Caswell County Training School, 1933–1969: Relationships between Community and School

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The history of education has many references that depict the inequities African-American children experienced during the pre-integration era, but few studies that describe the positive interactions in segregated school environments. In this article, Emilie Vanessa Siddle Walker discusses the case of Caswell County Training School of North Carolina. In this study, ethnographically approached, the author explores the relationships between school and community as they existed in a segregated Black school in the South that was defined by its community as a "good" school. Specifically, Siddle Walker considers: 1) the ways in which the community supported the school; 2) the ways in which the school supported the community; and 3) the implications of these relationships both in their historical context and in informing the current school reform debates.

When court-ordered school desegregation plans were announced in 1969 for rural Caswell County, North Carolina, the local newspaper recorded the reaction of one White parent:

> We have no animosity toward the Board. They have done all they can to stall. However, we now feel that this reorganization of our public schools will destroy our high standard of education, depriving our children of the quality of education they deserve and what we all want.

What they wanted, the parent continued, "was the highest standard of education in [the] county" ("Eighteen-Member Board," 1969).

That parent's implicit denigration of the county's one Negro school was ironic.[1] The county high school for Negro children, the Caswell County Training

[1] The terms "Negro," "colored," "Black," and "African-American" are used interchangeably in this article. In general, the term used reflects the appropriate label given to those of African descent during the particular era being discussed.

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School (CCTS), was a three-story, immaculately kept brick structure that included a gymnasium and a 722-person-capacity auditorium with a balcony.[2] The principal, Nicholas Longworth Dillard, who held a master's degree from the University of Michigan, was esteemed locally by both Black and White educational leaders for his knowledge of national educational issues. By 1954, 64 percent of the school's teachers had graduate training beyond state recertification requirements, and during Dillard's thirty-six-year tenure from 1933 to 1969, the school offered more than fifty-three extracurricular clubs and activities to enhance student leadership and development. Moreover, the school's educational programs had been on the approved list of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools since 1934, and were formally accredited in 1955 after that agency began accrediting Negro schools. In contrast, the area high school for White children was smaller, older, had fewer facilities, and was not accredited.

Yet this White parent's belief that White educational systems were superior to Black, and that Negro educators could have nothing to offer White children, is an accurate reflection of many White Americans' perception, both during that era and into the present. Indeed, the history of U.S. education documents so well the inequities African-American children experienced during the pre-integration era — specifically the lack of resources, the substandard facilities, and the poor response of school boards to the needs of schools (see Anderson, 1988; Brown, 1960; Clark, 1963; Clift, Anderson, & Hullfish, 1962; Kluger, 1977; Newbold, 1935) — that these images of uniform deprivation have become the dominant picture at the center of most thinking about the segregated schooling of African-American children.

This perception of inequality, while not totally inaccurate, is, however, one-sided. It highlights the need and struggle for equality, but overlooks any suggestion that not all education for African-American children during segregation was inferior. Sowell (1976), for example, in his description of six "excellent" historically Black high schools and two elementary schools, lists some traits common to these good schools. These traits include, but are not limited to, the commitment and educational levels of the teachers and principals, and the support, encouragement, and rigid standards that characterize the schools' atmospheres. Similarly, in Jones's *A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence* (1981), the segregated school environment is described as "one's home away from home, where students were taught, nurtured, supported, corrected, encouraged, and punished" (p. 2). These and other studies (Adair, 1984; Foster, 1990; Irvine & Irvine, 1984) suggest the presence of a positive sociocultural system in which "uniquely stylized characteristics" reflective of the student population developed independently of White control (Irvine & Irvine, 1984, p. 416), and in which African-

[2] During the last decade of segregation, the name of the school was changed to Caswell County High School, even though it continued to maintain an elementary department for the local township until 1967. In the early years, it was referred to as the Yanceyville School and, after integration, the name was changed to Dillard Junior High School. For purposes of consistency, this article consistently refers to the facility as Caswell County Training School, the name by which it was known for the longest period of time.

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The degree to which such descriptions of segregated Black schooling might also apply to other undocumented cases is further suggested by the numerous voices in southern African-American communities, which today speak forcefully of the "goodness" of their pre-integration schools. These voices do not speak of test scores and/or any measured success of school graduates in defining "goodness." Rather, they fondly recall a time when, in the words of one eighty-year-old grandmother, "colored children learnt something in school." Cecelski (1991) has captured some of this appreciation as he chronicles a little-known political struggle in which Negro parents and students boycotted their school system for a year, rather than sacrifice their schools in a locally proposed desegregation plan. Though other voices remain undocumented, the fact that they are heard so frequently in many small-town communities suggests that schooling that was valued by parents, students, and school personnel may have been more common than has been realized.

However, little is known about these unidentified good community schools. Even the paucity of literature that exists on pre-integration Black schooling focuses almost exclusively on good urban high schools, so defined because of their success with standardized test scores, the number of doctoral degrees earned by graduates, or some other easily measured outcome variables. Educators understand little of the emic perspective — that is, how and why communities considered their schools to be good. Educators also do not understand the nature of the schooling in those community-defined good schools. This lack of knowledge not only denies that there are valuable lessons to be learned from principals and teachers who successfully schooled African-American children in the past (Foster, 1990), but it also ignores the fact that the communities were pleased with that education. Perhaps more significantly, this lack of knowledge also results in ahistorical approaches to school reform that deprive reformers of important contextual information that could directly impact the success or failure of select school programs. Such oversight could well decrease opportunities for African-American children to succeed in today's schools.

I premise this article on the idea that segregated schools that were valued by their communities did exist, and that understanding more about the nature of those schools is important for historical accuracy and for educational reform. As I discuss below, I believe that understanding the history of education in these schools, as well as the types of parent and community participation that were present, will facilitate our ability to ask the right questions as we tackle current reform issues. This is preferable to focusing on questions that are premised on negative assumptions about African-American communities.

With this in mind, I present the case of CCTS, the segregated Negro school described earlier. Situated in North Carolina's rural Caswell County, CCTS was a self- and community-defined "good" school. The belief that their school provided a good environment for learning was shared by its graduates, parents, and teachers. This belief is documented in the school's written and oral history, and

remains generally consistent throughout most of its existence. In this article, I accept the community's evaluation of CCTS as a good school. I make no effort to argue that by traditional criteria, such as test scores or college attendance rates, CCTS represents the best in segregated schools in the South, or even in its region. Importantly, my description of why CCTS was perceived as a good school is not meant to validate the inequities or minimize the discrimination that existed in this and other segregated schools, where parents were overly burdened to create for themselves the educational facilities and opportunities school boards often denied them (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1967). Rather, I offer this case as representative of the many other southern African-American schools whose communities were also pleased with their schools, but whose histories have been lost and whose value is understood now only by former teachers, principals, parents, and students.

This case, ethnographically approached, uses eighty open-ended interviews with former teachers, students, parents, and administrators, to uncover the themes of the school's goodness, and also to explore the nature of the relationships within the school environment that explain that goodness.[5] To reduce the influence of interviewee nostalgia, school documents such as yearbooks, school newspapers, handbooks, and so forth, as well as newspaper accounts, minutes of school board meetings, Southern Association reports, and other archival materials are used to corroborate emerging themes. The knowledge base derived from a triangulation of documents with interviews is used in this article to analyze one area little explored in segregated schooling — that is, the nature of the relationship between community and school. Within the context of this discussion, "community" refers to all of the African-American adults who lived within the forty-square-mile county and who shared a real or imagined bond with CCTS. While some of the adults lived within the town in which the school was located, and thereby had more than the usual informal contact with the principal and teachers at the churches, stores, and other incidental meetings places, this discussion is not confined to their relationship with the school. It also incorporates the feeling of relationship and perspective of those adults who lived outside the town. Thus, the community was not defined by physical proximity. In this article, I focus specifically on the ways in which this community and CCTS supported each other. I further explore the significance of these activities, both in their historical context and in their implications vis-à-vis current advocacy for more involvement of African-American parents in their children's education.

The Case in Historical Context: African Americans in Traditional Modes of Support

CCTS did not always boast the facilities or programs it enjoyed in 1969, the year it ceased to operate as a high school. Indeed, like most other segregated schools,

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[5] "Open-ended interviews" is a term used to describe a questioning format that allows the researcher to ask for facts about the matter under discussion, as well as to ask the interviewee's opinion about the facts. This method was used in conjunction with Spradley's (1979) suggestions for the "ethnographic interview," which describes specific procedures to tap the knowledge base of a participant in a culture scene. Interviews lasted usually from 60 to 90 minutes; participants represented varying regions of the community and varying degrees of involvement in the school.

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its history was one of financial struggle, broken promises, delayed response from White school authorities, and financial burdens on its students and parents. It began as a small elementary school in a two-story house purchased by several prominent Negro citizens in 1906.[4] In the 1924–1925 school year, it expanded to a four-room "Rosenwald" structure, which teachers and community patrons had contributed $800 to complete[5]. Having previously been denied permission to expand the school beyond the seventh grade, community patrons, under the leadership of newly arrived Principal Dillard, were able in 1934 to add a high school attended by seventy-seven students, many of whom had to travel twenty miles to school on an open-air truck. The truck was donated by a parent, Ulysses Jones, who operated it at a loss for two years, before finally donating it to the state as collateral for the new truck the PTA promised to supply. Meanwhile, another parent, T. S. Lea, paid the electric bill, and others who had dug an unauthorized well were not reimbursed by the school board for their expenses.

Although by 1938 the over-crowded school housed six hundred children in fewer than ten rooms, and a "colored citizen [had] offered to donate to the county nine-and-a-half acres of land as a site for a new school" (Newbold, 1935), the community was forced to wait thirteen years before the new facility was completed.[6] This delay can be attributed in part to the school board's self-description of being "hindered in the making and completing of their plans by lack of sufficient funds" (School Board Minutes, November 3, 1941). However, the minutes also suggest that the county was initially unwilling to use local resources for the building of a Negro school. Further, even after local resources were appropriated, the building needs of the Negro children were merged with those of two other schools for White children.

In the meantime, while the school board passed four resolutions affirming its commitment to build a new school, Negro parents continued to provide resources for the twenty-two teachers and 735 pupils who were part of the school by the 1948–1949 school year. The 1949 yearbook notes that "while the building does not yet satisfy our patrons, they are proud of its equipment." This equipment included modern tablet arm chairs; instructional supplies, including audio-visual aids such as radios, a movie projector, a 35-mm projector, and a wire recorder; and other items they considered important for education, but which

[4] Under a fund set up by Julius Rosenwald in 1917, Negro patrons received matching funds for any monetary or other contributions they could make towards the building of schools for Negro children. Records indicate that Caswell County school patrons participated in this program, and that their school, like the 5000 others built in the South before 1948, was known as a "Rosenwald" school. This name, of course, detracts attention from the numerous contributions made by Negro parents and educators. This emphasis on the program rather than the parents is more fully discussed by Anderson (1988).

[5] Although I refer here to the first known building, the education of Negro children in the area precedes the purchase of a school building in Yanceyville in 1906. The North Carolina Session of 1897, for example, notes the incorporation of the "Yanceyville Colored Graded School" for the education of the colored children. Moreover, the oral history records the existence of church schools throughout the area in the late 1800s.

[6] This information is based upon a letter recorded in the school board minutes from N. C. Newbold, director of the Negro Division of Education, to Holland McSwain, Superintendent of Caswell County Schools. The letter itself is dated August 29, 1938; the letter is recorded in the school board minutes under the meeting for September 5, 1938.

the school board refused to supply. The academically oriented school curriculum was complemented by an award-winning debate team, a band (the first in any Caswell County high school), a newspaper, and other student organizations (Caswell County, 1949).

In March of 1951, when the students and teachers finally moved into the twenty-seven-room facility described by the local paper as "modern in every respect," the new building reflected the tremendous community support that was part of its history. While the county contributed $80,000 toward the cost of the $325,000 state-funded project, the Negro citizens themselves added close to $8,000 in equipment, almost a tenth of the cost the county expended, to create the kind of facility they had envisioned in 1949 — "a physical plant second to none in the state" (Caswell County, 1949). Among the items added were an $1,800 stage curtain and colored footlights, $3,000 worth of venetian blinds for the windows, a $400 time clock to regulate classes automatically, and a $2,000 public-address system ("Dedication," 1951). The money for these items was contributed by students, parents, and other community supporters.

Between 1951 and 1969, parents continued to support the financial needs of CCTS, supplying such items as band uniforms and instruments, science equipment, a piano, and workbooks. While they engaged in many fundraising activities during those years, the most consistent and most remembered was the Popularity Contest. In this annual event, each high school class nominated a king and queen; members of the class, with the participation of parents and other community leaders, then raised money to support their nominees. In the heyday of this event, records indicate that the winning class alone contributed as much as $1,410.35 to support the school. In February of 1969, however, things began to change: Principal Dillard died unexpectedly in the midst of planning desegregation, and that fall the school was reorganized as a fully integrated junior high. After these two events, Negro parents ceased all such financial assistance to the school.

Considering a rural community where, in 1953, 58 percent of the parents were farmers, 23 percent homemakers, 6 percent laborers, and 8 percent service and domestic workers, there is a temptation to view the CCTS community's financial contributions to the school as exceptional. Their self-reliance, sacrifice, and sense of community responsibility not only created ongoing support for the school, but also provided their children with a model for the role interested parents should play. Their commitment insured that continuous resources would be provided for the education of Black children, despite the lack of adequate support from the all-White school board. Yet, the sacrifices, self-help, and support of these CCTS patrons were typical of Negroes in many communities in the South during this era. This story of self-help for segregated schools has been most notably described and analyzed by Anderson (1988), who emphasizes the fact that, although such help was helpful in improving school conditions, it also was oppressive in that it imposed a "double taxation" on Negro citizens. According to Anderson, "rural Blacks in particular were victims of [this] taxation without representation" (p. 156). They were often forced to "take from their meager

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annual incomes and contribute money to the construction and maintenance of public schools for the Black child because southern state and local governments refused to accept responsibility for Black public education" (p. 176). In other words, Black parents paid taxes for services they did not receive. The history of CCTS lends additional evidence to Anderson's thesis.

What has been less often discussed, however, are the other avenues of parental support that existed in segregated school environments. Although CCTS grew significantly between 1933 and 1969, the nature of the relationship between school and community remained consistent. In addition to providing financial support, parents at CCTS 1) maintained a physical presence in the school, primarily through the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and other events to which they were invited; 2) played an "advocacy" role for the school in soliciting funds from the school board; and 3) provided invisible home-based support for the principal and teachers.

Parents in the School: Other Avenues of Community Support

In the CCTS environment, the PTA functioned as an umbrella organization that took the lead in providing financial contributions to the school, and also provided other opportunities for parental involvement in school activities. Perhaps the most obvious facet of this involvement was parents' attendance at PTA meetings. While exact attendance figures are not available, former teacher Helen Beasley remembers:

> I don't know how many folks we *didn't* have at PTA! Good gracious. If the auditorium wasn't filled up, it was maybe like three-fourths. That great big auditorium would be three-fourths full with the mamas and daddies and the brothers and the sisters and the grandmamas and the aunts, and the uncles and whoever.

Though not all informants are as enthusiastic in their memories of the number of people attending and often focus instead on whether there should have been even more, they do report that the auditorium was frequently filled to capacity as Beasley relates. In absolute numbers, PTA attendance was less in earlier years, when parents were more likely to sit around a pot-bellied stove rather than gather in a formal setting; nevertheless, participation was reportedly high, especially given the distance parents had to travel and the lack of automobiles. When parents did not attend, it was usually because of transportation problems or conflicting work schedules. Lack of interest in the school or a feeling of alienation were seldom the reasons given for their absence.

Several activities were consistently part of the business portion of the PTA meeting. First, parents received reports about the school's financial and educational status. Since one of the PTA's primary missions was to help supply the school's needs, the financial report often involved the president or the principal outlining the most pressing needs. Based on these reports, parents organized collaborative plans of action with teachers and the principal, and actively engaged in completing the projects. These activities typically included overseeing a teacher's homeroom activities and reporting on that class's participation, or

joining in a parent-teacher basketball game. Parents who were not active in planning often provided support by attending an event, and supplying or buying items on sale there.

The principal also regularly used a portion of the meeting to report to the parents about education, what was going on in the school such as problems drivers were having on buses, or ways in which parents could help their children succeed academically. He also reviewed his expectations for the children, the school policies, and the events planned for the year. Parents who recall Dillard's PTA reports remember how interested he was in the children. Says one parent: "[Having every child succeed] — that was his main priority."

Dillard also shared with parents his experiences at any national or regional meetings he had attended. His teachers, who were required to join their professional organization and urged to attend non-local meetings, were also expected to report to parents during this segment of PTA meetings. Today CCTS parents describe little about the educational trends that were discussed during those times, but they still remember the jokes Dillard was famous for collecting and sharing with them.

In addition to the PTA business reports and discussions, parents could also expect entertainment and refreshments. This entertainment came from various high school groups or elementary classes, who were assigned a time in the school year to make a presentation to the PTA. Teachers often repeated for the PTA the assembly programs they were periodically scheduled to have in Chapel.[7] Since few parents saw these programs during Chapel, they usually played to a new audience. The refreshments that were served afterward to cast, teachers, and parents were supplied by the PTA.

When the formal portion of the PTA meetings ended, the informal talk between teachers and parents began. According to parent Dorothy Graves, these informal talks, during which the parents could find out how their children were doing in school, was one of the primary reasons they went to PTA. She explains:

> You didn't go to the schools during the day or after school to talk about your children. You didn't go in unless there was a problem and the principal called you in. The time during the school day was allotted for the teaching of the student. Parents just didn't go in to school and disturb a teacher. [The teachers would say], tell your parents to come to PTA.

These informal conversations between teachers and parents sometimes took place in the classrooms, at other times in different areas of the auditorium. Most conversations began with the parent's single question: "How is my child doing?" If the teacher responded "fine," little else would be said, other than the parent perhaps saying, "Now you let me know if there's a problem." Or if there was a problem, the teacher might consult her rollbook and say, "Jeff is doing fine in

[7] Chapel was a weekly gathering of the principal, teachers, and students, where student talent was showcased and where the principal used the time to talk to the students about pressing issues, such as life, discipline, or any other topic he felt compelled to address. While religious services were not the focus of the gathering, talk often emphasized moral values that were consistent with the values held by the community.

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English; however, he needs to work on his math." Such informal conversations continued until each parent had the opportunity to speak to every teacher he or she wished to see. Since teachers were required to attend PTA meetings, said one parent, "there was never any worry that [your child's teacher] wouldn't be there."

Besides attending the regular monthly meetings, some PTA members implemented planned tasks, such as preparing appreciation dinners for the teachers or continuing their ongoing fundraising activities. They referred to this as "working along with the teachers," and valued the time as an opportunity to get to know each other. Parents also attended major school functions, filling the auditorium for the concerts held by the high school choir and band every Christmas and spring, and the annual "operettas" held by the primary and upper elementary schools. A few parents were also involved in some classroom functions, such as providing food and setting up for a class Christmas or end-of-year party, supervising the Maypole dances in preparation for field day, or, in the case of at least one teacher, assisting in classroom instruction by playing educational games with the children. Reports indicate that parents on all socioeconomic levels were likely to participate in the events, if they were asked.

What is central to the nature of this parental presence at CCTS is the key phrase, "if asked." For example, Nellie Williamson, the teacher who had parents play educational games with the children, emphasizes that "not many did this"; those who did, she says, did so "because she had a conversation with them individually." Thus, parents who helped in the classroom or assisted with other events, were responding to teachers' notes or oral invitations. PTA meetings and student performances were other events to which parents had invitations. Says Janie Richmond, a former student and later an elementary school teacher, "the parents supported the school" and came whenever you asked them, but they didn't schedule parent-teacher conferences, or volunteer to assist with tutoring, or concern themselves with other areas of classroom instruction. Long-time English teacher Chattie Boston concurs that "parents left curricula concerns to the teachers." The data suggest both are correct, as parents never describe themselves as having initiated visits to the school to observe or to discuss any curricular concerns. Some parents, however, did assume a political role that might be termed "working for the school." This role of advocate was historically associated with the PTA leaders. These advocates positioned themselves between the school's needs and the oversight of the school board, and on numerous occasions lobbied for additional funding for the school. No records indicate that the White school board was hostile to the Negro patrons who sought their assistance; they were generally polite, even as they postponed and denied repeated requests for funding.[8]

[8] The board's receptivity did, as may be expected, increase in the 1950s and 1960s. This may be attributed in part to the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, when the county sought to be certain that all its Negro schools were "equal." However, the parents also credit the efforts of a new superintendent, Thomas Whitley, who they characterized as a "fair" man who was willing to go "as far as he could go" to promote equity.

The leadership role these parent advocates took in going before the board to lobby for the school is termed "working" for the school because the teachers and principal seldom appeared before the board. In the political climate of the era, those employed by the school system could expect to lose their jobs if they involved themselves in questions of equity. As one parent advocate recalls, "Dillard himself couldn't afford to come out. He was a very smart leader who knew how far they would let him go." A second parent recalls, "Mr. Dillard provided prompting on preparation, who to speak to. He would give you an idea. Usually [men] would go. They would go as a group and usually have one spokesman." This behind-the-scenes prompting most often occurred with farmers who owned their own land, preachers, or private business owners. While in the earlier years these were primarily men, documents and interviews from later periods indicate that women also assumed an advocacy role. What all advocates generally had in common was that they relied on other Negroes for their income, and thus did not need to fear repercussions from the White school board.

The role of parent advocates also extended beyond the county level. Records indicate that these citizens, like Dillard, made numerous trips to the state capital to seek assistance when their requests were denied on the local level. This was particularly true of their efforts in the early years of CCTS to see that a high school be established, and later, that a new one be built. In response to these visits, and as a part of his push to get the county to build a new school, the Director of the Division of Negro Education wrote the Caswell County school board requesting that an "adequate brick building be supplied" for the Negroes. He freely admitted that his urging was the result of having been "approached by a group of very intelligent colored citizens from [Caswell] County."[9]

The importance of this advocacy role over the years was recognized and appreciated not only by other parents, but also by the students. Consider their commendation of three parents in the opening pages of the 1960 yearbook:

> The annual certainly would be incomplete if the seniors failed to salute the successful efforts of these three patrons in obtaining a modern physical education building for the school. Over a three year period they continuously appeared before the Board of Education in behalf of a new physical education building. Time and time again they made appeals and, needless to say, at times they were disappointed, but not enough to ever cease their efforts. Soon, thanks to them, this facility will be available. The students and patrons of C.C.T.S. shall ever remember with gratitude their untiring efforts. Again we salute you, Mrs. Bigelow, Mrs. Saylor, and Mrs. Little. Words will never express our appreciation.

The passage is accompanied by a portrait of the three women. While other CCTS yearbooks do not contain such elaborate expressions of appreciation, special

[9] In 1921, the Negro Division of Education was established by Legislative Act in the state of North Carolina. Although headed by a White agent, the director, N. C. Newbold, has been credited with helping to "set in motion the development and standardization of secondary schools" in North Carolina (Brown, 1960, p. 49). The school board minutes in Caswell County indicate that through both letters and meetings with the board, Newbold was instrumental in pressuring the county to address the needs of the Negro community.

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Perhaps the most consistent way parents supported the school — even those who never participated in PTA or related activities or assumed the role of advocate — was accomplished without the parents ever leaving home. They instilled in their children a respect for teachers, which carried with it an expectation of obedience. Says parent Nannie Evans, "I would always tell my child, 'when you go to school, remember you are supposed to obey your teachers just like you obey me at home.'"

These attitudes about obedience led students to believe that if they were punished at school for an offense, they could expect additional punishment at home. In the words of one student: "I knew not to get sent home for anything. If I did, I knew my daddy was going to whoop me good — not spank — but whoop me. I knew not to try to get into trouble." And if a child did get into trouble at school, the parent's likely response to the teacher was, "Well, if he doesn't do well, you just let me know again."

This "home training," as southern African Americans are likely to call their parents' expectations of them, reinforced school policies and provided a solid mechanism of invisible support. While the disciplinary skills of the CCTS principal and teachers will not be discussed in this article, I will point out that demands on their disciplinary skills were lessened by this seldom-articulated, yet forceful parental support. Thus, parent and school were united in their expectations of the students. As one student described the relationship: "My mommy and daddy are pushing me and my teachers are pushing me . . . oh well, I got to do good."

School Supports Community

CCTS parents provided financial and physical support, advocacy, and homefront support. From the vantage point of current advocates of parental involvement (see, for example, Henderson 1987, 1988; Rich, 1987), the parents' degree of activity might not be considered unusual. However, given the current lack of involvement of many African-American parents in schools (Henderson, 1987), the degree of their support is exceptional. To what might their level of involvement be attributed?

Several explanations are possible. As Lightfoot (1978, 1981) has noted, African Americans have traditionally believed in the importance of education, and have made sacrifices to be certain that their children had opportunities to achieve in school. That parents valued education and therefore contributed to the support of CCTS is corroborated by records from other elementary schools scattered throughout Caswell County, where parents were also active in PTA and other school events. Thus, the parental response at CCTS might well have been the public manifestation of the parents' private beliefs about the importance of education. Another equally compelling reason for the relationship between CCTS and parents in later years might relate to existing community ties. As many parents point out, they had known Principal Dillard themselves as children, when they attended school under his leadership; they had also gone to school

with some of the teachers. Therefore, school personnel were not strangers, but rather people with whom they already had a relationship.

Though parents' belief in education and the existence of community ties are both important factors in understanding the parents' relationship to the school, they offer an insufficient explanation for the levels of support provided by parents. Teachers who had not grown up in the county, for example, were equally accepted, supported, and welcomed by parents, as was Dillard, even in his early years. According to Inez Blackwell, a parent and former student, this was because new teachers quickly made themselves known to the community. "They were never stuck up," she says. "Within months," Blackwell notes, "it seemed like they had been here all the time." Thus, teachers who had previous ties with the community had little advantage over those who came into the county. Moreover, though African-American parents today still believe in the power of education, their belief does not evoke the responses described at CCTS. Perhaps a more compelling explanation for the consistency of support from parents at CCTS lies in the manner in which the school reached out to and supported the parents.

For example, in his weekly Chapel talks with the students, Principal Dillard was heard to say on more than one occasion: "I'm not going to let you come up here and wear your mama and daddy's clothes out and they're out there working hard for you and you're up here doing nothing." The band director, Leonard Tillman, recalls the admonishments students received in the classroom:

> I used to tell my kids — Miss Ann doesn't need anyone to cook for them anymore. ["Miss Ann" was a term used by Negroes to describe White women who had servants.] They got frozen foods. All they got to do is throw them in the oven. Don't you think you need to stay here and get this education?

In their talks with students, the principal and teachers assumed the posture of protectors of the parents' sacrifices, and their frequent reminders of the need to get an education echoed parents' aspirations for their children.

The school also actively assisted parents. For students who wanted to go on to college, this assistance included helping them fill out forms, providing financial aid, traveling with students to campuses, and in some cases giving advice on what would be expected in college. As Aleane Rush, former student, and later president of the state teachers' association remembers:

> [Mr. Dillard] would try to help students. . . . He would refer them personally to college contacts, friends; he was very helpful in trying to see that they would leave Caswell County with the appropriate kind of clothing. Remember I said he knew his students. So, he would not feel intimidated, nor would the student if he said, "Now Vanessa, you can not go to Shaw with those kind of shoes on. . . . You will be in college and you are coming from CCTS, remember that. And you've got to represent yourself, your family, and your community." And when he spoke of community, he was speaking of Caswell County. And parents of those students were very, very appreciative.

In some cases, as in that of teacher and former student Deborah Fuller, the principal actually accompanied the student and parents on their first trip to a campus, functioning as mediator between the family's aspirations and the un-

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known expectations of college admissions. Teachers also engaged in these sorts of supportive activities, providing financial assistance through their teachers' clubs and, more frequently, offering the encouragement a student needed to go to college. Irvine and Irvine (1984) have characterized this behavior most succinctly:

> Black schools served as the instrument through which professional educators discharged their responsibility to their community. Black educators labored to help students realize their achievement goals. In this role both principals and teachers were mere but profound extensions of the interests of the Black community. (p. 417)

In effect, the authors note, parents and school had a "collective stake in the educational process of the youth in the community" (p. 419).

But the school's support was not only available for college-bound students. The principal and teachers also assumed responsibility for students who were having difficulty in school by working with the child and contacting parents about any problems. One parent remembers Principal Dillard telling her about her son's school behavior: "Well, he just loves to sometimes stand out in the hall and have a chance to go uptown." ("Uptown" is a local slang term used to refer to the town's small business district, which was located approximately one mile from the school.) Of Dillard's disciplinary approach and contact with her, this parent says, "I felt good because I felt like he was there with him and he was paying attention [to my child]." After describing the events of mischievousness that accompanied her son through his school years, she concludes, "But anyway, he finally finished . . . and I felt like Mr. Dillard had a great hand in that."

The school's protectiveness toward the children — going the extra mile to see that students succeeded — instilled in parents an adamant conviction that the teachers and principal really "cared about those children." In the words of Rachel Long, a farming parent who sent nine children through high school and college, "I think all those teachers were really close to those students. I know they were to my children." Her conviction echoes the sentiments of many. A former student, the Reverend Cephaus Lea, remembers Principal Dillard:

> He was never too busy to talk with you about your problems. Not only was he interested in you in school, he was interested when you left school. He knew all the children by name. He wasn't like some other people I've known. He loved people and he was concerned about you. And that's the kind of principal Mr. Dillard was.

While the influence of the school's ethic of caring is a story that I cannot explore fully in this discussion, I must note that parents' belief that the school cared about the success of their children might help explain the "respect" and "trust" that parents had toward CCTS and their support of it. In essence, in supporting the institution, the parent were directly supporting those responsible for the success of their children.

Principal Dillard's particular style of interacting with parents is another way that parents were drawn to CCTS. In effect, Dillard created a sense of "us" that

helped to forge the collaboration between school and community. Though he was clearly the visionary, "he did not boast [about] what he did," says one parent. "He used to always say, 'we're working together. See what we can do if we work together.' But he never did say what *he* did." This style of interaction was probably carefully chosen. In the traditional African-American community, the "educated" are often viewed with suspicion if they are perceived as "above" the other members of the community; thus Dillard's approach represented an important way of reaching out, and conveyed to community members his respect for their contributions.

Perhaps the most striking way in which the school reached out was in its willingness to meet the parents on their own turf. Dillard, for example, was an avid member of community organizations and would often walk to town after school was out and take the time to talk with farmers gathered on the corner. He sang in the local choir, attended both the Methodist and Baptist churches, and frequently visited the rural churches and the homes of parents who lived out in the country. Says one parent:

> He visited my home a lot of times. He would get around. Then another thing he would do — if his children's [relatives] or somebody passed, he would try to make it to the churches to the funerals. He had a closeness to people.

Valuing community members apparently was an important part of Dillard's philosophy. Even "from the beginning, he worked with the community," reports teacher and former student Janie Richmond, whose mother worked actively in the creation of the first PTA. "Whatever project they put on, he was very diligent in working with them — picnics, fishing trips, etc. His being present helped to draw other people."

It is important to note that Dillard also used his visits in the community as opportunities to communicate. Often when invited to speak in area churches, he would speak about his belief in the value of education. Thus, parents were apprised of the goals of the school and the needs of the children in their own communities, churches, and homes. These visits and talks were supplemented by frequent notes that children brought home with information about school events or classroom needs.

Dillard expected no less community involvement from his teachers. "I would hope you would be broad enough to attend some of the area churches," he was known to tell new faculty members. In essence, he expected that if they worked in the community, they should make themselves known and become part of it. He wanted teachers who were accessible to the average parent. He also expected teachers to visit the students' parents in their homes, whether or not a disciplinary problem had arisen. "If you could see the circumstances out of which the children have come," many teachers remembers him saying, "you would understand better how to teach them."

And the teachers did go — both to the churches and the homes. Fifth-grade teacher Betty Royal remembers telling parents who opened the door to her knock, "I just happened to have been in the area and I thought I would just stop

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Reaching out to support parents occurred in other ways, too. The school offered adults classes in agriculture, typing, and sewing, and provided guidance and counseling for adults. The school also ranked itself highly on "providing community use of the school and facilities" (CCTS Faculty, 1950). From the parents' perspective, however, the school's interest in their children's development and the teachers' community visits are the ways of reaching out that are most remembered and most valued.

Significance of School and Community Interactions in the Historical Context

Long-time residents of this Caswell County community who participated in the CCTS culture remember the interaction between school and community as a collaborative relationship, a kind of mutual ownership in which the community and school looked out for each others' needs — the parents depended on the school's expertise, guidance, and academic vision, and the school depended on the parents' financial contributions, advocacy, and home-front support. They were united in a common mission to provide a quality education for their children.

This relationship provides several important ideas to consider. While school and community members moved easily in and out of each other's domain, the participants were clear about the boundaries of their relationships. The parents' role was to attend school events, reinforce discipline at home, and to get their children to school. They also made economic sacrifices to allow their able-bodied offspring to go to school rather than keeping them home to help "take in the crop." When the students went home in the afternoon, parents made sure the children had time to do their lessons. As one student remembers, "[Our] parents didn't have any education, but after you finished your work and chores, they knew to tell you to sit down and get your lesson." The teachers' and principal's reciprocal role was to exercise authority in the school environment and address issues of curriculum and instruction.

The strength of the respect for these boundaries was reinforced by its presence across economic and class lines. For example, even teachers who had children in the classrooms of other teachers did not discuss curriculum or help their children with homework. In fact, the attitude that the teacher was completely in charge of the child once in the classroom was reflected in private conversations with their coworkers. Said one teacher, "I've got my classroom to see to. If anything happens, you do the punishing. I don't have anything to do with it." Like other parents, these teachers did support the punishment given by their child's teacher by reinforcing discipline at home. However, they did not interfere with the teacher or class activities within the school.

Unlike current situations in which parents and schools disagree about how they should support one another (Henderson, 1987), in the CCTS environment, participants shared common expectations. The distinct roles minimized conflict

between school and community, as all interaction was defined by mutually accepted boundaries of authority.

Also significant are the opportunities for, and the positive nature of, the communication that was possible in the CCTS environment — unlike interaction today, in which talk between teachers and parents is almost uniformly negative, and parents indicate that they only hear from the school when there is a problem (Lightfoot, 1978; Swap, 1987). The school's fund-raising activities, for example created opportunities for parents, the principal, and teachers to discuss how to achieve their common goals. Moreover, during some fund-raising activities, opportunities existed for role-reversal between administration and members of the school community. For example, if parents were assigned to oversee participation in a particular classroom, it meant that the teacher looked to the parents for assistance. This created a sense of teamwork and reinforced the idea that parents and teachers could both be authorities — even if they exercised power in different domains. Thus, the creation of teamwork between teacher and parent was a direct outcome of the fund-raising activity.

Also important to the school-community relationship were the informal interactions maintained outside of school. When teachers visited the churches, parents were likely to invite them to other services, such as a revival or church homecoming, and teachers in turn used these opportunities to invite parents to particular activities at the school. Students' work was not necessarily discussed in these incidental interactions.

The opportunity to engage in dialogue both in the school environment and in the community was important to the community-school relationship, but it would not have succeeded had not the principal and teachers known how to talk to the parents. Parent Marie Richmond confirms this:

> I heard [Mr. Dillard] say it so many times. He would say, "When you are in a situation, you don't go in there using a lot of big words and you know the people can't understand you.". . . He wasn't one of these people that kept so high up that he couldn't get in where a person was and understand him. I think that's why people loved him so. You could relate to him. But when you go into a place . . . and are so high and mighty, parents would stay away from you, because they feel like you think you are better than they are because maybe they didn't get any schooling. But if you know how to mix, and they feel comfortable with you, they will work with you.

The ability to adapt his language to the demands of a situation is a talent for which Dillard is consistently credited; he told his son he learned it in his job as an insurance salesman after graduating from college. Of the teachers, parents also said, "They knew how to talk to you, and that made a big difference."

The "difference" was that, when parents had the opportunity to talk with teachers and the principal, both in and out of school, they were positive exchanges in which teachers and principal communicated with language parents could appreciate and respect. That is, they used the language of the parent, adopting informal forms of language and styles of communication that created an atmosphere in which parents did not feel intimidated to speak.

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This atmosphere of respect also created a positive environment for handling more sensitive problems. Teachers or the principal could begin a difficult discussion with positive comments about a child, because they knew the children so well, understood their family circumstances, and likely had some interaction with someone in the family. Moreover, because of the opportunities for positive informal talk and the school's proactive role in its relationship with parents, the parents did not view the teacher or principal as always being the bearer of bad news about their child, which diminished the potential for hostility or animosity.

The nature of the community-school relationship, strengthened by the principal's personal characteristics, eased tensions when differences did occur. English teacher Chattie Boston recalls that, if a parent came in upset over a perceived injustice done to his or her child, "Mr. Dillard didn't get excited. If the parent was excited, Mr. Dillard listened and let them talk. He let them get it off their chest." Then, she says, "he would explain the situation and when [the parent] left, everybody would be buddy-buddy."

This personal style of settling conflicts was impossible when the disagreement involved larger concerns, such as choosing a location for the new school. Such differences were resolved through an open meeting where both sides had opportunities to air their concerns, and the final decision was made by voting. But even when the community-school relationship was not completely tranquil, the dissonance did not destroy their working relationship or the individual respect between parents, the teachers, and the principal.

Segregation in Retrospect: Issues and Challenges for Today

The nature of the relationship I have described between CCTS and its community suggests some valuable lessons for education today. One suggestion is a possible change in the definition of parental involvement. Although parental involvement has been defined by researchers in a number of ways (Henderson, 1987, 1988; Rich, 1987; Swap, 1987), for purposes of this discussion, consider a definition offered by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987), who define parent involvement in their child's school as including: 1) parent-teacher conferences; 2) parent involvement in classroom volunteer work; 3) parent involvement in tutoring at home, such as assisting with homework; and 4) parent involvement in carrying out home-instruction programs designed or suggested by teachers to supplement regular classroom instruction (p. 423). In each of these cases, parents initiate and/or are involved in complementing the curriculum and instruction provided by the teacher.

Current definitions of parent involvement, however, do not explain the kind of support the CCTS parents demonstrated. They did not have formal parent-teacher conferences as they are now defined; they did not volunteer unless they were specifically asked; and they did not tutor at home or carry out home-instruction programs.

By current definitions, then, these parents could be deemed failures. One wonders, then, if African-American parents and White teachers and school leaders are operating out of different frameworks for parental involvement. Perhaps

schools apply dominant cultural definitions of good parental involvement, such as those described by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987), while African-American parents lean towards more traditional perceptions and modes of interaction, such as those practiced at CCTS.

To explore this possibility, consider the comment of Dorothy Graves, a Black parent who observed the CCTS parents when they first attended PTA meetings after court-ordered integration began in Caswell County in the fall of 1969:

> You just didn't see any teachers hardly. What few teachers came said, "you don't walk up to teachers and ask how your child is doing; you have a conference." They said we were not supposed to ask about any [concerns] about our children [in the presence of] anyone else. We were used to when we were there at the PTA meeting, we could just talk.

This parent further explains that PTA meetings after integration seemed to focus more on bringing in resource people than dealing with the problems of the students. She notes that before integration, the students were the primary focus for PTA meetings — either discussing their needs and jointly devising plans of action, and/or watching their performances before the PTA. After integration, she remembers that less attention was paid to students and that there was more of a focus on procedures. She sums up the differences by adding, "I guess this was their method. [It seems] when we integrated we went into using their pattern and not our pattern."

This difference in handling the PTA meetings suggests that after integration a cultural mismatch occurred between school personnel and parents on at least two levels. First, for parents accustomed to using the PTA to talk informally with teachers, the absence of many teachers and the directives by those present to schedule a conference represented a system for interacting with teachers that was not familiar to Black parents. While the data are not available to document the response of Black parents to this new system, it is worth noting that Dorothy Graves, the parent quoted above, recalls scheduling only one conference after integration, as compared to monthly meetings with teachers before integration.

In addition to creating new expectations of the appropriate way to relate to teachers, the focus of the PTA in the integrated system also was perceived by Black parents to change. At the segregated PTA meetings, parents expected to discuss the needs of the school and to see their children perform — both activities that contributed to the importance of attending PTA meetings. In the integrated system, they describe a system where "your part was already outlined and you just went through the procedure." PTA was thus transformed from a parent-school gathering where meaningful input was expected, to meetings that became the "contrived occasions" that Lightfoot (1978) describes.

The data are not available to argue that the failure of African-American parents today to volunteer, to schedule parent/teacher conferences, and so forth is the result of historical differences in definitions of involvement. However, the forms of support demonstrated at CCTS suggest that it is at least possible that historical models of parental involvement may differ from current definitions, and that this may be one area to consider in efforts to understand African-Amer-

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Consider further the current literature on parental involvement, which emphasizes the parents' desire to be involved in school decisionmaking. According to Henderson (1987), "Educators, tend to relegate parents to insubstantial bake sale roles, leaving parents feeling frustrated, belittled, and left out" (p. 2). Yet the CCTS parents did not express a desire to have input in the school's curriculum decisionmaking. The same is true in Sowell's (1976) descriptions of other historically Black schools:

> The interest of the teachers in the students was reciprocated by the interest of the parents in supporting the teachers and the school. . . . Parental involvement was of this supportive nature rather than an actual involvement in school decision making (p. 36).

Sowell's finding is consistent with the type of support CCTS parents offered, and their parallel lack of discussion of curricular matters. This is not to say that parents should not now be involved in such decisionmaking. However, making decisions on curricular matters may not be a traditional parental role valued within the African-American community, where community and school shared similar values and where parents trusted the teachers and principal to create the best learning environments for their children.

Moreover, while the current literature on parental involvement denigrates the bake sale and the ritualistic PTAs (Henderson, 1987, 1988), CCTS parents found comfortable avenues of support through such activities. Perhaps the value of these activities, especially their ability to create ownership and pride in the school, should be explored before they are unilaterally dismissed as trivial functions. Swap (1987) has advocated having refreshments at PTA meetings and using children in the program as examples of incentives that schools might use to help initiate parental involvement in school functions. Both of these activities made useful contributions to the CCTS PTA meetings, so perhaps the CCTS examples suggest extending the parent-school relationship beyond some current practices.

Two other ideas should also be briefly considered. The data suggest that the community-school relationship is a two-way process, that involvement should not be defined simply as how to bring the parents into the school, but also how the school can be "in" the community. It was CCTS's outreach to the community that prompted the parents to "reach in" to the school. While some studies have considered the positive results of home visits (Olmstead, 1983, cited in Tangri & Moles, 1987), too little has been done to create schools with positive attitudes toward the community, both in terms of the school's general outreach and the attitude of individual teachers. School reform leaders might do well to remember the CCTS example, and to consider ways that teachers and principal can become advocates for, rather than adversaries in, their students' communities.

Schools might also consider the benefits of implementing activities that communicate to parents a sense of caring about their children. The response of CCTS parents to their school should not be considered atypical; people generally respond well to those they believe are concerned about their loved ones. When people, or communities, perceive that this caring is no longer present, they respond with mistrust. Thus, it should not be surprising that many African-American parents are now distrustful of schools in which their offspring are the ones most often punished, most frequently on the lower tracks (Braddock, in press), most likely to have the least successful teachers (Darling-Hammond, in press), and most likely to feel alienated and drop out of school. This care ethic would seem to be as crucial to conversations about how to induce parental involvement as is advocacy for parental voice on curricular matters.

Can all ideas applied at CCTS transfer simply and easily to today's schools? Indeed they cannot. CCTS functioned in a uniquely closed society in which the school for the Black community was one of the two major social, cultural, and educational centers, the church being the other. Together these centers served to counteract the effects of racism in a segregated society. Since that era, the nature of problems confronting children has changed, as has the structure of families. The 1990 U.S. Census Bureau, for example, indicates that Black children are less likely to live with two parents today than they were in 1967, and that families are now more likely to be polarized between the well-educated and the poor. Moreover, crack, AIDS, and guns are the serious issues confronting school personnel, as compared with alcohol, smoking, and truancy during the era of CCTS.

What we can gain from the case of CCTS is a deeper understanding of what African Americans valued in their schools during legal segregation, an understanding of the community-school relationships that allowed for the school's successful operation, and a series of ideas about school-community interaction that might spur thinking on how to achieve similar ends in new contexts. Moreover, the CCTS case provides an important framework within which to consider current problems of school reform. For example, understanding the various possibilities for parental involvement may lead to more appropriate questions when considering how to link schools and communities. A question asked frequently about African-American parents in reform meetings I have attended is, "How can we get them to become involved with the school?" a question that suggests that parents have never been involved and are generally uninterested. Yet, as the evidence demonstrates, these poor, rural parents were very much involved, when one applies their definition of involvement. They only ceased to be so when the schools integrated. Thus, perhaps a more appropriate question is, "Why did they stop supporting schools and what can be done to eliminate the barriers so they will come back?" These different questions suggest a variety of different answers and strategies. Only by asking the right questions, however, are we likely to find answers that will result in meaningful and lasting solutions.

The CCTS case also suggests an agenda for new research questions: for example, how do African-American parents currently view the schools? Are there still

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"invisible" ways they support the school that are generally unknown and unappreciated? Are African-American parents and schools operating from the same expectations about appropriate community-school interactions? To what extent has the advocacy role ceased, or is it operative in other ways? For example, at the school level, do African-American parents have a mode of advocacy that creates dissonance, rather than collaboration, between parents and administrators? Is it possible that the level at which they protest treatment of their children has moved from the school board to the teachers and principal in the school itself?

Serious consideration of these and other questions about the relationship between African-American parents and their children's schools is important for enlightened educational policy and agendas. Seeking answers to these questions is also important in restoring voice to African-American educators and parents, whose knowledge has been devalued and whose opinions have been silenced since the onset of integration (Foster, 1990; Irvine & Irvine, 1984). Most importantly, documenting the nature of community-school relationships in the segregated school is important because it begins to correct the commonly held misperception that those schools were without any merit, and that educators have nothing to learn from them. The correction of this misperception is long overdue.

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Literacy for Si
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