

“They think we don’t care... but it’s not like that at all”

Examining the Impact of Detroit Public School Community District Student Testimonies
and Narratives in Legal Complaints and News Stories

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Introduction

We will speak for our rights and we will bring change through our voice. We must believe in the power and the strength of our words. Our words can change the world.

-Malala Yousafzai, speaking at the United Nations nine months after her attempted assassination¹

Pakistani women's rights and education activist Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Prize winner, built a platform through her storytelling.² Malala recognized the institutional oppression within the girl's school and opened the discussion to gender equity issues in a hostile environment. In 2009, she garnered an international audience by writing the *Diary of a Pakistani Schoolgirl*, an anonymous blog for the *BBC Urdu*, to report her pursuits for education equality for girls while facing Taliban violence in Pakistan.³ In her January 5th account, she wrote that "my friend came to me and said, 'for God's sake, answer me honestly, is our school going to be attacked by the Taleban?' During the morning assembly we were told not to wear colourful clothes as the Taleban would object to it."⁴ By narrating the constant threat and pressure from their oppressors, Malala Yousafzai makes the reader understand why she fears for her life and why she fights for reform and justice for girls' education.

¹ Malala Yousafzai, "Malala Yousafzai's Speech at the Youth Takeover of the United Nations," (speech, New York, NY, July 12, 2013), *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/malala_speech.pdf

² Brittany Vernon, "Young, Powerful and Influential: How Malala Yousafzai is Changing the World" *National Underground Railroad Freedom Center*, <https://freedomcenter.org/voice/young-powerful-and-influential-how-malala-yousafzai-changing-world>

³ Kate Douglas, "Malala Yousafzai, Life Narrative and the Collaborative Archive," *Life Writing*, 14, no. 3 (July 5, 2017): 297-311, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14484528.2017.1328299?src=recsys&>

⁴ Gul Makai (pseudonym for Malala Yousafzai), "Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl," *BBC*, last modified January 19, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7834402.stm

At the age of 11, she spoke publicly about her right as a female to have access to an education which the Pakistani government had barred. Malala told CNN that “I was scared of being beheaded by the Taliban because of my passion for education. During their rule, the Taliban used to march into our houses to check whether we were studying or watching television” to broadcast the intimidation tactics that she faced in pursuit of her education and to contrast her experience to those across the world.⁵ Due to her growing fame and her outspoken and critical voice of the Taliban’s ill doings, Malala and her school were a visible threat to the Taliban. After surviving an attempted assassination from the Taliban, Malala used her growing platform to establish the nonprofit Malala Fund for equity and opportunity in education rights for girls, to become the United Nations Messenger of Peace, to write memoirs, and to star in broadcasts and documentaries across the world.⁶

Malala Yousafzai embodies the hope and power of youth activists. Instead of ignoring her young voice, people listened. Yousafzai said that “soon I realized that people were listening to me and my voice was reaching to people around the world. So change is possible and do not limit yourself, do not stop yourself, just because you are young.”⁷ Malala’s testimony and subsequent activist efforts model a route for students to get their voice heard. Like Malala, K-12 public school students across the United States can serve as activists through their detailing their experiences in forms of social media, blogging, speeches, and local campaigns and social justice

⁵ Nasir Habib, “14-year-old girl wins Pakistan’s first peace prize,” *CNN*, last modified November 24, 2011, <https://www.cnn.com/2011/11/24/world/asia/pakistan-peace-prize/index.html>

⁶ Alexandra, Gibbs, “Malala Yousafzai: Anyone can bring about change at any point-and at any age,” *CNBC*, last modified February 14, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/31/malala-yousafzai-on-leadership-and-her-own-career-path.html>

⁷ Alexandra, Gibbs, “Malala Yousafzai: Anyone can bring about change at any point-and at any age,” *CNBC*, last modified February 14, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/01/31/malala-yousafzai-on-leadership-and-her-own-career-path.html>

movements. This speech, in the form of oral and written testimony and narration, carves open the opportunities for students to fight injustices. Similar to Malala, the assistance of media outlets provides a larger platform for students to advocate for an equitable education and expose education injustices that would otherwise go ignored.

Students in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) employ this technique to uncover the injustice in resources that have impacted the quality and pathway to a proper education. In an interview with USA Today and CBS This Morning, Jamarria Hall, a DPSCD graduate of Osborn Evergreen Academy of Design and former plaintiff in the *Gary B. v Snyder* lawsuit, questioned the quality of education and conditions he received at Osborn by asking “is this really a school? Like, this has to be a movie. People were getting set up to fail.”⁸ *B. et al v Snyder et al*, also known as and referred to as *Gary B. v Snyder*, is a federal civil case brought forward by DPSCD students who sued the State of Michigan for not providing the necessary resources that they need to succeed, which has led to a cyclical pattern of low proficiency grade levels and poor academic achievement and performance growth.⁹ As the intentional representative for the student plaintiffs in news reports and stories, Jamarria Hall advocates through his own narration and testimony for the improvement in resources in DPSCD schools to leverage a fair opportunity for students to gain an education like other students across districts in Michigan.

Through Hall’s testimony, he addresses the state government’s systematic failure to address crumbling school conditions and provide the necessary remedies needed to help students

⁸ “‘We are 10 steps behind’: Detroit students seek fair access to literacy,” *CBS News*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/school-matters-detroit-students-lawsuit-claims-schools-denied-them-access-to-literacy/>

⁹ *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018)

learn. To contrast the blatant disparities and implications of institutionalized racism that produced the failing test scores and poor proficiencies in literacy and academic subjects, Hall asserted that “Grosse Pointe is right across the city border line. Right across, [there are] iPad, tablet, SMART Boards everywhere. Their floor is glossy. Glossy clean. There's no metal detector, no security guard. And it's right across the border line.”¹⁰ In addition to finding sources to blame for student’s lack of academic achievement and performance growth, testimony like Hall’s intentionally demonstrates a counter depiction to prejudiced judgments about student’s character. These forms of speech work as tools to promote activism and reform in education which alone demonstrates that these students care deeply about their education and future. As an advocate, Hall enhances the plaintiff’s ethos and pathos through his demonstration of the school’s resources and his own personal experience at the school to justify the case’s credibility and to appeal to the audience’s emotions.¹¹

By focusing on an often-ignored perspective, I will be examining how recent student testimony in Detroit Public Schools Community District detail activist efforts to reform or protest state and local policy through two sources of media. One major account I will focus on includes a legal complaint for *Gary B v Snyder*. This complaint, submitted by a pro bono law firm on behalf of seven Detroit Public School students, contains student accounts and reports from five of the most ill-equipped schools in the district. The other source for student testimony I

¹⁰ Chrissie Thompson, Michelle Miller, Maite Amorebieta, and Joseph Annunziato, “‘Is this really a school?’ Desperate for education, Detroit students pin hope on lawsuit,” *USA Today*, updated September 18, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/09/18/detroit-students-lawsuit-water-michigan-school/1326060002/>

¹¹ Chris Alderman, “Ethos, pathos, logos: a script for clinical communication,” *Pharmacy Practice and Research*, 48, no. 4 (2018):301-302, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jppr.1468>

will analyze are local and national news stories that have resulted from student activism and narration.

These two forms of media serve different purposes and convey information in a way that best articulate their goal. The legal complaint serves a source of factual information and testimony to persuade the district judge to rule in the student's favor. The news stories and investigative reports communicate relevant information and stories that impact their local and national communities while pushing certain stories to the forefront of conversations and placing others in the background. Both sources may include student accounts of mice racing around student's feet or students wearing multiple coats to stay warm in the winter; however, the way in which the story is presented will differ between the two sources. The complaint and the news stories that cover these topics have power and jurisdiction to control the narrative of the student's testimony.

In terms of *Gary B v Snyder*, the complaint represents a form of legal remedy that students are utilizing to create a substantial and fundamental interpretation of what an education in the United States entails. Due to the federal implications that this case potentially offers, news media sources have covered this story to inform their national audience about a potential change to public education and to highlight and display the specific student narrative from students like Jamarria Hall to gain the audience's support. The other news reports explain student's social activism that is displayed through school walkouts and protests in order to create policy reforms in schools. The news reports, compared to the complaint present these narratives in a more relatable and digestible account that the audience can understand and empathize.

Literature Review and Historical Analysis

According to professor and author Lee Anne Bell, the goal of social justice is to reach a level of equity for all members of society while fulfilling their needs. Bell asserts that “the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” to ensure that each member can become self-determining and interdependent.¹² Student testimony are a form of social justice. This justice can manifest into political remedies like new legislation, policy reform, and elections; judicial remedies through lawsuits, judicial review, and jurisprudence; and social remedies through marches, elections, strikes, protests, and boycotts. Providing a platform to those who are marginalized can empower individuals to tell their story and build a more inclusive form of history.¹³ Given the type of student testimony deployed in this thesis, these DPSCD students are advocating for quality resources that level themselves to public students in privileged districts.

By framing issues in their perspective, testimony from marginalized individuals like the DPSCD students inform the public of oppression in an understandable and realistic way. Narratives offer insight into discussion that may not be heard otherwise. According to the Michigan School Data, there are 50,176 students in the Detroit Public Schools Community District for the 2018-2019 school year. Of this total, 41,196 students (82.1% of the student body) are African American, 6,723 students (13.4% of the student body) are Hispanic or Latino, 1,217 students (2.43% of the student body) are white, 797 (1.59% of the student body) are Asian, 139

¹² Lee Anne Bell, “Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education,” in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, Diane J. Goodman, and Khyati Y. Joshi (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 1-5, <https://www.northwestern.edu/care/about-us/philosophy/assets/theoretical-foundations-for-social-justice.pdf>

¹³ “Oral History as Social Justice,” *Voice of Witness: Amplifying Unheard Voices*, (January 4, 2019), <http://voiceofwitness.org/oral-history-as-social-justice/>

students (0.28% of the student body) are two or more races, 71 students (0.14% of the student body) are American Indian and 33 students (0.07% of the student body) are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.¹⁴ It is no coincidence that this majority-minority student body has such major disparities in resources and finances and poor academic performance outcomes. As discussed in the report by senior policy analyst at the Michigan League for Public Policy Pat Sorenson, institutionalized racism has been incorporated and reinforced in Detroit Public Schools Community District recent history through lack of affordable or free early childhood learning, local and state budget and policy decisions, and Michigan's school funding formula disproportionately affect communities with low socioeconomic or impoverished families.^{15 16} Detroit Public Schools, DPSCD's predecessor, experienced major waves of inequity throughout its history due to de facto and de jure segregation, redlining, white flight, emergency management control, and policies that intentionally caused damaging conditions and failure for its predominantly African American student population.^{17 18}

According to researchers Jessica T. DeCuir and Adrienne D. Dixson, Critical Race Theory provides a solution for these marginalized students. Derived in the mid-1970's, Critical

¹⁴MI School Data, "Student Count Snapshot," 2019, <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/StudentCount.aspx>

¹⁵ Pat Sorenson, "Race, place, and policy matter in education," *Michigan League for Public Policy*, October 2, 2018, <https://mlpp.org/racial-equity-issues/race-place-and-policy-matter-in-education-2018/>

¹⁶ Bre'Anna Tinsley, "How are Michigan's Public Schools Funded?" *WDET 101.9 FM*, April 23, 2018, <https://wdet.org/posts/2018/04/23/86691-how-are-michigans-public-schools-funded/>

¹⁷ April Van Buren, "The decline of Detroit's neighborhood schools," *Michigan Radio*, August 30, 2016, <https://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/decline-detroits-neighborhood-schools>

¹⁸ Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit 1907-81*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999)

Race Theory focuses on how racism is permeated in society and addresses the system of White supremacy. The journal article mentions that Critical Race Theory strives to utilize social justice in a means to end oppressive entities and traditions. This can be accomplished through counter-speech and counter-storytelling.¹⁹ Student narratives and stories are vital to combatting the racist structures that exist as a result of the school system and state government. DeCuir and Dixson acknowledge that counter storytelling gives the oppressed minority the opportunity to voice their perspective and story, by challenging the narrative and ideology of privileged majority.²⁰ By exploring their story, the counter stories of DPSCD students aim to defeat the stereotyped and popular narrative as helpless and less intelligent students compared to their suburban counterparts. Advocacy and greater activism result from storytelling and is vital for students to propel their message forward which can be seen through the means students have taken in the Detroit Public Schools Community District.

The perception of children's agency has evolved over the past thirty years. Researchers Allison James and Alan Prout assert that "children should be seen as already social actors not beings in the process of becoming such."²¹ As a result, these accounts from students can inspire strategies that lead to community action and social justice and students can create systematic change to the institutions that have silenced and diminished their voice. Kimberly A Nance suggests that narratives make for a change in the audience's mindset regarding critical global and

¹⁹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition. New York: New York University Press

²⁰Jessica T. DeCuir and Adrienne D. Dixson, "So When It Comes Out, They Aren't That Surprised That It Is There": Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education," *Education Researcher* 33, no. 5 (June 2004): 26-31, doi:10.3102/0013189X033005026

²¹ Allison James, "Giving Voice to Children's Voices: Practices and Problems, Pitfalls and Potentials," *American Anthropologist* 109, no. 2 (2007): 261-72

local issues.²² Writer and project manager for justice organizations Paul VanDeCarr asserts that those who have privilege or are unaware of these institutions and structures gain a new outlook, appreciation and sympathy, and can inspire change. He believes that the tool of narration, especially from the articulation of children, can inspire a movement or simply a necessary conversation.²³

The Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) students do not receive an equitable education compared to wealthier districts across Michigan. Across the district, students encounter issues of inequity and injustice. Often, the blame is directed towards school finances, parental involvement, and teacher quality and quantity. Legally, children in these primary and secondary schools are entitled to rights as minors. Some of these rights are dependent on state constitutions and provisions. Under the U.S. Constitution, minors have rights through the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection clause that guarantees that every citizen should be treated equally under the law, regardless of race, gender, religion, or ability and Due Process clause that ensures children would be given a hearing before their rights are sieged by the government.²⁴ ²⁵ Despite these guaranteed individual rights, the U.S. Constitution does not mention or ensure the quality and funding of a public education for its citizens. With the lack of federal protection and the limited notion of public education in the Michigan Constitution,

²² Kimberly A. Nance, "Conclusion," in *Can Literature Promote Justice? A Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 159

²³ Paul VanDeCarr, "In Focus: Storytelling and Social Change: How Stories Help Advance Human Rights," *Human Rights Funders Network*, (November 7, 2013), <https://www.hrfn.org/community-voices/in-focus-storytelling-social-change/>

²⁴ [Amendment] U.S. Const. Amend. XIV. Sec. 1

²⁵ [Amendment] U.S. Const. Amend. V. Sec. 1

students put their fate in the hands of adults like policymakers, administrators, and public servants to ensure that their education is up to standards.

States and federal governments measure school success in terms of student's academic performance among other factors. Legislatures and policy makers have overvalued standardized testing performance, grade level proficiency, and graduation in order to compare schools, districts, and states to one another. Often, these numbers are not inclusive of other factors that might provide the insight for the contrast in performance rates. The barriers to properly funded and supplied materials resources reduce DPSCD students' opportunities for greater success.²⁶ To many politicians and critics, DPSCD's reputation is a measure of standardized testing performance and proficiency levels. These testing results often translate to poor or below standard achievement levels which are utilized as the main source for comparisons and measurements the academic and nation. Due to these low scores, these comparisons showcase the district's academic regression. The prolonged emergency management control of the school district combined with these low performance achievements, Detroit has become the platform for experimental policies aimed at transforming the education experience to foster new growth.²⁷

Proper material resource access should be treated with the same value and attention to teacher shortage issues. Teachers need proper instructional material resources funded and provided by the district so that students can learn in adequate and modern ways while learning the techniques and knowledge to perform well on standardized tests and compete against other districts. Material resources that directly affect the classroom include adequate and accurate

²⁶ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018)

²⁷ Josh Sanburn, "Inside Detroit's radical Experiment to Save Its Public Schools," TIME, September 6, 2016, <http://time.com/4390000/detroit-public-schools-charters-debt/>

school books, accommodating room temperatures, clean water, access to school lunch programs, the condition of the school building. These resources can positively impact or negatively hinder student's academic performance and growth as well as influence their wellbeing and social development. Limited and crumbling resources are a repeated cyclical offender in the history of DPSCD and its predecessor, the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). In a study conducted by Avital Kaye-Tzadok, Asher Ben-Arieh, and Hanita Kosher, children's social well-being was tested to see the relationship between material resources and hope. The researchers concluded that hope acts as mediator for the negative reaction that the lack of material resources have on children's wellbeing.²⁸

In combination with factors including teacher quality, parental or guardian involvement, and structural and institutional racism, improper material resources are capable of limiting future educational possibilities and narrowing employment opportunities for its students. While making policy decisions regarding funding, curriculum, programming, social welfare/poverty and additional education resources, policy makers tend to rely on quantitative research, outsider influence, political party agendas, and past education policy precedent. This conversation is missing the voice of the students whose lives will be directly impacted by these laws.

According to Leah Shafer from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, when schools and policymakers allow students a seat at the table, students create and implement policies and programs that follow school guidelines and easily appeal to students. Through this process, Shafer argues that schools develop more engaged students, gain diverse and critical feedback, support authentic representation, and normalize student's role and ability to be active change

²⁸ Avital Kaye-Tzadok, Asher Ben-Arieh, and Hanita Kosher, "Hope, Material Resources and Subjective Well-Being of 8- to 12-Year-Old children in Israel," *Child Development*, 90, no. 2 (March 2019): 344-358, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13130>

agents.²⁹ Students can provide the key insight into what proposed legislative policy and school programming solutions would best help their peers improve. In the instance of the conditions and resources of DPSCD, students can describe the horrid conditions they encounter daily and provide solutions and feedback. Students know their schools, classrooms, and peers the best.

The confines and structure of K-12 education limit students from exercising their voice against or for school enacted or government education policy measures. This restriction forces students to utilize measures of activism in order to start a conversation or raise awareness to certain issues. To get their message across, students rely on their work and channels like news coverage and social media. By publicizing their stories, audiences can hear, visualize, identify, and potentially empathize with the injustices that these students encounter in classrooms.

In order to demonstrate the power of student narratives that are employed in media stories to raise awareness of inequities in the Detroit Public Schools Community District, I will analyze two sets of testimonies. In “Chapter One: *Gary B v Snyder* Testimonies,” I outline the student accounts that are injected into the *Gary B v Snyder* complaint which outlines the reasons why the plaintiffs brought forth the class action lawsuit. In “Chapter Two: Media Outlet Narratives,” I concentrate on how local and national news cover education topics and stories that feature DPSCD student testimony and advocacy. These topics include Jamarria Hall’s narration as a student and product of Detroit’s public schools as well as stories from students who are participate in protests and walkouts for gun safety policies and reform and for the district and government to address the contaminated and undrinkable water in schools. By limiting my scope to DPSCD students and news media sources, I can to analyze the different implementations of

²⁹ Leah Shafer, “Giving Students a Voice,” *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, August 18, 2016, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/08/giving-students-voice>

testimony to illustrate and model the injustices this district experiences because of the city's history with institutionalized racism, failing policies, and emergency management.

In all of these narratives, students are challenging the notion that they are indifferent to their academic experience and are passive actors in the education system. Students are participating in varying forms of social justice by demanding solutions for their woes, all of which are out of their control. Students alone cannot solve and fix all of the lead and iron filled pipes that are contaminating the water, but they can protest the district and government's inaction, and gain media attention for these efforts to start a conversation that can build to physical change. If no change results from these efforts, these student change agents prove that they care about their future and their educational experience and are rewriting the stigma that typically is associated with students. By standing up and searching for remedies through different forms of activism, these students gain self-efficacy and autonomy. These narrations and testimonies demonstrate their dynamic role in education and their care for their future.

Chapter One: Gary B v Snyder Testimonies

At Hamilton, teachers keep canisters of Raid on their desks
to address the many cockroaches throughout the school.
-Testimony from the *Gary B v Snyder* Complaint³⁰

Facts and Case Law

Through the remedy of legal action, students testified to the injustices within the Detroit Public School Community District through a class action lawsuit against the state of Michigan education officials and then Governor Rick Snyder. On behalf of seven DPSCD students, a California public interest law firm filed the lawsuit for a civil action for deprivation of rights under 42 U.S. Code §1983.³¹ The student plaintiffs and their lawyers argue that the defendants, the state board of education officials and former Governor Snyder, have violated their Due Process and Equal Protection Rights under the Fourteenth Amendment for their fundamental right to literacy.³² The State of Michigan Constitution has an article dedicated to education, however, the plaintiffs allege the state denied their right to literacy as provided by the federal United States Constitution. Again, this sparks the conversation and tension of what the federal, state, and local government should provide to students for a public education and what students should expect to achieve from a public education.

The defendants made and filed a motion to dismiss this case. A dismissal to the plaintiffs' claims would end the legal progress that would lead to a jury trial. Without a trial, there are no oral accounts from the student plaintiffs, potential witness testimony from teachers, principals,

³⁰ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 14, 20

³¹ University of Michigan Law School Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse. "Case Profile: Gary B. v. Snyder." Last modified March 22, 2018.
<https://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=15474>

³² Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 119-121

and other school officials, and introduction of physical evidence. The complaint must convey the student testimony, present facts regarding the school's condition and student performance levels to persuade the judge to move the case forward. Thus, the fate of the case lies within the total jurisdiction of the federal district judge District Judge Steven J. Murphy III.

The 2016 *Gary B. v Snyder* complaint documents the students' experience in the DPSCD schools to elaborate the reasoning for pursuing this lawsuit. Within their complaint, the plaintiffs outline their grievances to portray the injustice over conditions and resources they encounter inside and outside the classroom that have led to their poor literacy proficiency. They assert that the state has committed "systemic, persistent and deliberate failure to deliver instruction and tool essential for access to literacy...which serve almost exclusively low-income children of color." The factors listed for their lack of literacy and proficiency include teacher shortages and ill-equipped teachers who are not qualified; overcrowded classrooms often deter learning; teachers must buy their own supplies and supplemental instructional material; students and families do not get the support necessary; English language learners are not equipped with the right resources and left far behind; and student's basic health and safety are threatened in the school buildings.³³

The lack of care and proper resource remains a key reason why teachers have issues conveying lessons and providing support to their students who need to perform well on standardized tests to avoid further issues and complications with the law and the district. The horrid conditions include vermin infestation in classrooms, unbearable temperature swings in classrooms, dilapidated and out-of-date textbooks that directly hinder their ability to concentrate

³³ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 1-12

and learn. These students come from five schools including Osborn Academy of Mathematics, Osborn Evergreen Academy of Design and Alternative Design, the Medicine and Community Health Academy at Cody, Hamilton Academy (charter school), and Experiencia (charter school).³⁴

By representing their student body through a lawsuit, the students further their activist efforts to create a systematic and fundamental legal change to improve the conditions within their school. This form of activism demonstrates a legal remedy that could set a major precedent for student and educational rights by holding states accountable for providing quality resources for all students in every district. Education policy often stresses accountability for teachers and schools to make sure their students are proficient in subject areas like math and reading. This legal challenge would make states accountable for student's academic achievement through a safe and quality environment.

Despite these claims and factual information from students and amicus curiae (friends of the court) briefs from prominent research groups and nonprofits submitted on behalf the plaintiffs, District Judge Steven J. Murphy III dismissed the case. The legal rationale demonstrates the court's inability to properly address social justice issues that pertain to education because of the lacking conversation in the Constitution. Judge Murphy declared that these students could not proceed with a Due Process violation because they did not provide a sound argument for a violation in their "negative right" in "denial of access to literacy."³⁵ Murphy suggested that these due process rights need to be "fundamental" enough to discuss outside of its proper place in legislation.

³⁴ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 1-12

³⁵*B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018)

This tension between what the court views as vital and a natural right versus what the other branches of government view reflects the disconnect between who controls and authorizes extension over state sanctioned education. Through the simple look into a Detroit public school, it is evident that the school district does not have the resources and autonomy to provide their students with the tools like modern books, clean facilities, proper air and heating conditions, and subsidized lunch programs to ensure a safe and palatable environment for learning. Judge Murphy does not consider these other issues that influence the enriching educational experience that these children need in order to be properly taught and to focus on their school work which limits his rationale. Since the court is restricted to analyzing the legal arguments against state and federal statutes and Constitutional violation claims, the plaintiffs are at a systematic and repressive disadvantage to ignite a social justice and education reform within the court. The students are currently appealing the decision in hopes to set a precedent through the appellate court, or potentially the Supreme Court of the United States.³⁶

This student activism for legal reform has led to a larger conversation with the public. This case gained major traction before its hearing and after the district court's decision because of the media. The Eastern District of Michigan United States District Court received 4,318 civil cases for the 2017-2018 filing period.³⁷ For this case to be highlighted so prominently by the local newspapers and picked up by national news services like USA Today and CBS demonstrates that impact of the student narrative. Students were able to convey their struggle

³⁶ Federal Judicial Caseload Statistics, "U.S. District Courts-Civil Federal Judicial Caseload Statistics," last modified March 31, 2018, <https://www.uscourts.gov/statistics/table/c-3/federal-judicial-caseload-statistics/2018/03/31>

³⁷ Lori Higgins, "Appeal planned in Detroit Literacy Lawsuit Tossed by Federal Judge," *Detroit Free Press*, last modified July 2, 2018, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2018/07/02/detroit-literacy-lawsuit-appeal/751767002/>

through testimony through a lawsuit and gain attention from across the nation. Frustrations have escalated across the nation which has led to Michigan legislatures to make solutions through policy and program support. Although there has been major media coverage of the case, there is a lack in scholarly literature, law review articles, or case law analysis regarding the *Gary B v Snyder* complaint and case.

Differences between Legal Complaint and Journalistic Reporting

Within the *Gary B v Snyder* Complaint, students have listed their tribulations as well as disgust for the current system and its lack of attention for students. This narrative is very controlled and tailored to fit the needs of the legal arguments and claims that justify the pursuit of the lawsuit. This legal document lays out the critical debate regarding the right to an education and more specifically a right to literacy. Socially and economically disadvantaged urban districts must stay committed to students to provide resources; however, these districts lack the financial and political support from the state and federal government. Unlike other articles that report on education and include dialogue, this lawsuit contains only testimony from the classroom through the student plaintiffs. These student accounts provide an underrepresented perspective into the inequity in schools along with other facts and general information gathered by the lawyers. Since the document's wording is crafted by lawyers, there is a lack of direct quotation that other sources of journalism may contain. Since this case did not make it to trial jury, this is the only opportunity the students have to testify and demonstrate their reasons for their lawsuit.

The media reports that echo and contain student testimony employ direct quotes from students. In Michigan, students attend school for 180 days a year.³⁸ These DPSCD students are not just “eye witnesses” to one specific crime. They experience this repeated injustice every school day. They are experts in this field. As discussed in the study “Stories of a public: Journalism and the validity of citizens’ testimonies,” journalists who allow ordinary citizens discuss their own personal experiences add a necessary dimension to their report and makes comprehensible and relatable language and storylines reach the public sphere. By normalizing this experience, the study argues that the “expressive force of stories (mainly arising from the combination of expressive and aesthetic validity) challenge the official assumption...the stories thus became-at least momentarily-powerful arguments in the public debate.”³⁹ Thus by including student speech in more forms of media will normalize their voice and restore their credibility to provide critical information and challenge preconceived notions. This is the larger role that news stories and journalists play to maximize and raise the DPSCD student voice.

Lawyers and media journalist and reporters have different obligations and purposes for their work. An ethical criterion to journalistic reporting is sourcing. According to the Society of Professional Journalists, media journalists must engage in four principles while reporting. The Code of Ethics encourage journalists to seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and to be accountable and transparent.⁴⁰ Similarly, the American Bar Association

³⁸ Michigan Department of Education, “Instructional Time Requirements and the State Assessment Window,”

https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Day_Requirement_and_State_Testing_558418_7.pdf

³⁹ Risto Kunelius and Mika Renvall, “Stories of a public: Journalism and the validity of citizens’ testimonies,” *Journalism*, 11, no.5 (October 2010): 515-529,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884910373533>

⁴⁰ Society of Professional Journalists, “SPJ Code of Ethics,” last modified September 6, 2014, <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

has professional responsibility standards for practicing attorneys that deal with client-lawyer relationships, counseling, advocacy, legal service information, public service, maintaining integrity, law firms, and transactions.⁴¹ Since the plaintiffs are minors, the lawyers are careful to maintain the integrity of these student activists who have provided their voice to this case. Although lawyers are not journalists, they still adhere to guiding moral principles through their work. Again, both professions follow guidelines and principles that best align to their career objectives.

Testimonies found within Complaint

The testimony provided exemplifies the issues that students encounter on a daily basis that impact their level of learning due to a myriad of distractions and lacking material. These issues, the students and lawsuit argue, impact their achievement level and prohibit students from achieving proficiency levels. These students may not have access to books or other expansive forms of literature to grow their vocabulary and reading comprehension skills.

In the complaint, students and the law firm argue that the Detroit Public Schools are not equipped with the tools needed to provide an education that exudes achievement and obtainment. Through a series of grievances found in the complaint under the section, “Failure to Ensure Educational Conditions Necessary to Attain Literacy,” the students showcase the district’s resource neglect. The complaint states that collective challenges that these students face “are

⁴¹ American Bar Association, “Model Rules of Professional Conduct: Table of Contents,” December 4, 2018, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/model_rules_of_professional_conduct_table_of_contents/

characterized by illogical or inadequate allocation of resources, and the complete lack of any considered policy or system for the delivery of education.”⁴²

To further amplify the problems that students and teachers encounter on a daily basis, the complaint notifies the audience of the horrid physical conditions and infestations at their schools. The complaint discusses school infestations of mice, bees, cockroaches, and other pesky animals and insects that slither, buzz, and tap inside the classroom, causing a major disruption in the daily academic routine as illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2. According to the document, this is an occurrence at all of the plaintiff’s schools. For instance, at Hamilton Elementary, the students report that “teachers keep canisters of Raid on their desks to address the many cockroaches throughout the school.” Plaintiff Jessie K. says that “classes are interrupted by students calling the teacher over to kill a cockroach or screaming as a mouse runs across the floor” and that the building “was filled with yellow-jackets and multiple students and teachers were stung.”⁴³ These irritations will disrupt the classroom environment as students run away from the buzzing sound trying not to get stung. Students should not have to consider the possibility of getting stung inside their classroom daily. This story illustrates the constant disruption that breaks up the classroom producers and agenda.

⁴² Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 78

⁴³ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 86



Figure 1: Cockroaches in classrooms at Hamilton in September 2016. Taken from B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint, p.86.



Figure 2: A cockroach trap in a Hamilton classroom that has collected a large amount. Taken from B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint, p.85.

In addition to vermin, temperatures in the classroom provide a major distraction. According to the complaint, “all of the Plaintiffs’ schools periodically experience classroom temperatures that range from so cold the students can see their breath to above 90 degrees, depending on the time of year.” The plaintiffs recount that the on the first day of the school year, “temperatures grew so extreme that multiple students fainted, both students and teachers got so sick they threw up, and multiple teachers developed heat rashes.” By contrast, when students returned from winter break, Plaintiff Jessie K’s third grade classroom would get “so cold that she felt like she had to go to sleep and was unable to concentrate on learning” which led to kids who did not have sturdy winter coats to shiver all day. At Osborn, classrooms were so inconsistent because a boiler was broken which caused classrooms to either be 90 degrees or below freezing which forced students to be sent home.⁴⁴ These are conditions are unmanageable and cannot be

⁴⁴ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 87-89

fixed with new textbooks. These structures prohibit students from focusing and staying in classrooms.

Resources that are not inside the confines of the classroom pose a threat to the academic wellbeing of students. In one specific instance, Jaime R. recounts his experience at Osborn with unusable resources which are further illustrated in Figure 3. The complaint alleges that:

The water fountains, toilets, urinals, sinks, and locker room showers at Osborn are frequently out of order, and the bathrooms are frequently out of toilet paper and soap. Even when he feels like his head is spinning from the heat, Plaintiff Jaime R. cannot get a drink of water to help with the heat because the water fountains are filthy or sealed off with plastic or unusable because they are contaminated with lead. Walking through the halls and bathrooms, students see broken water fountains and toilets covered in black garbage bags. Teachers use their own money to purchase paper towels, toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and soap. At Osborn MST, urine frequently leaks out of the men's room and soaks the carpet in the hallway, causing the hallway to smell for days. Although there is a swimming pool at Osborn, it has been empty for over 6 years. Plaintiff Jaime R. used to be on the swim team, which he loved, but he can no longer use the facility.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 91-92



Figure 1: Unusable Water Fountain at Osborn High School taken from B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint, p. 92.

For the students at Hamilton, the extracurricular activities and additional amenities provided by the school are damaged beyond repair. This school's physical condition poses a threat to their safety and wellbeing. According to the complaint and illustrated in Figure 4, students have injured themselves on the broken playground equipment, the hallway floors are often covered by wet ceiling tiles that cause students to fall and create mold, large potholes at the school's main entrance of the school cause students and faculty to twist ankles easily. A bullet hole had not been repaired when students returned to school and the auditorium are not usable because they are broken.⁴⁶ These all pose dangers to student's physical state, which should never be a worry or a jeopardy at school. These testimonies exemplify how students must be on a constant lookout for their health and wellbeing, instead of focusing on learning math equations or world history.

⁴⁶ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 90

Regarding health, these schools are supposed to offer subsidized or free breakfast and lunch meal programs for students and drinkable water. The residue from the Hamilton hallways and walls has seeped into these meals. The complaint notes that “it is not uncommon for meals to feature moldy bread and expired milk. The students know not to drink out of water fountains, which are frequently infested with cockroaches and maggots, and the teachers and principal bring in water they purchased themselves.”⁴⁷



Figure 2: Cody MCH collecting ceiling leaks using buckets in the middle of school hallway where students travel between class and visit their lockers. Taken from the B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint, p. 94.

In the complaint, students also discuss the issue of teacher shortages to convey the reasons why these students are not proficient in any academic measure. The students share that at Hamilton, a seventh and eighth grade mathematic teachers left during the school year because of his disdain for the overwhelming class size and lack of resources provided by the district and state.⁴⁸

Although this conveys the general teacher shortage story, student’s recollection of the classroom

⁴⁷ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 90

⁴⁸ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 100

days following the teacher's dismissal shows how disruptive the lagging resources affect students and leave students helpless in DPSCD. The students share that the teacher was "temporarily replaced by a paraprofessional and then a special education teacher." Even if this seems acceptable, the students recount that for the following month "the highest performing eighth grade student was asked to take over teaching both seventh and eighth grade math, while the paraprofessional remained in the room to assist with classroom management."⁴⁹

Often, news stories cover the teacher shortage issue when there is a strike or large controversy. This complaint provides proof of the damage that a teacher causes for the classroom learning plan. An abrupt interruption during the middle of the school year, as depicted in the complaint, fundamentally disrupts the academic progress students make for the rest of the year. Fellow students do not have the knowledge and skills to teach two math classes for a month. As researcher Brian Jacobs concludes, this increases pressure on both the students and substitute teachers to still perform at a proficient level on state tests without a teacher who knows and can teach the material adequately.⁵⁰

The school district and state government continue to fail these marginalized ethnic groups like English Language Learners by providing insufficient or no supplemental resources to learn. English Language Learners make up 6,194 or 12.34% of Detroit Public Schools Community District's student population.⁵¹ According to plaintiffs Isaias R. and Christopher R., they were

⁴⁹ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 99-100

⁵⁰ Brian Jacob, "The Challenges of Staffing Urban Schools with Effective Teachers," *Future of Children*, 17, no. 1. (2007), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795883.pdf>

⁵¹ Student Count Snapshot: Detroit Public Schools Community District, MI School Data, accessed April 22 2019, <https://www.mischooldata.org/DistrictSchoolProfiles2/StudentInformation/StudentCounts/StudentCount.aspx>

unable to develop a basic level of proficiency in English and could not understand any coursework unless their teacher could speak Spanish and take time out of class to help translate. To learn English and to learn his other school subjects, one student stole a textbook so he could translate it at home. Another plaintiff, Esmeralda V. was asked to summarize lessons to her English Language Learners classmates while Esmeralda still needed support in understanding English Language concepts since she relies on her Spanish skills, not her English. Their parents could not even see how far behind the children were because the school only sent home English-only report cards.⁵²

At Cody MCH, the Detroit Public Schools tried to transfer a student who was an English Language Learner and an Iraqi refugee because the school did not have those services. Fellow students who spoke Arabic were the ultimate teachers and translators for this student. Fellow students and Google Translate act as their educational resources, which defeats the purpose of classroom lessons and the purpose of attending school.⁵³

These testimonies demonstrate that there is a lack of focus and attention given to these marginalized students. As DeCuir and Dixson explained, these counter stories provide an opportunity to be heard for those who are ignored.⁵⁴ Learning from their point of view through the counter story challenges the privileged and traditional practices like printing report cards only in English. This story and the testimony of fellow students having to teach English

⁵² Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 97-98

⁵³ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 98

⁵⁴ Jessica T. DeCuir and Adrienne D. Dixson, "So When It Comes Out, They Aren't That Surprised That It Is There": Using Critical Race Theory as a Tool of Analysis of Race and Racism in Education," *Education Researcher* 33, no. 5 (June 2004): 26-31, doi:10.3102/0013189X033005026

Language Learners highlight the disconnect between the school district's communication with parents who are non-English speakers and the district's lack of knowledge and resources to properly educate English Language Learners. These cyclical issues produce students who are far behind in their academics and raise questions as if education is really for all, or for those who fit the traditional English-speaking student model.

The quality and quantity of textbooks poses a threat to the learning environment for these students. According to the complaint, books are not up to grade levels which bars students from developing critical literacy skills or reaching a basic proficiency level in subjects. In addition, many of these schools prohibit students from taking books home because there are not enough books for each student. Third grader Plaintiff Jessie K. recounts that the books available to her in second grade were picture books and not adequate resources to promote and learn how to read. Thus, she was often directed to her computer to learn off of websites but the computers were unable to connect to the internet so she never learned how to properly read.

The personal and quantified testimony further narrates the cyclical effect that results from a lack of resources. When students do not have the opportunity to learn from subject and grade level tailored books, they will not learn or retain the material. Jessie's story further illustrates how fundamental the basic necessities for children's education development. There is no substitute method to practice literacy than from books.

At Osborn MST, Plaintiff Paul M. says that he has "never had a book that he could take home from school" and that teachers make photocopies of assignments when the copy machine actually works. If there are books available, they are often years out of date and constantly taped up by the teachers. Below, Figure 5 shows a worn out and taped up book in Osborn schools and Figure 6 displays a history book that is from 24 years ago and is still the main textbook for this

class. Osborn also had a “U.S. History class that only had 5 textbooks for a class of 28 students, and an economics teacher had 25 textbooks for 118 students.”⁵⁵ These students did not have the tools needed to perform at grade level standards with the limited or nonexistent books available to them. Students are learning from a history book that is older than them and learning about a man who was President of the United States when they were not even alive. Textbooks may not need to be updated every 2 years, but there has been a substantial change in society, the economy, and politics since the 1990’s. This testimony shows that students need updated textbooks that meet state and federal subject standards and that match current trends in technology and inclusion of representation in stories, texts, and historical events that match the identity of students.

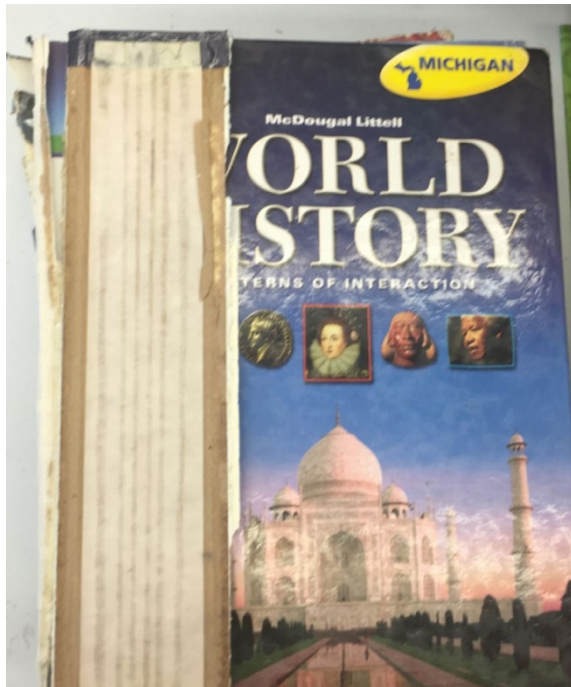


Figure 3: A taped and damaged textbook from Osborn. This was taken from the *B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint*, p. 81.

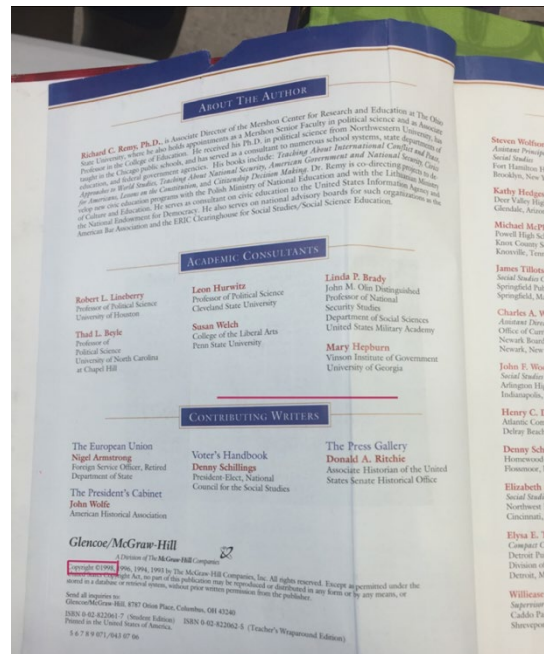


Figure 4: A textbook published and produced in 1992 utilized by students at Osborn MST in 2016. This was taken from the *B. et al v Snyder et al Complaint*, p. 82.

⁵⁵ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 79-80

Although one can simply list the issues of a school building, the power of storytelling through this situation brings the audience into the classroom. However, the intended audience in this situation differs from the intended audience of a news story. This legal complaint is intended for the District Judge, who will utilize this information for their judicial decision. The student plaintiffs' lawyers and counsel created a website to inform the general public of this case and to increase its popularity across the nation. On the home page of "Right to Literacy Detroit," there is section to "Key Links" and the first link listed is the plaintiff's complaint.⁵⁶ This is an intentional placement to encourage the documents reading. The scope of this document now extends farther than fellow legal and academic scholars and can be dissected by a more general audience.

The *Gary B v Snyder* complaint provides the insight into the classrooms that school supervisors or reporters may not see or hear otherwise. Although the student's words are altered through the lawyer for the purpose of persuasion, these personal accounts act as a main source of evidence for the lawsuit. Rather than listing the extreme temperatures of classrooms that impact students' concentration, the complaint explains that classrooms are "so cold that students and their teachers can see their breath and must wear layers of winter clothing indoors."⁵⁷ Audiences react differently and code this information through their senses. People know what temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit and below 20 degrees Fahrenheit feel like but cannot identify with the student's experience in the classroom setting. However, when people process student

⁵⁶ Right to Literacy Detroit, "Key Links," Last modified December 2018, <https://www.detroit-accessstoliteracy.org/>

⁵⁷ Complaint, *B. et al v Snyder et al*, No. 2:2016-CV-13292 Justia, (E.D. Mich. June 26, 2018), p. 9

testimony about seeing their breath and wearing outdoor clothing inside, they can understand the deplorable conditions teachers and students were forced to endure and learn.

Chapter Two: Media Outlet Narratives

It's only a matter of time. It's not like if it's going to happen, it's when it's going to happen.
-Tia Smith, a DPSCD student speaking about gun violence at a school assembly⁵⁸

Student activism in the Detroit Public Schools Community District is publicized through local news sources. When the story contains the compelling storyline and characters, a wider and more diverse audience can resonate with certain aspects of one story. Due to this relevance and connection, that story can be propelled into the national conversation. Given Detroit's history and stereotypes and the appeal to children, student activist stories have the great possibility to move to larger platforms to raise consciousness and propel change. These stories can provide and challenge preconceived notions of their life and educational experience. As the speaker, the student gains autonomy to produce a counter or a new narrative. As noted by Kimberly Nance, the student advances itself against the system that has oppressed them through their testimony, allowing the narratives to duel out their issues in the "court of world opinion."⁵⁹

By focusing on stories that impact or come as a result of their community, local news outlets provide relevant and in-depth coverage that inform their audiences on an array of topics. According to the Poynter Institute, local news stations and media outlets are vital because of their content and the reporter's role to deliver this news.⁶⁰ General local news and media sources for Detroit include the *Detroit News*, the *Detroit Free Press*, *Metro Times*, and the *Bridge*

⁵⁸ Kimberly Hayes Taylor & Amanda Rahn, "Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: 'We all deserve to be safe,'" *Chalkbeat*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/14/students-walking-out-of-detroit-high-schools-as-part-of-a-national-protest-recalled-personal-tragedies-we-all-deserve-to-be-safe/>

⁵⁹ Kimberly A. Nance, "Conclusion," in *Can Literature Promote Justice? A Trauma Narrative and Social Action in Latin American Testimonio*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006, p.159

⁶⁰Melody Kramer, "Why does local matter? Let's ask our audience," *Poynter Institute*, Accessed June 23, 2015, <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2015/why-does-local-matter-lets-ask-our-audience/>

Magazine. These outlets inform the Detroit and surrounding populations of current events that are affecting their communities as well as national and global stories.

Education specific media outlets include *Chalkbeat-Detroit* and *Education Week*. *Chalkbeat* is a nonprofit news organization that specifically reports on cities and states that endure education inequity by discussing improvements, following and breaking local investigations, and forming dialogue with teachers, superintendents, teachers and political candidates. Some of the places that *Chalkbeat* highlights include Chicago, Indiana, Detroit, Tennessee, New York, Newark, and Colorado.⁶¹ One of the most popular periodicals for education news is *Education Week* which provides national news along with investigative stories, and national and state level reports across virtual and print services to raise awareness and knowledge of issues schools in the United States face.

In this Chapter, I will explore how national news outlets report stories utilizing direct testimony. During the first half, I will analyze how student testimony through Jamarria Hall and his friend provide a counter narrative for preconceived judgments of student's indifference and a model for how the school's resources molded his education performance and shifted his life outcome. These accounts shaped the national reporting of the *Gary B v Snyder* class action lawsuit and the coverage of U.S. district Judge Stephen J. Murphy III's dismissal of the civil lawsuit. In the second half, I explore how students employ testimony to strengthen their activist efforts through local news outlets that cover student activism and unpack how the student voice is effective in exposing the district's and government's wrongdoings. I have organized this chapter by resource category to compare how individual stories regarding the same injustice are covered and explored by the media outlets.

⁶¹Chalkbeat, "Locations," <https://www.chalkbeat.org/#>

Media Narratives Resulting from the Complaint

As the *Gary B v Snyder* case gained local and later national popularity, so did media coverage. Since children are central to the issue and are often seen as symbols of hope, they are a prioritized symbol in media coverage. Given the way that the children and the lawyers publicized this case through their website, there were avenues to get this case local and national attention. According to the Cartesian model, people form beliefs after they learn about a situation and visualize it for an evaluation.⁶² An avenue for news stories to gain momentum or resonate with the audience is through a visual and oral testimony from one of those affected by the matter.

Jamarria Hall has vocalized his concerns and narrative throughout the litigation process and after the district court decision was announced. Hall made himself available after oral arguments were made at the federal district court house. He told reporters that he got involved when the main attorney asked him to join the lawsuit and Hall viewed this as his opportunity to make an impact in the legal and school system. Through testimony captured by its affiliate WXYZ, ABC News reported that “Hall says he can’t even seem to get a teacher in every class, noting that he is sick of being sent to the gym to play basketball during Spanish class because there is no Spanish teacher.” In the report, Hall recounts that in the past, he learned to read at home with his family because he has not always had an English teacher at school. For those who lack additional support to learn when the school cannot, Hall testifies that “we don’t even have books for them to practice reading.”⁶³ This detail can resonate with parents who work full time

⁶² Andy Egan, “Seeing and Believing: Perception, Belief Formation and the Divided Mind,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 140, no. 1 (2008): 47-63, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27734279>

⁶³ J.J. Gallagher, “Suit: Michigan Violating Detroit Students’ Right to Literacy,” *ABC News*, September 14, 2016 https://abcnews.go.com/US/suit-michigan-violating-detroit-students-literacy/story?id=42076018&cid=abcn_tco

or handle nontraditional hour shifts that do not have the ability to teach their children since that is the reason they send their kids to school. By enabling the audience to reflect on their own experience, Hall is encouraging the audience to either join their fight for bettering the school conditions in Detroit, or at least appreciate their own education and economic background.

In an *VICE News* video segment, Jamarria Hall willingly participated in the report that discussed the case and gave a first-person perspective on why this lawsuit was filed in the first place. The video begins in Hall's bedroom as he gathers his belongings and heads to the bus stop. He then begins to narrate his daily experience by taking public transportation since he lives so far away from his school. After introducing more facts from the case and about the district's failing proficiency scores, *VICE News* Correspondent Jay Caspian Kang interrogates Hall for reasons why he is repeating pre-calculus as a senior. Hall justifies his course selection because "I don't think there is even another teacher available to teach the next math class, and even if it is, [there are] probably no books for the math class."⁶⁴

To further his point, Hall lists the issues he encounters in the school to King:

The bathroom sinks don't work, there's no door on the bathroom, the classes are just subs[titute teachers], so many different subs every day, the water fountain doesn't work. It's just books, no books, books all torn up, gotta get tapped up, the teachers got to put the assignment on the board and everybody got to copy it down just because there's not paper to make the copies. The school is so hot in the summer, so cold in the winter⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jay Caspian Kang, "Detroit Students Sue Michigan" *VICE News*, Accessed November 18, 2016, https://news.vice.com/en_ca/article/ne4jj7/detroit-students-sue-michigan

⁶⁵ Jay Caspian Kang, "Detroit Students Sue Michigan" *VICE News*, Accessed November 18, 2016, https://news.vice.com/en_ca/article/ne4jj7/detroit-students-sue-michigan

When asked why are the resources in this condition, Hall concludes that “they do not care, and that they think we don’t care... like we all agree that this is cool. But it’s not like that at all.” By speaking on behalf of the student body, Hall challenges the preconceived notions that students do not care. Waking up extra early and taking public transportation because a school bus will not pick him up to go to a school that lacks the basic necessities shows that Hall cares. Hall represents students who do not have the power to advocate for their rights.

In addition to the interview, Hall is shown working the concessions at a high school football game or practice. His cash register is a large empty candy box, showing that the problem lies not just within the classroom walls as illustrated in Figure 7. *VICE News* shows images from the complaint that show the taped-up books, trash bag covered drinking fountains, and broken desks and chairs left outside to rot. These oral and visual testimonies transfer the frustration from the students to the audience as well. After hearing and seeing these conditions, one should ask themselves if these are acceptable conditions and circumstances, or if they would attend or send their children to these schools. Unlike the audience who is removed from this situation, the Osborn students cannot escape this reality unless they enroll in a new school that most likely endures similar issues or students stop coming to school and become chronically absent. As portrayed in the complaint, students do not learn in this environment and cannot break away from the cyclical system.



Figure 5: The make shift cash register that Jamarria transformed into a make shift cash register. Taken from VICE's "Suing the Schools."

Through the national series, *School Matters*, CBS This Morning and USA Today partnered to highlight education investigation and stories. After the federal district's decision was ruled and the student plaintiffs appealed the case to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, this story was featured for its possible implications of federal legal implications. The report details the *Gary B v Snyder* case facts and then interviews a teacher who attended schools in Detroit and the same books his students are using when he was a student, the superintendent who argues that the policies were systemically racist, and Jamarria Hall, who is now a community college student in Florida and hopes to attend Florida A&M University.

In this Detroit edition of "School Matters," Hall talks about the prejudice that students in Detroit face stating that "coming from Detroit, they always say that you are barely going to graduate high school and you are going to end up in jail...so I don't want to end up being a statistic." Knowing how the education system has failed him he concludes that "it makes me feel like I am dumb sometimes or I am not as smart as I need to be, I know it is not my fault, it from

the school system that I come from.” Michelle Miller, the national correspondent for the story, inquired about Hall’s reading proficiency level to which he claims to be reading at a junior or senior proficiency level in high school as a college student. When asked if he feels cheated by his public school education that limited his opportunities, Hall reflects that “we are ten steps behind, always, we are always trying to catch up.” Lastly, Hall was asked a hypothetical regarding the case’s potential to reach the Supreme Court and get denied certiorari to be heard or gets struck down which the reported suggested would be a catastrophic blow to the plaintiff’s investment in the case. Like an activist, Hall acknowledges the potential outcomes for the case but affirms that “at least we tried, because at the end of the day, that is all we can do, to say that we tried.”⁶⁶

This account was specifically crafted to fit the investigative journalism for CBS and USA Today and utilizes Hall’s critical analysis and reflection of the school system to model the results of a DPSCD education. Again, Hall’s poignant testimony about the psychological impact that DPSCD students endure and his willingness to share his far below reading average with the nation exemplifies why this case matters. By touching upon issues of racism, prejudice, inequity, and hope, he connects his story with anyone who has experienced oppression.

While reporting before the federal district decision had been reached, Chalkbeat-Detroit, a local education media outlet ran a story that contained a wider perspective on the pending case including the lead attorney Mark Rosenbaum, a resource teacher at Cody Medicine and Community Health Academy Shalon Miller, and Osborn student Micah Paul, who wants to become a plaintiff in the case. By adding the student perspective, he describes his school’s disparities that interrupt Osborn student’s academic learning.

⁶⁶ “‘We are 10 steps behind’: Detroit students seek fair access to literacy,” *CBS News*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/school-matters-detroit-students-lawsuit-claims-schools-denied-them-access-to-literacy/>

He says that the problem is with the environment, as Chalkbeat reports:

[there is] mold on the ceiling from a leaking roof, no books to take home to do homework and having look up lessons on his iPhone 5. If he can, he gets water from a gallon container in his counselor's office because he refuses to drink from water fountains with lead discovered in the pipes. If he can't, he remains thirsty or high-tails it to a nearby store for a few sips of bottled water.⁶⁷

Within this Chalkbeat article, Micah Paul discusses how fortunate he is to have access to the internet to look up homework and lessons while many of his fellow students do not have a cell phone with wifi. He argues that the lack of proper resources like books or water “is about privilege. I’m not going to say this is white supremacy, but I feel our education should be equal and fair. We should get the same access to education as other students. They get better books, better learning conditions and better everything. For real, for real better. A better education than someone in the city would. But it is what it is.”⁶⁸ From this reflection, it is evident that Hall understands the systemic issues that DPSCD faces. These students are not ignorant to the fact that they are categorically stripped of the resources and tools they need to pursue better opportunities after high school because of the majority of the student's race. Since Chalkbeat operates as a local and independent education news source aimed at improving school equity and quality, stories like Micah Paul's can further uncover DPSCD's resource failures through testimony, education policy, education research, historical context, and their past news stories.

⁶⁷ Kimberly Hayes Taylor, “Detroit students filed a lawsuit seeking the right to an equal education-18 months later, they're still in legal limbo,” *Chalkbeat*, March 12, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/12/155682/>

⁶⁸ Kimberly Hayes Taylor, “Detroit students filed a lawsuit seeking the right to an equal education-18 months later, they're still in legal limbo,” *Chalkbeat*, March 12, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/12/155682/>

With new state legislature and offices, state officials passed legislation that would restructure the system. Detroit schools were given grades based on achievement on student growth and achievement through test scores because of a 2016 state law.⁶⁹ In her article, reporter April Van Buren explains that if schools are in the bottom five percent among student growth and achievement for three years in a row, they are assumed to be worst in the district and across the state and are mandated to close at the end of the school year.⁷⁰ In 2017, Van Buren disclosed that DPSCD had the potential to lose 16 public schools, 8 Education Achievement Authority state reform districts schools, and one charter school.⁷¹ This threat of potential closure looms over the heads of all students and teachers at the lowest performing schools. This threat has been met with teacher and student protests. When other traumatic events occur, students have raised their voice to call out a lack of action by the district and the state or to honor the legacy of a murdered student.

School Closures and Student Response

Regarding the closing of their schools, students collaborated with faculty to make their voice heard in the media. The Detroit Free Press covered a protest regarding this situation in a story titled “Teachers, students rally to prevent Detroit schools from closing.” In February of 2017, rallies sponsored by the school district took place at the 25 of the lowest performing schools in the Detroit Public Schools Community District. One of these schools, Osborn College Preparatory Academy, held a 50-person protest outside and garnered attention from the Detroit

⁶⁹ MI H.B. 5384 (Lexis Nexis 2015) (passed June 9, 2016)

⁷⁰ MI H.B. 5384 (Lexis Nexis 2015) (passed June 9, 2016)

⁷¹ April Van Buren, “Mapping the Options for Kids in Failing Detroit,” from State of Opportunity: Can Kids in Michigan Get Ahead? *WOMFM Michigan Radio*, January 25, 2017, <https://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/mapping-options-kids-failing-detroit-schools>

Free Press. One protester, Kataria Green, was a 17-year-old student who voiced her concerns and reasons for attending the protest to the news. She explained that “they’re trying to shut down the best school I ever attended. It’s not a school, but a family.”⁷² She is trying to elicit and illustrate her actual love for the community that this school has built for her that cannot be replicated or replaced by another school. By appealing to these emotions, Green connects with audiences who would fight for something that they loved. In addition to simply connecting to others with passions, Green demonstrates that to students, the classroom community is a more valuable measure of worth than simply the test scores that students can produce. Her simple statement demonstrates the impact that a safe school can make in a child’s life. Hostility and resentment can grow from attending a new school after the closure occurs.

Through a story in the series titled, “The children of 8B: One classroom, 31 journeys, and the reason it’s so hard to fix Detroit’s schools,” DPSCD students elaborated on issue of cyclical school closures and its impact on students’ academic success as well as their social and mental health. For students at the Bethune Elementary-Middle School, a full homeroom of 31 eighth graders had attended a total of 128 schools prior to graduating middle school.⁷³ One student, Shawntia Reeves, informed journalists that she had attended kindergarten at her local neighborhood school where her family had attended school for generations. However, Reeves was forced out of her local elementary school because the district shut the school down due to costs. She said that cycle repeated with her leaving schools because of the unsafe environment or

⁷² Ann Zaniewski, “Teachers, students rally to prevent Detroit school closings,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 3, 2017, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2017/02/03/detroit-schools-rally-closures/97444718/>

⁷³ Erin Einhorn & Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “The Children of 8B: One Classroom, 31 journeys, and the reason it’s so hard to fix Detroit,” *Chalkbeat*, October 2, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/10/02/students-change-schools-turmoil-disrupts-detroit-classrooms/>

because of other closures which left her feeling isolated without familiar classmates or teachers. She told reporters that “it makes you feel like you ain’t got no one to talk to.” This repetitive detachment affected her classroom participation, school attendance, social interactions, and ability to learn.⁷⁴ This verbalized story demonstrates how school closures are a constant disruption for teachers who are accountable for students’ performance and for students who are never in stable academic environments.

This article also depicts how the abrupt school switches affect students’ mental health. Gabrielle Elliott told reporters that because her family moved to the west side of the city, her parents could not make the 35-minute commute to her former middle school so she enrolled at Bethune. She emphasized how nervous and anxious she was to start a new school in the middle of the year by telling reporters that “I was nervous, I’m a nail-biter.” In addition to pressures to make new friends in the midst of her final year in middle school, Elliott mentioned how her teachers did not even notice she was in the classroom as a new student. The article explains that new students often blindside the administrators which gives teachers little time to gather material or review transcripts.⁷⁵ This shows that school closures affect more than just her and fellow students’ educational experience. Switching schools frequently and readjusting and restarting their academic and social life can impact on their mental health, especially as young teenagers. This testimony provides the audience an opportunity to compare their own academic and social

⁷⁴ Erin Einhorn & Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “The Children of 8B: One Classroom, 31 journeys, and the reason it’s so hard to fix Detroit.” *Chalkbeat*, October 2, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/10/02/students-change-schools-turmoil-disrupts-detroit-classrooms/>

⁷⁵ Erin Einhorn & Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “The Children of 8B: One Classroom, 31 journeys, and the reason it’s so hard to fix Detroit.” *Chalkbeat*, October 2, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/10/02/students-change-schools-turmoil-disrupts-detroit-classrooms/>

experience when starting at a new school which can bring back own memories of anxiety and pressure to “fit in” and feel accepted by their peers and teachers. This is a monumental amount of pressure to place on students who switch schools frequently, especially when they have little to no control over the switch, like Gabrielle Elliott

In a follow-up discussion at her eighth-grade graduation, Elliott told reporters that “now I’m more relaxed. People ask me to sit with them. People want to be my friend.”⁷⁶ This illustrates the importance of school stability and the social development and connections that students can make if they are able to stay in the same environment for a longer period of time.

Student Activism and Movements

Students have protested the unsafe surroundings and highlighted students’ deaths to demonstrate the hostility within the district. Schools like Osborn High, where there have been issues of gang territories and violence, the environment that students learn and socialize in can greatly impact their mood and feelings of security. Students and teachers have raised major issues of safety concerns. According to reporter Jeff Seidel, 7 student athletes had been killed between 2000 and 2012. The article, “Detroit Osborn football team tries to learn lessons from star’s murder,” focuses on the death of prominent and beloved football team captain Allantae Powell who was murdered in an unsolved shooting case, 10 miles west of the high school. His coach and fellow teammates took to the media to pay tribute to Powell’s leadership and to acknowledge the anxiety that kids in this school endure. A former classmate and teammate

⁷⁶ Erin Einhorn & Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “The Children of 8B: One Classroom, 31 journeys, and the reason it’s so hard to fix Detroit.” *Chalkbeat*, October 2, 2018, <https://chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/10/02/students-change-schools-turmoil-disrupts-detroit-classrooms/>

Trevor Denson told Seidel that “it was devastating” so he could not go into the church for Powell’s funeral. He affirmed that “Allantae was good, strong. A captain. I didn’t believe it at first. I was mad. He was good. He didn’t do anything.” As a tribute, Denson says “I haven’t missed a day of practice since, I’m committed, just like he was.”⁷⁷ As a witness to Powell’s character and friend, Denson’s testimony represents how these losses are so frequent in number but unpredictable in the target.

In addition to speaking to Powell’s moral upbringing, the article utilizes testimony from Powell’s social media to depict his thoughts and worries over violence in his neighborhood. In the months leading up to his murder, Powell sent out tweets that echoed his resentment like “Damn, three people dead from Osborn” to “People dropping like flies. Summertime. I’ve known three people killed in the last two weeks. SMH” to “My life is a circle.” His mother recounts a conversation they shared where Powell told her that “sometimes I feel like I’m not going to be here long.”⁷⁸ The inclusion of this dialogue serves as a depiction of Powell’s fear for his safety. In addition, it emphasizes the distributing reality that a child can predict and sense his own death because of the violence in his neighborhood.

In an effort to rebuild community and make a welcoming atmosphere, Seigel reports that Osborn repainted and added new carpet to brighten and warm the building’s facade. Principal Tanya Bowman explained that “we are trying to bring out the life in the building [because] in

⁷⁷ Jeff Seidel, “Detroit Osborn football team tries to learn lessons from star’s murder,” *USA Today High School Sports*, August 24, 2012, <https://usatodayhss.com/2012/jeff-seidel-detroit-osborn-football-team-tries-to-learn-lessons-from-stars-murder>

⁷⁸ Jeff Seidel, “Detroit Osborn football team tries to learn lessons from star’s murder,” *USA Today High School Sports*, August 24, 2012, <https://usatodayhss.com/2012/jeff-seidel-detroit-osborn-football-team-tries-to-learn-lessons-from-stars-murder>

years past, this building looked literally like a prison.”⁷⁹ Repainted walls and fresh carpet may alter the school’s aesthetics, but those new changes do not replace students like Allantae Powell nor do they heal the school’s suffering. School in this type of environment, as echoed through Powell’s and Denson’s testimony as students, triggers student’s minds to think in terms of life and death, not English and Math.

In response to current movements, DPSCD utilized the nationally organized March for Our Lives walkout to advocate for gun smart laws and to publicize and remember their own gun violence stories and victims. Covering the protests, Chalkbeat reporters Kimberly Hayes Taylor and Amanda Rahn recount the tragedies these students have endured and highlight student activist efforts to mandate gun safety policies in their neighborhoods. At Martin Luther King Jr High School, some students marched two miles to the Spirit of Detroit for a demonstration in temperatures below 30 degrees Fahrenheit and others listened to student council members give gun control speeches in their auditorium, depicted in Figures 8 and 9. In the speeches, student Zion Garret demanded that his fellow students who “have a voice, and use your voice” while fellow classmate Tia Smith concluded that “after we heard about the tragedy at Parkland, we were moved. We need to protest-we need to do something. It’s only a matter of time. It’s not like if it’s going to happen, it’s when it’s going to happen.”⁸⁰ This testimony echoes the students’

⁷⁹ Jeff Seidel, “Detroit Osborn football team tries to learn lessons from star’s murder,” *USA Today High School Sports*, August 24, 2012, <https://usatodayhss.com/2012/jeff-seidel-detroit-osborn-football-team-tries-to-learn-lessons-from-stars-murder>

⁸⁰ Kimberly Hayes Taylor & Amanda Rahn, “Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: ‘We all deserve to be safe,’” *Chalkbeat*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/14/students-walking-out-of-detroit-high-schools-as-part-of-a-national-protest-recalled-personal-tragedies-we-all-deserve-to-be-safe/>

internalized thought process about the inevitable death of themselves, their classmates, and their loved ones. This alarming realization depicts the trauma and worries that the student's must acknowledge and balance with their academics and activities.



Figure 8: Students begin their two-mile walkout at Martin Luther King Jr. High School. Taken from the Chalkbeat article titled "Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: 'We all deserve to be safe.'"



Figure 9: Students speak at the gun reform student assembly which the name of the Parkland victims illuminated behind them. Taken from the Chalkbeat article titled "Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: 'We all deserve to be safe.'"

Dennis Johnson, a senior at Martin Luther King Jr. High School told reporters that "just because I'm 17 or 18 years old doesn't mean I don't see his in my everyday life. It's not a matter of age, it's a matter of experience."⁸¹ He also declared his hopes for schools to be a place of sanctuary from gun violence but he no longer feels safe anywhere, which is similar to the disturbing testimony provided by Allantae Powell and Tia Smith.

Students at Western High School staged a walkout for the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting victims and to acknowledge the DPSCD students' pain suffered due to gun violence in their family and community. In an inclusive demonstration, students released 17

⁸¹ Kimberly Hayes Taylor & Amanda Rahn, "Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: 'We all deserve to be safe,'" *Chalkbeat*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/14/students-walking-out-of-detroit-high-schools-as-part-of-a-national-protest-recalled-personal-tragedies-we-all-deserve-to-be-safe/>

orange balloons for the 17 victims, held a moment of silence, and prayed in English, Spanish, and Arabic as depicted in Figure 10. Western International high school student activist and documentary director Rebecca Feliciano told reporters that “it’s important for our generation to voice our opinions. I’m here because I’m against guns and gun violence. There should be a lot more safety precautions taken before people are given a gun.” Feliciano knows the trauma that results from shootings as one of a loved one and a baby were shot and killed by the loved one’s ex-husband.⁸² These narratives show how violence is highly intertwined into their school experience. From reading these testimonies, one should demand that students deserve to attend a school that feels safe and protected, not one where there is a constant threat of terror looming in their minds.



Figure 10: Students at Western International High School release 17 balloons for the 17 victims and join in prayer. Taken from the Chalkbeat article titled “Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: ‘We all deserve to be safe.’”

⁸² Kimberly Hayes Taylor & Amanda Rahn, “Students walking out of Detroit high schools as part of a national protest recalled personal tragedies: ‘We all deserve to be safe,’” *Chalkbeat*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/detroit/2018/03/14/students-walking-out-of-detroit-high-schools-as-part-of-a-national-protest-recalled-personal-tragedies-we-all-deserve-to-be-safe/>

Sarah Cweik from Michigan Radio covered the work of students who organized and held a boycott, walkout, and teach-in as a protest of DPSCD's apathy to fix the contaminated water pipes in their schools. This past fall, a large group of Detroit students walked out of their class on Count Day, the day in which attendance is recorded to determine the per-pupil funding the school district receives to protest the district's water contamination. The students who left class went to their "Wednesday Freedom School" located in the Cass Corridor where they held information sessions and further organized with students across the district which can be seen in Figure 11. ReJoyce Douglas from Western International High School said that the walkout was an "act of symbolism [because] I should just be able to know where I can get clean fresh water, and be able to have my water. I shouldn't have to go oh, this one's empty, let me go find another one. Let me go to the first floor. Let me go to the third floor. Let me go try to find some water." Within the following weeks, the DPSCD school board voted to replace the water resources with hydration stations.⁸³

ReJoyce Douglas's testimony demonstrates that even with a temporary solution like water bottles and fill up stations, those are often empty and pose an inconvenience for students who are running to find water in between classes. This narration highlights why the DPSCD students made demands and staged this walkout to get real answers and real change. Since the school board voted to replace the temporary solutions with larger hydration stations, this demonstrates the positive impact local student activism can make in changing policies and garnering media attention from the local tv news stations, radios, and newspapers.

⁸³ Sarah Cweik. "Detroit students stage count day walkout to protest school water contamination," *Michigan Radio*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/detroit-students-stage-count-day-walkout-protest-school-water-contamination>



Figure 11: Students compile information about the water contamination issue while attending the Freedom School. Taken from the Detroit News article "Detroit students strike for safe water on Count Day."

Detroit News also covered this story and talked with students to understand the reasoning behind the protest. Reporter Sarah Rahal interviewed Mumford High School student council president Imani Sharp who explained that after attending meetings to voice their concern, "we're given the runaround, told to be quiet, to stay in our places and to let them work. We have no problem with the hydration systems if they can show statistics about how they work, and the water coolers aren't a solution if they're always empty."⁸⁴ By providing this insider information that only students receive, the audience is able to see the risk that these students took to get their plea heard by the public.

Students also disclosed how the school attempted to deal with the threat of a potential student walkout. Cass Technical High School senior Maya Soloman told Rahal that "they were giving out free stuff, said there would be an expanded lunch menu, free homecoming tickets, it was also a dress down day. They said there would be easy tests with open notes and visits from

⁸⁴ Sarah Rahal, "Detroit students strike for safe water on Count Day," *The Detroit News*, October 3, 2018, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2018/10/03/detroit-students-demand-clean-water-count-day-strike/1512727002/>

celebrities...the number of bribes given was crazy.”⁸⁵ This disclosure depicts the efforts that the school district was willing to through to keep this water contamination story internal.

Students created a list of demands (documented in Figure 12) that asked for “free lead testing for students, ensured safe and affordable drinking water, IEP’s for all students impacted and a substantial investment in special education services to support all students, [and] answers.” Imani Sharp expanded and broke down this list for reporter Sarah Rahal and explained that “we’re not being heard [and] my principal Angela Prince told me not to bite the hand that feeds me... we’re getting their attention, but they don’t want to meet our demands, which are simple: We want free water testing, (Individualized Education Programs on lead poisoning), and to regulate suspensions. People are getting suspended for nonviolent behavior.”⁸⁶

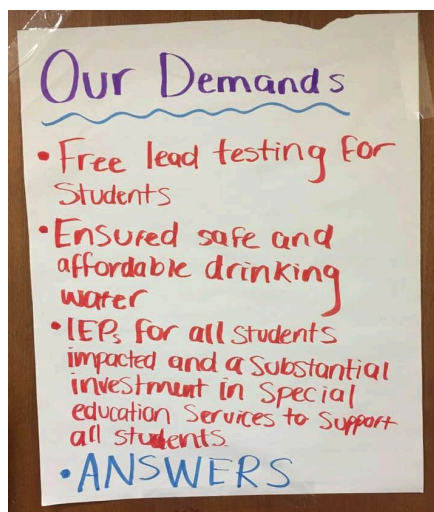


Figure 12: Students created list of demands for DPSCD to address. Taken from “Detroit students stage count day walkout to protest school water contamination” by Sarah Cweik through Michigan Radio.

⁸⁵ Sarah Cweik, “Detroit students stage count day walkout to protest school water contamination,” *Michigan Radio*, last modified October 3, 2018, <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/detroit-students-stage-count-day-walkout-protest-school-water-contamination>

⁸⁶ Sarah Cweik, “Detroit students stage count day walkout to protest school water contamination,” *Michigan Radio*, last modified October 3, 2018, <https://www.michiganradio.org/post/detroit-students-stage-count-day-walkout-protest-school-water-contamination>

These student narratives paint a larger picture into the daily life of DPSCD students and brought to light some major concerns that the district needs to address. By taking a risk and making a stand through a walkout or simply sharing their story with reporters, students contributed to social justice. They utilized and leveraged their marginalized voice to get answers, be heard, and show that they care for their school, peers, and their educational pursuits. With the media's support and visualization of the student activism through direct quotes and photographs, audiences are able to interpret the student's perspective and empathize with these students.

Conclusion

This research leads to opportunities to discuss institutionalized racism found within the Detroit Public Schools Community District in order to further examine the inequity in resources which have made a psychological and mental impact on students. As mentioned throughout the narratives, students are trying to learn in under-resourced environments while balancing anxieties about imminent violence as well as fitting in with their peers. One hope for future research is to examine schools individually. School districts across the United States experience disproportionate distributions of financial and material resources which affect student learning and academic outcomes. It would be valuable to examine how certain schools are perpetually stuck with outdated and lacking resources when compared to other schools across the district and how this affects school enrollment and perception. Since there is an option for school choice, especially for competitive and quality high schools, there seems to be major barriers and inequity that have allowed a system like this to persist. A conversation with faculty, students, and parents would provide the missing qualitative component to the quantitative conversation and demonstrate the patterns and effects of inequitable resources.

As depicted through this thesis, there is power in a singular voice. When students are given the opportunity to share their story through a narration for a news report or a testimony in a legal complaint, they gain autonomy. Through counter narratives and exposing discrimination in their school system, students are able to change the way they are viewed by society. As Jamarria Hall echoed, students truly care about their schools but they are not given enough opportunities to correct the injustices that they witness and experience daily. I hope that in the future, students are given a seat at the table where policy and programming decisions are made so that all voices are represented to form a more true and representative democracy in the education system.

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