% more students of color than the district average. Therefore, the goal of the act was to limit the number of students of color who could be in a school. One critic, Theodore Driscoll, pointed out that this meant that schools in Hartford could have anywhere between 15% and 87% students of color and still be considered in compliance. He went on to say:

Integrated education is not just to get black and white youngsters together in a school yard. The idea is to get disadvantaged youngsters into classrooms with more highly motivated youngsters of whom more is expected by their teachers. The value of this has been shown by busing programs such as Project Ghetto students do much better in integrated schools than in neighborhood schools with only ghetto classmates.

Like Jonathan Kozol, Driscoll and many of his contemporaries understood “integration” as a system where students of color benefitted from being around white students who were supposedly more dedicated to their education, and who might then teach students of color to do better as well. As a result, it was thought that a school could not accomplish this task if the number of students of color permitted in a school were not limited. In contrast, the reasoning was that white students were already good students, so their numbers did not have to be capped in a school. One of the major critiques of the new law was that cities like Hartford might have to enact “reverse busing,” or busing white students to schools of color, in order to meet the racial requirements. Hartford officials feared that if this happened, white families would

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115 Driscoll, “Guidelines Obviate Use of Law,” 23 Nov 1969, p. 3B.
116 Ibid.
leave the city, which would “bring about a completely black city.” The effect of this would be to “increase the percentage of minority enrollment in the schools and make integration efforts even more futile.” Even though the law has since changed, the idea that mixing schools is only beneficial to students of color if whites are in the majority continues to inform how we as a society view integration today.

Despite these concerns, residents of Connecticut soon realized that the Racial Imbalance Law had no teeth. The schools had to submit their reports on racial imbalance, but nothing was done to address those that fell out of compliance. As a result, the law changed several times during the ensuing decades. The only major change between 1969 and 1980 was in 1974, when the phrase “color, appearance, features, physical characteristics or any combination thereof are distinguishable from persons whose ancestry is totally Caucasian” was excluded from the definition of “minority.” Over the course of the next several years, committees were formed several times to address the law, only to either disagree on solutions in the committee or get turned down in the legislature. According to a 1980 newspaper, new regulations had been rejected by the Regulations Review Committee three times.

However, on April 1st, 1980, after more than a decade of back-and-forth in the legislature, regulations were finally added to the law that allowed it to finally become implementable. These regulations changed the 1969 definition of racial imbalance to mean: “a minority enrollment of 25 percentage points more or less than the

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119 Lohman, op.cit.
120 Sevick, Stephanie, “Cities Begin Efforts to Follow Rules on Racial Imbalance;” The Hartford Courant, 11 May 1980, p. 29A.
121 Lohman, op.cit.
districtwide percentage for that age group.”  

It also included an “early warning system,” which would notify schools that they had “impeding” racial imbalance when they reached a 15% more or less than the average of students of color. While generally viewed by advocates for students of color as a move in the right direction, they “generally perceived the law as a first step, not a solution to racial inequities.”  

After all, according to a panel of Connecticut educators, “Desegregation can succeed only where the quality of education – ‘what makes the bus ride across town worthwhile’ – improves significantly.” Additionally, the law would only significantly affect seven cities at that time, since most cities had so many white students or so many students of color that the mandates did not make a big difference.  

The law operated for fifteen years without any major legislative changes. However, between 1995 and 1998 “the SBE's authority to take action concerning racial imbalance in any school district” was suspended for schools where “a remedial plan was not approved before January 1, 1995.” The SBE and the Education Committee were required to “review the laws and regulations concerning racial imbalance” and report back with their findings. This review “had to include alternative ways to measure the concentration of students with economic, social, and educational needs and ways of improving these students' education or

127 Lohman, op. cit.
make other corrections that may not require mandatory student reassignment.\textsuperscript{128} Although originally slated for completion by November 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1996, that due date was later extended to February 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1998.\textsuperscript{129}

In 1998, the law underwent its most dramatic changes. In addition to students of color, teachers of color and students eligible for free and reduced lunches had to be included in schools’ annual reports to the government. The definition of “minority” was again changed to “other than white,” as designated by the US Census Bureau at that time.\textsuperscript{130} This meant that many white Hispanic students were excluded from the minority definition, although the definition was again changed in 2003 to include Latino and Hispanic students. As previously mentioned, the new changes in 1998 also allowed an out-of-compliance school district to “limit its plan to address a racial imbalance to an affected school without extending it to the whole district or causing a district-wide pupil reassignment,” as well as to request an extension for submitting a plan to the SBE when the number of students affecting the “racial imbalance” label were fewer than five at the school.\textsuperscript{131} The 1998 changes also made reports mandatory on an annual, rather than quarterly, basis. The new regulations allowed “voluntary enrollment plans as alternatives to mandatory student reassignment,” meaning that guardians would be able to choose a different school for their child to attend if a school was found to be “racially imbalanced.”\textsuperscript{132} They also made “allowances for

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
diverse schools in districts with minority enrollments of 50% or more." These provisions went into effect on November 1st, 1999.

\[133\] Ibid.
Chapter Three

Macdonough’s History of Redistricting and Threats of School Closure

1980’s

Over the years, the effects of the Racial Imbalance Law and general assumptions about integration have been made evident through the events that have transpired in Middletown. In 1980, when the Racial Imbalance Law first became implementable, Middletown school officials worried that some of their schools might fall out of compliance. At that time, 24.4% of the district was made up of students of color, up from 22.9% the year before. On the two extremes for the district, Wesley Elementary School had 32.5% students of color, and Farm Hill Elementary School had 17.5%. No plans were made to redistrict at this time. However, officials did mention that students, most of whom were students of color, were currently being bused to Farm Hill, Moody, and Wesley. As is the case today, Moody had a high percentage of white students, and the superintendent, Alfred Tychsen, said that very few students of color would attend the school, were they were not bused in from other areas.134

In response to a 1987 State Department of Education report which “[called] on cities and suburbs to work together to end the isolation of minorities in the state's

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urban areas,” the Middletown School District considered implementing inter-district busing in order to find “regional solutions” to Connecticut’s segregation problems.\(^\text{135}\) Middletown was one of 14 districts targeted by the report, since at that time its school district was made up of 30% students of color.\(^\text{136}\) The report did not target majority white school districts, following a pattern of placing the responsibility for integration squarely on the shoulders of people of color, as has been perpetuated in the years since. The proposal was met with fairly strong opposition locally, and it was expected to meet even more opposition in whiter communities outside of Middletown. William J. Mariano was quoted saying, “How does one become a strong proponent of the neighborhood schools and then all of a sudden have global concerns?”\(^\text{137}\) Superintendent Dr. Alfred B. Tychsen, who would be an important figure for the next few years, pointed out that the resistance to the proposition created a “double standard,” given that students from Long River Village, a housing project in southeast Middletown, were bussed out to several schools in order to achieve racial balance in the district.\(^\text{138}\) The superintendent pointed out that “parents and board members registered strong opposition to the possibility of busing students in several neighborhoods during a recent debate over regional K-1 centers, but that there has never been any opposition to busing minority students.”\(^\text{139}\) A Board of Education member named Marie E. Coughlin concluded, “even if Middletown supports the proposal, it will not win acceptance in towns with large white middle-class

\(^\text{137}\) Ibid., p. 1, 6.
\(^\text{138}\) Ibid., p. 1, 6.
\(^\text{139}\) Ibid., p. 1, 6.
populations… Parents are not going to be told they're going to have to send their kids into a Hartford or a Bridgeport... If they have to wash floors on their hands and knees to afford private education, they'll do it.” The report urged the districts to find voluntary solutions to regional de facto segregation, but threatened to come up with mandated solutions if the local districts failed to do this. This likely would have involved forced busing (wildly unpopular with most parents, and particularly with white parents), so it is not surprising that at least in Middletown, little to no concrete action resulted from the report.

140 Ibid., p. 1, 6.
141 Ibid., p. 1, 6.
In 1989, Superintendent Tychsen proposed a redistricting plan to address racial imbalance that was to go into effect in September of 1990. Before implementing the plan, he planned to conduct three public meetings for the parents at the schools most affected, as well as a final district-wide hearing. At that time, the percentage of students of color in the district still hovered around 30%. Tychsen planned to address the discrepancies un the schools, which ranged from 17% students of color at Lawrence School in the wealthier area of Westfield to 41% at Wesley School, where most students of color were bused in from the housing projects in Middletown. According to Tychsen, “Shifting population patterns and school building projects have made the current lines obsolete.” The new lines would establish averages of students of color closer to 30% at each of the schools with the lowest percentage at 23.9% and the highest at 37.13%, and the changes would affect between 400-500 students. The plan would also balance out the number of students at each school, so that between 275-300 students would be enrolled at each school. (This would later cause problems, since some schools have more space than others, meaning that 300 students in one school would be far more crowded than in another.) Enrollment of students of color would increase at Moody and Lawrence, decrease at Wesley and Farm Hill, and stay about the same at Macdonough, Bielefield, and

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According to Tychsen, “To achieve better racial balance, many of the children who live in public housing projects will be bused to a different school than they attend now.”146 As if to justify this statement, he pointed out, “The vast majority of the district’s minority students live in public housing projects and now ride buses to school each day.”147 However, this does not change the fact that not only were students of color already the ones most affected by redistricting brought on by racial imbalance, but that under this plan, their lives would again be interrupted and rearranged, since many of them would have to change schools.

Given this attitude by the superintendent and BOE, it is interesting that Macdonough was one of the schools that would be least affected by this plan, even though even at that time, it had slightly more than the district’s average minority population at 38.1%, which would be changed slightly to 37.13% under the proposed plan.148 When asked why this was, Tychsen replied that officials “wanted to leave the Macdonough district as intact as possible, because it is particularly important to the children in the area. Macdonough has the highest percentage of poor students and walkers of any school.”149 Certainly this is interesting to hear from a superintendent, given the attitudes of school officials towards Macdonough since then.

The four meetings open to the parents and communities affected by the redistricting produced surprisingly little pushback. Even before these meetings were held, a Farm Hill PTO parent said that she had not heard much from the parents at her

145 Ibid., p. 5.
147 Ibid.
148 Delisio, op. cit., p. 5.
school in opposition to the plan. She added, “There’s nothing you can do about it, really... They are doing it for the betterment of the schools.”\textsuperscript{150} The percentage of minority students at Farm Hill was expected to fall from 33\% to 25.6\%. The first meeting at Bielefield yielded some concerns from Farm Hill and Bielefield parents about transportation, sending siblings to separate schools, and smooth transitions, but of the 50 parents in attendance, no one voiced strong opposition, and in fact there was actually some support for the project. Bielefield would remain at around the same percentage of minority students. One parent from Bielefield did point out that at 25.7\% students of color, the school was nowhere near racial imbalance, and that “If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it,” but she was told by Harry M. Peters Jr., chairman of the BOE’s long-range planning committee, that “changes in one school were necessary to effect changes in others.”\textsuperscript{151} Another resident said that he was “concerned about the distribution of students from different socio-economic backgrounds at the schools and asked if the administration has taken that into account in developing the proposal.”\textsuperscript{152} However, Peters said that there was no way to distribute students based on this. (This would turn out to be false in later years.) The second public meeting, held for Wesley families, yielded even less pushback. Not one of the 40 people in attendance offered strong opposition. One parent said that they were relieved that overcrowding would finally be addressed. The percentage of student of color at Wesley would go down from 39.7\% to 26.7\%.\textsuperscript{153} The Spencer and Lawrence meeting was similar in its lack

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p. 1, 6.
of resistance. The only real issue pushed by parents was regarding transportation and concerns that some students would have to cross busy roads to get to school. Only 8 people attended the final district-wide meeting in March, and the redistricting recommendations were passed on to the Board without a fuss. Given that this was the first time redistricting had happened since the early 1980’s, it is remarkable that it was passed with nary a protest sign. The committee chairman Peters stated that he wanted the plans to remain in place for 10 years at least.

In contrast to the apparent special attention given to communities at schools affected by the redistricting, it appears that many students of color who would have to change schools were talked about, rather than talked to. The original plan would move 14 Long River Village students from Beilefield to Moody, and split students from Maplewood Terrace up to three different schools: 30 students at Wesley, 20 students at Lawrence, and 25 students at Spencer. The various articles on the redistricting plan made it very clear that the district planned to bus students of color from the housing projects very intentionally and largely without regard to their homes’ geographic proximity to the schools. Although the district map in Figure 3 shows different school district lines that those from 1990, the fact remains that Maplewood Terrace students did not attend any of the three closest schools to their homes, Macdonough, Farm Hill, and Beilefield. Long River Village students

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158 Delisio, School Redistricting Plan Outline,” 29 Nov 1989, p. 5.
attending Moody would have had to pass through four different school districts to get to their elementary school, since Moody is the farthest school from the Village. To add insult to injury, final decisions about school assignments for students from Maplewood Terrace and Long River Village were postponed until the summer. Given that the redistricting plan was approved in March, this effectively denied them any chance that they might have had to meet about or contest the decisions being made about them. Superintendent Tychsen said that these delays were due to “the constant migration of students in and out of those areas” and that “The administration wants to get as accurate a count as possible to avoid having to move students after school has started.” Regardless of the accuracy of this statement, Tychsen was suggesting breaking up a very specific group of students of color and busing them out to several different schools regardless of geographic logic in order to meet a state-mandated quota supposedly meant to help those same people. The fact that he and other school officials had conversations with literally every other group of people affected by these changes other than these students of color seems to defeat the point of the Racial Imbalance Law.

Around the same time, Middletown school officials were looking at solutions to regional racial imbalances outside of the city, following a state report that called for “further study of ways to end the growing isolation of minority students in the state’s larger cities.” This was likely due to the pending Sheff vs. O’Neill case at that time, which called for regional solutions to racial segregation.) The report came from Education Commissioner Gerald Tirozzi, who said that, “Equity in education can only exist in integrated settings,” a claim which this thesis aims to problematize. In response to this report, Tychsen proposed programs “aimed at reducing racial isolation in area public schools” that would include “an elementary

Figure 3: Busing from Long River Village and Maplewood Terrace, 1994

school exchange program between Middletown and area communities, a special summer school and a Saturday morning program,” and would go into affect in September of 1990.\textsuperscript{164} Surrounding districts included that of Durham and Middlefield, which was made up of over 99% white students, and Portland, which had 94% white students at that time. The superintendent stipulated that “All the programs would be voluntary and draw students from predominantly white towns in the area by offering educational alternatives not otherwise available, such as arts or foreign languages.”\textsuperscript{165} This follows a longstanding pattern of offering advanced educational programs in districts and schools with a higher percentage of students of color in order to attract more white students, an incredibly problematic practice which incentivizes integration with the stipulation that white students will always get the better end of the deal. Although as committee chairwoman Elizabeth L. Morgan pointed out at the time, programs like this “[offer] some opportunities for our own kids,” the point is that as much of the money and resources for these programs would go to the white students as to the students of color (if not more), rather than just investing in students of color.\textsuperscript{166} Essentially, this type of integration comes at the cost of a better education for students of color, which effectively defeats the point, if one operates under the assumption that integration is meant to create equity, as Tirozzi claims.

Tychsen added that one of these programs would allow students from whiter districts to “come here for a day and get a feeling for what it's like in an integrated setting,” in return for Middletown students to have the “opportunity to visit other

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., p. 1, 13.
\textsuperscript{166} Julien, “Tychsen to Begin Area Talks on Racial Balance,” 7 Apr 1989, p. 5.
schools where the composition is different,” meaning whiter schools. This white tourism of “an integrated setting” relates to bell hooks’ ideas presented in “Eating the Other.” She explains that white people often tokenize people of color by viewing interactions with them as adding a sort of exotic value to their life experience. She says that for white people, there is a “pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference,” and that this pleasure masquerades as anti-racism. It is an attitude that regards people of color as existing in order to serve the needs of white people, in this case as a way for white students to “get a feeling for what it’s like” to interact with students of color. It is also characteristic of the attitudes that are held by many white people, particularly white liberals, about the importance of “diversity” in the classroom as a way to educate white students about “different” cultures and types of people. As previously mentioned, this places whiteness as the norm, and people of color as the “diverse” outsider, there to teach white students about how “other” people live. Many white people who hold these beliefs think that their actions “[represent] a progressive change in white attitudes towards non-whites. They do not see themselves as perpetuating racism.”

Although this inter-district plan was implemented in 1990, state funds were cut the following year for regional magnet programs such as this. A 1991 3-week summer program that was meant to “provide eighth graders from different

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169 Ibid., p. 368.
170 Ibid., p. 369.
backgrounds the chance to interact, develop leadership skills and dispel racial stereotypes” and “reduce racial isolation among groups of students” was cancelled after funds were cut at the state level.\textsuperscript{171} It is interesting that Tychsen and the Education Commissioner Tirozzi were so interested in these “integration” programs, given that Middletown’s school district only had around 30% students of color. Therefore, the “isolation of minority students” from other white students was certainly not an issue, in fact quite the opposite. It is unclear why Middletown was singled out in the report as “racially isolated.”

In the fall of 1990, Middletown found itself struggling to fill teaching positions with people of color. Tychsen said the district had “struggled with ways of attracting minority candidates to Middletown,” but that the district was continuing to work on it.\textsuperscript{172} At that time, teachers of color only made up about 6% of district staff. The BOE had voted to create program to encourage students of color in the Middletown area to become teachers, but did not follow through with this because of how expensive it would be. According to Tychsen, “The timing for mentioning money is just not right,” but he wanted to help encourage students already interested in teaching.\textsuperscript{173} According to the mayoral race relations committee, “more has to be done about hiring minority teachers and providing a multicultural curriculum, but the district has been addressing these issues.”\textsuperscript{174} Associate superintendent Vincent P.

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\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1, 6.
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Malone said that there were very few students of color entering the teaching profession, and that those who were, proved difficult to attract.\textsuperscript{175}

However, a 1993 letter to the editor in the Middletown Press accused the Board and the superintendents of playing favorites when they hired the white husband of the vice-chairman of the board (who voted for a pay raise for the superintendents), who was less qualified than a person of color who was applying for the same position, and who had been a long-term substitute teacher in the district.\textsuperscript{176} The NAACP got on board with this accusation, and a second editorial requested that the ensuing conversations between the NAACP and the Middletown BOE “focus not on a single hiring, but on strengthening the school system’s affirmative action efforts and the climate for minority students.”\textsuperscript{177} The editorial claimed that during the past 15 years, the gap had widened between the percentage of students of color enrolled in schools statewide and the percentage of full-time staff of color statewide, and that Middletown should do its part to shrink this discrepancy.\textsuperscript{178} As a result, the Board of education proposed a policy that would

seek minority applicants for all open positions in the school system, with a goal of having the “minority make-up of the work force of the Middletown public schools reflect the population of the City of Middletown by increasing the number of qualified minority applicants.”\textsuperscript{179}

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\textsuperscript{175} Delisio, “Minority Teacher Recruitment Sees Mixed Results,” 7 Sep 1990, p. 1, 6.
\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 8.
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The program drew strong support from people of color in the city, “including a busload of members of the Shiloh Baptist Church” who showed up, along with 100 other residents. The Board promised an “aggressive effort to recruit and hire additional minority teachers and other personnel, including expanded notification and outreach efforts to the minority community,” as well as incorporating people of color in the committee that was in charge of hiring teachers.

As of 1995, these efforts to establish a teaching staff that reflected the demographics of the school district seemed to be headed in the right direction. 10 of the approximately 50 new teachers hired in the past two year had been people of color, coming out to 20.4% of new staff, a number that helped increase the overall percentage of teachers of color, which had been 6.7% in 1993. Supporters of this affirmative action hoped that over time, this policy would significantly impact the makeup of Middletown’s teachers. However, Superintendent Larson warned that budget cuts meant that not only could the Board not guarantee hiring more people of color, but it might even have to lay off recent teachers, many of whom were people of color. Whether or not those layoffs happened, it is clear that these initiatives ultimately failed, since in the two decades since 1995, the percentage of teachers of color peaked at 8.4% in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years, then declined to 6.7% in 2015-16, while the percentage of students of color has increased to 48.4% district-wide, as shown in Figure 4. At Macdonough currently, 100% of the teachers are

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180 Ibid.  
181 Ibid.  
183 McCausland, “‘It’s not about quotas,’” 20 Mar 1995, p. 1A.
During the summer of 1993, Superintendent David Larson created a committee to look at options for redistricting again in 1994-5. This time, the goal of redistricting was not only to balance out students of color, but also low-income students. The city had been warned by the State Department of Education (SDE) that it was approaching racial imbalance in some of its schools. During the school year of 1991-2 the percentage of students of color had risen to 45.2% at Macdonough and dropped to 23.3% at Moody, compared to the district average of about 30%.

Additionally, Wesley, Spencer, Moody, and Bielefield had all lost or come close to losing Chapter I funding because of decreasing numbers of low-income students in
the schools. Students receiving free and reduced meals were at a high with Macdonough’s 60.4% and a low with Lawrence’s 21.3%.  

After almost a year of planning, the committee presented 4 potential courses of action to the board (Figure 3). Plans I, II, and III involved dividing the district into 3-4 smaller districts and splitting up the schools by grade. These options would affect a larger percentage of students (as much as 50%) but officials argued that it would reduce issues in the future. Plan IV would “maintain the current grade configurations in each of the city's eight elementary schools, but would entail busing of students to achieve racial balances.” This plan would only directly impact 8% of the students and would involve adding 4.5 teaching positions. The committee recommended that the Board pass Plan III or Plan IV because both would bring schools closer to the average population for low-income students and students of color, which would mean that the district would come under compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law, as well as secure Chapter I funding for schools in danger of losing it. Additionally, either plan would work to equalize available space for students in schools, since utilization of the buildings were drastically different. For example, Snow had 16 seats available, and Moody had 160 at the time, and while either plan would narrow the gap, Plan IV would bring the schools the closest. Given that schools in Middletown do not have equal capacity, it is likely that Tychsen’s redistricting that aimed to bring all schools to within 275-300 students

187 Ibid., p. 1, 4.
188 MPress 94/3/9
189 MPress 94/3/9
resulted in large discrepancies in the overall uses of the buildings. Plan III would cost $113,042 and Plan IV would cost $180,000.\textsuperscript{190} There was strong community support for Plan IV, and that was ultimately what passed.

During the entire process, school officials maintained the narrative that redistricting was important to do for the district, and that it was primarily meant to benefit the students. According to Sylvia Webb, Spencer’s principal, “redistricting is ‘something we should do every few years’ as pupil populations and neighborhoods

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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{potential_plans.png}
\caption{Potential Plans of Action for 1994 Redistricting}
\end{figure}

change” and that the 1990 redistricting “went fairly smoothly.”\textsuperscript{191} Larson held that “the plans are as responsive to the educational needs of local students as they are to

\textsuperscript{190} Cassell, “City panel offers four redistricting options,” 5 Mar 1994, p. 1, 4.
any state integration quotas.”  He also stated that “This came about because we definitely agree with the state and federal laws that exist to prevent districts from warehousing all of their minority students in one or two schools” and that “the committee's dedication to redistricting extends far beyond the school system's legal obligations,” which showed an “underlying faith that a quality education is one that promotes diversity as well as academic excellence.” Given Middletown’s history with busing students of color all over the city, one wonders whether “warehousing” students of color is really worse than parceling them out to majority-white schools in order to meet a state requirement.

Like the 1990 redistricting, there was, for the most part, not much community pushback from most of Middletown, but this time, community members from the North End spoke up in opposition to the changes. This appears to be the first time that Macdonough was significantly affected by BOE actions influenced by the Racial Imbalance Law. Kim Quinones, chairwoman of the North End Coalition, spoke before the Board on March 30th, 1994, and stated, “Most people in the North End are against redistricting... And I am definitely against letting the city borrow my children to meet its quotas.” This certainly butts heads with Larson’s belief that “a quality education is one that promotes diversity as well as academic excellence.” As in later redistricting plans, Quinones was worried that the plans would “further isolate poor and minority parents from active participation in their children's education.”

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193 Ibid., p. 1, 4.
since many students would be moved from Macdonough to Moody, meaning that the commute to school would change from a short walk to a distance of several miles, which posed many issues in a community where most families did not (and do not) have access to their own means of transportation.\textsuperscript{196} “It would be nearly impossible for concerned parents to attend school meetings, or even pick up their children at Moody if they fall sick,” pointed out Quinones, practically outlining word-for-word the arguments against changing schools that would come up again and again over the years.\textsuperscript{197} At the time of her comments, the Board of Education had already held 2 public meetings and was expected to vote on the matter in two weeks on April 14\textsuperscript{th}, but Quinones said that board members had not gotten enough input from North End residents. “They intended to make this change regardless of what people here thought. That's why they didn't host a public hearing in our community,” she said.\textsuperscript{198} Jacqueline White, a Traverse Square resident, also said that transportation could be an issue, given that it was hard enough to get to schools as it was. Even with this clear opposition from residents of neighborhoods with a high percentage of people of color, Larson still stood by his idea that “redistricting is the key to a better and stronger school system for all of the city's students.”\textsuperscript{199} He attempted to reassure the parents who had spoken up by saying, “I realize that people don't like the change. But I will guarantee that the children moved to Moody will be very happy and will do very well there. It is one of our most newly renovated and well equipped schools.”\textsuperscript{200} This claim that the school board knew what was best for people in the North End demonstrates a

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 1, 7.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., p. 1, 7.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., p. 1, 7, Emphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p. 1, 7.
paternalistic attitude that results in officials not taking into account the concerns of community members actually affected by integration policy. Larson also said that sick students were always taken care of in “emergency situations” and even driven home by the principal if necessary, which still does not address the fact that it would be harder for parents to stay involved with their kids’ school life if they were not able to get there, a central focus for concerned North End parents. He concluded by saying that he had met with the parent-teacher organizations at all of the school, and that therefore he had talked to them before making the decision.201

On April 14th, the Board passed Plan IV and received a “roaring round of applause” from the crowd there.202 Redistricting would go into affect by September of 1994 and would affect 12% of the students in the district.203 The BOE seemed to think that it had done a good thing, but was also aware that this was with the power of the state pushing them. Before the vote, Debra Moore, a BOE member said, “Redistricting is something that we must do now, while we have some good options before us.”204 According to Elizabeth Morgan, “It just stands as more proof of the fact that we live in an intelligent city that is obviously committed to building an even stronger sense of community.”205 The redistricting went into affect in September of that same year as planned. In October, Darlene Sestero, a former Macdonough parent whose child was moved to Moody, asked in an editorial in the Middletown Press, “what proof is there that being balanced will create better learning.”206 She added, “I

201 Ibid., p. 1, 7.
203 Ibid., p. 1, 5.
204 Cassell, Michael, “Officials cite support for redistricting, diversity,” Middletown Press, 13 Apr 1994, p. 1B, 3B.
205 Ibid., p. 1B, 3B.
am forced to send my child to a school she is not familiar with which is causing her unnecessary stress. Every morning she claims she is sick and does not want to go to school… Next time you redistrict, and we know you will, please think of the children and how this affects them.\textsuperscript{207}

In September of 1997, a report from Middletown’s Diversity Enhancement Advisory Committee was released that demonstrated that students of color were not enrolled in as many higher-level academic activities as their white counterparts. The study found that although students of color made up 35\% of the district, they only comprised 17\% of the PROBE gifted and talented program. Additionally, at Keigwin, the 6\textsuperscript{th} grade school, “white students were twice as likely to be in the top language arts and math classes as African American students, and nearly 12 times as likely as Hispanic students.”\textsuperscript{208} Since men were also disproportionately represented in higher-level academic activities, the Board said it would “continue working on eliminating racial and gender imbalances.”\textsuperscript{209} The associate superintendent at that time, Carol Parmeele-Blancato, added that she would suggest that more money be added to the budget to address these issues.\textsuperscript{210}

In 1999, Superintendent Larson again called for redistricting to address impending racial imbalance at Moody and Macdonough. The superintendent proposed moving as many as 24 students from Macdonough to Moody. At that time, the district had an average 36\% students of color. Macdonough had 18\% more than the average, with a total of 54\% students of color, and Moody had 12\% less with a

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., p. 4A.
\textsuperscript{208} Wong, Stacy, “Report: Females, Minorities Underrepresented School Officials Promise Action in Middletown,” \textit{The Hartford Courant}, 18 Sep 1997, p. 1B.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
total of 24%. One of the Middletown housing projects, Long River Village, was in the process of closing in 1999, and Larson said that since many students from the Village had attended Moody, and some of the families from the project had since moved to the North End, this would affect demographics at the schools.\footnote{Rich, Eric, “Student Transfers Planned to Stem Racial Imbalance,” \textit{The Hartford Courant}, 12 Mar 1999, p. B1.} This may explain the almost 10\% increase in students of color at Macdonough between the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years.\footnote{“Profile and Performance Reports for Middletown, CT: MacDonough School,” \textit{EdSight: Insight into Education}, Connecticut State Department of Education, 2001-2016. http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do} James McNair, chairman of Middletown’s NAACP education committee stated, “It’s nice to see these kids bused over to Moody. It gives them an opportunity to get an equal if not better education.”\footnote{Rich, “Student Transfers Planned to Stem Racial Imbalance,” 12 Mar 1999, p. B1.} This reflects the pro-integration attitude of the NAACP that Irving Joyner describes in the 1960’s.\footnote{Joyner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.}
2000’s

In 2000, school officials suggested closing Macdonough for the first time. The now-superintendent, Carol Parmelee-Blancato, said that in the preceding eight years, Macdonough had been forced to redistrict due to racial imbalance on four separate occasions.215 (Although my research only yielded three such occasions since 1990, it is possible that the smaller spot redistrictings that occurred which did not garner as much attention, and therefore were not reported on by the newspapers.) At that time, 38% of Middletown’s school population was made up of people of color, and Macdonough had been cited by the state because its student demographics included 17% more students of color than the town average.216

According to Parmelee-Blancato, in order to deal with the racial imbalance at Macdonough, “Every other year [former Superintendent of Schools] David Larson proposed a spot redistricting to deal with the imbalance,” and from Parmelee-Blancato’s perspective it was time to look for a new solution.217 In a Board of Education meeting on October 17th, she proposed closing Macdonough and relocating those students to other elementary schools in the area, including to five new classrooms in the Wesley and Lawrence elementary schools, since there was renovation already in the works for those buildings.218 She suggested that closing Macdonough would be “‘less disruptive’ than a total redistricting of Middletown,” and that it would also cut the cost of maintaining Macdonough’s building from the

217 Christie, op. cit.
BOE budget.\textsuperscript{219} Interestingly, these justifications are exactly the same ones that would later be used in the 2016 threat to Macdonough. It is important to consider what Parmelee-Blancato means by “less disruptive” in this situation, since closing Macdonough would certainly be disruptive to the school with the most students of color in the area. Parmelee-Blancato mentioned that the families on Grand Street, which is about a block and a half south of Macdonough, had already been moved to other schools, and that if nothing changed, families closer and closer to the school would also have to be redistricted, which was “certainly not a solution,” according to the superintendent.\textsuperscript{220} This justification that Macdonough could not be a “neighborhood school” since so many students were already bused elsewhere was also used to rationalize the threat to close the school in the 2016.

Additionally, closing a school due to previous action on the part of the Board, in this case redistricting, is not logical. Given Middletown’s history of spot redistricting students of color to fill quotas at majority white schools, the logic would follow that instead of closing the school, the district should spot redistrict white students and bus them to Macdonough, a majority student of color school. The fact that this was not considered reveals the probable underlying motivations and assumptions about integration informing the superintendent’s decision. Parmelee-Blancato suggested closure sometime during the 2003-04 year, possibly because the distribution of students to new schools depended on the Wesley and Lawrence renovations, which were in progress at that time.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Ibid.}
Unlike the redistricting of the 90’s, this time, community pushback was strong. According to *The Middletown Press*, “Parents, many who wore large buttons saying ‘Don’t Close Macdonough School,’ argued that the racial imbalance was not problem for a school continually cited for academic excellence.” Parmelee-Blancato acknowledged that the school had won a Title I award in 1997-98, but stood by her proposal. (Title I awards are given to high-need schools that show “exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years,” are “closing the achievement gap between student groups,” or exhibit “excellence in serving special populations of students.”) Parents argued that they did not think that racial imbalance was an issue. One resident, Rick Sexton, stated, “I think that we have a successful school and nobody’s complaining about a racial imbalance.” Like in 2016, the parents pointed out that busing students out of the neighborhood would do a disservice to their families, because many did not own cars and would not be able to access the new schools easily, if at all. The North End Action Team also got involved for the first time in 2000, and the group held that closing Macdonough would greatly hinder community efforts to reduce crime and poverty in the neighborhood and that doing so would be “disrupting the whole fabric of the North End.”

After the initial proposal, about 100 people showed up to protest the threat at the following BOE meeting on November 1st, just as they would later do in 2016.

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224 “The National Title I Distinguished School Program,” *National Title I Association*.
225 Christie, *op. cit.*
Subsequently, an advisory board called the “Macdonough School Advisory Committee” was created to discuss ways to address the racial imbalance at Macdonough. Initially parents were concerned that there were not enough Macdonough parents on the panel, but Board member Sally Boske, who was head of the panel, said that the group would include “one teacher from Macdonough, a representative from the North End Action Team and two parent representatives,” and possibly a member of the NAACP.\(^{229}\) On January 6\(^{\text{th}}\), 2001, the Macdonough School Advisory Committee offered four options to the Board of Education: “creating a magnet or unique school, adding a special program that will attract students to the school, redistricting the whole district, [which would mean] redistricting students into the school - and out of the school only if necessary, and creating a charter school.”\(^{230}\) Closing the school was placed at the bottom of the list of options, although it is worth noting that creating a charter school, the least-favored option, would have required closing the school as well.\(^{231}\)

On February 13\(^{\text{th}}\), 2001, the Board unanimously voted to keep Macdonough open. However, as in this past year, Macdonough’s troubles were not over. During the February meeting, three distinct points of view about Macdonough from three different institutions came to light. First, Parmelee-Blancato said that “The racial imbalance at Macdonough has been a constant problem for the board… forcing spot redistricting every other year.”\(^{232}\) As superintendent she had a responsibility to be in accordance with the Connecticut law, and she seems to be most focused on


\(^{231}\) Ibid.

addressing “racial imbalance.” In contrast, Lydia Brewster, a representative from NEAT, held that, “It's been strongly recommended that neighborhood schools are very important to the health of a community.”\textsuperscript{233} From her perspective, Macdonough was an important part of the neighborhood and keeping it a neighborhood school was necessary to improve the area. Finally, the NAACP representative, Faith Jackson, held that, “no great effort has been made to racially balance the school,” because “black students have been bused out to area school but no white students have been bused in.”\textsuperscript{234} The NAACP here has a positive view towards reducing “racial imbalance,” but believes that students of color should not be the only ones who have to make efforts to achieve it.

Although the school had avoided the threat of school closure for the moment, Macdonough still faced issues due to the racial imbalance law, since its status was “classified as impending racial imbalance.”\textsuperscript{235} As a result, the idea to turn the public elementary school into a “unique school” was discussed. A unique school is “one established to solve problems relating to racial imbalance… one that is entered by voluntary enrollment… [It] could be a magnet, charter or lighthouse, intradistrict, alternative, special education or a school at the commissioner's discretion.”\textsuperscript{236} The idea was dropped, and then briefly picked up again in October of 2003 during the election cycle for the BOE members.\textsuperscript{237} Although it is difficult to say what form the “unique school” would have taken since the idea never came to fruition, one thing is

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.  
clear: the changes to the elementary were considered almost exclusively because of the district’s struggles with “racial imbalance” at Macdonough.

On May 5th, 2008, the Board of Education was offered $3.2 million less by the City Council than what they asked for. As a result, the idea of closing Macdonough School was again proposed by the chairman of the Board, Theodore Raczka, who explained that it was the least populated school in the area and that closing a school would be better than firing teachers and staff. Two weeks later on May 19th, 2008, parents and supporters of Macdonough crowded into Middletown High School to voice their concerns and outrage about the threat of closure, and the Board decided to take it off the table.

In February of 2009, Macdonough was named one of the best achieving schools in the state. Not two months later, it was cited again by the state for being “racially imbalanced.” On April 21st, 2009, Superintendent Michael Frechette told the Board that the state had cited Macdonough as “racially imbalanced,” and that because of this, the district would need to submit a plan to address this in less than 120 days. According to the superintendent (and the law), the plan did not have to be detailed, but the district did have to make changes. What followed was an exercise in the workings of bureaucracy: rather than 120 days, the final decision took a year to be made.

242 Ibid.
Before explaining the events that occurred after this announcement, it is important to establish what the situation was for Middletown elementary schools at the time. In the initial meeting where this was announced, it was pointed out that Macdonough had seen great improvements over the past few years, and that these proposed changes were being made to meet a state mandate, not because standards were not being met.\textsuperscript{243} Izzi Greenberg, who at that time was the executive director of NEAT, was quoted as saying, “Kids in the neighborhood are achieving… Making changes that will interrupt the momentum of success is a mistake.”\textsuperscript{244} It is also important to point out that at this time, Moody school was experiencing overcrowding as a result of bad redistricting from previous years. Additionally, at that time, Middletown had spot redistricted many of its students of color to other schools over the years in an effort to meet the CT racial balance law. As a result, the president of the Macdonough PTA, Jennifer Alexander, described an overview of the district as a “bowl of spaghetti” that made no logical sense and was unfair to students of color.\textsuperscript{245}

It was in this context that JCJ Architecture was asked to assess the district and make a recommendation for it.\textsuperscript{246} Superintendent Frechette was quoted on April 21\textsuperscript{st} as saying that the firm would come back with its recommendations in April or May.\textsuperscript{247} As it turned out, although they presented their initial observations in late May, the entire process took much longer, and the firm did not come up with a plan that took all the factors of the district into account until late November of that year.\textsuperscript{248}

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{246} Brewster, op. cit.  
\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.  
The firm was tasked with several jobs, the most important of which being to alleviate overcrowding at Moody and to address racial imbalance at Macdonough. On May 26th, 2009, Greg Smolley, a representative of JCJ Architecture, told Moody parents that nothing would be done to alleviate the overcrowding at that time because changing attendance borders for the moment was a short-term solution, and it would be better to wait until all the numbers had been crunched to make a final decision.\textsuperscript{249}

Given that average first-grade class sizes at Moody were around or above 20, whereas other schools in the area had around 15, there was understandable frustration with this decision. "I think it's really upsetting that the education in Middletown is not equitable," is the way that one first grade teacher, Joan Pestritto, described it.\textsuperscript{250}

Given strong Moody pushback, Smolley returned a week later on June 2\textsuperscript{nd} with a suggestion to move 24 students from Moody to Macdonough, and 12 students from Macdonough to other schools.\textsuperscript{251} However, given that the suggestion did not adequately address overcrowding at Moody (each class would only lose about one student) or "racial imbalance" at Macdonough, the Board rejected the proposal.\textsuperscript{252} It was not until November that JCJ Architecture came back with a more concrete proposal. Their report on November 17\textsuperscript{th} for Macdonough offered several solutions, including “closing it, expanding it or adding an intra-district magnet school. The report also recommended that attendance boundaries for elementary schools be redrawn regardless of implementation of other recommendations, calling the current boundaries ‘very convoluted.’”

\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Ibid}.
Greenberg stated that Macdonough was made up of equal parts black, Latino, and white students, and that to the North End, the school seemed “perfectly balanced.”\(^{253}\) Alexander, the PTA president, “expressed disappointment that the report asks Macdonough to ‘bear the burden’ of fixing the racial imbalance issue in the district and requested that the Macdonough community be given sway in the decision of which option to implement.”\(^{254}\) Both women evidently thought that the needs of the neighborhood and its students were more important than the racial imbalance mandate. Alexander’s comment also points to the repeating pattern of considering desegregation the problem of people of color, while simultaneously denying those from the affected community a voice in the decisions being made. On November 21\(^{st}\), JCJ came back with a proposal to move 79 students out of Moody to

\(^{254}\) Ibid.
Macdonough and 66 students from Macdonough to Spencer and Lawrence. According to Moody principal Yolande Eldridge, “JCJ certainly did fine by us.”255 However, this was not the full solution for Macdonough’s “racial imbalance,” and beyond redistricting, JCJ recommended “closing Macdonough, expanding it, or adding an intra-district magnet school, possibility as part of Macdonough.”256 However, the Superintendent Frechette expressed his commitment to keeping Macdonough open.257 Of the options, Greenberg favored the magnet school idea as the best option.258

As a result of the lack of consensus about what the best future plan for Macdonough was, the Board decided to implement an Ad Hoc Committee to decide on Macdonough’s future.259 The committee was made up of “three members of the Board of Education, four parents, three community members, three teachers, three principals, a Common Council member and a district administrator, for a total of 18 members.”260 It was expected to meet weekly to come to a final decision about Macdonough based on JCJ’s report, which described the district as “a ‘maze’ of bus routes” as a result of bad districting.261 The Chairman of the Board, Ted Raczka, mentioned that “I think the board not only wants to meet the minimum state requirements but come up with a solution that really moves the school district ahead… [To] make what goes on at all our grammar schools a little better than it was

256 Ibid.
257 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid.
before – that's the goal.” Whether this was just rhetoric, or whether Raczka was aware of the distinction that he was making between equality and integration, we are reminded here yet again that redistricting in Middletown in the past few years has largely been mandated by the state, and has for the most part not been motivated by low-achieving schools but by “racial imbalance.” In fact, during a NEAT community meeting, the “consensus that emerged from the meeting from families of children who attend Macdonough is that they like the school's atmosphere, teaching, teachers and leadership, and ‘want as little to change as possible.’”

A month later on January 19th, 2010, the Board of Education hastily approved a plan that the Superintendent Frachette had filed with the State Board of Education about how the district planned to proceed with fixing its “racial imbalance.” Evidently this was the same plan that was supposed to have been filed in August, but the Board had gotten an extension to February 1st by the state because of the 5-person rule outlined in Chapter 2. This plan was filed and approved before any members of the Ad Hoc committee, or the BOE for that matter, had been able to read it. It is unclear why it was filed at the last minute without any other approval, but one can only assume that delays with JCJ and perhaps the Ad Hoc committee prevented the lack of overhead. That being said, the plan “included the possibilities of consolidating preschool programs, redistricting, and creating an intradistrict magnet school at Commodore Macdonough Elementary school,” but did not include the possibility of

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262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
closing Macdonough.\textsuperscript{267} The Board was also assured that they would be able to modify the plan later if necessary.\textsuperscript{268}

\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Ibid.}
2010’s

On March 9th, 2010, the Ad Hoc Committee came to the Board with the long-term proposal they had been working on since December 8th. The committee said they had been offered a “bowl of spaghetti,” and had tried to reorganize the district to make it more of a “patchwork quilt.”269 However, as a result of a total restructuring of attendance lines, the final proposal by the Ad Hoc committee involved moving 438 students in the district.270 Every single elementary school in the area would be affected, but the plan would in theory rectify spot-districting, lower attendance at Moody, and fix the “racial imbalance” at Macdonough.271 In the end, the new plan would move 80 students out of Macdonough and add 78 new students. The demographics within the school would shift from 67.77% students of color to 64.79%, not even a full 3% points, but enough to keep Macdonough within the racial balance mandates for the moment.272 Although these percentages seem incredibly inconsequential considering the number of students’ lives that would be disrupted, according to Greenberg, the “redistricting plan would fix what she called ‘one of our city's quietest and greatest injustices’ – that some of the city's most vulnerable students in the North End are currently being bused to schools out of their neighborhood to fix the district's racial imbalance issues, and their families being shut out of participation in their school because of transportation issues.”273 She also said, “Historically, the school district has tried to stay in compliance with racial imbalance

270 Ibid.
271 Ibid.
272 Ibid.
273 Ibid.
law through spot redistricting, which has unjustly caused North End minority students to bear the brunt of the law and be bused to far-away schools.\textsuperscript{274} Beyond the North End, this has been true for housing projects and other centers of students of color, as well. At the April 6\textsuperscript{th} Board meeting, Middletown residents had mixed feelings about the plan, with passion on both sides. However, the North End seemed to be largely in support of redistricting, possibly because Greenberg was behind this and the whole point of it was to eliminate spot redistricting.\textsuperscript{275} Ultimately, the Board voted in favor of the new plan, with only one dissenting voice from Sheila Daniels, a Republican member of the BOE who wished that the magnet school option had been more seriously considered.\textsuperscript{276} She added that the numbers keeping Macdonough within code were “precarious,” and could change at any time.\textsuperscript{277} According to the \textit{Middletown Press}, “Proponents of the plan said it would strengthen neighborhood schools by making attendance boundaries less convoluted and fix overcrowding at Moody, where two storage closets had to be converted in to offices because of lack of space.”\textsuperscript{278} The Ad Hoc Committee also suggested that a permanent group be maintained to watch and plan for Macdonough’s racial balance, in order to avoid a similar situation in the future, but this was not voted on by the Board.\textsuperscript{279}

In 2010 and 2011, Macdonough appeared to be doing pretty well academically. In September of 2010, it was quoted by the Middletown Press as

\textsuperscript{274} Vahl, Hannah, “Updated Middletown Board of Ed Votes in Favor of Redistricting All of City’s Elementary Schools,” \textit{The Middletown Press}, 8 Apr 2010.
\textsuperscript{275} “Board of Education Special Meeting,” 6 Apr 2010, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{276} Vahl, Hannah, “Middletown BOE votes to redistrict all elementary schools,” \textit{The Middletown Press}, 6 Apr 2010.
\textsuperscript{277} Vahl, “Updated Middletown Board of Ed Votes in Favor of Redistricting All of City’s Elementary Schools,” 8 Apr 2010.
\textsuperscript{278} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{279} \textit{Ibid.}
having made “exceptional progress” in closing the achievement gap. In May of 2011 it was even visited by U.S. Senator Blumenthal, who said, “I have visited a lot of schools, and it's among certainly the best in the state in producing better students.” He said that he “hopes to use Macdonough as a model for other schools to emulate when he works on education legislation in Washington.” In September of 2011, Macdonough was recognized for its “Exemplary School Climate” by the Connecticut Association of Schools.

However, on April 10th, 2013, Macdonough was again told that it would have to redistrict some of its students, this time because of overcrowding. Although this redistricting was relatively small compared to previous shifts, and only affected 30 kindergarten and first-graders, it was pointed out that this affected families that had just been switched from other schools to Macdonough in the 2010 redistricting. However, the response to this critique was that these children would only be experiencing their first school transfer because they were too young to be in school in 2010. This redistricting did not affect issues with Macdonough’s racial balance.

As a result of the discussions that had started during the 2010 redistricting, it was eventually decided that Macdonough would add a STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) program to deal with its “racial imbalance.” After several years of planning, the program kicked off at Macdonough in the 2015-16 school year.

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282 Ibid.
284 Gecan, Alex, “Middletown schools to redistrict around Macdonough,” The Middletown Press, 10 Apr 2013.
285 Ibid.
year. Since the program was implemented in order to address racial imbalance, one of its goals was to attract white students to Macdonough School. A 2013 report entitled “3rd Revision to Plan to Address Racial Imbalance” which outlined how the STEM program would be implemented in the district stated that, “To be successful in attracting families to attend the Macdonough TAG/STEM program, the district will offer programs and services that are not available in other schools.” The program offers afterschool programs, summer programs, and during regular school days, the group meets for part of the school day on its own. It is described in the Elementary Parent and Student Handbook for Middletown schools as a program that “provides opportunities for our highest achieving students to enrich their learning in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math,” including opportunities to explore “3D printing, computer coding, as well as other technology based learning experiences.”

While in some ways the addition of this program to Macdonough School was a clever solution to comply with the Racial Imbalance Law in a way that benefitted students throughout the district without threatening to close or redistrict Macdonough, it is also emblematic of the pervasive attitudes that inform decisions regarding integration mandates. The simplest solution to the racial imbalance issue at Macdonough would have been to bus white students to the school. Instead, the district “[offered] programs and services that are not available in other schools” in order to attract white students to the school. Cookie Quinones, a North End resident, reported

287 Ibid., p. 8.
288 Ibid., p. 9.
that during a recent meeting between parents of color in the Middletown School District, some parents mentioned that “some of the kids that go to [STEM] are saying, ‘My parents didn’t want us to come to this neighborhood.’”\textsuperscript{290} She continued:

The only reason you have a few kids from different schools is because of the STEM program we have at Macdonough… You want the kid to have the good program, but you just don’t want them to go to that neighborhood… Why is there a problem with moving the kids to Macdonough? ... Like if there’s a racial imbalance, then take some of your kids and move them to Macdonough.\textsuperscript{291}

Even though the program serves both students of color and white students, in order to achieve the district’s goal of racial balance, the percentage of white students it serves must remain higher than the percentage of students of color in Macdonough. Thus, students of color who attended the school originally have not been afforded the same opportunities as students who are now bussed in from other areas of town.

In 2014, Middletown crossed the threshold to become a “diverse school” district. This means that over 50 percent of its students were students of color.\textsuperscript{292} (The use of the word “minority” here is incredibly ironic and problematic.) At this time, both Macdonough and Moody were singled out for their “impending racial imbalance.”\textsuperscript{293} The district set out to address “overcrowding, equity and racial imbalances across our elementary schools,” and the conversation to turn one of the schools into a magnet school was again considered.\textsuperscript{294} At this time, there was some confusion about whether the impending racial imbalance would affect the district’s

\textsuperscript{290} Conversation with Cookie Quinones, 10 Apr 2017, In Person.
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{293} “Morning Mix: What you need to know for Thursday,” The Middletown Press, 13 Aug 2015.
funding. The President of the BOE, Gene Nocera claimed it would, but a parent, Chris Bosignore, refuted that and said that funding would not be affected, and neither school would cross the threshold anyway. At this time, Nocera was quoted as saying, “This is a longstanding concern for the last couple decades. It is not a new issue. The schools at this time are moving to a point where minority students are out of balance and we need to make an adjustment. There was an adjustment made in the ’80s and the ’90s and one a few years ago, but it continues to be a concern.” He also said, “The public has to understand why we are doing this. It is because of the racial balance. We are not doing it to create hardships for anyone and we are not doing it to make problems for anyone, we are doing it to solve a problem that has been present for way too long.”

The language that Nocera used here exemplifies his understanding of racial imbalance as a “concern,” an “issue,” and a “problem” that must be “solved” even if it causes “hardships” as a byproduct. His comment that “minority students are out of balance” also implicitly places the responsibility to fix the problem on the shoulders of people of color.

Given these “concerns,” Superintendent Patricia Charles stated that the following were the goals for the school district:

1. Increasing enrollment balance: racial, socioeconomic and deployment of resources.
2. Minimizing negative impacts on students and families.
3. Maintaining grant funding and minimizing additional costs to the district.
4. Ensuring the long-term stability of the plan.
5. Striving for student and family proximity to assign schools and building strong school communities; and
6. Maintaining flexibility for future programming opportunities.

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295 Ibid., Emphasis mine.
296 Ibid.
The focus on “minimizing negative impacts” and “striving for student and family proximity to assign schools and building strong school communities” seemed particularly aimed at North End parents, but unfortunately, the Board’s actions over the next few years in regards to Macdonough would render these phrases mere rhetoric. According to a blog post by Ed McKeon, a member of the BOE, the director of the survey done by Milone and MacBroom, Rebecca Augur, stated that there was a discrepancy in the ways that spaces were being used in Middletown, with a shared art and music room at Macdonough in contrast to the two music rooms and one art room at Moody. This harkens back to the 1994 redistricting, when Moody had extra space as well. The consulting group explained the possible scenarios for fixing the district issues, but said that none of them was a complete solution. A few hundred people attended this meeting, and more than twenty parents, teachers, and other community members spoke, nearly all of them stating that they did not want the redistricting to happen. There were racial tensions emphasized by the issues with Moody, and the majority of parents who showed up in opposition to the plans were Moody parents, likely because this redistricting would cause them to lose space in their school. Many Moody parents said that overcrowding should not be a reason to redistrict all of Middletown, which is ironic considering the redistricting of 2010 was largely put into motion because of overcrowding at Moody. Meghan Glomb, a Farm Hill parent spoke up, saying she didn’t want to move because her family chose their house so their child could go to Farm Hill. The only parent who spoke in favor of the redistricting was Cathy Lechowicz, a Farm Hill parent, who said that overcrowding needed to be addressed through redistricting.²⁹⁷

In the December 27th meeting, the ad hoc committee assigned to assess the issues at hand said that it did not suggest a full-scale redistricting at that time, although 60 students from Farm Hill would need to be moved. Superintendent Charles pointed out that Macdonough was nearing capacity and that that might affect the STEM program, were it to go overcapacity. She also said that she wanted possible redistricting to “improve the racial, socioeconomic and resources balance” of Middletown schools, while trying to minimize the impact of the redistricting. She stated that, “Even though the state may say that [the schools] are not out of compliance right now, they are not balanced... I firmly believe that equity in schools is important.” She further explained that, “The research demonstrates that all kids’ education is enhanced when you have a more equitable school distribution.” In this case, Charles equates “equity” with “integration,” which may inform the way that she approaches school policy. The final recommendation by the ad hoc committee as well as the decision by the Board were slated to be made in January of 2016.

On January 20th, 2016, the ad hoc committee asked for more time to finish evaluating the district, but presented the following options to address the district’s issues:

- Create a centralized magnet school
- Create a sister school arrangement, such as a kindergarten- through second-grade school, and a third- through fifth-grade school
- Cap the kindergarten classes at Macdonough Elementary School and potentially Farm Hill School

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299 Ibid.
300 Ibid.
• Offer families voluntary movement from overcapacity schools to underused institutions
• Relocate the Intensive Case Management program for kindergarten to second-grade students
• Renovate Macdonough elementary

Charles pointed out that these did not address the overcrowding issues at Macdonough. At that time, there were 223 students enrolled in the school, with a cap of 250 students for the school’s capacity, and the school’s student of color population was 74%. The board discussed moving students to either Keigwin Middle School or to Wesley, Bielfield, or Snow, which would have then bumped 35 Snow students to Moody, but in the end they decided not to take either of those options immediately.

On February 9th, the ad hoc committee presented their final recommendations, which were:

1. No redistricting for next year; only move the ICM program from Farm Hill;
2. Maintain the portable at Farm Hill and monitor enrollment;
3. Cap kindergarten enrollment at Macdonough and Farm Hill (as long as they are at 95% Capacity) and allow parents to send their kindergarten students to another school that is not at full capacity…
4. Continue to meet as a committee to discuss long term plan options and expound upon the intricacies of the solutions (K-2, 3-5 paired schools, magnet school options and renovations); and,
5. Evaluate additional supports at Farm Hill based on enrollment.

(2/9/16)

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302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
In the end, no redistricting was carried out, but Macdonough families were not able to rest easy for long, since that same year, the Board threatened to shut down the school again. \(^{304}\)

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\(^{304}\) “Board of Education Regular Meeting,” 9 Feb 2016, Minutes.
Chapter 4

2016 Proposed School Closure

Mutual recognition of racism, its impact both on those who are dominated and those who dominate, is the only standpoint that makes possible an encounter between races that is not based on denial and fantasy. For it is the ever present reality of racist domination, of white supremacy, that renders problematic the desire of white people to have contact with the Other. - bell hooks, 1992

The most recent threat to Macdonough School was in 2016, when the superintendents and the Board of Education again suggested closing the school. The issue was first brought up in April, when the City Council offered the Board of Education $3 million less than they had initially requested for the budget. As a result, in a May 10th BOE meeting, Superintendent Patricia Charles suggested closing Macdonough School or Spencer School, which at that time they said would save them $695,000 per year. This lead to a six month-long debate about whether or not Macdonough should close, and for the majority of the fall semester, parents and students did not know if this would be their last year at Macdonough.

305 hooks, op. cit., p. 371.
During the initial May 10th Board of Education meeting where closing a school was proposed, the pros and cons for closing either Macdonough or Spencer were presented to the Board by Charles. If agreed upon, the decision would go into affect during the 2017-18 school year, and the consulting firm Milone and MacBroom were hired to provide guidance and information about the effects of such a decision. Spencer was looked at because of its central location in the district, but closing the school would bring some other schools to overcapacity. Macdonough was chosen for consideration because it was the smallest school, its roof needed to be repaired, it was already operating at a high capacity, and, predictably, because closing it would result in better “racial balance” in Middletown Schools. Option 1, closing Spencer, would result in moving 303 students, 84 to Moody, 93 to Wesley, and 120 to Lawrence. The changes would return previously displaced students to their home districts, but would bring three schools to overcapacity. Closing Macdonough, Option 2, would mean that 49 students would be moved to Spencer, 91 to Lawrence, and 84 to Moody, for a total of 230 students. Charles noted that closing Macdonough would mean closing a “true neighborhood school” and a loss of access to services offered there. Closing would also incite the additional cost of busing students. When asked by Marylin Dunkley, a board member from the North End, how this would affect the many families in the North End with one or no cars, Charles responded:

That is absolutely one of the challenges that we have, but right now we have kids that should be walking to Macdonough that go all the way over to Wesley and to Farm Hill. So there's not a neighborhood solution that we have unless we were to decide that we were going to put some type of addition on to Macdonough that
would enable us to bring more students into Macdonough. We’d have to enlarge the footprint.\textsuperscript{308}

Charles’ statement that there is no “neighborhood solution” because North End students are already being bused to other schools is odd when one considers that closing Macdonough would in fact create a larger number of students who would be bused out of the neighborhood. She mentions the construction of “some type of addition” to the school in an off-hand manner, as though it is out of the question. This is a clear example of integration over equalization, because on the one hand, were Macdonough to be renovated or even to add trailers to the school, students of color would have more space and less chance of losing their school, but on the other hand, closing the school would mean that the Board would not have to worry about Macdonough falling out of compliance. Although this redistricting is technically a budget issue, it is impossible to ignore the fact that closing Macdonough would not only “solve” the racial imbalance problem at that school, but that adding students of color to other schools would also help to balance out the numbers of students of color there as well, thus “integrating” the school district. During this May 10\textsuperscript{th} meeting, the Board decided to create an Ad Hoc Committee to further explore these options.\textsuperscript{309}

On June 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2016, the Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee met for the first time and heard information provided by Milone & MacBroom about the potential closures. During this time, the committee brought up the fact that closing Macdonough would result in “the absence of a significant anchor within the North end community and the vacuum created without the services and community hub the

\textsuperscript{308} Board of Education – May 10, 2016, 36:00-50:12.
\textsuperscript{309} Norton, Sam, “Middletown education board considering 2 schools for possible closure,” The Middletown Press, 12 May 2016.
school has become.”\textsuperscript{310} However, like the last meeting, “Dr. Charles reminded the group that Macdonough students are already impacted since Macdonough cannot accommodate the number of students that live in the north end.”\textsuperscript{311} The Committee also talked about what would happen to the school buildings once empty, and Charles responded that they would be turned over to the City. The group said that the following would need to be considered in order to make a final decision:

1. School capacity: building condition/equity of building resources
2. Community Resiliency
3. Travel distance to new school
4. Air conditioning\textsuperscript{312}

Additionally, the Committee requested the following information for the next meeting:

- Financial analysis of the cost to close each school.
- Cost to break contracts currently in place at schools. Grant money lost due to closure.
- Number of students affected by lost grant dollars. Impact to move Snow School students to Wesley School\textsuperscript{313}

Finally, the committee asked Charles why Moody was not considered for closure, since it had low enrollment. Charles said she would “verify the impact of closing Moody.”\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{310} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 27 June 2016, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{311} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 27 June 2016.
\textsuperscript{312} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 27 June 2016.
\textsuperscript{313} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 27 June 2016.
\textsuperscript{314} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 27 June 2016.
The School Closure Advisory Committee met again on August 22nd, and Milone and MacBroom presented new options for the district. For the first time, the committee also discussed the possibility of closing Moody more seriously with Milone & MacBroom’s “Option 3.” This would send Moody students to Lawrence and Spencer, but would cause a “domino” effect, which would impact the rest of the district.\(^3\) It also would move 384 students and do nothing to address the district’s racial imbalance issues.\(^4\) Option 4 involved still closing Spencer, but moving students to Snow, Lawrence, and Moody, instead of Wesley, Lawrence, and Moody.\(^5\) 308 students would be affected.\(^6\) Option 5, marked the “Preferred Option” by Milone & MacBroom, would close Macdonough, but would send the entire school to the Spencer building, and disperse the Spencer students throughout the district. This would ideally allow Macdonough to maintain a lot of its programs, but obviously would not solve the transportation issue, and would result in the STEM program moving to Lawrence.\(^7\) It would also result in moving 534 students, which would be the most students out of any of the options presented previously. There would be more classroom space for students with this option and the district would achieve racial balance, but buses would need to be added to the district to move


\(^4\) “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 22 Aug 2016, Minutes.


\(^6\) “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 22 Aug 2016, Minutes.

\(^7\) “Middletown Public Schools Elementary School Consolidation Analysis: Additional Options for Consideration,” p. 3, 24.
Macdonough students.\textsuperscript{320} Although there are certain benefits to this plan over the others since Macdonough is a smaller school, it is interesting to note that the plan that solves racial imbalance is the one supported here, despite the fact that it would result in moving the most students.\textsuperscript{321}

On September 15\textsuperscript{th}, the Advisory Committee met again to try to solidify their recommendations to the Board. Although Moody was technically still in the mix for schools to consider closing, it was clear that Macdonough and Spencer were the only ones being seriously considered, given that potential savings were only offered for those two schools, and the discussion centered around them as well. As in past meetings, Dr. Charles made it clear that she was in support of closing Macdonough by stating that the school would save the most money in facilities. One member, Mike Maier, who was also the chair of the Macdonough Governance Council, stated that Moody would be the best school to close.\textsuperscript{322} The group stated that it was “difficult to compare the possible losses to communities because all the schools are valued, and any closing will be a loss.”\textsuperscript{323} It is true that most families value the schools that their children attend. However, given that Macdonough is central to many community activities and events, offers many programs to its students, and is in close proximity to the families it serves, who would face difficulties in getting to a different school, it seems clear that this community stands to lose a great deal more than some of the other families. Christine Wagner-Morella, a Spencer parent, also stated,

\textsuperscript{320} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 22 Aug 2016, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{321} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 22 Aug 2016, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{322} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 15 Sep 2016, Minutes.; “2016-17 Governance Council,” Middletown Public Schools.
\textsuperscript{323} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 15 Sep 2016, Minutes.
“Macdonough students might benefit from their school closing because it is crowded and other schools offer some additional educational programs.”\textsuperscript{324} Not only is this false, since Macdonough would likely lose quite a few educational programs by shutting down, but suggesting that students of color would “benefit from their school closing” for the sake of better programs at other schools is another example of decision-makers advocating for integration instead of directly investing in schools of color. Telling a community in Middletown that their school would “benefit” from shutting down would not be received well for any other school, but given popular assumptions about integration, it is not the first time that this argument has been made about Macdonough in one form or another. The group stated that they would try to make a final decision during the next meeting.\textsuperscript{325}

The Committee voted on October 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2016 about what their recommendations would be to the Board of Education. Prior to the vote, the Committee discussed some final details about the changes. Busing was talked about, and the group that provides busing, Dattco, stated that 3 buses would need to be added for Macdonough, but that busing would not change for Spencer, either way.\textsuperscript{326} Although the company did not give an exact number for the cost of additional busing for Macdonough at that time, earlier that year a Dattco representative stated in a May 9\textsuperscript{th} meeting with the Board that a bus costs $482.68 per day. Assuming 180 required school days in a year, this would come out to $86,882.40 per bus per year, and $260,647.20 for three extra buses.

\textsuperscript{324} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 15 Sep 2016, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{325} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 15 Sep 2016, Minutes.
\textsuperscript{326} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 4 Oct 2016, Minutes.
per year, which is a cost that Spencer in theory would not accrue.\textsuperscript{327} However, these numbers were not spoken about explicitly in the October 4\textsuperscript{th} meeting. Janice Pawlak, president of the teacher’s union, Middletown Federation of Teachers,\textsuperscript{328} stated that:

We have been cutting things for so long. We have been told that next year will be a tight budget. The State mandates do not stop. We appreciate that the City does not want us to close a school. We have 3 buildings that are bulging at the seams and we have 3 schools with low enrollment. We said we would only have the portable for one year at Farm Hill, now this is year 2. If we don’t do something, we cannot keep the families and kids in limbo. What is left to cut?\textsuperscript{329}

She pushed to close one of the schools. The Committee then voted on the following three questions: “1. To close or not close a school. 2. If a school is closed, which school is recommended? and 3. Other information the Board should consider.”\textsuperscript{330} The results were the following:

1. No closing of school – 8; Close a school – 4
2. If we must close a school: Macdonough – 6; Spencer – 3.5; Moody – 1.5; Blank – 1
3. Other considerations:
   A. We don’t have enough information. I would like to see an in-depth research project done (not by an architect) on the academic, social, and community ramifications of any school closure or redistricting option before it is done. This cannot be done in haste. It is not worth the savings.
   B. Moving our [at risk] children.
   C. Do not close any school until the City decides on [whether or not they will close] Keigwin [the school for 6\textsuperscript{th} grade]…
   D. K-2, 3-5
   E. If we have to close a school, choose Moody.
   F. Redistrict then close a school so we don’t end up here again.
   G. Close [Macdonough] and redistrict the whole community.

\textsuperscript{327} “Middletown Board of Education Budget Committee Minutes,” 9 May 2016, Minutes, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{328} “Contact us: Middletown Federation of Teachers,” Middletown Federation of Teachers Local 1381.
\textsuperscript{329} “Middletown Board of Education Ad Hoc School Closure Advisory Committee,” 4 Oct 2016, p. 1.
H. Redistrict.
I. [...] There is a difference between the 4 more affluent schools when compared to the less affluent schools.
J. Explore K-2, 3-5 option. What does the research show in similar communities.  

The Ad Hoc Committee voted 8-4 to recommend that the Board not close a school at this time. However, if the Board decided that a school had to be closed, Macdonough was the preferred school to shut down, with 6 votes in favor, as compared to Spencer’s 3.5 votes, Moody’s 1.5 votes, and 1 abstention. Members of the committee also asked the Board to take into consideration the fact that there was not enough information to make an informed decision about closing a school at this time. Additionally, they asked the BOE to take into account the affluence of the schools considered, to consider redistricting, and to wait until they made a decision about closing Keigwin, the 6th grade school, before deciding to close an elementary school.

332 In early October at an Ad Hoc meeting open to the public, presumably the one on October 4th, the assistant superintendent of the Middletown School District apparently made a comment that served to galvanize the North End community. In justifying closing Macdonough and moving those students to Moody and other Middletown schools, the assistant superintendent allegedly stated that low-income Macdonough students would learn better at schools like Moody, because there was data to prove that “It matters who you sit next to.”  

333 The official also “told our committee that it troubled them to see all of our black and brown children in one

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school,” according to Izzi Greenberg, former director of NEAT and a member of the Ad Hoc committee, as well as other members of the community who heard the comment. Greenberg continued:

Let that sink in. Because it sunk in for our parents and our teachers who were sitting in the room at the time, hearing that it bothers our district leaders to look at their children. That’s what they heard. I bring this up because countless parents and teachers have brought it to me, and it’s important to know that these word choices matter. Comments like these always have been and still are deeply offensive. The repeated threats of closing this school equates to bullying at best and racism at worst.

The assistant superintendent’s remarks became a touchstone of the many frustrations that the North End community has had with school officials’ attitudes towards Macdonough both in 2016 and in previous years. Although I did not attend the meeting and was unable to find a recording of this official’s comment, North End residents would refer to the statement many times during the 2016 fight to keep Macdonough open.

On October 12th, NEAT organized a community meeting, held at Green Street Teaching and Learning Center, to give community members a chance to speak about the possible Macdonough/Spencer closure, and to discuss ways to mobilize. Those present spoke on a variety of subjects, both about the imminent closure and about Middletown schools more generally, but several familiar themes emerged in regards to the Board decision, including the community’s concerns about closing a neighborhood school, their frustration at being targeted again, and their anger about the school officials’ perceptions of students in the North End. Although when I

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335 Ibid.
attended the meeting, I did not record it, I did take notes, and some of the most important points made by those in attendance include the following paraphrases:

Regarding concerns about closing Macdonough:
- There are 204 kids that walk. There are families that walk kids to school every day.
- Busing would be an issue, particularly for after-school programs. It would be 2.5 hours round-trip.
- It would be one thing if that building switched to a youth center or something, but it’s not.
- Macdonough is a vibrant community. People with young kids go to Family Resource Center [a program run through Macdonough] for support, so that’s also a place for them to grow up, develop, socialize.
- Closing Macdonough would eliminate a lot of parent involvement. The relationship between the teacher and the parent is so important, and taking that away will tarnish our community. Also, taking all the events that that school offers away from the community is awful, because people can’t commute.
- This would hurt the kids emotionally and financially.
- I’m not really sure where this supposed $700 thousand is being saved. I’m not comfortable with numbers that they’re presenting us. They’re bundling in numbers that aren’t an actual expense for them, and there are no line items.

Regarding continual targeting:
- There is always some sort of crisis with Macdonough.
- How do we keep this from happening in the future?
- Nobody is talking about Moody.
- Why were only Spencer and Macdonough targeted?
- This keeps happening, and we need to talk about sustainability. How can we fix the school?
- What’s to say that it’s not going to be the same conversation again next year?
- Redistricting is still an issue, even though we’re not out of compliance, not even at a tipping point.

Regarding perceptions of the North End:
- If you take all these poor kids and put them in new school, it’ll be great – no!
- If we are ok in our community, why attack us and make us feel like we’re not good enough?
- I don’t think that being in a shiny new school means that they’ll do better.
- Macdonough always wants to make the best of everything that’s available to them.
- [In regards to the assistant superintendent’s comment] As a person of color, I was shaking with anger at the language that was being used in this situation.
- People try to fix the neighborhood, but they don’t live there.
- The North End is seen as “those people,” and the thought is that if we erase part of it, all the better. We need to let them see the human face of all of us.

Regarding community action:
- We should start a petition.
- NEAT had a survey, and I can send in the comments that were on there to the city council.
- This needs to be about the community as a whole.
- We shouldn’t just let this go in 3-4 months, we need to have a plan so that this doesn’t happen again.\(^{336}\)

Although I did not realize it at the time, most of these issues echoed problems that had been discussed over and over again over the past two decades. Not only were members of the North End opposed to closing the school because it was doing so well, they were opposed to all the costs that would come after closing it, from busing, to loss of programs, to loss of community. They expressed frustration that the Middletown community and the Board of Education regarded North End students as though they were not smart, and they questioned why school officials felt that they needed to move students of color into whiter areas.

Although the idea of a rally was brought up, no community members volunteered to organize it, so instead, a petition was created and distributed, and community members were encouraged to show up to on October 18\(^{th}\) to make their voices heard. So it was that I found myself in the North End ringing doorbells and knocking on doors on Saturday, October 15\(^{th}\), along with at least 15-20 other

\(^{336}\) Meeting about Macdonough School Closure, 12 Oct 2016, Notes.
volunteers from Wesleyan and the North End. In just one day, we collected 500 signatures, and by the time the Board met three days later, we had over 750 names from both the in-person and online petition to hand to them. Clearly, people in and around the North End were passionate about keeping Macdonough open.

In addition to canvassing, NEAT encouraged a letter-writing campaign to the Board of Education to let them know how important Macdonough was to the community. During our October staff meetings, I wrote and offered other Wesleyan students the chance to write and send letters to the Board of Education encouraging them to keep Macdonough open.

Previous to the letters, canvassing, and community meeting, back when the suggestion to close Macdonough had originally been brought up in May, NEAT had distributed a survey asking families at Macdonough how closing the school would affect them. Unsurprisingly, the comments on the survey reflected the usual themes about why the school should be kept open. Many families reported using the many programs that Macdonough offers and being worried about transportation, but they also continually mentioned that Macdonough formed a strong community for the kids and that they were worried that they would not find that at other schools. The following quotes encompassed many of the topics covered by other parents as well:

**Quote 1**
Our school is a beacon of light in our community. Being a part of our school brings us a great deal of pride and this helps to shape our kids and our family identity - our children would risk loss of the excellent education and profound sense of community and support we have at Macdonough. Walking to school would no longer be an option. Loss of the free afterschool care would impact our

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family financially - having an empty school would be detrimental to our neighborhood in multiple ways. Experiencing the diversity in our school is important to our family and we don't want to lose this. Having a walking neighborhood school brings parents and families into the school and the lack of access to transportation will significantly impact this valuable aspect of our school community.

Quote 2
I don't want my kids transferred to another school and see their grades start dropping because they are not used to a new school or they aren't getting the help that they need like they do at Macdonough with all the teachers and staff understanding the troubles my kids have in their life.

Quote 3
I have concerns about how my children will be treated at a different school, especially with all the negativity about the children when the talk of redistricting was on the table. I also worry about my child’s learning environment not all the other schools offer the same enrichment programs and faculty that are so involved in the children's lives, that they take the extra time to run these programs to try to better our children. Closing Macdonough would greatly impact my family life in a negative way, but not just our family will be negatively impacted. The community will be negatively impacted by the closing, Macdonough is some of the reason families, businesses and neighbors come together.

On October 17th, the day before the October 18th BOE meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee met again for a revote because the group wanted to “clearly identify the committee member and his/her vote as required by the FOIA [Freedom of Information Act].” The result was the following:

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The results of the second vote by name on 10-17-16 are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>CLOSE or DO NOT CLOSE a SCHOOL</th>
<th>IF WE MUST RECOMMEND A SCHOOL to CLOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Daniels, BOE Member</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>K-2, 3-5 Configuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Costello, Spencer Parent</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Pawlak, MFT President</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne Zahner, Spencer Principal</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Dempsey-White, BOE Member</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Moody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Duda, Spencer Parent</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Woznicki, Macdonough Principal</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Spencer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enza Macri, Assoc. Superintendent</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Charles, Superintendent</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Macdonough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Maier, Macdonough Parent</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Moody</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Results of the Ad Hoc Committee Revote, October 17th, 2016

The Committee voted 7-3 not to close a school. If forced to close a school, 6 voted for Macdonough, 2 for Moody, 1 for Spencer, and 1 advocated for a new K-2, 3-5 Configuration. Three members, Marilyn Dunkley, Amy Waterman, and Izzi Greenberg, all either North End residents or connected to Macdonough, were not listed in the revote.

On October 18th, parents, teachers, students, and residents filed into the City Council chambers to make their voices heard. Around 100 people were in attendance, and most who spoke were from Macdonough, but there was some representation from Spencer supporters as well. The assistant superintendent’s comment was front and center for many commentators, although no one mentioned the official by name. At least 6 people out of the 34 who spoke alluded to the assistant superintendent’s comment as well as other comments made during the Ad Hoc meetings by the administration. Precious Price said, “I also heard comments like, ‘The data shows that it matters who you sit next to.’” If that’s the case, then the argument should be

made that black students at Moody school are doing outstandingly better than students at other schools. And that’s not the case.”343 Another parent questioned whether the data the administrator referenced referred to willing participants in moving them to a different school.

In terms of moving Macdonough students and “It matters who you sit next to,” and all of those comments that were made, in terms of that research that’s done, I don’t know this, but I would just wonder if in those success stories, whether those successes were driven by the communities that were reassigned or placed elsewhere or diversified in some way. Because that’s not reflected in what we have here tonight. So I would question whether that outcome would be the same if it were done here by moving all the Macdonough students.

- Sean King, Macdonough and Spencer parent344

In addition, members of the audience spoke about how they felt that Macdonough was intentionally targeted in ways that were detrimental to the community in order to address the issue of “racial imbalance,” which many did not believe was a problem in the first place. Both Cathy Lechowicz and Izzi Greenberg mentioned that the story changed about why Macdonough was being considered for closure several times over the course of the process, and that it felt as though the school were being targeted without cause.

Honestly, it felt a little bit like quicksand. There were times where, this is the reason that we need to close the school, no this is the reason. We want to diversify our schools. We need to save money. Some of the factors that were brought in felt frankly like there was a case being made for one school only. And that was really disconcerting.

- Cathy Lechowicz, Macdonough parent345

With each new meeting there was a change in the numbers and new reasons why Macdonough should close. When it didn’t save the most money, it’s underperforming. When the state data shows it’s not underperforming, it’s too segregated. When it’s made clear that Macdonough and Moody share the same racial spread, then it’s too poor. Then the facility’s too old. Then it’s an equity issue. It can’t exist because we don’t have a separate art and music room. Our students are performing competitively despite our concentration of high-risk students, so why does district leadership want to close our school?

- Izzi Greenberg, director of Middlesex Coalition for Children

Greenberg also urged the Board to change the ways that they perceived North End students: “Don’t stick to the script that we’re somehow the worst school because we’re the darkest and the poorest. We change that assumption. We think we’re the best and we should be celebrated, not condemned.” Additionally, community members spoke to the fact that taking North End students away from Macdonough to send them to other schools would do nothing to give them a better education:

[Macdonough is] a school that equalizes the community, bringing positive and safe opportunities for kids into the neighborhood. And I get that academic achievement needs to accompany this as a priority if we are to be doing the kids the justice they deserve. That is why the school receives well-appropriated Title I money that enables more support than any other elementary school in the district has to offer. We also have the support of Wesleyan… If we are having this conversation because of the disparity in the community, then it is a no-brainer that the resources should be funneled into the school with the highest need. And if the kids are no longer concentrated in this school, then they are no longer saturated with the much-needed resources that they are receiving now. We would move them further from home, adding bus costs and disenfranchising parents that we’ve worked so hard to reconnect to the school community. And this undermines the integrity of what we’re trying to do here.

- Lauren Layda, Macdonough teacher

347 Ibid.
348 “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 18 Oct 2016, 1:35:00.
I ask, are we really willing to uproot and displace families from our most economically disenfranchised community for the purpose of saying that we did something? … And yes there are more black and brown students percentage than at other schools, but the North End community feels like that diversity is a strength. We are equally black, brown, and white, and we are happy with our school. The benefits of families of all different colors being able to engage in children’s education makes us able to support each other and work as a team is not worth losing to gain an extra white student in each class as proposed. The notion of this is offensive to the Middletown community.

- Precious Price

Around 2000, we moved from Cromwell to Newfield Street, and my two youngest went to Spencer. And they were miserable. My youngest daughter was told by a lot of the children that they were told not to play with her because of her skin color. So I sat in the parking lot on several days and observed myself. They were miserable, down to me not having any kind of communication with the principal, leading me to my own one-man picket about the bus monitors.

- Cynthia Spievy, former Macdonough parent

Sebastian Juliano, a class mentor at Macdonough, stated it more succinctly: “Solving your problem, real or perceived, by simply creating problems for people who don’t have them right now, is no solution.”

However, the unifying theme for all of the speakers was the strong sense of community that Macdonough offers for its students, their families, and the North End. Spievy continued her story:

Anyway, we moved to Prospect Street on the North End in 2001… I was parent of the year at Macdonough, served on a lot of committees. My kids soared. I don’t know where they’re getting their numbers, but [talking about her kids] I have a bachelor’s from Central, I have a ten-year war veteran, I have an MBA from Central, and I have a UConn student that started this year. So if they would have stayed at Spencer, they probably would have stayed shut down and quiet. But they

were able to soar at Macdonough ... Without the help of Macdonough and the community... I just don’t know where my children would be today.\footnote{“Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 18 Oct 2016, 1:13:00.}

Another Macdonough parent, Quan Daniels, gave an anecdote about the way that Macdonough takes care of its community. Years ago, her sister had an aneurism and had to stay in the hospital for an extended period of time. During this time, teachers at Macdonough had taken Daniels’ sister’s children into their homes for the summer and had fed them, placed them in after-school programs, and brought food to the hotel where Daniels was staying. They even helped pay for her sister’s medical bills.

Daniels says she bought a house in the North End so she wouldn’t have to be away from Macdonough.\footnote{“Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 18 Oct 2016, 1:02:05.} One parent in particular spoke with fervor about the importance of the Macdonough community:

Now, everybody’s saying this is a community. It’s not a community. This is home. This is family. I can go to any one of these teachers personally and ask them how any of these children are doing and they will let me know ... You say we’re “poor”? I believe we’re the richest ones out here. We’re not a community. We’re family. [Pointing to people in the crowd] Family. Family. Family. Family. It doesn’t matter the color of our skin. Nothing. Because we have the same blood inside. It’s the same color everywhere. We are a family. I walk to school every day. I go to every fieldtrip. Titi, can you go on this fieldtrip with me? Sure, why not? Titi, can you go on this fieldtrip with me? Sure, why not. I’m a stay-at-home mom, I work from home. If mom can’t make it to an assembly, guess who’s going to be there? Titi’s going to be there. I will be there every single time. But if this school closes, guess what? All my nephews, my son – If you did not see me earlier, I don’t know if anybody noticed it, my son was crying in the back. I stood up, gave him a hug. Why? Because he does not want this school to close. It will break his heart. It will change all these kids emotionally. You’re just going to traumatize them. Absolutely traumatize them. And that’s not right. It’s absolutely not right. My son cried back there. I don’t know if anybody saw that. I’m doing this for him. This is my son’s future. I have not moved to Florida, why? Because
of Macdonough. I’ve had the opportunity to move so many times, but I’m not going to. Because of Macdonough. This is not just “school.” Absolutely not. This is family. I can walk in that school any time of day and they will invite me in, with open arms. They do every single time. We’re not “poor.” Rich.

- Regina Cardona, Macdonough parent/aunt

In all, the public comments section lasted for 1 hour and 18 minutes.

During the November 15th Board of Education meeting where the decision was ultimately made, a curious thing happened. About 13 people stood up from the audience and congregated at the podium to explicitly come out in support of the assistant superintendent who had made the comment that “It matters you sit next to.” It is unclear what motivated these people to speak, whether it was because they knew the administrator personally, were loyal to this person as assistant superintendent or former principal, or if it was for political reasons. However, most people were from Lawrence, where the school official used to be the principal, with a couple representatives from the teacher’s union as well. Although the comments are largely directed towards Greenberg, who stood up and spoke about the comment during the October 18th meeting, Greenberg was not the only person who critiqued the official’s comments, and in supporting the assistant superintendent, the people who spoke on November 15th were directly challenging the opinions of a community of color by using the rhetoric of integration. Therefore, these comments are a very clear example of how popular assumptions about integration can serve to actually oppose the interests of people of color.

The first person to speak was a member of the teacher’s union:

I attended last month’s board meeting and was appalled to hear people criticize, attack, and tell outright lies about our administrators... [The assistant superintendent] never said it makes her sick to see a group of students together. What she said is that it is not okay for our district to be segregated when we have the means to correct it... [In past administrations] I have never heard anyone address or even acknowledge that achievement gap, and not only have [the administrators] acknowledged it, they’ve put it front and center for all to see and to demand that we work to close it. And what did they get for their troubles? They got blasted and scapegoated by the very community that they are trying to support. I think we all owe them a gratitude for their honesty, dedication, and commitment. Not only to our students, but to our entire community... we may not be able to fix the problems of the nation, but we sure as hell can fix and work on our own if we stop this blame and shame, divide and conquer games, and work honestly, openly, and fairly with our administration.

- Steve McKeever, from the Middletown Federation of Teachers

First, it is important to note that numerous past administrators have acknowledged achievement gaps, and like the current superintendents, they too have suggested redistricting or shutting down Macdonough, as is outlined in the previous chapter. However, what I am more interested in is the way that McKeever admonishes those who rewarded the superintendents’ “troubles” with “scapegoating” from “the very community that they are trying to support.” The fact that he not only calls out the North End and Izzi Greenberg for standing up for themselves, but also says that Macdonough families “owe them a gratitude” for threatening to shut down their school is an example of paternalistic integration attitudes at their worst. It is the idea that the (white) superintendents know what is best for people of color, and that the North End should allow them to enforce their ideas about who they think students of color should sit next to without question. The next speaker was a man who had grown

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up in a low-income family in the North End, and who had known the assistant superintendent since childhood and described her as a mentor and a friend.

And today, it is my privilege to represent everything that this person has strived for on a daily basis. Now I am not aware of the educational statistics or demographics of our school systems. But I have always known that there is a great member in that administrative unit. Someone who will not be derailed or discouraged by ad hominem attacks. Someone who I know will dedicate the rest of their career to changing the lives of other underrepresented students and ensuring that they have the tools necessary to succeed the same way they once did for myself.

- Tony Woolard, resident of Middletown

After this, 13 people got out of their seats and stood up to speak on behalf of the administrator. They appeared to be primarily from Lawrence School:

It is very frustrating for all of us to be here year after year, worried about losing programs, teachers, and schools. This is not something that anyone wants to have happen. Unfortunately, the Board only has so much money to work with, and without additional resources, cutting important people and programs is discussed... It is often unfair to blame the Board and district leaders for this when they work so tirelessly for our students. Our frustrations can cause emotions to run high. No one wants to see a school close. However, when there is a committee created to work together to do this hard work, I would expect the committee members to act professionally and respectfully. It is shocking and disturbing to hear pieces of a conversation taken out of context, yelled out to a room full of people, and used to disparage the integrity of our leadership.

- Suzanne Shippee-Lopez, Moody teacher

Here, Shippee-Lopez takes the same attitude as McKeever did by berating Greenberg and residents of the North End for criticizing the official’s comments. Afterwards she went on to say:

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357 “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 15 Nov 2016, 10:30-37:15.
I know that students from that school and across the district could tell you many stories about the support and help they have had from this leader. I can guarantee you would hear so many specific examples about the dedication of this leader to every child, it would bring tears to your eyes. We should all feel embarrassed for what was said to her at the last board meeting… She is not a politician who wants recognition for what she does. She also does not strive to see her name in the paper, be heralded a hero, or have any public recognition… I am hopeful we can work together in a respectful manner since we are all committed to do what’s best for our Middletown students.358

Two Lawrence teachers then spoke in support of the administrator. The second one addressed “diversity” in a manner that bell hooks deals with in her article, “Eating the Other,” when she critiques the “projection onto the Other of a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams” as a way to typecast people of color and appropriate their life experiences for the desires of white people:359

As a teacher, I know that the success of children in the real world does not always depend solely on academic achievement, but also on understanding and true knowledge and compassion for all kinds of people. I do not believe that the research does not support that this kind of knowledge can be taught best through books and even well-crafted lessons on diversity and cultures, but needs to be experienced first-hand… I found out later that life is much richer and satisfying with the advantage of learning and growing among people of different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences from my own. I wanted this for my own children and feel that the residents of Middletown are very fortunate to have the splendor of cultures, as it is the unique and very special, and I believe lends itself to turning out not only knowledgeable young people but young people who are prepared to participate fully and successfully in a diverse world with understanding and compassion for all kinds of people. When I began teaching, I started in a school system much like the one I grew up in, and I can personally say that this was not nearly as energizing, interesting, or rich in culture as the schools are here in Middletown… The administrators I have worked under, without a shadow of a doubt, have shared these views passionately. This is not to say that

358 “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 15 Nov 2016, 10:30-37:15.
359 hooks, op. cit., p. 369.
the schools that have less diversity cannot be just as or even more enriching and energizing, it is simply to say that diversity is one of the magnificent gems that Middletown has to offer. To discount these benefits for all students would be a shame.

- Karen Share, Lawrence teacher

In this quote, Share is approaching “diversity” (meaning “students of color,” given the way that she uses the word) as a commodity, something to be bought and sold by white people to spice up their students’ classrooms with an “energizing, interesting” “splendor of cultures.” My point here is not to argue against diversity, but to point out that the way it is approached here is used to justify the administrator’s comment that “It matters who you sit next to,” as well as to support closing Macdonough. The context for the comment makes it clear that when Share discusses “diversity,” she means students of color coming to white schools, not the other way around.

Therefore, students of color in this context are something to be acquired, perhaps because they can provide “a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams,” almost like a classroom learning tool that she claims is better than a book or a lesson plan.

Shortly after the group of teachers sat down, Izzi Greenberg spoke again, both in defense of her former statements, and in regards to data that she said the assistant superintendent had sent to her about Macdonough:

First of all, I want to be clear. I don’t think there was any mischaracterization. I think those of you in the audience, you know as someone who sat through those meetings, we heard repeatedly in those spaces and in other spaces, “It matters who you sit next to.” That could be intended one way, but it could also be received in another way. And I think our point is to understand how that message is being received in our community, not what the intent of the sender is… I don’t think anyone believes that there isn’t the best of intentions. But if the information

360 “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 15 Nov 2016, 10:30-37:15.
is received by our community in this way, we really need you to be open to hearing that and then work with us to adjust it.\textsuperscript{361}

Izzi is challenging the assumptions that the administrator is working under, and says that community voices need to be the most important voices in a decision like this.

And it is not okay to let comments that are hurtful go, even if they aren’t intended to be hurtful. That’s an important distinction. And I think it needs to be made… I’m urging you to vote tonight, and I’m urging you to vote not to close Macdonough. That’s my job here as a representative of the community. But I do want to also say that it’s important to mention that we got an email from Dr. Macri on October 26\textsuperscript{th} with data in it which characterizes Macdonough as one of our lowest performing schools and at times, our lowest performing school over the years. And I feel after looking through the data, and we’ve received it now disaggregated, Macdonough is the lowest less than 10% of the time. It is right in line with 5 or 6 other schools in almost every single category. There’s something like 67 data points in here, and of them, Bielefield is lowest 18 times, Farm Hill 8 times, Moody 9 times, Snow 7 times, Spencer 7 times, Macdonough and Lawrence 6 times, and only Wesley is lower than Macdonough. I mean, to characterize this, and say this, is one more thing that makes our community think that there’s an ulterior motive. This kind of language is hurtful. It’s hurtful to our teachers, it’s hurtful to our kids, they internalize this. When you see that it has been our lowest performing school and then the data doesn’t back it up, we need honesty, we need truth. Our community needs that... It is not fair what’s happening to our teachers, it is not fair what’s happening to our kids.\textsuperscript{362}

Even though much of discourse about integration is labeled as anti-racist, some of the assumptions that underlie and inform this discourse actually serves to harm people of color. Therefore it is important to point out when these assumptions are being made.

In the moment of truth during the meeting, some members of the Board seemed to make a complete 180 in their opinions on the matter. In initial meetings,

\textsuperscript{361} “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 15 Nov 2016, 10:30-37:15.
\textsuperscript{362} “Board of Education,” Agenda and Video, 15 Nov 2016, 10:30-37:15.
many on the Board had not appeared to be opposed to closing a school. However, in this final meeting, the BOE voted unanimously to keep all eight elementary schools open. While this was a huge relief for many, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Board ever intended to close the school in the first place, or if it was just another “ruse to get more money for the budget” as had happened in the past.363

By coming together, the North End was able to keep Macdonough open for one more year. However, for many, the victory was a hollow one, since the Board emphasized the likelihood of more budget cuts in 2017, and many anticipated needing to return to the Board yet again in the near future, whether it be for redistricting or school closure.

Conclusion

It is April of 2017, and I am sitting in a coffee shop on campus with Cookie Quinones, the AfterSchool supervisor for Green Street, board member of NEAT, and my boss. I am in the midst of putting the finishing touches on my thesis, and we are discussing some of the themes in the piece as they relate to Middletown and Macdonough. I mention that I think that it is important to be most focused on equalizing education both in Middletown and as a society, and she agrees. She adds, “And that’s my thing. Let’s all get together and make sure that everyone gets the proper education that they need. No one should get less, no one should get more, everyone should get the same thing, wherever you’re at. It’s not like, we need to move them over there so they can learn better.”

My intention with this project has never been to discredit integration, and there are many situations where integration is the most direct way to guarantee a better education for students of color. However, sometimes the best way to ensure a quality education for students of color is not necessarily through the implementation of integration policy. Any time that a policy is created to equalize education for students of color, it should be implemented in a way that avoids placing the burden of the law on the shoulders of the communities that it is supposed to assist. Additionally, all decisions should be made based on what the affected families of color want, not

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364 Conversation with Cookie Quinones, 10 Apr 2017, In Person.
based on what school officials think is best for them. Finally, whether equalizing education for students of color means integrating students, hiring more teachers of color, creating additional resources for students, or funneling funds from other communities into communities of color, lawmakers should never lose sight of their main goal, which is to provide quality education for students of color.

While the integration versus equalization debate has not had a strong presence in popular discourse lately, it is not completely without traction. In 2003, former U.S. Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. introduced a constitutional amendment which would have reversed the decision made in the 1973 Rodriguez case that has immobilized education reform for decades. The proposed amendment “would establish education as ‘a fundamental human right’ under the U.S. Constitution” and would “essentially strike down Rodriguez and defend the education rights of children that are not defended by the high court’s present readings of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” Although the proposed amendment did not pass, it demonstrates that it is not impossible to change the Constitution to ensure equal education for all students, and that with enough public support, this could in fact come to pass.

In the meantime, Quinones and other community members are looking to the future of Macdonough. They are tired of fighting every year, and are hopeful that eventually the Board will tell them once and for all that they will not close Macdonough. This year, the Board is looking into consolidating the 6th grade school, Keigwin, into the 7th and 8th grade school, Woodrow Wilson, and shutting down the

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Keigwin building. Quinones hopes that if this happens, the Board will leave Macdonough alone. However, she knows that if they do not, North End residents will be lining up again at the next Board of Education meeting to fight for their school. “I don’t think it’s going to change where the North End’s going to give up. They’re not. They’re going to keep going at it, so you’re going to have this problem until the Board of Education says, ‘Okay, you guys got it, we’re okay with this,’” she says. “As much as we can, we’re going to keep fighting… We’re not giving up on our schools.” To reiterate Regina Cardona’s words from the October BOE meeting:

You say we’re “poor”? I believe we’re the richest ones out here.

We’re not a community.

We’re family.366


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Appendix A
Public Session from Board of Education Meeting on October 18, 2016

To view full session, visit:
http://middletown.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=534
0:23:35-1:41:45

Precious Price (0:23:35)

I could feel the anger, the confusion, and the hopelessness of having to deal with the same issues and have the same conversation over and over again. Then after attending the Ad Hoc School Closure Committee Meeting I understood where those feelings resonated from. As I sat shaking with anger at the insensitive, stereotypical, racist, and downright classist comments that I heard coming not only from the administration but from other members of the committee as well, I listened as the members threw out ideas because the students were poor. I heard comments to the effect of, “let’s just vote closing a school to say that we did something,” and I ask, are we really willing to uproot and displace families from our most economically disenfranchised community for the purpose of saying that we did something? I also heard comments like, “The data shows that it matters who you sit next to.” If that’s the case, then the argument should be made that black students at Moody school are doing outstandingly better than students at other schools. And that’s not the case. Research that supports this theory argues that this is true if black students are overwhelmingly the minority. Fortunately, as for moving all of Macdonough students to Spencer, this would make them 62.4% majority. This argument is unsubstantiated. Technically in a classroom of 20, only 1.3 more white students would be present. Yes, Macdonough is small and it needs a new roof… And yes there are more black and brown students percentage than at other schools, but the North End community feels like that diversity is a strength. We are equally black, brown, and white, and we are happy with our school. The benefits of families of all different colors being able to engage in children’s education makes us able to support each other and work as a team, is not worth losing to gain an extra white student in each class as proposed. The notion of this is offensive to the Middletown community. I have with me a petition of over 750 signatures from just three days.

Cathy Lechowicz (0:41:55)

[about Ad Hoc meetings] Honestly, it felt a little bit like quicksand. There were times where, this is the reason that we need to close the school, no this is the reason. We want to diversify our schools. We need to save money. Some of the factors that were brought in felt frankly like there was a case being made for one school only. And that was really disconcerting. Because that’s not the Middletown that I have known, and honestly that’s not what I’ve been working towards in the many years that I’ve been working with the schools and trying to make change. There were many hurtful comments made, and it was really sad, and it was hurtful. So I urge you as you’re listening to all of these things to make sure that you’re thinking about the biases that are involved here. For example, we talk about diversifying our schools. By moving Macdonough to Spencer you’re changing the diversity rate by 6%. Is that honestly worth it? Is that going to make a significant impact in a child’s education, by have a 6% difference in the student of color rate? I would argue no.

Quan Daniels (1:02:05)

• Has 6 children
• Macdonough fed family when sister had aneurism
• Teachers at Macdonough took kids for the summer, fed them, had after-school programs, brought food to hotel
• Paid for sister’s bills
• With redistricting, made it so that nephews could graduate there so sister wouldn’t have to worry about getting kids
• Bought house so that wouldn’t be away from Macdonough
• Older kids get younger kids from school
• If go somewhere else, they can’t do that
• Macdonough is big part of my family

Cynthia Spievy (1:13:00)

Around 2000, we moved from Cromwell to Newfield Street, and my two youngest went to Spencer. And they were miserable. My youngest daughter was told by a lot of the children that they were told not to play with her because of her skin color. So I sat in the parking lot on several days and observed myself. They were miserable, down to me not having any kind of communication with the principal, leading me to my own one-man picket about the bus monitors. Anyway, we moved to Prospect Street on the North End in 2001. Before the kids started their school year, we had a house fire. We lost everything. And we went the Red Cross, it wasn’t, or whatever other agencies. It was Macdonough that came and introduced themselves to us, gave the kids clothes, backpacks, whatever we needed. And we were just new to the neighborhood… Anyway, I was parent of the year at Macdonough, served on a lot of committees. My kids soared. I don’t know where they’re getting their numbers, but [talking about her kids] I have a bachelor’s from Central, I have a ten-year war veteran, I have an MBA from Central, and I have a UConn student that started this year. So if they would have stayed at Spencer, they probably would have stayed shut down and quiet. But they were able to soar at Macdonough. And even myself, you know, getting involved and active… I just think it’s going to do an injustice because all my children were basically raised on Prospect Street… but my kids are really well-rounded because of the family. Because it is a family, and I’ve heard so many people say that the community, and it does take a community to raise children. I’m not so sure if we would have stayed on Newfield Street if my children would be the children that they are today. Without the help of Macdonough and the community… I just don’t know where my children would be today. So please take the community aspect and the family aspect into consideration before you just close the school.

Izzi Greenberg (1:16:05)

The numbers provided by the administration say that closing Macdonough would save the least money by hundreds of thousands of dollars. It still stayed at the top of the list [for schools to close]. With each new meeting there was a change in the numbers and new reasons why Macdonough should close. When it didn’t save the most money, it’s underperforming. When the state data shows it’s not underperforming, it’s too segregated. When it’s made clear that Macdonough and Moody share the same racial spread, then it’s too poor. Then the facility’s too old. Then it’s an equity issue. It can’t exist because we don’t have a separate art and music room. Our students are performing competitively despite our concentration of high-risk students, so why does district leadership want to close our school? At a recent meeting of the committee, an administrator said that education could only happen with a diverse school body. That it matters who you sit next to. Specifically, they told our committee that it troubled them to see all of our black and brown children in one school. Let that sink in. Because it sunk in for our parents and our teachers who were sitting in the room at the time, hearing that it bothers our district leaders to look at their children. That’s what they heard. I bring this up because countless parents and teachers have brought it to me, and it’s important to know that these word choices matter. Comments like these always have been and still are deeply offensive. The repeated threats of closing this school equates to bullying at best and racism at worst. From the outside, it may seem like just another easy fix, but to our community it is another punch in the gut. The fifth in my memory. Year after year, it’s one more time our community is pushed aside for the comfort of whiter, wealthier communities. These threats have a degrading affect on our children’s morale, and you can read the countless studies of the erosive effects of racism on student achievement to know that you are only adding to a cycle of oppression with these threats. It’s not okay that for years, past Boards of Education have felt comfortable doing this to us. At times even admitting afterwards that it was just a ruse to get more money for the budget. It’s not okay to have used our bodies and our psyches for political gain. It is not okay...
Anna Flurry

for the rest of our city to stand by while this happens to our families year after year after year. There are many leaders that have seen Macdonough for the diamond that it is and supported us. We have parents that keep coming out year after year to fight for what they know in their hearts is right for their children, and our teachers and leaders that keep being told that they are teaching the hardest kids in the district, but who go to school every day expressing their conviction that our students can and will succeed in showing their undying love to our kids every day. This city let Macdonough fail for years. Our school was rotting away until our families took it into their own hands and forced it to be fixed. But somehow residents of our city still believe it’s the failing school of fifteen years ago. Generations of kids have gone through this school dealing with the stigma of being Macdonough kids. When that stigma should have brought pride, it brought shame, and shame on our city for allowing it. Mixing kids up in balanced classrooms won’t solve achievement gap problems. We have a district problem that is pervasive in every school in the district. Not one school is educating black and brown students and low-income students at levels you would consider acceptable. It’s not Macdonough’s problem, and closing our school won’t solve it. If anything, it will exacerbate it, since Macdonough kids often perform better than kids at higher-income schools. I tell you this because this Board has an opportunity to take charge and change this cycle. Next year when someone brings up redistricting again, you will remember this room full of parents and teachers telling you to leave us alone and let our kids learn. Remember that this is a solution without a problem. Don’t stick to the script that we’re somehow the worst school because we’re the darkest and the poorest. We change that assumption. We think we’re the best and we should be celebrated, not condemned. These words are hard for me to say, but they’re the truth. And they’re from my heart. If I sat silent and watched our families get dragged through the mud again, then I’d be part of the problem too.

Sean King (1:28:00)

In terms of moving Macdonough students and “It matters who you sit next to,” and all of those comments that were made, in terms of that research that’s done, I don’t know this, but I would just wonder if in those success stories, whether those successes were driven by the communities that were reassigned or placed elsewhere or diversified in some way. Because that’s not reflected in what we have here tonight. So I would question whether that outcome would be the same if it were done here by moving all the Macdonough students.

Regina Cardona (1:28:40)

I have a son that goes to Macdonough School. He’s in the fourth grade. I have a nephew that’s in the fifth grade. I have a nephew that’s in the third grade. I have a nephew that’s in the second grade, first grade, and I have a niece that’s in preschool. Now, everybody’s saying this is a community. It’s not a community. This is home. This is family. I can go to any one of these teachers personally and ask them how any of these children are doing and they will let me know. Can you tell me, my son does the running club, he does every race possible. He just did the Hartford marathon last week. We’ve been doing this for two years. Every race he does, I’m looking out for his future. Can you guarantee me, today, that if my son goes to another school, that he will have that opportunity? I’m looking out for my son’s future. He loves running. He wants to be a track star. He wants to be in the Olympics. Can you guarantee me that I can get the same opportunity in a different school? Yes, crime rate will go sky-high if Macdonough is closed. The streets of North End, Middletown, crazy. It’ll be crazy. Absolutely crazy. You say we’re “poor”? I believe we’re the richest ones out here. We’re not a community. We’re family. [Pointing to people in the crowd] Family. Family. Family. Family. It doesn’t matter the color of our skin. Nothing. Because we have the same blood inside. It’s the same color everywhere. We are a family. I walk to school every day. I go to every fieldtrip. Titi, can you go on this fieldtrip with me? Sure, why not? Titi, can you go on this fieldtrip with me? Sure, why not. I’m a stay-at-home mom, I work from home. If mom can’t make it to an assembly, guess who’s going to be there? Titi’s gonna be there. I will be there every single time. But if this school closes, guess what? All my nephews, my son – If you did not see me earlier, I don’t know if anybody noticed it, my son was crying in the back. I stood up, gave him a hug. Why? Because he does not want this school to close. It will break his heart. It will change all these kids emotionally. You’re just going to traumatize them. Absolutely traumatize them. And that’s not right. It’s absolutely not right. My son cried back there. I don’t know if anybody saw
that. I’m doing this for him. This is my son’s future. I have not moved to Florida, why? Because of Macdonough. I’ve had the opportunity to move so many times, but I’m not going to. Because of Macdonough. This is not just “school.” Absolutely not. This is family. I can walk in that school any time of day and they will invite me in, with open arms. They do every single time. We’re not “poor.” Rich.

**Sebastian Juliano** (1:33:00)

Solving your problem, real or perceived, by simply creating problems for people who don’t have them right now, is no solution.

**Lauren Layda** (1:35:00)

Administrators have asserted that Macdonough is always at the bottom, and there are times that we are, I’m sure. However, when data was presented that demonstrated that Macdonough’s African-American subgroup and free-and-reduced-lunch subgroup had outperformed another school, an administrator’s response was, “Oh, Bielefield had a bad year.” As if it is so inconceivable that the students at Macdonough school could demonstrate more growth than other children. His comments insinuate that the problem with staff and kids is systemic and perpetuates the idea that the poorest school will always be the lowest-performing school, when that simply isn’t true. And even when it isn’t true that these students will always have to combat the public belief that they are inferior. And this message was coming from our highest academic office… I was confused because I don’t find it especially useful or helpful to disaggregate racial data in the context of the school with the highest free and reduced lunch population. Quite simply because you don’t have to be black to be poor, don’t have to be poor to be black. Furthermore, I find it offensive to think that I would teach African-American students in any way that’s different than to white, Latino, Middle-Eastern or any children that lack resources... but I can take myself out of the job to see that big picture. And here’s what that picture looks like to me: a school that equalizes the community, bringing positive and safe opportunities for kids into the neighborhood. And I get that academic achievement needs to accompany this as a priority if we are to be doing the kids the justice they deserve. That is why the school receives well-appropriated Title I money that enables more support than any other elementary school in the district has to offer. We also have the support of Wesleyan… If we are having this conversation because of the disparity in the community, then it is a no-brainer that the resources should be funneled into the school with the highest need. And if the kids are no longer concentrated in this school, then they are no longer saturated with the much-needed resources that they are receiving now. We would move them further from home, adding bus costs and disenfranchising parents that we’ve worked so hard to reconnect to the school community. And this undermines the integrity of what we’re trying to do here. If we can reconcile dismantling the school community that is least likely to advocate for itself and calling it what’s best for kids to justify our choices.