

Everyone Is Community: A Community Schools Approach to Immigrant Families' Needs

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Abstract: Meeting the needs of all students regardless of immigration status is a challenge faced by many school districts. Utilizing participatory action research (PAR), we partnered with a local community school district to explore family engagement practices and organizational response to increasing numbers of immigrant families in the community. Using interview and site observation data, we explored connections between leadership values and ability to welcome newcomer families into the school district. Guiding principles expressing meaningful responsiveness, genuine connection, and care for all transcend moments of “crisis” (COVID-19/immigration legislation) to create structures continuously able to meet the needs of students and their families. Schools, educators, and administrators can learn from the equitable approach to serving a school community and be inspired by an organization actively meeting the needs of families it serves.

“I want to always be heard and seen, not just in a crisis, but I'll take it.”
— Ruth, Community Schools Leader, Hatlen School District

Given the heightened visibility of immigration in the United States, the diverse needs of immigrant families are central to important community work schools can accomplish and coordinate to positively affect students' education. The Hatlen School District (HSD) — pseudonyms utilized throughout for school district, town, and all participants — exemplifies successful public-school responsiveness to a multiform community. The district's student body is 18% Caucasian, 68% Hispanic, 8% Black, 3% multi-racial, and 3% nonreporting. District English Language Learner (ELL) enrollment has increased by almost 40% over the past five years. Currently, 20% of district students are English learners, 14% are students with disabilities, and 61% qualify for free or reduced-price school-provided meals. HSD has 77 families who lack a fixed, regular, nighttime residence, and so meet the McKinney-Vento criteria for homelessness (Cunningham, 2014). To address the needs of its diverse students HSD uses a K-12 community school model clustered into 6 schools that serve 5,000 students. Horizon, HSD's community schools organization, is led by Ruth, who, with her team of family engagement specialists, works to create structures for sharing community resources by building relationships with families, schools, and community partners. Horizon currently works with over 50 partners to provide adult English classes, food pantries, clothing drives, housing support, back-to-school resource fairs, and connections to community organizations like the local library, legal offices, and counseling. Schools are used as central locations where resources are housed, shared, or utilized. The community schools model puts in practice a simple concept, as stated by HSD's Director of Facilities and Operations: “a school can be a hub of a community, right? This whole idea is that the school can leverage the resources in the community, and that the community can resource the leverages of the schools.” Forged in the heat of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when community needs expanded and meeting *those* needs became a test of determination and creativity, the central mission of Horizon is to meet community needs. Still committed to its original mission, Horizon is confronting new challenges. In meeting its new challenges Horizon has created a school district where families can receive resources they need so students can thrive in the classroom regardless of immigration status.

Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to build a mutually beneficial research partnership with Horizon and HSD, a partnership centered on respect, trust, and knowledge-

sharing, the members of an Education course at Vassar College explored the challenges school districts face when experiencing a shifting demographic of immigrant families. With faithful commitment, Horizon's leadership created the infrastructure necessary for attaining a successful community school model even in the difficult political climate of 2025. Our research into Horizon's success began as a university-school district partnership that over the past three years has grown into a longitudinal study involving undergraduate students, their professor, and community schools partners. PAR is conducted *with* people, not on them. "*With*, not on" became a bedrock mantra guiding our partnership with Horizon. All research team members were not only data collectors and analysts but also, whenever possible, participants in the activities that they observed. At the same time, the PAR model empowers participants to actively engage in the research process as "equal partners," creating a less hierarchical research dynamic that centers community knowledge (Cohen et al., 2020; McIntyre, 2008). After many iterations in collaboration with our partners, we settled on the research question, "What are key elements of a community school district that affect newcomer families?" Utilizing grounded theory methods to identify likely themes of significance to Horizon's success in welcoming newcomer families, our focus fell on Horizon's leadership philosophy, its capacity to build networks of community partnerships, and its development of individual champions.

Study Framework: PAR, Community Cultural Wealth, and Critical Education Theory

Our theoretical framework centered on PAR (Participatory Action Research), which works both as a method of inquiry and as a paradigm guiding thought and action while researching (McIntyre, 2008). PAR's emphasis on power equality among researchers and participants helped us interrogate aspects of power throughout our study (Fine et al., 2021; Mackay, 2006). In every encounter with our community partners, we purposefully reminded ourselves of any asymmetrical power between the university and the community, while also reminding ourselves that asymmetry can be reversed based on different contexts and spaces we entered. PAR expands the sphere of who is counted as a researcher by extending that role beyond students and professors to include mothers, youth, teachers, librarians, volunteers, and organizers. Yosso's (2006) Community Cultural Wealth theory (CCW) gives specific content to critical education theory's concern with power relations (Giroux, 2023) by identifying areas in which power asymmetries are likely to form. Yosso (2006) distinguishes six types of community cultural capital: Aspirational, Familial, Linguistic, Navigational, Resistant, and Social. Aspirational capital is the ability to generate hopes and dreams and, despite challenges, persevere in pursuit and realization of them (p. 41). Familial capital is knowledge nurtured among kin that inculcates community history, memory, and cultural intuition (p. 48). Linguistic capital points to intellectual and social skills learned in communication experiences using language(s) (p. 43). Navigational capital consists in skills at maneuvering through social institutions (p. 44). Resistant capital expresses skill learned from challenging inequality, oppression, and systematic injustice (p. 49). Social capital concerns networks of community resources and peer support (p. 45). As our study progressed we noticed that familial, linguistic, and social capital surfaced most frequently in our interactions with participants. Linguistic capital was evident throughout our data collection and interaction with our community partners where interviews, observations, and casual conversations were in a language other than English, most often Spanish. Developing linguistic capital among researchers and participants enriched us, our community partners, and our data collection. A strong sense of family is fundamental to the Horizon team both internally and in interactions with families in the district. Newcomers shared values with the family

engagement specialist with whom they worked. Continuous creation of social capital is the aim of Horizon's community school leader who works tirelessly to expand and nurture the community partners and resources she brings into Horizon. By modeling the leveraging of social capital, her staff and even the families supported by Horizon were able to see how they could also extend their own social capital and create new networks of resources. Figure 1 provides a model of our theoretical framework describing how we approached our study of Horizon's creation of community wealth in the interest of improved power relations among newcomer families to Hatlen School District:

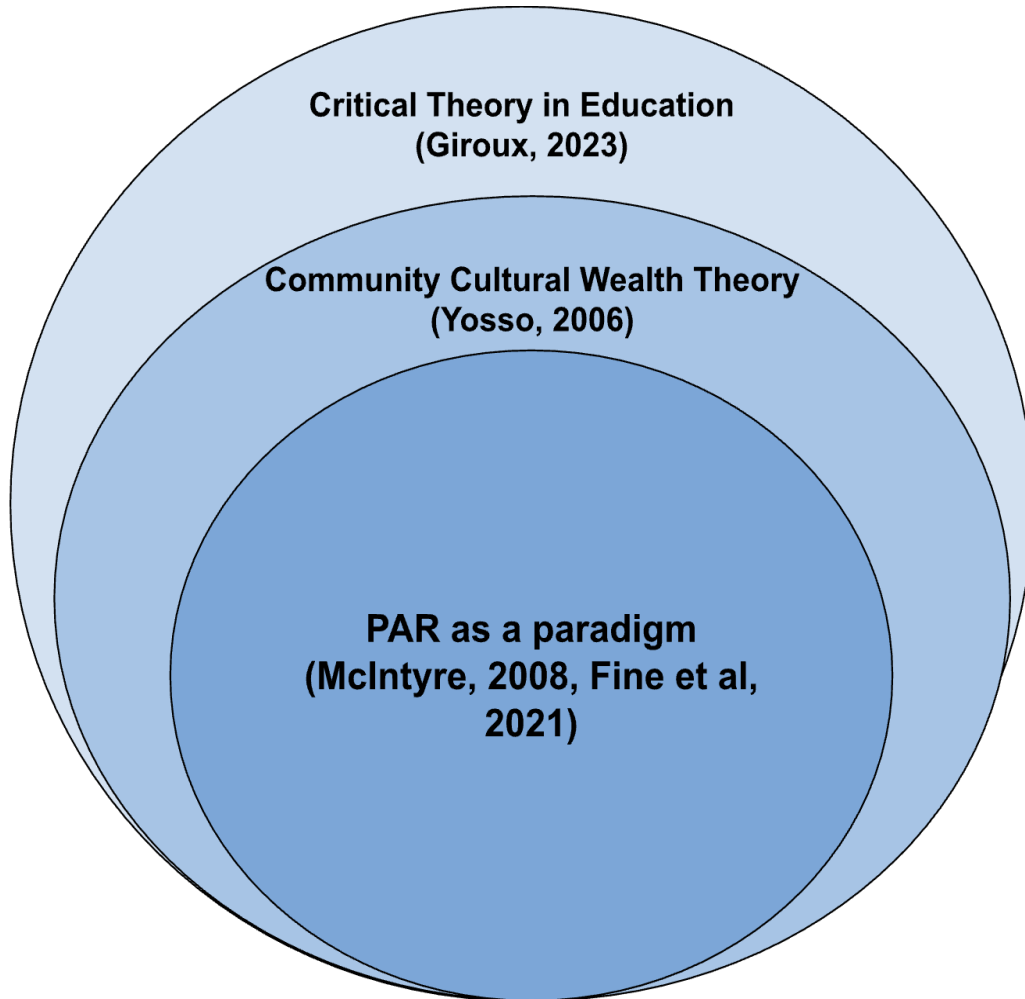


Figure 1: Critical Theory Focused through Community Wealth Theory to Understand Horizon's Success

Immigration Challenges, Community Schools, and School-College Partnerships

To understand the magnitude of its achievements with newcomer families to the Hatlen School District, Horizon's goals, influences, and structures must be contextualized in the politics of immigration, the community school district model, and the potential community schools create for school-college partnerships. According to Passel and Krogstad (2025), there are approximately 14 million undocumented immigrants in the US. Approximately 40% had some protection from removal. However, "these protections can be, and in some cases have been,

removed by the federal government, sometimes with little notification” (Passel & Krogstad, 2025, n.p.). Disappearing protections were evident in the summer of 2025, when U.S. immigration enforcement intensified across the country. Undocumented people were stopped, arrested, and taken away from their families and communities by masked Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents (Hesson et al., 2025). People were taken away and held in overcrowded immigration detention centers (Jarvie & Solis, 2025). Perception of the immigration issue as binary (legal vs. illegal) is too simplistic. Motomura (2014, p. 192) reminds us that there is a problem with this view because “...it disregards both US immigration history and the current state of immigration law and policy.” Every immigration case is different and every immigrant, even undocumented immigrants, have different, albeit, limited options available to them. Motomura (Ibid.) observes, “...the immigration law system is one of selective admissions, selective enforcement, and vast unpredictable and inconsistent discretion.” While simultaneously not wanting them to integrate into the society they helped build (Bosniak, 2008), selection of whom is allowed into the US is often tied to labor demands that cannot be met by documented citizens and residents (Garcia, 1980; Green, 2003). Lastly, ICE agents across the country, including at our research site in Hatlen, now have access to sensitive locations like schools, places of worship, and healthcare facilities, where they once did not (Crudo Blackburn & Callaghan, 2026). Oversurveillance, always prominent in communities where undocumented immigrants live, is now heightened and expanded to include institutions that work with newcomers to the country, such as community schools.

When discussing an issue as complex and large-scale as immigration in the United States, one must try to envision a better future to (re)shape the present. Sonny Villamor (2005) shares how transformational leadership utilizes vision, example, and challenges to inspire a community to take shared ownership in a joint creation of change. A transformational leader develops relationships of high expectations and high-levels of support that empower and motivate others to collaborate and innovate. When a community is faced with change, visionary-focused leadership can create positive motivation, partnership formation, and community empowerment (Pitler, 2024). Transformative leadership finds ways to continue radical care in disruptive times. Rebecca Lowenhaupt and colleagues assessed COVID-19 responses from high-immigrant population school districts. They discovered the importance of sustaining, adaptive, and innovative leadership practices for all, but most specifically for immigrant families. Lowenhaupt et. al. (2025, p. 523) found “...leadership practice was both shaped by and shaped immigrant contexts of reception through disruption.”

Community school models function optimally under transformative leadership. A community school model seeks to meet student needs to improve student academic achievement (Castrechini et al. 2012, Zehr 2011, Fehrer et al. 2016, Sanders et al. 2005). While assessing a community school response to unequal access to educational resources, Medina et al. (2020) performed a PAR study that found collaborative leadership, family engagement, culturally relevant practices, and family support all create an effective community school system. Fehrer et al. (2016) and Sanders et al. (2005) also found that leadership and intentional family engagement are the two most discussed capacities for establishing and maintaining an effective community school. Family engagement, in a community school context, means an intentional and reciprocal partnership between a school (or district) and the families that send their children to that school (or district). When students’ physical, social, and emotional needs are met, they can succeed in school (Diamond et al. 2016). But the community school model extends past student achievement to foster the development of a complex interconnected relationship between

schools, community organizations, community members, students, and families (Fehrer et al. 2016, Holme et al. 2022). Central to supporting family engagement to best enhance a child's educational well-being, a school (or district) keeps the parents of students informed about and involved in their child's education, regardless of the family's ability to provide resources for their child's educational journey (Ferrara, 2011). Considering the current family demographic of Hatlen, it is crucial to keep in mind that family engagement is affected by multiple factors, including language differences, immigration status, parent education level, family socioeconomic level, and differing family values (Peña, 2000). We acknowledge these important factors in studying the family engagement efforts of Horizon.

Combining research on community schools, school leadership, and immigrant communities, Lowenhaupt and Montgomery (2018) highlight the challenges faced by school districts with growing immigrant populations. They advocate for university-school partnerships, like ours, utilizing PAR to assess quality of school-family communication, looking especially for ways to bridge communication gaps stemming from cultural and linguistic differences. Similarly, Song (2022) used PAR within a university-school partnership to investigate how translanguaging pedagogy — intentionally using multiple languages in the classroom — can increase the engagement of parents in their bilingual children's education. Intentional use of multiple languages surfaced several times in our study and was especially noted in our findings. Our college-school research partnership highlights the power of PAR to enhance collaboration among teachers, students, and families; and was instructive for our own study of immigrant communities and how community schools address newcomer needs. Our study examines the interconnectedness of leadership and caring for immigrant families that has developed at Horizon. We provide the story behind Horizon's organizational structure with in-depth portrayals of two individuals who created the Hatlen community school district. Educators have much to learn from the philosophies, qualities, values, and practices of Horizon's leaders.

Enacting a College-School PAR

Our college research team worked to share the opportunity of decision-making with the members of Horizon as much as possible. Our PAR relationship allowed our team the ability to enter into the Hatlen community alongside trusted members who helped ground our research in the voices of community members to whom they were actively providing resources. The current iteration of the research partnership discussed here is a longitudinal study which builds off the research into Horizon carried out by two previous years' classes of undergraduate students, their professor, and community schools partners. Our team chose to use a mixed qualitative approach collecting data from fieldnotes during site observations and conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants. The research design is outlined in Figure 2 on the next page. We found it instructive how PAR can be used to create systemic family engagement strategies. PAR's emphasis on collaboration empowers families to contribute to shaping school practices and fostering stronger partnerships through the encouragement of parental engagement (Pushor, 2018). While university-school partnerships (USP) are effective in developing short and long-term solutions for family engagement in schools, there is mixed discourse about the efficacy of USPs as evaluative avenues (Booth et. al. 2003; Provinzano 2018; Yapa 2009). According to Provinzano (2018), USPs provide a new lens to evaluate programming and can make improvements that would be otherwise hard to identify. Specific obstacles to effective evaluative partnerships include creating diverse methods of engagement, effective implementation of methods, bridging the gap between policy and research, and ensuring a long-term viability of the partnership

(Booth et. al. 2003). Centering research on communication and shared values can help USPs using PAR avoid these common pitfalls.

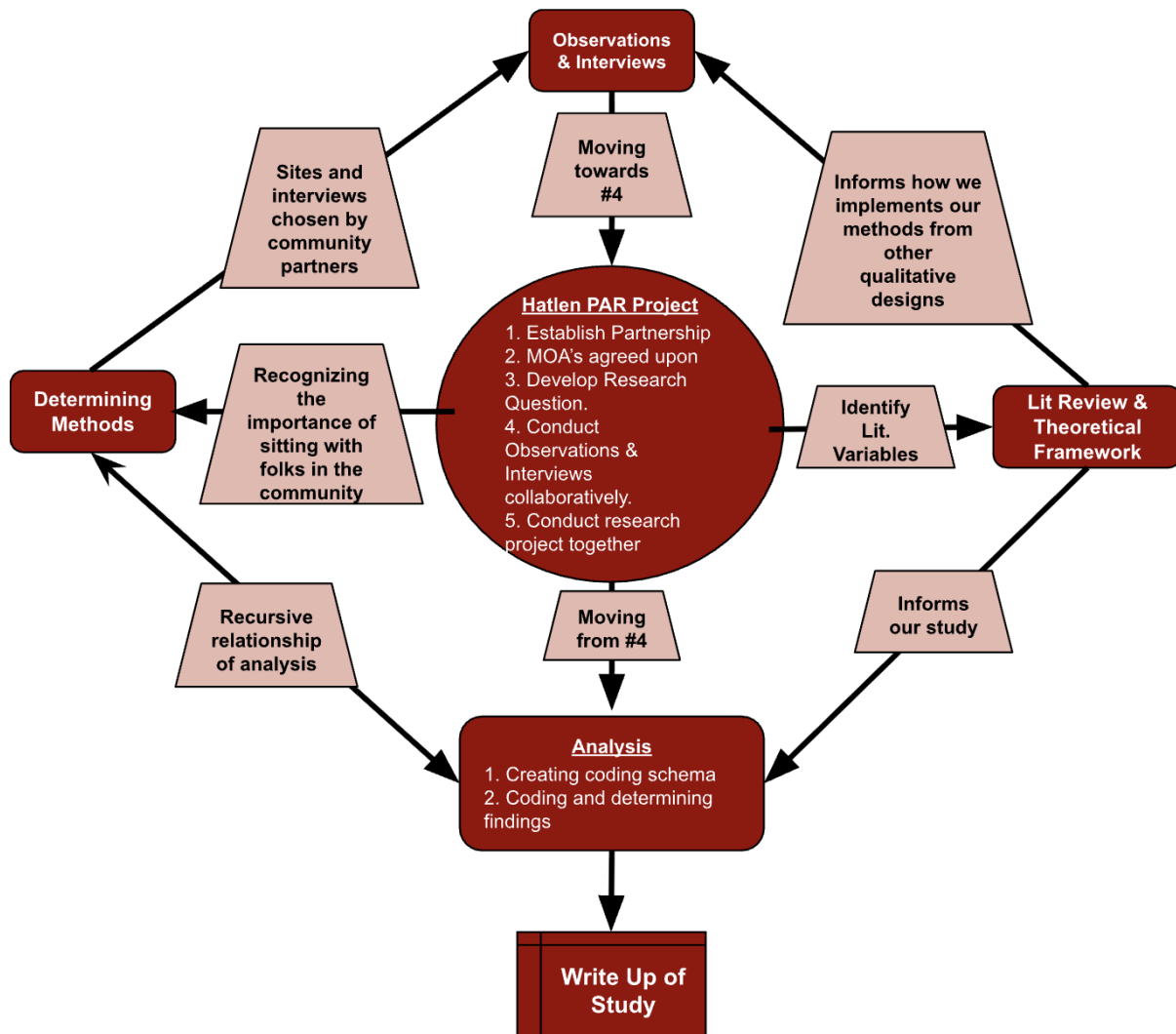


Figure 2: Horizon-Vassar Research Partnership

Data Sources: Our research team worked alongside participants (the community school director and the family engagement specialists of Horizon) to select 11 observation sites and 24 interviewees for data collection. Sites were chosen as hubs of community in terms of location, participants, and programming. Observations focused on sites that showcased Horizon directly involved in family engagement. The research team also emphasized sites observed in previous iterations of this research partnership. All twenty-five (25) interviews and twenty-six (26) observations were conducted from March 2024 to May 2024. Our team interviewed a range of school personnel including the current superintendent and a former superintendent, principals (3), school staff (3); community members including parents (8) and community organization partners (2); Horizon staff (5, including family engagement specialists); and the community schools leader (twice). Each semi-structured interview ran to no more than an hour in length. Bilingual members of the research team conducted some interviews in Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English. Table 1 (next page) describes the observation schedule.

Event	Event Duration	Location	Total Observations
Adult English Class	3 hours	Hatlen High School	3
Art Program	45 minutes	Hatlen Library	4
Digital Tech Class	2, 90-minute sessions	Immigrant Rights Organization	3
English Language Education	90 minutes	Immigrant Rights Organization	3
Family Yoga Storytime	45 minutes	Hatlen Library	2
Minecraft Day	1 hour	Hatlen Library	2
Mobile Food Pantry	2, 1 hour deliveries	Hatlen Elementary	2
Mother Goose Time	45 minutes	Hatlen Library	2
Parent-Child Class	2 hours	Immigrant Rights Organization	1
Reading with Pets	45 minutes	Hatlen Library	2
Story and Crafts	45 minutes	Hatlen Library	2

Table 1: Number and Description of Observations

Data Analysis: After transcribing the interviews, we analyzed the data through multiple levels of qualitative coding (Saldaña, 2021). As our research team shifted composition due to members of our team leaving after graduation or to pursue other commitments, we have continuously coded and re-coded our data to identify connections across entries and salient themes. In addition, multiple research team meetings spanning 2 years were crucial in thinking and rethinking our research project. At times, we moved back to move forward. For example, our two research foci of leadership and newcomers were fine-tuned through repeated conversations about what we could extract from our data. Reconsideration required us to start anew and revisit previously coded data and at times recode some data. In one instance, we went so far as to re-interview the community school leader and compare the second interview to the original to see what differences, if any, existed.

A Source of Horizon's Success: Leadership Philosophy Responsive to Constant Change

While there are many lessons to learn from Hatlen's district-wide community schools model, the most significant findings were the success of their leadership and the responsiveness of their methods for welcoming newcomer families. Exploring the values embedded in Horizon's leadership philosophy assists in understanding the organization's ability to welcome newcomer families on the families' own terms and to meet their needs. The scope of Horizon's community school model operating on a district-wide scale is impressive, but the success of the organization lies in the values that constitute Horizon's philosophy. The Horizon leaders have employed intentional leadership practices grounded in a core principle of building strong relationships. Focusing on strength of relationships with families and community partners allows Horizon to respond to the Hatlen community at all times, including times of crisis. To understand the connection between values and practice constantly forged and reforged at Horizon, one can look to Dave, the former superintendent who envisioned the movement of creating a community-school district at HSD, and Ruth, the current Horizon leader who has made the community-school district vision a reality.

Dave: Beginning as a teacher, Dave held many positions in the district before becoming superintendent of HSD. After hearing about the community schools model, Dave recognized shifting needs of the community as a reason to create a community school district: “The demographics had changed since I first started in the district to where I was. Significantly, poverty levels increased while enrollment was increasing... the community became predominantly Latino. So doing things the way we did in the past is not the way we were going to do things now.” Dave was assessing needs of those around him and, in order to respond to changes in the community, he understood the potential of pivoting to develop a new model. A core value of Horizon is understanding through relationships. Acting as a community organization, Horizon emphasizes building relationships with community members and organizations. Strong relationships help target services, but also keep Horizon in the know about who’s living in Hatlen and what’s going on in their lives. Horizon is embedded in the community because they recognize the necessity of knowing their population in order to serve their population. However, the goal of Horizon is not just to help people, but to re-imagine Hatlen as an inclusive community where people work together to meet their needs. Tasked with bringing his vision of a community school district into reality, Dave needed to find a leader who could make it happen. He took a chance on Ruth. Ruth worked as a special education teacher in HSD. After volunteering at the mobile food pantry, Ruth observed that serving direct needs (food) left families vulnerable to other unmet needs (lack of weather protection, lack of childcare, lack of time). Ruth shared possible solutions with her former principal, who passed the ideas on to Dave. Dave recognized Ruth’s ability to see the bigger picture while valuing the humanity of the individual. He approached her to partner with him in creating what is now known as Horizon.

The philosophy of “Maslow before Bloom,” which means, as Dave shares, “making sure that everyone is cared for, not only just academically, but socially, emotionally” is core to the construction and implementation of Horizon. The “Maslow before Bloom” approach requires seeing the person through the need, regardless of age, education, or immigration status. Subordinating Bloom’s Taxonomy to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs expresses how students must have their basic needs met before they can reasonably be expected to learn. This mantra is more than words: Dave and Ruth breathe this philosophy into every action and decision, and this commitment to enacting their beliefs inspires others to do so, too. To Horizon, everyone in Hatlen is part of the community. Horizon’s communitarian outlook is exemplified through Horizon’s Block Party, an annual event before the beginning of the school year for community organizations to gather with information, food, games, and resources. Dave shares: “...it brought families from everywhere to these hot streets of Hatlen... But it wasn’t just for these families and that families... it brought the whole entire community, you are a high SES or low SES, right? [It] brought together people as a community and brought administrators and teachers and staff. We were just there and we got to know each other.” Horizon is situated as a resource for every single person in the community as they understand that the wellness of each relies on the wellness of the whole. The network of partnerships Horizon has built in Hatlen reflects Dave and Ruth’s philosophy of helping the whole person. For example, family visits to the mobile food pantry have been created to emphasize dignity and ease as much as getting food into people’s hands. Adult English classes and library story times understand their attendees and cater instruction and material to the specific needs of the group. The alignment of values between Horizon, its partner organizations, and the community creates a joint ownership over Hatlen resources and partnerships that generates success in large- and small-scale engagement. These partnerships do not solely provide resources for the families, but actively build community.

Ruth: Ruth's ability to center humanity in her role as Horizon's leader has allowed her to create strong connections and inspire those around her to do the same. Expressing the drastic positive change stemming from working with Ruth, the principal of a school Horizon partners with said: "In the beginning there was nothing, we had nothing for families. If we needed school supplies, we bought them out of the school district budget. [Ruth] has brought partners to us... she brings these events, and through those events, we're able to then find out what more do you need as a family?" But the best showcase of Ruth's capacity for community leadership is the team of volunteers and Family Engagement Specialists — all bilingual, immigrant mothers with children attending school in the district — she has assembled and trained to become leaders in the work they do with families. The team who works to meet needs of families in the district employs Horizon's values of awareness, empathy, and diligence. Ruth shares a proud moment as a Community Schools Leader:

We had a family who was moved into a shelter, and there was a period where they were not coming to school because we couldn't figure out what was going on. And I'm so proud of my family engagement team, because this individual said to me, "I'm really upset. This family is now missing a week of school, and we're not set up for next week. Can you help me?" And so I did. I dropped everything. I got on the phone. And I was so proud of this moment that they advocated for this family, and that whole mission of we remove barriers. And that we will do whatever it takes for kids. That was a proud moment for me, that they came to me and that they know that that's what we do. So we collectively came together to figure it out. And I reached out to United Way and I said, "Can we use your Lyft services? I know that you have them, but they're individualized right now." And she said, "Yes, absolutely." And then our family couldn't figure out how to use Lyft. My staff member left work at five o'clock last Tuesday and drove down to the shelter to figure out how to make it happen. So that's I think a proud moment.

First, the staff member felt safe and confident enough to speak out when they noticed something was wrong. They then invoked the Maslow before Bloom philosophy because the student could not learn and grow if they couldn't get to school. Next, Horizon connected with one of its many local organizations to leverage resources. When roadblocks occurred, the leaders changed the system to meet their needs. And finally, staff patiently invested time well-spent to ensure they were connecting genuinely with families and meeting their exact needs.

Horizon is not special because it makes sure families can get to school. It is special because the leaders of Horizon have established clear values of relationships, dignity, and intentionality to drive the creation of thoughtful, genuine networks of hardworking, compassionate people. This network of nonprofit organizations, donations, mobile services, childcare opportunities, adult classes, and countless other groups and services was built with purpose and care by select leaders in the community. Dave and Ruth enacted a philosophy of forming genuine relationships with everyone in the community to not only assess individual needs, but also to gauge a community member's ability to contribute to other people's needs. Persistent, creative, diligent, and ambitious, Dave and Ruth form meaningful connections with those around them to leverage assets within the community. Horizon represents a complete community schools model in theory and in practice. The values of Horizon spread power to everyone, regardless of resources, ability, or identity, to engage in a collective vision of a shared community that meets the needs of all its residents. Horizon's value-based model allows for the community school district to be adaptable

to any need presented. Dave reiterates this promise stating: "...in Hatlen this is who we are and we're a welcoming environment, and whoever comes in here, you're going to get served and served well. But the other part of it is always with this mindset of we have to evolve, right? Because our families are changing and the influx of families might be different, but whatever happens, we're going to take care of you." Horizon cannot solve every problem and meet every need, but values put into practice by Horizon's leaders, partners, and community members lay foundation for creative, intentional, timely problem-solving to meet present and future challenges, especially those involving newcomer/immigrant families. By positioning humanity as its central virtue, Horizon continues to evolve in sync with the Hatlen community.

Meeting the Changing Needs of Newcomer/Immigrant Families

While Horizon seeks to meet the needs of all families in their district, newcomer families have specific needs such as adapting to a new country as well as school. Most immigrants in Hatlen come from Latin America, so, to continue the organization's standard of serving families well, Horizon directly needed staff who understand Spanish and understand the cultures from which families come. Equally important was a staff that honored knowing a language other than English as being an asset, not a deficit, imbuing interactions with the form of cultural wealth Yosso (2006) refers to as linguistic capital. Horizon's staff, with the exception of the Community School Leader, shares with the families they serve the experience of being bilingual, immigrant mothers with children in the district. Family engagement specialists relate to and communicate with newcomer/immigrant families to help them navigate a new place and new country. As one of the most senior staff members said:

Sobre todo con estos padres nuevos que recién llegan al país y obviamente la mayoría llegan de países latinoamericanos... Y se encuentran con un mundo que no conocen y para eso estamos nosotros

Especially with these new parents who have just arrived in the country, and obviously most of them come from Latin American countries... And they find themselves in a world they don't know, and that's why we're here.

The staff member's comment exemplifies how the Horizon staff see their purpose: To respond to families in need is "Why we're here." Horizon remains strong in its mission that every community member is a person first. Family engagement specialists approach every new family, immigrant or not, from an asset-based framework designed to invest in newcomer and needy families all the forms of capital Yosso (2006) identifies as community cultural wealth. When newcomer families become part of the Horizon "family" their familial capital increases exponentially. Family engagement specialists increase families' social capital by connecting newcomers to community resources and informing them of opportunities to seek peer support. Additional support with accessing available resources increases navigational capital. Family engagement specialists are well-versed in working within the system. Interaction with Horizon staff and at Horizon events enhances linguistic capital among newcomers by engaging them in bilingual conversation. Horizon fosters strong resistance capital by demonstrating time and again that systemic injustice need not remain unresolved. Invested with greater community cultural wealth across the board, families are able to improve their own aspirational capital as opportunities arise to imagine and to realize hopes and dreams. Relationships built between community members and staff are the reason the organization can meet so many needs. Every Horizon-related interaction creates new community cultural wealth.

As immigration continues to spin into a political conversation about scarcity of resources and limited availability of support, Horizon's philosophy remains a clear and simple beam of hope, offering intentional support and completing connections so more families' needs can be met. Though Horizon's leadership recognizes that there is a current rise in immigrants and immigration enforcement, they do not view it as a crisis. When responding to the notion of an "immigrant crisis," Dave, a former superintendent of the district, said: "I wouldn't say crisis. I think folks really started to say that because we started to see them, not just a few but a number of our families coming in, recent immigrants. And I think there was a real urgency to really think about how we address the needs of all our families. And more importantly, and I give credit to a lot of the staff, is really thinking carefully about the individual stories of those said by students and those said by families." When Horizon started to see numbers of immigrants rise, they did not see the newcomers as being the problem. Instead, the problem that needed to be solved was how they were to help these newcomers integrate into the district. Every time a new family moved into the district, Horizon did an intake interview to see what their needs were and quickly directed them to any existing resources. If these resources did not exist, then Ruth, the Horizon community school leader, added it to her list of things she needed to find and provide for her families and students. The problem was not, "There are too many people!" Rather, the challenge was, "How can we best serve all these new people?"

Horizon shines in its ability directly to confront and contain problems and situations. An example of this devotion to all families can be found in the vignette below that tragically but fully illustrates the types of cases Horizon helps out with when newcomer families first arrive.

Vignette - "When is Mommy arriving?"

Claudia, a Horizon family specialist, we interviewed in her native Spanish, provided an account of one of the children in Hatlen who had a short time in the district. We provide Claudia's actual response in Spanish and then offer our English translation. Claudia said,

El caso de una niña. Llamé para hacer una cita. Respondió su padre. Luego pregunté por su madre, y el padre me dijo que su madre había fallecido. Entonces vino y me dijo que había llegado hacía unos cinco años. Y ella [la madre] llegó después con los dos niños, y por alguna razón, la deportaron y dejaron pasar a los niños, ya que su padre estaba aquí. Bueno, [la madre] intentó cruzar de nuevo y murió. Y él me dijo que los niños acababan de llegar. O sea, no había estado con sus hijos en cinco años. Y me dijo que ni siquiera sabía cómo decirles que su madre nunca volvería a casa. Me preguntaban todos los días: "¿Y cuándo llega mami? ¿Cuándo llega mami? ¿Cuándo llega mami?". Y bueno, yo estoy ahí para contarles esa historia a los maestros de la niña, porque muchas veces, un maestro ve a un niño triste y muchas veces no se acerca, y no tiene la humanidad de preguntar: "Mi hijo,

A case of a little girl. I called to make an appointment. Then her father answers. Then I [ask for] her mother, and the father tells me that her mother died. So, he came and told me that he had come about five years before. And she [the mother] came later with the two children, and for some reason, they deported her and let the children cross since their father was here. Well, [the mother] tried to cross again and died. And he told me that the children had just arrived. I mean, he hadn't been with his children for five years. And he told me he didn't even know how to tell them that their mother wasn't ever coming home. They asked me every day, "And when is mommy arriving? When is mommy arriving? When is mommy arriving?" And well, I'm there to tell that story to the girl's teachers because many times, a teacher sees a sad child and many times they don't approach

¿qué le pasa?". Si no, simplemente no, ya no quiere estudiar. No, no está prestando atención, pero hay algo más. Así que recuerdo que se lo dije a su maestra, y todos ya lo sabían, sobre todo si llegaba el Día de la Madre, que la trataran con un poco más de cariño, porque su madre había desaparecido.

them, and you don't have the humanity to ask, "My child, what's wrong?" Just simply "No, she doesn't want to study anymore." No, she's not paying attention. There's something else going on. So, I remember having to tell this to her teacher. So now everyone was well aware, and especially when Mother's Day came around, they should treat her with a little more care, because her mother had gone missing.

The vignette expresses the degree of investment that the Horizon staff has with families in their district and also, how much newcomer families trust Horizon with sensitive information like the tragic death of a mother who was trying to reunite with her children but died while crossing the border. The vignette also describes how Horizon intercedes on behalf of the grief-stricken father to explain to his daughter's teachers what had befallen the girl's mother. As educators, we may see students who are withdrawn and may not know the enormous burdens they may carry with them to school. Claudia's vignette is an important reminder to all who work with students that withdrawal, even misbehaving, may not be malicious in intent but unsuccessful ways of coping with tragedy and/or trauma.

"Everyone Is Community:" Horizon's Unifying Theoretical-Practical Principle

The task of meeting basic and complex needs for thousands of families is monumental, but the Horizon leaders' ability to connect, combine, and empower has established a community that can accomplish the goal of meeting the many needs of a growing and diverse community. They do not ask, "Why are you here?" They ask, "How can we help?" While talking with Dave, Ruth, commenting on the scope of services provided, said: "We have a bigger thing going on here. We're not just at one school. We have all of this." The issues within the Hatlen community, the country, and the world are big, but so are the partnerships, services, and relationships created by Horizon. Supporting newcomer families is a difficult task that requires resources, staff, funding, empathy, and time, but it is possible. While many school districts in the United States are unable to provide adequate support for their newcomer families, HSD's Horizon demonstrates that, with the proper structure and leadership, meeting the needs of newcomer families is achievable. However, Horizon is notable not just for the scope of its district-wide community school efforts or for effective implementation, but also for the resilient community, the genuine relationships of care and support they have built. By centering the humanity of all people, Horizon fosters relationships of genuine care to build the trust necessary to meet people's needs — especially the complex needs of a newcomer family. Identifying the assets in everyone, including community members, school personnel, and community organizations, allows Horizon to leverage the community to share collective goods and services on a district-wide scale. Horizon empowers all members of the community, especially those with shared identities, stories, and language, to help create a community for newcomers. The leaders of Horizon have a strong vision of creating community for everyone in Hatlen and a philosophy of always meeting the need. Pairing this vision with tireless implementation creates partnerships, structures, and relationships that not only achieve the initial goal of meeting needs but also inspire others to join in the collective action working toward the Horizon vision for Hatlen's community.

With the current increased visibility of immigration in the United States, the ability to meet the needs of all families in diverse situations is deeply important for schools and school districts. Experience with an influx of immigrant families and increased needs to meet inside and outside of school are not unique to Hatlen School District and Horizon. But Horizon's success in Hatlen may very well be a one-of-a-kind response to greater numbers of immigrants moving to a community. Shining a spotlight on a school district working tirelessly to meet the needs of its community can provide information and ideas on how to replicate Horizon's success in other school districts and the communities those districts serve. The values employed by the community schools leader, the family engagement specialists, and all of their community partners were established at the inception of Horizon and, regardless of the people involved or the environment in need of improvement, those principles persist through every conversation and decision. Horizon does not need to reconstruct their approach to meeting community needs because their organization was created for perpetual reconstruction as it constantly adapts and readapts to changing community circumstances and emerging needs of community members. As we move further into this current era of ICE raids and widespread deportation fears, further studies of Horizon-like structures of hope, safety, and support become necessary. However, the members of Horizon are clear that their operations transcend headlines and crises. Schools play a pivotal role in the lives of many newcomer families, and the community school model expands avenues of support. Participatory Action Research partnerships between a college and a school district provide university-level researchers the opportunity to inquire into and experience creation of community cultural wealth by building mutually beneficial research partnerships centering respect, trust, and knowledge-sharing. Future studies exploring the impact of district-wide community school models on newcomer families can shed light on social processes that shift division into community, fear into hope, and powerlessness into potential.

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