EXPLORING POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PHILADELPHIA-AREA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND GRADUATES’ LATER LIFE PATHWAYS: ARE THESE SCHOOLS HELPING TO SHAPE SERVICE-ORIENTED CITIZENS?

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Patricia Boyle
DEDICATION

To my grandmother, the late Virginia Henon Cassidy, who encouraged the pursuit of education, particularly for the women in our family. Gram believed we could never have enough education, travel, world languages and lifelong learning.

To my mother, the late Joan Elizabeth Cassidy, who is undoubtedly telling everyone in Heaven about her only daughter’s accomplishment, and to the many of you in our family who had to bear with this sort of thing for decades. Joanie was the most saintly patient and giving woman who wanted only the absolute best for me.

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To my Angel, my son, Riley Patrick Boyle. Not a day goes by that doesn’t begin and end with you. You are in my heart and soul forever. Believing we’ll be together again someday helps me live my life and my faith in a way that I hope makes you proud.
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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING POTENTIAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PHILADELPHIA-AREA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND GRADUATES’ LATER LIFE PATHWAYS: ARE THESE SCHOOLS HELPING TO SHAPE SERVICE-ORIENTED CITIZENS?

Patricia Boyle
Michael C. Johanek

As the continuous search for educational alternatives in Philadelphia intensifies, one only has to look at the current landscape, our surrounding communities, and fiscal pressures to appreciate the need for better alternatives to our public system. This study examines one such “alternative,” though long-standing education model, Philadelphia’s Catholic schools. Within these schools, perhaps we have leaders and a system that may be positioned to play an even greater role in providing a set of experiences that may impact the later life pathways of graduates, potentially predisposing them to community or civic service interests in their adult lives. I have completed an analysis of recollections of Catholic high school graduates across multiple graduation eras and collected insights from their narratives, to help illuminate those potential connection points. Further, unlike many previous longitudinal and correlational studies, in both Catholic and secular schools, I have conducted qualitative research to map earlier student experiences to current-day life practices and dispositions. Through surveys, one-on-one interviews and a focus group with graduates of Philadelphia’s area high schools, I am surfacing findings to
determine if graduates are embracing certain values from their experiences and whether
and how this may have helped shaped their civic and community interests years later.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Over the past 15 years, as a direct result of the No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, federal education officials have designated thousands of our nation’s public schools as failing. With state and local revenue shortfalls, continuing education budget cuts, and workforce reduction pressures (Caskey & Kuperberg, 2014), the landscape has proven ripe for alternatives in Pre-K to 12 education. NCLB’s negative impacts on public education fostered accelerated growth of the charter school networks, such as Mastery Charter Schools, advocates of which cite the nearly 10,000-student success stories as the ultimate solution and model structure (Denvir, 2014). NCLB’s more contemporary successor is the recently enacted “Every Student Succeeds Act,” or ESSA, signed into law by Former President Obama on December 10, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). With the goal of upholding and advancing equity, furthering accountability, and conquering implementation hurdles, many are optimistic that struggling schools may gain the long overdue support required to effectively prepare students for college and careers. Simply stated, the act proposes, “to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to ensure that every child achieves” (ed.gov, 2017), perhaps indicating a broader trend toward examination of school alternatives.

Today, U.S. educational leaders continuously pursue better models for our nation’s schools, with emphasis on underserved community students. The Catholic school system, with its long history of educational quality and community contribution, may be a model worth devoting increased attention. Of particular interest may be the track record
of our nation’s Catholic schools in producing graduates with the skills, predispositions and commitments to community and civic service in later life. This study examined those claims more closely by seeking and inviting the voices of Catholic high school graduates across decades to learn more about their experiences and inform the broader education reform conversation.

Of the many contemporary written works defining the macro U.S. educational landscape, Ravitch (2010) perhaps provided one of the strongest, clearest portraits of the struggles between providing access to quality education and ensuring the right models to fund it successfully. In Philadelphia, though the region overall indisputably offers high school breadth, options, and quality choices, most would agree that the well chronicled challenges of current economic constraints outweigh most other considerations of quality, accessible education. While the school district of Philadelphia is the 8th largest in our nation, public education is viewed as continually in crisis. Several studies have been conducted with goals of analyzing and recommending innovative solutions to reverse dramatic budget deficits, resolve union breakdowns, and preserve waning teacher benefits (Christman, Gold, & Herrold, 2006; Sanchez, 2014).

Caskey and Kuperberg (2014) described Philadelphia’s fiscal scenario: “The danger is that the district may have entered a vicious cycle in which persistent financial crises encourage more parents to leave the city or move their children to charter schools, further undermining the district’s financing and reinforcing the exodus of students.” Whether one is an advocate or not of charter networks, the reality is that quality education in Philadelphia remains inaccessible due to limited seating in these schools, in addition to highly regarded magnet schools, like Masterman, often considered among the
District’s better quality publicly operated schools. Some educational leaders agree that Philadelphia needs both dramatic improvements to publicly operated schools and quality alternatives to public education, given the challenges the system faces. School District of Philadelphia Superintendent William Hite is quoted as saying, “The crisis is real . . . if there is not a more significant investment in the education of the children of Philadelphia, the future is at risk” (Sanchez, 2013).

The search for options in urban education. One potentially viable alternative is the collection of Philadelphia-area Catholic schools, consisting of Archdiocesan, independent and national network schools. Although there is a tuition requirement involved, such an option could potentially be a solution for families able to make financial commitments to secure their children’s educational futures and/or for families qualifying for tuition assistance and desiring a Catholic education. In the broader conversation of school choice, the Catholic school options, particularly in the city of Philadelphia, may hold real promise and genuine opportunities for our young people, as viable alternatives to struggling district schools. One key element of Catholic school education that warrants further examination is the experience of students in those schools beyond academic development.

Research Topic / Goal

My topic of interest focused on positive individual characteristics that may be fostered in today’s Philadelphia Catholic high schools. I researched alumni perceptions of how the educational experiences provided in these high schools may have impacted their values development generally, and their interests in community service specifically, both as students and later, as graduates. Ultimately, I was interested in isolating aspects of the
formal and informal curriculum that may be drivers with specific impacts upon the
disposition and commitment to community service. And while this study does not attempt
to be comparative across institutional types, there is no denying that we are living in a
divisive era of education today. Typically, community clashes center on funding
constraints, pressures on technological innovation or academic performance comparisons.
Few experts, policy-makers, and educators are looking through the lens of the “student
experience,” and linking that experience to the set of decisions, dispositions, and
commitments those students go on to pursue in later life. This study provides a potential
bridge across those divisions, centered upon identifying outcomes of interest to parents
across their ideological divides. The goal of offering this bridge is to introduce an
alternate lens through which to evaluate “best fit” schools for their children.

**Defining “Service” in the interest of this study – What it is and what it is not.**

One dimension of service, commonly referred to as “community service,” has nearly as
many definitions as there are community leaders interested in its benefits. The simplest,
most refreshing definition I have uncovered to date is from the Oxford Dictionary (2016),
“voluntary work intended to help people.” While this tends to call to mind images of
charitable works for those less fortunate, the purpose of service, in the context of Catholic
schools, may more likely resemble Pope Francis’ message:

> An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. Pope Francis, in his homily during the September visit to Philadelphia went on to distinguish genuine community service from what it is not: “self-serving” service. He warned of this faux variety of service as the act of performing seemingly generous deeds for the purposes of making oneself feel gratified and to be noticed by others, while perhaps even “looking to one side or the other to see what our neighbor is doing or not doing” (usccb.org, 9/20/15, Mass).
Another dimension of service predisposition examined was more closely associated with democratic citizenship or “civic engagement.” Renowned political theorist and University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutmann, described what she considered the most significant influence in citizenship preparation. In *Democratic Education* (1987), she referred to school environments, where continuous occasions present themselves for students to debate and resolve issues of importance to their educational communities. Gutmann referred to these practices as cultivating “the morality of association,” defining core virtues including “empathy, trust, benevolence, and fairness” (p. 61). In her related work, *Why Should Schools Care About Civic Education?* (2000), Gutmann described civic-minded practices of teaching students to resolve differences with respect, and with neither discrimination nor repression.

And what study on the impact of a Catholic education would be complete without seeking to understand the perspective of the highest-ranking leader of the global Catholic community? Pope Francis weighs in on civic engagement as well:

People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens, not as a mob swayed by the powers that be. Let us not forget that responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. (11/24/13, no. 220)

The Pontiff’s suggestion puts forth a refreshing, direct guidepost for anyone who may have wrestled with the connection between the church’s expectations beyond purely conventional religious values, and instead underscores the importance, in a moral sense, of playing an active role in one’s community.

The goal of my research was to examine how alumni of area Catholic high schools view their educational experiences in light of their life pathways, with a focus
upon how those experiences may have identified and cultivated an interest in, and commitment to, serving the communities around them. If so, how does this develop? What, if anything, are Catholic secondary schools doing, supporting, and cultivating, particularly as related to community / civic service and political engagement?

**Emergence and Relevance of Non-Cognitive Studies**

Importantly, recent years have seen increasing interest and attention to research data on the topic of “non-cognitive,” or social emotional skills (Duckworth, 2013; McKee & Boyatzis, 2005) purported to contribute significantly to success during and after a student’s school years. The argument of how vital these “non-cog” skills may be in later life has raised educators’ and policy-makers’ collective interests in examining their development. Similarly, research continues to identify factors driving the cultivation of these skills, though little consensus has been reached on “how” to develop them (Zernike, 2016). There appears to be a strengthening national discussion advocating for the power of these skills, with continuing inquiry beyond the contained walls of education.

The key goal is to clarify which experiences and learned life skills matter most for the investigation of these topics, while understanding how to best develop them. Related concepts, such as “grit” – the ability to have resilience in life’s toughest challenges, supported by loyalty to one’s commitments (Duckworth, 2016), “emotional intelligence” – learned abilities, such as self-awareness and empathy (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 1998; McKee, 2015) and “moral intelligence” - the ability to differentiate right from wrong (Lennick & Kiel, 2011) have brought attention even in the popular media to cultivating these skills beyond schooling. So while many of today’s leading educational experts are interested in promoting these further and recognizing school leaders who
accomplish these goals best, what is particularly significant is the level of increasing interest in developing these qualities in our youth. Why all the fuss, when seemingly grave societal problems, such as poverty and crime continue to plague our communities? Perhaps, there is a simple, “Tough” (2012) answer, and it trumps the dividing lines between the advantaged and disadvantaged, the well educated and not so much.

Character strengths that matter so much to young people’s success are not innate; they don’t appear in us magically, as a result of good luck or good genes. And they are not simply a choice . . . they are molded, in measurable and predictable ways, by the environment in which children grow up. (Tough, 2012, p. 196)

With increasing interest in the educational field devoted to assessing measures of non-cognitive skills, the importance of this study is its ability to examine the drivers of these skills more closely. Put another way, illuminating these experiences in Catholic secondary schooling and mapping resulting characteristics that may drive service interest and commitment in later life could present a way to understand further another type of educational outcome. Ultimately, as parents and guardians struggle with their children to discern the respective value of different school types, perhaps this inquiry into this aspect of values development may illuminate a set of observable experiences offered by Catholic high schools – experiences that may be shown to influence graduates’ later life pathways.

Catholic Schooling – Defining Focus of Study

To access a variety of views across Catholic school types and timeframes, I fielded this research with alumni from a cross-section of Philadelphia Archdiocesan secondary schools, with varied socio-economic student body compositions and graduation eras. For those unfamiliar with “the Catholic school world,” it is probably
useful to briefly note that there are three distinct varieties commonly referred to as Catholic schools in the Philadelphia region. Each has varying economic and student population models that distinguish them from one another.

First is the most tenured and populated model, known as the [Arch]diocesan high schools, whose alumni served as the participant source of this study. The overall Philadelphia Archdiocesan system, comprised today of 121 elementary, 18 secondary, six early-childhood and four schools of special education, is comprised of a student body numbering close to 45,000, with just under 14,000 of those in high school (Archdiocese of Philadelphia, 2017). Tuition for the high schools in this system hovers around the $8,000 per year mark, with many families struggling to meet increasingly rising costs.

The Office of Catholic Education is the leadership body for this system, with Christopher Mominey as Secretary for Catholic Education, reporting to Bishop Michael J. Fitzgerald and ultimately, to Archbishop Charles J. Chaput. Philadelphia’s Archdiocese is one of 33 in our nation today (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017).

Second, there are Philadelphia-area independent Catholic schools, most often, single-gender, with tuitions more than double, with some triple and a few nearing quadruple, that of the Archdiocesan schools. Their funding source is a combination of endowments, donations, and tuitions, with missions similarly “Catholic” though bolstered with premium positioning and funding. The Philadelphia area has 18 private Catholic high schools, with just over 7,500 students total. These schools are each independently led, with independent boards, though they maintain their connection to the Archdiocese in all matters of religious instruction. Independent Catholic schools otherwise direct their own curriculum and programs.
Third, there is a unique national network school, known as Christo Rey, a system of 30 schools in 19 states across the U.S., serving some of the neediest families in their home cities since 1995. Through a unique model of work-study, Christo Rey allows students to subsidize a “private-like” high school education at a fraction of the cost. The supplemental costs per student are met through the work-study program, in partnership with each city’s leading corporations, enabling students to gain valuable work experience and marketable skills during their high school years. Admissions are limited and based on a combination of need, demonstrated work ethic, and family commitment. Philadelphia’s Christo Rey, established in 2011, recently graduated its first-ever alumni class in June of 2015 where 100% of the graduating class was accepted to college, as were the members of the Class of 2016 (Christo Rey Network Schools, 2017).

Because Christo Rey is a relative newcomer in Philadelphia’s Catholic education landscape, and recognizing the independent nature of the area’s private high schools, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia seemed the natural choice for a study of this nature. I envisioned this research as narrative or life-course oriented. Its ultimate objective was to examine graduates’ schooling experiences, and perhaps assess potential connections, if any, between these experiences during their high school years and their dispositions to community service and civic engagement in later years. In considering how these current high schools, together, form the region’s collection of Catholic secondary education landscape, it is perhaps also useful to place them into a wider context, providing a sense of their history and how these schools have evolved to present day.
Background and Context

**Historical Literature on Catholic education in the U.S.** “At a time when IT and marketing mavens promise data-driven personalization of our online experiences, history forces us to be ‘led outward from our present selves’”(Johanek, 2001).

Such is the case with the 400+ year history of Catholic Education, noteworthy particularly given that this system of education has a history that pre-dates the founding of the U.S. itself. While many rich descriptions of the earliest beginnings of Catholic schooling in this country are available, perhaps one of the most impactful is Andy Smarick’s (2011) historical portrait. With the first Catholic school, founded in 1606 by the Franciscan Order of priests in what is currently St. Augustine, FL, focused on teaching students Christianity plus the essentials of reading and writing, growth was slow at first. Colonies, families, and church leaders each brought their own perspective to education and the result was an inconsistent, unregulated mixture that catered to disparate interests.

The late 1600s saw the emergence of The Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits, who in 1677 founded the first two Catholic preparatory schools for boys in Maryland. Often credited as “the first teaching order within the Catholic church” (O’Malley, 2000), the order went on to create a model that differentiated its brand of education from other seemingly like approaches in three unique ways. First, the Jesuits officially determined school resourcing and operations to be part of their ministry; second, they pursued the development and sustenance of those institutions; and third, the Jesuits set out to teach young men qualities that would equip them for actual careers in the world, not simply religious vocations, as other orders of the time commonly pursued.
In Philadelphia, at about this same time, the city’s founding father, William Penn, advocated for his “holy experiment of religious toleration” (Archdiocese of Philadelphia website, 2017). Colonial Philadelphia in 1682 became a refugee sanctuary for those undergoing religious persecution, both Catholics and other non-Protestant religions as well. The Catholic population numbered only 40 people by the time the first Catholic church, Old St. Joseph’s, was built in 1733 in what is now considered “Old City” Philadelphia. St. Joseph’s Church was the only site anywhere in the English-speaking world where celebrating Catholic mass was considered legal (Tierney, 2016). Old Saint Mary’s Church arrived on the scene in 1763, followed by Holy Trinity Church in 1789, serving Philadelphia’s first German-speaking congregation, and establishing itself as this country’s first national parish. By the following year, 1790, Philadelphia’s Catholic population was reported to have grown to about 8,000 (Archdiocese of Philadelphia website, 2017).

Globally, by the late 18th century, the education network of Jesuits counted an estimated 800 institutions on its growing roster. Secondary education, specifically, became a hallmark of “The Teaching Order.” Further, one of The Order’s distinguishing characteristics in these schools had been a promoted commitment to access for any student, regardless of their social class or socioeconomic status. (Equitable as that mission may have seemed, this was still decades before this inclusiveness extended to women and minority students.) At the same time, The Order met with the pressures of global suppression, as Pope Clement XIV officially opposed its teachings and practices. It would take more than four decades for the Society to be restored as a globally recognized order by Pope Pius VII (O’Malley, 2014).
A defining mission of Jesuit education was then (and is today) the belief that a solid education in the humanities would lay the groundwork for young people to form “pietas” (O’Malley, 2000). This term for the ancient Roman virtue is translated as respectful, dedicated, loyal, devoted, or simply being an individual of good moral character, often associated with the Jesuit commitment to developing a worldwide community of “men and women for others.”

In the early 1800s, schools affiliated with local parishes, referred to as parochial schools, arrived on the scene, amidst the backdrop of a national population that was almost entirely Protestant. At the time, only 3% of U.S. residents were registered Catholics. As Maryland and Pennsylvania were known for their support, or more accurately, tolerance of religious diversity, a handful of parochial schools, led by those in the religious vocations, struggled to operate within resources.

Prior to the Civil War, as Catholic schools expanded to educate more of the nation’s children, particularly those arriving as immigrants, there were an estimated 200 Catholic schools. That rapidly changed in the latter decades of the 19th century as the immigrant population rose. Many children were denied an education due to a lack of schooling space in the country’s largest, most populous cities, such as New York and Chicago. St. Mary’s, built in 1782, is considered by many to be the first official Catholic school in the city. By 1808, Michael Egan, O.F.M, became the first bishop of Philadelphia’s new diocese, which then spanned the entirety of Pennsylvania, Delaware, plus western and southern New Jersey, serving 30,000 Catholics with only 11 priests. Beginning in 1852, when the Philadelphia parochial school system began, the city’s fourth bishop, John Nepomucen Neumann (1811-1860) led the charge. By 1890, Roman
Catholic High School replaced the Cahill High School for Boys and opened as the first, free diocesan high school in the U.S. (Ryan, 2016). In 1908, Bishop Patrick Ryan, Philadelphia’s second archbishop, announced a commitment to build the city’s first all-girls Catholic high school, established in 1912 and later to be named John W. Hallahan High School for Girls. Bishop Ryan also participated in the founding of Mother Katherine Drexel’s house of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, serving Philadelphia’s Native American and African American residents (Archdiocese of Philadelphia website, 2017).

Nationally, by the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, many Catholic schools throughout our nation began to benefit from public dollars, most often at the local level and informally, to help educate the citizens of the communities. This was not to last, however. The fervent debate between separation of church and state, in addition to the rise of “common schools” (today’s public schools) meant for many that government funding would be limited only to non-religious institutions. Fueling the fire of that debate was a rising anti-immigrant sentiment, and a quest for incoming citizens to assimilate to American culture (Bauch, 2014). Understanding the mission, role, and function of these schools, while appreciating the pressures placed upon them to educate a certain population, contributes to an appreciation of how Catholic schools served a truly public interest.

In the earliest days of the 20th century, America had become 16% Catholic, as the majority of immigrants were from European countries with largely Catholic populations. Many states, such as Illinois and Wisconsin, displayed their anti-immigrant sentiment by enacting laws against foreign language education and further, against families’ rights to
choose to even send their children to Catholic schools. By 1925, a Supreme Court
decision, Pierce v. Society of Sisters, rendered states’ regulations requiring children to
attend only common schools as unconstitutional. By 1930, Catholic schools in this
country numbered over 10,000. By the mid-1960s, the post baby-boom generation saw
13,000 schools educating over 5 million K-12 students.

At this same time in Philadelphia, Archbishop John Joseph Krol served as
Archbishop and later, Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In an era of sweeping
social changes, Cardinal Krol demonstrated a continuous commitment to racial harmony
and equity, establishing a Commission on Human Relations and leading a Catholic
population in the city and surrounding suburbs that exceeded 1.35 million. (Archdiocese
of Philadelphia website, 2017.)

As meteoric as the rise of Catholic schools was, the decline of the system was
even more accelerated. The 1960s and 70s began to see urban, middle-class families plan
their exodus from cities, flocking to suburbs, pursuing promises of safe, well-located,
accessible, no-cost public schools. By the late 1970s, Catholic school tuitions were on a
rapid rise, with aging facilities needing overhaul, requiring costly maintenance or
replacement. Meanwhile, human capital costs to educate and operate these schools began
shifting from virtually “free labor” models of teachers with religious vocations to higher-
cost union and private sector professional teachers and administrators. Further, the
character of the schools was perceived as changing, with fewer religious leaders at the
helm, staffing of largely lay teachers, and student populations that were largely non-
Catholic. Government interventions, such as vouchers, tax credits, and tuition assistance
were sought to fill the funding gaps, but closures due to economic instability were unavoidable.

Throughout the 1980s, Catholic schools continued to decline in number and enrollment, but the most substantial hit was still to come – the arrival of charter schools in 1991. While that chapter in our nation’s educational history is its own body of research, it bears mentioning for three specific determining factors: (a) urban America had few to no options, as many inner city schools were low-performing and fiscally strapped, (b) urban residents did not have resources to leave the city and move to suburban counties with better alternatives, and (c) charter schools, though limited in student capacity, were free-of-charge to families, provided the students were fortunate enough to be admitted.

The Philadelphia region, while historically a leader in terms of its Catholic schooling system, was among the hardest-hit by these negative factors, with its speed of decline in Catholic education a woeful outcome. While other Catholic school systems, such as New York, Newark, Boston, and Chicago experienced similar challenges, Philadelphia arguably suffered a virtual free-fall, even while the Catholic population in the region continued to grow. The onset of charter schools and skyrocketing Catholic school tuition costs packed a punch even Rocky Balboa could not combat. The early 1990s in Philadelphia also brought an exodus of working-class families to Philadelphia’s suburbs. These towns offered respectable, award-winning public schools, and it soon became an increasingly insurmountable hurdle for Catholic schools to compete with “free” education.
Flash forward to present-day: The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, now operating 148 schools in the five-county area, reports a K-12 student population decline in the past school year of about 2,100 students, from roughly 59,600 to 57,500. Archdiocesan officials consider this 3.5-percent decline as a positive trend compared with recent historical losses of 7+ percent annually of their student populations (Archdiocese of Philadelphia website, 2015). Only 5 short years ago, Philadelphia Archdiocesan students numbered around 68,300 (McCrorry, 2014). In recent years, following fiscal struggles and changing demographics, school closures and mergers have dominated the headlines. A mere 52% of those attending Catholic grade schools in Philadelphia go on to attend Catholic secondary schools, with the drop-off commonly attributed to families’ inabilitys to meet the staggering increase in tuition costs, combined with the competition from charter schools.

Rationale and Significance

As these schools are Catholic-led, and recognizing that the religious aspect may be a perceived barrier for non-Catholics, this study attempts to understand the extent to which Catholic education develops and enhances character and values-based qualities that influence students, as they make personal and professional choices in later life. Clearly, there are myriad dimensions of character and values-based qualities; no singular study is likely suited to capture all of the influences, life experiences and developmental impacts that contribute to an individual’s formation during these critical adolescent years. Recognizing this reality and for the purposes of this study, I proposed to isolate the aspect of commitment to community service, with a lens toward understanding which educational experiences may have served to drive that motivation, both then and later, in
their adult lives. In its simplest definitions above, I regard the signals of this service disposition in later life to be activities outside the home environment, including community, civic, and political, pursued for purposes other than social or commercial business.

One main question was constructed, with sub-questions designed to help further define these developmental, service-oriented experiences and to tease out how different components that may have made lasting impacts. This question set sought to inform thinking about how and whether specific experiences, as part of students’ Catholic school curriculum may be beneficial differentiators, as graduates become adult citizens. Examples of those school experiences may include volunteer clubs, service leadership and formalized community service days and importantly, the less overt, less “packaged” experiences that result from expectations, behavioral norms, and affirmations that may happen quietly, yet consistently in these schools. My intention is to avoid prescribing or pre-ordering these experiences into any sort of “importance hierarchy” or prescriptive outcome. It seems preferable to allow the research to guide / narrow which experiences are recalled and relayed as being most frequently correlated to continuing community service commitment beyond the Catholic high school years.

By fielding this research over the course of several months and with alumni of mixed demographics across graduation eras, I hoped that graduates’ narratives would paint portraits articulating how their educational experiences impacted later life decisions and pathways. These softer, experiential sets of feedback may vary over time. As such, an aspect of my interest in assessing these impacts was examining how one cohort of graduates may differ from another and if there were any recognizable patterns in
narratives over time. For example, were the influences and experiences for alumni who graduated in the 1960s or 1970s stronger or unique in any ways, compared to what was recounted by more recent graduates, such as those in the 1990s or 2000s? What, if anything, may have changed from one decade to another, and were there any significant patterns related to propensity for civic engagement and/or commitment to community service, including differences in alumni recollections of how it may have developed?

While there are several important studies probing the differentiating factors of Catholic education and their relationship to improved academic success and/or career earnings (LePore & Warren, 1997; Riordan, 1985), these only paint a partial portrait of Catholic school impacts on later life pathways. Much of the focus of these studies is on students from minority or urban communities, highlighting how Catholic schools provide safety, security, quality education and a sense of community, which are valued by these students and their families (Kim, 2010; Merritt, 2008; Neal, 1994). These consistently reported “outcomes” have been well chronicled and met with little dispute. What’s being measured is the expected set of “industry standards” in terms of performance, both at the individual school and student levels.

Unlike research on the potential benefits for economically disadvantaged students, this study took an approach that is decidedly different. First, the research was broader in terms of demographics, examining graduates from a variety of socio-economic conditions. Second, rather than place the spotlight on the “here and now,” with emphasis on protected, positive learning environments, the research was more focused on decision-making of graduates during later life pathways. The study was designed to examine how graduates’ potential predispositions to supporting their communities may have been
influenced by unique, formative experiences during their time in Philadelphia’s Catholic high schools. Third, and perhaps most importantly, was the significant lens of examining these high school experiences by learning from alumni what they recollect from a non-cognitive standpoint. What do they remember learning outside of pure academics? What lessons were taught in those schools and the surrounding church-related organizations? What behaviors were modeled? What expectations were reinforced that may have altered their views of their community responsibilities and their sense of responsibility in the world? Why do they believe these experiences matter?

If Catholic schools are no longer teaching students solely about faith formation (i.e., the notion of creating citizens of the Catholic faith) and are instead working toward a mission of quality education, regardless of students’ religion or economic status, then identifying these unique experiential elements of Catholic secondary education may help articulate a differentiated position for the schools, allowing them to take a distinct place in Philadelphia’s challenged system. Further, if the students that these schools are educating are demonstrably more diverse, not just socio-economically, but by heritage or nationality, then is there also a significant opportunity for culturally engaging pedagogy to offer these values to more families who may desire this educational experience?

**Research Questions**

My research question and sub-questions are, What, if any, is the relationship between the Catholic secondary school experience and a graduate’s disposition toward and engagement in community service later in life?

(a) What are some specific elements of those Catholic high school experiences that alumni identify as associated with commitment to community service or civic
engagement in their later adult lives? How and why do they believe those early experiences contributed to their interests in service as adults?

(b) Are there notable differences across time, with graduates of different eras reporting distinct types of experiences and impacts?

**Positionality**

As to significance realized by my own professional and personal experiences with Philadelphia’s Catholic schools, I can say with confidence that I have witnessed the life-changing impacts these schools can bring. In my experience, as an only child of a single and hard-working mother, my Catholic school experience “saved me,” though not in the dramatic, overt ways one might expect. Catholic schools and the related organizations that surrounded my education define pivotal aspects of that experience. Adults in our parish community, activity leaders at Catholic Social Service sites and fellow students and coaches in Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) sports leagues, together became my siblings, my 2nd parents, my cheerleaders, and ultimately, my college sponsors.

Catholic schools and one in particular, later in life, became the Grief Counselor and support system to my young children and husband when we lost our 6-year old son to a tragic accident in May of 2006. Sadly, but no doubt inspirationally, Catholic school communities, not simply our own, but several across the country, became our sources of daily encouragement to pursue happy lives when all else appeared dark. Catholic schools have become a choice we’ve made over and over for decades. In my personal view, and certainly as a parent of five, I value Catholic education as the single best investment I’ve made in life.
Professionally, my work with the Faith in the Future Foundation afforded hundreds of first hand experiences to see real-world family challenges, heartbreaks, and triumphs. In my position as Chief Marketing Officer, I had the opportunity to help a school system focused on turnaround and revitalization promote its lead qualities, match merit-based scholarship funding to needy families and offer bright futures in cases where choices appeared bleak. While there were, and are, many families for whom the tuitions did not present hurdles, the nature of my work presented me with those who needed the most help and were willing to work for access to Catholic education, believing in its promise. Children and adolescents who may not otherwise have seen clear paths to opportunities have leveraged their Catholic school experiences to build and advance their identities, pursue meaningful careers, provide service, continuing these patterns across generations.

Specifically, if parents and guardians were to see specific positive differentiators, these schools may be perceived as more viable educational choices, regardless of whether prospective students are Catholic or not. The Catholic high-school option may be particularly attractive in areas where charter admissions are severely limited or where neighborhood school quality has been assessed as failing. Clearly, there is still the funding question, as the gap between tuitions and average family earnings remains wide. Leaders of funding sources, who may share the vision of these values, could be inspired to offer additional support, if these schools are able to demonstrate clear connections between experiences provided and alumni’s commitment to serve their communities.

Recognizing my positionality, I intended to mitigate any potential considerations that could interfere with my ability to be objective. Steps I took to minimize researcher
bias included having a peer review process for transcripts, including a co-facilitator and note-taker in focus group settings and soliciting assistance and independent review in the coding process.

In the next chapter, I examine the potential link between secondary schooling (both Catholic and non-) and community service/civic engagement, referring to the current state of knowledge on my core research question.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK/LITERATURE REVIEW

Beyond the introductory observations above, I foresaw two additional bodies of literature forming the foundational backdrop of my study. By examining the existing research, I’ve gained an understanding about how to best bracket the learning and importantly, to identify what remains to be studied that is of value to the field. These collections of research examine potential evidence of distinct impacts during adolescence that may create interest and commitment in community service pursuits, in a manner that endures in later life. Further, these studies include examinations of how that may happen and what linkages may exist between those high school experiences and the set of decisions and journeys pursued by graduates as they create and proceed along with their later life pathways.

The two areas include:

1. Recent literature on documented and potential benefits of Catholic education as directly connected to higher incidences of service commitment, and studies that counter these views, by claiming no discernible differences.

2. Literature connecting the secondary school experience with moral development generally and long-term commitment to community service specifically, including civic engagement. This includes research on the role of non-cognitive skills development, with a focus on community service disposition, in order to chronicle what is known about how that propensity may develop over time, for different populations. A review of each research area is below, with a synthesis following, summarizing what appears to be known as a result of these studies, with the goal of locating this research.
Relation of Catholic Schools to the Development of Service Dispositions

Research on non-cognitive outcomes of Catholic education. To set the stage for the type of Catholic school experience I investigated further with alumni, I recalled the impact of narratives relayed by educational leader, renowned author and University of Pennsylvania Professor, Dr. Gerald Campano:

The second classroom runs parallel to, and is sometimes in the shadow of, the official first classroom. It is an alternative pedagogical space. It is part of regular instructional hours, but it also occurs before school, after school, during recess, during lunch and occasionally on weekends and extends beyond the immediate classroom walls, into homes and community spaces. (Campano, 2007)

Where, then, is that second classroom and how can we go about understanding what happens there? The original context of Campano’s construct was derived from immersive experiences he had as a teacher, with elementary school children, from urban, largely immigrant communities. Anchored in a similar construct, what lessons may be applied in examining the Catholic high school “second classrooms” and the surrounding experiences that contribute to adolescent learning?

There are multiple popular texts, articles, and reports positioning Catholic school systems as district alternatives, albeit requiring significant tuition. As school alternatives, the literature frequently compares these schools to charters in terms of quality, though the latter remain free to students who can access their limited seats and geographic locations. These writings highlight key questions on how to effectively sustain (or “save”) the Catholic school system amidst increasing pressures on budgets and declining enrollment (Dent, 2016; Freedman, 2010; Meyer, 2007). These popular pieces, while grabbing headlines and spurring conversation, are strong examples of the agreed-upon themes of the Catholic-public-charter debates. As frequently as these articles and
editorials nurture popular discussion, they fail to originate new research or introduce any new solutions.

Against the backdrop of this popular content is a body of academic literature representing findings from studies over the past few decades, with the goal of addressing whether there are advantages afforded by private and specifically, Catholic schools vs. their public counterparts. Of particular interest, beyond traditional cognitive development, is the question of whether and how Catholic schools may prepare high school students to appreciate and develop their civic identities leading them to value community pursuits in later life. In *Making Civics Count: Citizenship Education for a New Generation*, Campbell (2012) elevated this inquiry to one beyond simply the question of which sector of school provides better preparation, resulting in more positive impacts. He instead advocated for an investigation into how schools are accomplishing these goals, with a focus on what can be learned from their successes, shifting the measurement stick from typical testing and curriculum debates, to what can be replicated to enhance civic appreciation and community involvement.

The late, prominent sociologist, James Coleman and his co-author Thomas Hoffer (1987) contended that Catholic secondary schooling was proven to yield better student outcomes than public high schools. Further, the authors argued that Catholic students, in fact, learn more and have lower high school dropout rates than their public counterparts. Findings from this work, based on the “High School and Beyond” (HBS) data, were collected in two stages, 1980 and 1982, across 1100 secondary schools. The boldness of these Catholic school superiority claims launched a debate nationally with policy-makers, educators, and academic experts raising a number of critiques about the results.
Referring to the reliability of what was dubbed “the Catholic school effect,” researchers such as Wenglinski (2007), Hallinan and Kubicheck (2010), and Heckman and Kautz (2012) questioned the validity of the claims, asserting that selection bias (introduction of school choice variable, present for Catholic school students / parents, while absent for public), statistical insignificance, and critiques of using test scores vs. other measures rendered the superiority claims dubious.

Neal (1997), and Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) also identified patterns of Catholic secondary schools as uniquely capable of closing the achievement gap, with an emphasis on the abilities of these schools to succeed in communities with children in greatest need of financial, cultural or educational support. These studies relied largely on subject-matter test score data and as such, spoke to academic advantages of Catholic over public schools, such as the likelihood of higher graduation rates and college matriculation. While many public schools at that time were working to instill practical labor skills, Catholic secondary schools remained committed largely to instilling faith-based, morally centered values and college preparatory paths.

Neal (1997) described how often critics of Catholic schools contend that some of those positive outcomes are simply due to the fact that the children of Catholic school families tend to be more homogenous in nature and come from more stable, affluent families, making them easier to educate. In Neal’s (1997) extensive research, he segmented different types of student backgrounds and school types, concluding that Catholic secondary schools did, in fact, encourage higher graduation rates in both high school and later in college, in addition to supporting high wages once graduates pursued professional lives. Neal posited that Catholic school students were essentially well trained
in how to learn and motivated to achieve in order to create better lives for themselves.

The advantages were observed as particularly striking with populations of urban minority students, while only modest for urban white students and noted but very minor for suburban students. Neal’s lens for this work focused on segmented student populations by racial identity and residential areas, compared school types, and connected those experiences to graduation statistics. Neal reported that the interest in student achievement had more to do with students’ and families’ interests in bettering their own life circumstances, rather than instilling an obligation to give back. Neal’s methodology included accessing data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and the Survey of Churches and Church membership. Developing proprietary measures to replicate measures of access by county, Neal also cast a spotlight supporting greater minority student attendance, attributable to geographic location of these Catholic schools, and positioning them as accessible antidotes to failing area public institutions. What is gained from this study, particularly in its earliest years, is a segmented view of Catholic school benefits particularly for a population that many would contend has been underserved. Notably, the study is located among many others of the era (Greeley, 2002; York, 1996), each summarized below, and for years after, which underscore Catholic schools’ benefits to urban minority populations, while showing lessened effects for urban and suburban white students. Locating these in the field, we are left to wonder about answers to the persistent questions regarding how and why the schools achieve these missions, as well as what citizenry or community service benefits may have resulted. With the lapse of time, we are also left to wonder if these studies’ observed impacts will be recounted as observed
phenomena in graduates of Catholic high schools in more modern recent eras.

For example, York (1996) identified specific benefits of Catholic-school education, including academic performance, increased graduation rates, and better college acceptance percentages, especially for students in greatest financial need. In fact, according to York (1996), the more disadvantaged a student is, the more benefits and gains in achievements that highly motivated student is likely to experience by attending Catholic schools. York's assessment of the literature regarding characteristics of Catholic education credited with driving achievement for African American students, specifically described these schools as "more effective for the education of African American students" (p. 21), posited that "the deleterious affects of race, gender, and social class seem to be ameliorated, if not eradicated, in Catholic schools" (p. 39). Ultimately, while these studies help build support for the Catholic secondary experience positively impacting service predisposition, because that impact appears evident for students in greatest financial need and particularly African American students, we are left to wonder about generalizability, addressing whether that same impact may apply generally to Catholic high school students of any background. The passage of time also raises questions about the studies’ applicability to modern day Catholic schooling. This locates the research among many studies, which illuminate connection points between Catholic education and increased achievement, but only for students of need and of a specific racial background.

Garcia (2014) wrote one of the most directly relevant, current, and clearly defined pieces in which she advocated strongly for non-cognitive skills to be recognized as vital in the education process and illustrated how these develop for adolescents into adulthood.
This follows Garcia’s (2013) study in which she found non-cognitive skills to be vital predictors of cognitive development and that, in fact, the relationship between the two goes in both directions. Specifically, Garcia’s research also demonstrated how cognitive achievement contributes to the cultivation of non-cognitive skills. Using a methodology based on modeling a framework for both types of skills and then assigning indices to their outcomes, Garcia’s research was fielded with children in grades Kindergarten through 8, and enabled her to slice the data, in ways that show steady increases in this interdependency and its positive effect with students in later grades. A great asset of this study, beyond its timeliness, was the interdependent nature of the examination. Unlike previous studies in the field, Garcia’s commitment to take an integrated, vs. disintegrated view of development and outcomes took us out of the “either-or, which is more important?” discussion and instead studied inter-relationships. Further, her findings support the thesis that these skills carry great, life-long importance given their correlation with civic involvement and community participation. While hard-pressed to highlight a negative in the study, its participant base of younger students and the realistic limitations of “modeling” vs. “live study” could raise questions about applicability to high school experiences and their connections to later life pathways.

In her 2014 policy recommendations, Garcia referenced the evidence presented to illustrate interdependency between traditionally recognized cognitive and the more emergent non-cognitive, and introduced several concrete policy recommendations intended to encourage K-12 school leaders to help cultivate these vital assets as part of every students’ development. Her three-point recommendation consisted of promoting the centrality of non-cognitive skills, including disposition for service in public
education, recognizing baseline levels of non-cognitive development, and embracing natural variations in students.

Finally, Garcia outlined challenges to the advancement of a stronger non-cognitive agenda by acknowledging disparate views on defining these skills, lack of alignment on which ones matter and how, and the crucial role of coordinated future work as the anchor tenet to providing a full education. In Garcia’s stated vision, this should be undertaken by a collaborative approach, enlisting students, teachers, parents, testing agency leaders, policymakers, and foundation representatives, working together to develop strategies, supports, and protective measures. Garcia was not prescriptive in the manner in which these goals should be pursued, nor was her stated interest beyond public education or public policy. Because her interest included exploration of how these skills are developed and nurtured, including the influences outside the classroom, I would like to think that Garcia might regard this study as complementary. I envisioned this study additive to her work, deriving extra nuances from recollections of alumni as they share how their Catholic high school experiences may have impacted their interests in community involvement.

University of Chicago’s Father Andrew Greeley (1928-2013) was arguably one of the foremost experts in the field of Catholic education in addition to achieving years of acclaim as both a recognized sociologist and best-selling novelist. His work on Catholic High Schools and Minority Students (2002), published originally in 1982, contributed significant evidence about the veracity of a Catholic school effect, driven largely by the leadership role of vocations, a high caliber of teaching, and the impact of discipline as part of the culture. Greeley employed custom mathematical modeling techniques to
separate family circumstances and student’s individual work ethics from impacts of the school experience. In Greeley’s (2002) update, he referenced the two decades of research that followed to reinforce his observations, advocating even more strongly for the positive impact of Catholic schools on minority and disadvantaged youths. Advantages of Greeley’s work included the discipline applied and presented in his methodology, isolating multiple potential influence factors, and the credibility he brings based on his long-standing reputation, vocational capacity, and first-hand educational experience. Critics may argue that it is these very attributes that could imply a stance of overly positive bias in assessing these effects. Nevertheless, this research is generally located in the context of seminal works within the field, a perspective I would embrace.

There are additional studies about the myriad positive effects of Catholic education, chronicling advantages beyond those that relate to service disposition. In these studies, those advantages include benefits such as higher earning power (Hoxby, 1994; Neal, 1997), higher academic achievement than students with comparable socio-economic backgrounds (Coleman & Hoffer, 1997; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Sander, 1996), and higher college graduation rates (Benson, Yeager, Guerra, & Manno, 1986, Evans & Schwab, 1995; Neal, 1997; Sander & Krautman, 1995.) Methodologies used in these studies are generally quantitative correlations, placing available data at per student levels and pairing this with later life outcomes, once students graduate and move on to higher education and career lives. For example, in perhaps what is commonly considered the most significant limitation of these correlations, the use of standardized test scores is highlighted with its connection to graduation rates. In this common correlation example, we gain no insight into any
element of the secondary school experience, nor do we learn about any long-term impacts on service disposition in graduates’ later lives. While those correlations help lend directional encouragement for identification of other likely benefits, they are not able to probe the more qualitative factors and capture feedback on the impacts of the experience. This places this set of studies in a light of positive indicators, yet is unable to go the distance demanded in this study.

There is further significant research that speaks to common values of Catholic schools (Bryk et al., 1993; Grace, 2002; Youniss & Yates, 1996, 1997, 1999), describing how the schools articulate their offerings, in terms of character building and community involvement, to prospective families. Gerald Grace’s (2002) study was particularly notable in that he found indications of spiritual, moral, and social justice outcomes in students attending Catholic secondary schools as a result of their schools’ missions and teaching. While the study was conducted in the UK between 1997 and 2000, it lends many parallels by virtue of its methodology. Interviewing 60 lead teachers in the schools of study, largely in urban, economically challenged settings, Grace probed for connections and examples demonstrating how the experiences in these schools led teachers to observe and describe in detail multiple instances of students embracing positive moral concepts and seeing them as part of their identities. The methodology also included a broader perspective beyond just teacher narratives, in that it also included interviews with outside education evaluators and diocesan education professionals, in addition to focus groups across a base of 50 students attending 5 high schools. Where the study excels in applicability to this work, its value is in its pursuit and findings of connection points between what is experienced in these schools and how teachers and
students alike identify with impacts that are moral and community-minded in nature. The wider net cast to include outside influencers, beyond just the expected teacher and student bases also achieved a more rounded perspective than we are accustomed to seeing from similar studies in the field. Acknowledging the geographic differences and the UK’s more significant financial support model for its schools, a disadvantage for the study in this context is that we are left wondering about the depth of the parallels that can be drawn. Further, as interviews were conducted close to 20 years ago, it is difficult to assess with assurance how relevant these findings might be if these discussions were to occur in modern day times, within modern day Catholic schools.

Developmental psychologists Youniss and Yates (1996, 1997, 1999) conducted relevant research designed to address questions of whether service experience in the formative adolescent years correlated to service inclination in later years. One particularly relevant study (Youniss & Yates, 1997), conducted at an urban (Washington, DC), predominantly Black Catholic high school, focused on a programmatic approach to service learning, with the goal of identifying evidence of service disposition formation. As part of a course in social justice, 160 students performed periodic service at St. Francis, a local soup kitchen. Following each service session, they then returned to school and participated in reflective classroom discussions to exchange views on the experience. The qualitative study revealed compelling evidence showing these experiences to be formative of certain identity traits in some students, as they considered their own moral perspectives on homelessness and poverty, government involvement, and personal responsibility. The effects reported included increased senses of conscience, political awareness, and interest in civic involvement. Many described being inspired by
meaningful work and learning from program organizers, as well as from teachers and one another. Issues of race, class and gender were also prevalent with students sharing experiences of learning inter-relational skills in conversing with and “serving” the homeless residents. While compelling, the study’s methodology bounds the findings to a specific programmatic intervention in time; no longitudinal data were included. We do not know whether or how the experience delivered lasting impact beyond the short-term period in which it occurred, nor whether these traits may have continued to develop and manifest in the years to come. The study also did not indicate whether there were any other experiences within the curriculum or school life that might have promoted the social justice learning. The lack of a control group further limits our ability to sort out the relative impact of other influences, such as home, family, or neighborhood communities.

As I considered how best to locate this study in the field, it took a prominent place among defining qualitative inquiries into the positive impacts of volunteering in an urban Catholic high school setting, but did not reveal the drivers of these outcomes, nor did it provide a view of how sustaining, or not, these service dispositions turn out to be for students as they enter adulthood.

Bryk et al. (1993) reinforced previous study findings demonstrating the positive academic impacts achieved by Catholic school students, including those of all socio-economic strata. In fact, the data paints an even stronger portrait of performance for students of less privileged backgrounds, contributing to the belief that these schools have an even greater impact on those who struggle financially and have fewer resources. Reasons offered for the positive performance included the supportive environment described by students, ongoing access to one-on-one attention and a sense of greater
expectations for the students to do well in their studies and lives. The methodology employed centered on a 10-year-long in-depth study of seven well-established, though fiscally challenged Catholic high schools across the U.S. Bryk et al. accessed a set of Catholic school databases to provide more thorough information, toward the goals of both illuminating a modern day history of this sector of education while also defining which special supports the experience may afford students to help lay the groundwork for their success. Interestingly, Bryk and his colleagues draw comparisons between the Catholic school experience and teachings modeled after Dewey’s (1916) *Democracy and Education*, in which the school community has an express purpose of providing a democratic education to benefit both the individual and common society. One advantage of examining Catholic secondary schools in this light is that the approach and findings offer a construct for evaluating the potential strengths of Catholic schooling, through a lens examining more than the traditional cognitive development, including the important dimensions of community and civic engagement. A potential disadvantage, one could argue, is a possible bias on the parts of the study’s authors, who appear to have focused on a set of observed results that were positive in nature, leading one to wonder about stance and its effect on findings. Within the field of similar research conducted almost 25 years ago, the study served to directionally support the benefits of Catholic secondary schooling in instilling service predisposition, yet left open questions about how that happens, if it lasts into adulthood, and if it is still relevant in today’s changing educational environment.

Campbell’s (2001) research showed Catholic high school students as more civically engaged, more committed and active in volunteering, as well as more open to
diversity of viewpoints in community members. In fact, the research showed that these effects and observed participation propensities were a direct result of the central role of the church in serving in the context of civic association. To determine this, Campbell accessed data for this section drawn from High School and Beyond (HS&B), a major longitudinal study conducted by the United States Department of Education. The study, initially including a 1980 high school sophomore cohort extends to an approximately 12,000-member cohort in 1992 when the original students had reached an average age of 26. This study, conducted across a broad database of participants and with the benefit of longitudinal data is a convincing, additive body of work, contributing to the viewpoint that Catholic schools are every bit as qualified, and in many cases, more-so, than their public counterparts, in instilling civic values that last. However, like many others, we are not privy to data crystallizing what these schools are doing to create the interest and propensity in students to go on to pursue civic engagement in later years. Amidst other studies, Campbell’s research showed support for Catholic secondary schooling in instilling these service values and even suggested how the church serves as a proxy for a civic association, which offers further insight into how this effect is achieved. However, like other studies, because it is based on data two and three decades ago, its real-time relevance remains in question.

Thomas Dee (2005) set out explicitly to ascertain how attendance at a Catholic high school would correlate to civic engagement and propensity to volunteer as an adult. Dee, in fact, found strong evidence that Catholic high school graduates had higher voter participation rates in their adult lives and that this observation was consistent regardless of socio-economic, demographic, or other factors. However, a surprising finding was the
lack of evidence in community service participation or commitment; those surveyed showed no higher propensity to volunteer. To derive these findings, Dee accessed that same High School and Beyond (HS&B) database, then added a sophisticated multivariate analysis to help splice the data on dozens of additional dimensions, to greater refine results. Perhaps the greatest merit of this study was the coupling of its longitudinal nature, with the explicit emphasis on community service and civic engagement. A detracting factor of the research may be its self-reported nature, as adults may be prompted to report higher-than-actual voting rates. Contextually, this places the research in an affirming position with several other supporting studies promoting Catholic high school attendance as a driver of later civic engagement, yet in a detracting position on the findings regarding volunteer disposition.

Greene, Kleitz, and Thalhammer (2001) aligned with this view and extended it further, asserting that Catholic school graduates are also more oriented to diverse cultural and societal views and are more active in community service initiatives as well, given the character bases developed during their schooling. The source of this outcome was stated as uncertain. The researchers’ method was to employ a multivariate regression analysis on a survey database of over 1,200 college students in four Texas universities, seeking to assess differences in those who had attended K-12 private vs. public schools. Fielding this research in 1997, Greene et al. developed a Tolerance Scale, among other original techniques, with tailored questions designed to assess openness to disparate points of view and to gain a sense of most and least favored political or civic group associations. This study included multiple benefits, in its tailored nature, especially in its unique coding to segment the education sector backgrounds of the college students. What it
lacks, like the many comparable studies above, is the vital insight into the causes of the relationship between Catholic schooling and civic engagement. Geographically, as well, the study is isolated to a narrowly defined set of colleges and by definition, includes results specific to area public and private schools.

More recently, University of Alabama’s Patricia Bauch published *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest* (2014), following rigorous research aimed at deriving solutions for Catholic schools’ futures. Bauch anchors many of her recommendations in the thesis of moral values cultivation as an observed phenomenon during the education experience in Catholic schools. Dispelling images of Catholic schools as exclusive and “private,” Bauch instead highlights the strength of their educational missions and outcomes as beneficial to society as a whole. Placing a stake in a public interest context, Bauch advocated, can bring new models to the forefront, while preserving the mission, construct, and values for which Catholic schools have been recognized. Importantly, this context also underscores the centrality of civic preparation and community interest, correlating these attributes with the social justice lessons offered through the Catholic educational experience. This is not to say that public schools do not effectively develop civic and community strengths in their students, rather it is to recognize that each sector accomplishes this differently, a heated topic attracting increasing attention, particularly in light of public school quality and policy debates. In Bauch’s concluding chapter, co-authored with Cooper and O’Keefe (2014), she advocated seven strategies, with the last among them being increased visibility of how Catholic schools contribute to the public interest. She and her colleagues referenced research from Brinig and Garnett (2010) showing the manner in which Catholic schools offer community capital and support the
public interest. Bauch’s knowledge and practical experience gives credence to all of the research and narratives in her edited collection, while as a set of studies, it is difficult to not suspect inherent bias. In summary, her cause was noble and support unwavering, though the studies selected appear to be those one would expect from a Dominican nun and Professor Emerita at the University of Alabama, and not surprisingly a former parochial school teacher.

The counter-claims: Studies purporting to show no evidence of any connections between Catholic education and disposition for service engagement.

To represent a balanced view, there are several studies that claim to discover no discernible differences as compared to other school types. Hallinan and Kubitschek (2010) noted, “Research on school factors affecting achievement often has focused on what Catholic schools do well, such as establishing a school community, enforcing order and discipline, and creating a strong academic culture” (p. 166). This statement underscores the previously reported strength of Catholic schools in excelling both academically and in terms of community cohesiveness, yet the authors reported observing evidence of only academic effects, rather than distinctions related to community / civic predispositions or commitment levels. The Chicago-based longitudinal study separated out the effects of race, ethnic background, and socio-economic status. Using data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR), both quantitative data (test scores) and qualitative data through surveys, were collected to assess whether this “Catholic School advantage” had a proven basis, either academically or in terms of social-emotional or cognitive growth. A strength of this study is its impressively high rate of school compliance and therefore, data access, with 75% of public schools and 85% of
Catholic schools participating; the reliability of this study appears strong. Similarly, because standardized testing was a public school requirement, a healthy 98% of test scores were made available for analysis. Even the Catholic schools, where testing was voluntary, managed to reach a 90% participation rate. Perhaps the greatest weakness in the study is not a drawback for the study’s stated purpose, but instead a shortfall in its applicability to the research question at hand in this study. Specifically, as Hallinan and Kubitscheck’s research centers on Chicago area public and Catholic middle schools, it by definition, focused on earlier stages of adolescent development and was likely influenced by developments specific to public school reform. These reform measures, over 20 years, are shown to improve academic outcomes for public school students, while Catholic schools struggle financially, and are met with systemic resource constraints, a reality which may negatively impact benefits observed in past research. This refutes earlier claims of an observed Catholic school advantage. Importantly, however, this research recognizes the importance of growth and achievement factors beyond pure test scores, as it discusses the fostering (in both sectors of schools) of socio-emotional benefits and cognitive development, as well as values development and attitude formation. While the study does not isolate what may be distinctive in these school sectors relative to service disposition, the findings do attribute notable distinctions between public and Catholic schools. Public schools are observed as successful in instilling a sense of equality and Catholic schools show evidence of fostering environments of faith and community.

Wenglinski (2007) fielded a comprehensive study for the Center on Education Policy, based on the National Education Longitudinal Study, or NELS, a national sample across all school types, comprised of 1000+ low-income, urban students. Fielded to
identify if there was any demonstrable advantage, near- or longer-term, afforded to
students of high schools other than the neighborhood public variety, the research sought
to respond to earlier studies touting a private school advantage. Once family
circumstances and SES were taken into account, the study finds no observable
differences in achievement performance among students attending independent, most
parochial (except Jesuit), and public “choice” high schools when compared to
conventional public high schools. Students were no more likely to attend college,
experienced no greater job satisfaction, and were no more likely to be civically engaged
than their counterparts who attended regular public high schools. Arguably, these
methods represented an advance on previous assessments focused strictly on subject
matter knowledge, in that they took into account outcomes over time, giving us
longitudinal learning. In addition, these studies also considered family influences,
acknowledging the impact of family members on student experiences. Ultimately, we’re
still left with questions, largely dealing with understanding the “how” and “why.” For
example, while diocesan school student outcomes were shown to be academically ahead,
but had no impact on civic-mindedness, career satisfaction or educational attainment
compared to public schools, Jesuit high school students did seem to have advantages in
all of these areas, perhaps given their consistent educational emphasis on cultivating
“men and women for others.” Further, private schools were shown to have advantages,
but conclusions about the root cause of those outcomes led to speculation about increased
parental involvement, better standardized test preparation, and reserves of social, cultural
and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Also, because the study focused on low-income
students in urban areas, we are unsure of the applicability to middle and upper class
suburban or rural populations across the socio-economic spectrum.

My review of these surveys and publications, particularly with a focus on secondary schools, reveals an array of reported positive characteristics afforded to high school students, but with no definitive evidence awarding one sector or the other top billing in cultivation of these values. In these studies, alumni richly and proudly described their educational experience, and outcomes are described in terms far beyond the expected topics of academics, sports achievements, and social interactions. Ground-breaking at the time in the field, potential drivers ranged from teachers’ encouragement to development of students’ unique interests and strengths, to fostering self-confidence yet selflessness, and modeling leadership.

My assessment of these studies is that those that probed for demonstrated evidence of proven connections, fell short of illuminating why and how those connections exist. As a result, we see correlation or relationships, but not causality. In cases where the connections were not evident, there were no direct lines of questioning of participants designed to solicit their views on why they may not have continued these pursuits in later life. Perhaps they were persuaded to participate in activities that were simply not motivating or not appealing to them. Or did they fail to see the differences they made? Or perhaps they actually did leverage these experiences but in individual ways that do not strike them as “service” – might they simply name their activities with different labels? This study was every bit as much about the why as it was about the what.

What started as a literature review on “differences/benefits” of Catholic secondary schools, quickly led to a revealing look at what is really being taught and learned, beyond documented curriculum and standardized tests. What emerges is a profile on the Catholic
secondary educational experience – the sum of its many parts. In the leading studies referenced above, there is little dispute that Catholic secondary schooling in fact does provide a set of experiences, beyond the academic, athletic and social, that together appear to interest and encourage disposition to community service and engagements for graduates in their later lives. Whether inspired by the religious, spiritual, moral, or behavioral practices, most experts agree that there is a proven “Catholic school effect” and one of its key dimensions is propensity to serve. Even many of the experts who purport that the Catholic school effect is more myth than reality do acknowledge a set of observations offering possible links between that experience and observed community engagement patterns in graduates, such as the impact of church and parish communities and the continual support of committed teachers. What remains to unpack are the answers to these questions about the “how” and “why,” an in-depth exploratory on a mission to identify not just what is happening, but further to chronicle if possible, examples of the ways this phenomenon may be happening.

**Relation of Secondary School Experience to the Development of Service Dispositions**

Synthesizing the extensive literature on research into moral values formation and development in schools, I find the writings of John Dewey (1916) to be an indisputable starting point. Consistently advocating the view that schools’ primary purposes are grounded in their social functions, Dewey stressed how that stage of the formative process requires moral education, to prepare young people to function successfully in their adult worlds. “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (Dewey, 1916, p. 239).
Notably, Emile Durkheim (1961) and B. Edward McClellan (1999) are also indisputable authorities with work directly relevant to this research. Durkheim, like Dewey (1916), believed in the expansive role of education as an institution much like religion. Respect for discipline, the fostering of a sense of autonomy, and students’ interests in putting their independent concerns aside for the good of the collective community are prevalent characteristics presented by Durkheim’s research, while McClellan highlights character training and the honorable move to instill moral education as a priority. In McClellan’s case, connections are explicitly made to both the rise of secular education and the conscious marginalizing of cultural and traditional materials as having a significant negative impact on the teaching of moral education.

Goodman and Lesnick’s *Moral Education* (2001) described themes and potential patterns, supporting the thesis of moral values cultivation as an observed phenomenon during the educational experience and suggest pathways to help accomplish this mission. Relating the classroom with its expectations, norms and practices, to serve as a proxy for “community,” Goodman and Lesnick take a page from Durkheim’s (1961) book, suggesting schools’ vital roles for teaching and instilling early moral values. I found these useful as general orientation, as contributors to formation of this theoretical framework.

**General studies examining secular high school experiences with development of non-cognitive skills that lead to service predisposition: Examining the notion of the Hidden Curriculum.**

What students learn in schools has as much to do with social relations as with the content of the academic curriculum. Much of this social activity is implicit, informal and unstated, prompting observers to use the term “hidden curriculum” to refer to the norms, behaviors and roles transmitted to students. (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 50.)
Experts in the fields of sociology (Ingersoll, 2003), economics (Garcia, 2014; Heckman & Kautz, 2012, 2013), psychology (Duckworth, 2011, 2013; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), and education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Rosen et al, 2010) have examined how schools play a role in the cultivation of vital life skills that positively impact students’ success, particularly in adolescence. While methodologies, participants, and research questions differ, each of these studies identifies relationships between in-school experiences, challenges, and developmental skill sets and later life impacts, such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and college acceptances. Life skills cultivated vary in each study, though insights discovered support the direct connections, fueling further interest in explaining why and how these positive impacts are achieved. Because of the recency of these studies, they add credence and heightened interest in exploring what more might be done in today’s schools to further drive these positive impacts.

Heckman’s research with co-author, Kautz (2012) contributes further to the portrayal of non-cognitive skills as vital to producing later life success. Heckman and Kautz (2013) offer a definition for non-cognitive skills, characterizing them as softer, socio-emotional or personality qualities, and like many others, describe these as skills of character. There appears to be no evidence, purported the authors, that these skills are cultivated more strongly or with better results in Catholic, or in any sorts of religious institutions. In fact, the authors also claim that existing research in the area of non-cognitive skills is substantially more developed at the early childhood and elementary levels, while inconclusive during adolescent years, where interventions vs. cultivation activities are common. Performing a series of extensive and meticulous quantitative correlation tests on existing data from sources as diverse as NLSC and the National
Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), to IQ test stats and GED figures, Heckman and Kautz construct tables to derive estimates of which non-cognitive factors may be driving certain behaviors, both positive (e.g. mentoring relationships and attachment /bonding between teachers and students) and negative (poor health habits, criminal activities). An advantage of this study was its comprehensive, original view of the correlations, juxtaposing sources that had not yet been examined, one in light of the other. Yet, certain proxy license, by necessity, means that the historical data on record, in the form that it was originally collected, has to stand on its own, including labeling certain schools “Catholic” when there are actually unknown varieties of private. All told, the study stands as one of the seminal works in the field and is highly respected for its original design and for beginning to at least purport to discover what certain drivers of values might be. In this study, the authors find that while lasting character skills development is evidenced in the secondary school experience, support is much clearer for those skills fostered in the earlier years, with longer-lasting observed effects. Further, the authors identify the sources of this development as a combination of schools (particularly early childhood and elementary), successful family environments and social settings.

Connecting soft skills cultivated specifically in Catholic high schools to later life outcomes gets to the central issue in my research, though I was looking to narrow and refine these connection points, plus advance discovery of their causes.

Johanek and Puckett (2002) included an impactful quote in their chapter submission to Fuhrman and Lazerson’s work (2005) connecting public schools to formative experiences as students mature into contributing adults in our democratic society:
Engaged citizens do not create themselves. We should no more expect spontaneous engagement than we do spontaneous combustion. The norms of the culture are against the former, just as the laws of physics are against the latter. (Johanek & Puckett, 2002)

Johanek and Puckett (2002) go on to describe the longstanding tensions between the expectations placed on citizens and the role of schools in fulfilling those expectations. While the lens is squarely on public school policy, amidst the continuing backdrop of high-stakes testing and standards, the themes of declining civic knowledge in adolescents and insufficient measurements for citizenship development so often become overshadowed by pressures of accountability, marketability, and social mobility. The authors highlight the current struggles to identify what we, as a country, mean by “citizenship preparation.” They remark upon how controversial it can be to agree on the outcomes that we, as a society, say that we want. Importantly, the authors depict how adolescents are in the unique prime of their developmental lives, as they build cognitive frameworks required to understand and relate to the communities and nation in which they live and will later work. Acknowledging this milestone stage of development, yet still struggling with national civics standards and customized state-level bolt-on programs, Johanek and Puckett paint a portrait of varied priorities, inconsistent service-learning models, and mixed expectations.

As the concept of citizenship is grounded in a sense of belonging to a macro society, not simply living life as an individual, the balance between community and independent self can be challenging and is by definition, not an “either / or.” Johanek and Puckett’s (2005) continuum features two ends, at left, the individual citizen, personally accountable and equipped to contribute to society. At the other end is an active citizen,
highly participative, defined by positive actions within a society. This citizen is pre-disposed and motivated to help solve social problems, empathizing with their root causes and taking an active stance to improve community conditions. This construction of one’s civic identity within a broader societal framework has merited extensive study.

Perhaps if school leaders were to view civic engagement and community service as part of their educational missions, the debate about which sector of school could move to the side, while reserving center stage to spotlight how those experiences get constructed over time. Empathy, a sense of society vs. solely a sense of self, and inspired motivation to be a man or woman of character, began to emerge as central themes in my research.

**Longitudinal studies linking secular high school service experiences with commitments to service in later life.** Johnson Beebe, Mortimer, and Snyder (1998) explored the connections between Minnesota high-school students’ service activity and their service predispositions four years later. This type of longitudinal work gets us closer to discoveries about how these identities are cultivated and whether certain qualities and interests appear to follow students into later life. Johnson et al. sought to identify the types of students who volunteered, and whether that activity affected their later professional and social choices. Compared to a control group of non-volunteers, adolescents who volunteered developed increased motivation to succeed academically, possessed great academic self-confidence, and performed better in school. Significantly, Johnson found discernible links between community involvement and a fortified work ethic, with volunteers expressing intentions to carry the service commitment forward in later life. While longitudinal in its approach, a rare quality not found in many studies in
the field, the time period only extended to four years past graduation. Further, it emphasized developmental consequences rather than any individual life pathways selected. The geographic nature of the study’s setting in Minnesota also raises questions about applicability to a major metropolitan area, as well as questions regarding timeliness, given the passing of nearly two decades. Ultimately, Johnson et al. provided a study that contributed strongly in its longitudinal nature, illuminated specific effects in participants who volunteered during high school, though stopped short of offering explanations about the way this happens. We are still left wondering about the why and how, along with longer-term impacts.

Additional longitudinal studies, including Texas A & M’s Ladewig and Thomas’ (1987) and Hanks and Eckland (1978), have examined the question of whether adolescent participation in volunteer programs can be determined to have a positive impact on youth development. Exploring adults, on average 30 years old, who had participated in the 4-H Club as youths, Ladewig and Thomas found that 4-H alumni reported developments of skills such as learning to work with others and increased senses of responsibility. Notably, however, the study found that these adults, while more likely to be involved in community activities later as adults, were no more likely than alumni of other volunteer organizations to develop these characteristics and describe similar levels of community involvement. The 1985 study utilized a national survey respondent base of over 700 4-H club members, a similar count of volunteer participants in youth organizations other than 4-H, and a sample of non-participants, numbering just over 300, for comparison. Positive aspects of the study included its informative use of comparisons between 4-H and “other” volunteer organizations, noting that even the former 4-H
participants were also involved in additional volunteer groups, and the use of a control
group, to compare / contrast those demonstrating the disposition and commitment vs.
those who did not. Other benefits included the study’s national scope, its ability to reach
a significant, randomly selected cross-section of an adult population fitting each criteria
(4-H, “other” volunteer organization members and non-volunteers), and focus upon
connections between youth participation and characteristics formation that impact adult
volunteering. Weaknesses in the current context of my research included the emphasis on
a specific volunteer club vs. school setting, the younger life-stage when volunteering was
active (average 10 years of age) vs. high school, and as with many of the studies profiled,
the passing of three decades since its published findings.

Similarly, and perhaps with more direct application, Hanks and Eckland (1978)
examined the effect of extracurricular involvement during high school and its impact on
adult volunteering. Probing for both direct participation levels and indirect effects, such
as pursuit of higher education, career and compensation levels, and political involvement,
the study found demonstrated positive impacts, equally for men and women, contributing
to support of long-term benefits. The study used a phone survey methodology to pursue
responses from high school graduates who had reached an average age of 30 and asked
them a series of probing questions related to their involvement in extracurricular
activities as teens, as well as their current involvement in civic or community
organizations. This study is widely referenced as one of the landmark contributions for
longitudinal findings of direct relationships between high school youth extracurricular
involvement and adult community activism, addressing a long-standing question about
how adolescent socialization may be predictive of adult behavior. Establishing a strong

50
and positive association, with focus directly on the high school years, provides a baseline foundation, which went on to inform other significant work in the field. Conversely, because it’s widely agreed that the underlying causes or sources are complex and varied, based on individual circumstances and other intervening variables, the study, like so many others, failed to establish causality. We are still left without evidence of how this pro-social development is cultivated and why it manages to follow students into adulthood, informing their later life choices and pathways, especially as related to community service and / or civic engagement.

As to how these studies fit into the field, they each provide similar longitudinal views, looking at adults with an average age of 30, who reported heavy participation levels as high school students, specifically in extracurricular, student government or community organizations. Each study used a methodology featuring phone interviews with nationally representative samples from databases of former youth volunteers and participants in extracurricular programs including civic organizations. The studies found significantly higher than average instances of volunteerism in those individuals as adults. An interesting finding in the latter of these studies is the connection documented between volunteer experience in adolescence and later life interest in civic engagement (not simply community service), specifically increased propensity to vote and a reported sense of connectedness to politics. Further, these studies did not probe for the connections between graduates’ narrative recollections of school experiences and learning, linking these to life choices they made in later years, such as career selection or community involvement. Clearly, these studies were also secular in nature, with no particular religious or even spiritual basis. Perhaps most importantly, these studies, like so many
others, do not get to the “why” or “how” this development occurs, an integral element in my research. Each is also national in its scope, by design, rather than particular to a specific geographic region or set of communities. The passing of an average of three decades since the fielding of any of this research also raises questions of present-day application. In locating the Hanks and Eckland (1978) study, it offers strong rationale for longer-term effects, and cites specific effects observed (e.g. increased voting behavior, decreased political alienation), helping to build the case of correlation, stopping short of illuminating causation.

Within this body of research focused on non-secular high school experiences and connections to later service disposition, there are some that focus on longitudinal observations, others that point to specific effects discovered, and still others that offer early hypotheses on how and why these effects are cultivated. No single study derives conclusions about the combination of the three, nor do any of these examine generational differences across high school graduation decades. What was promising and supportive for this study was the consistency of findings across studies that adolescent volunteering did appear to correlate to building heightened moral-political awareness and that the effects were likely to endure over time in a manner that could conceivably inform later life pathways.

Regardless of the labels these studies used to denote learning beyond the formal, academic curriculum, the general consensus was that development during adolescence of social, behavioral, and non-cognitive skills merits increased and sustained focus, given these skills’ importance to fostering commitment to community [service] in adult life. We see through these research examples the types of life skills and personal characteristics
that may be cultivated, but the lens is limited on the topic of how this development happens. Nevertheless, there was ample evidence enabling us to glean insights from this body of work. This evidence, collectively, supports the relationship between Catholic secondary schooling and service predisposition in later life. And while additional limitations include evidence and concrete examples of what drives the extension of these experiences to be durable for many students, we clearly see cases in which graduates make later life choices and are motivated (or not) to include service elements in their adult lives.

In summary, the literature review produces major themes to guide my methods, and help shape my questions to define what remains unanswered in the quest to understand “the value of values education” as it relates to commitment to community service and / or civic engagement in later life. Specifically, these themes include:

(a) Uncovering potential links between Catholic secondary education experiences and propensity of graduates’ later life dispositions in the area of community service. Studies profiled above, especially those from Grace, Lee, Bryk, and Campbell, bring this connection to life and provide a strong foundation for further inquiry, in the search to identify specific practices, drivers, and experiences that cause the formation of these predispositions and later life commitments.

(b) Illuminating any unique characteristics related to time horizon and influence of different eras of graduation on the service-oriented characteristics formation. The longitudinal studies offer a vibrant glimpse across the passage of time, suggesting enduring, positive impacts. Examples include Ladewig and Thomas (1987) and Hanks and Eckland (1978).
(c) Suggesting, though not yet defining, possible drivers within these formative elements of adolescent experiences that may contribute to service disposition and commitment in later adult life. The methodologies of these studies allows limited glimpses of participant feedback in constructed response formats, though does not have the open-ended, experiential element that was infused into this study with specific probes to identify drivers.

Overall, the research reviewed provides a comprehensive view of adolescent service, but is missing actual, definitive drivers (how and why) of links between secondary school experiences and involvement with community service and/or civic engagement in adulthood. In addition to these thematic conclusions, the methodology employed in the field’s most significant studies shows correlation and limited longitudinal views but lacks any specific mechanisms to isolate the actual drivers, to illuminate causality. Because no explicit research has been fielded with a lens of understanding the drivers that impact students’ later life pathways after graduating from the Philadelphia region’s Catholic secondary schools, it was my hope that this research would contribute to knowledge in that realm and perhaps would extend to other Catholic school types, systems, and grade levels. My professional experience in working closely with Catholic secondary schools in this region has demonstrated time and again, that the decision-making process for parents and students choosing a high school is often opaque, and without clear distinction. Rather, the decision is often reliant on perceived “fit” of an institution rather than an understanding of experiences individual schools can provide. It was my hope that this research could illustrate a more transparent picture of the Catholic school experience in this region and demystify what is taught in these schools beyond
quality academics. In my view, the likely drivers are experiences having to do with an instilled, consistent sense of morals and ethics, the expectation of values such as respect, compassion, humility, honesty, and selflessness. These attributes are overtly and subtly woven throughout the informal curriculum, while also forming the structure and code of the schools behavioral norms and conduct expectations. While it remains unknown exactly how these behaviors are exemplified, encouraged, and ingrained, it is intriguing to think about the possibilities of a structured inquiry designed to elicit the perspectives of the graduates themselves. While there may likely be no “silver bullet” single answer, a rich portrait emerged, revealed from the lens of the graduates themselves, how they see the world, what they expect of themselves in their families and communities, and what milestone experience they believe informed their worldviews.

The insights from this in-depth research, intentionally fielded across a system of Catholic high schools vs. narrowly examining single institutions or a few, fulfilled the promise of helping to identify these drivers.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview of Methodology. This study began with a “pre-phase,” followed by three key qualitative phases, and included ongoing field notes, reflective memos, and journal entries to document observations and emerging insights.

Table 1
Summary of Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Phase</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
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Pre-phase began following approval of proposal, including doc review and conducting of info sessions

Instrument

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Online Survey</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>One on Ones</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alums / 18 HS</td>
<td>Alums: 3 HS’s: recruited from sub-set of survey</td>
<td>Alum recruits: Recruited from survey and focus groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

| 2,332 participants | 7 participants | 30 participants |

Notes

Qualitative research was used to address my research questions, given the open-ended, self-reported, individualized nature of learning I looked to achieve. Following the initial document review, I designed and fielded an online survey, through Survey Monkey, to initially narrow the “values” definition, and probe generally for experiences in community service that may be recollected as having made an impact during the high school years. The survey was sent through the Archdiocesan system’s 18-school
secondary network throughout the Philadelphia region, for broad scope and with the goal of engaging the widest number of participants within the aggregate alumni population. The rationale for focusing on the Archdiocesan secondary system is the single-point of access gained through leveraging a central administration contact point as the gateway to 18 schools of study. Additionally, the online survey attracted alumni of several other area Catholic high schools and as such, these additional schools are represented. The survey also provided an opportunity to recruit willing, validated volunteers among the alumni bodies of these schools, for participation in the final two phases of research, the focus group session and one-on-one in-depth interviews.

Second, I conducted a focus group, comprised of alums of three high schools, to refine the future line of individual interview questioning of alumni. The three schools of study were selected to represent a cross-section of socio-economic student populations, so as to examine alumni experiences in consistent school types. Ultimately, Phase 3 consisted of conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, to gain insight into how alumni describe their educational experiences in Catholic high schools in narrative form, guided by a set of open-ended questions. The appropriateness, or fit of this methodological approach seemed the strongest match to address these research interests, in that it enabled learning about first-person experiences recalled by individuals in a specified context across multiple time horizons, given their varied graduation years. My focus was on extracting details inside of graduates’ educational experiences, as I was looking to gain their impressions or interpretations of what these schools offered that may have helped develop their values generally and commitment to civic engagement or community service, specifically. Recognizing that not all factors are equal
across time horizons, I worked to actively listen to understand the complex nature of influences in different eras, including economic impacts and local circumstances that may have colored these experiences, to contextualize the accounts.

In addition, because the gathering of data occurred in immediate, singular instances and in ongoing ways, I followed the sequence of steps and guidelines offered in *Studying Your Own School* (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). To prepare for the line of questioning, I focused on expository questions vs. the yes-or-no, a lot-or-a-little variety, and began with warm-up questions, to create an encouraging, supportive backdrop. This appeared to foster an exchange that was more honest and open, and one that proved to address the research questions with unexpected responses and more robust learning.

I was cognizant of what Barbara Kamler (2001) warned are the inherent limitations when drawing from participant narratives as singular, fact-based truths. By the very nature of the narrator’s position, I needed to take into account the many surrounding impact factors that have molded the narrative, including social influences, cultural ones, and the potential relationship I may have been viewed as having as researcher with the respondent. Pavlenko (2002) similarly cautioned against defaulting to the participant-led narratives as factual data and authentic truths, advocating for the vital contextual research elements to offer a more valid interpretation. Grimes and Schulz (2002) detailed the limitations of recall bias, as well, and prescribed control techniques to protect the validity of data gathered, including being attuned to the temporal sequence of reported causes and effects, and a recognition of the subjective nature of recollections from participants’ distant pasts. Zimmerman (2009) also cautioned of the potential risks of “misremembering,” particularly in situations where individuals may idealize their pasts.
I also used field notes and a research journal throughout the process, as they afforded richer detail and insight than self-reported recollections and descriptions alone can provide. These data inputs proved a useful supplement to interview and survey feedback, providing and recording further contextual cues and observations. Using multiple forms of data collection is desirable to increase trustworthiness of findings. Maxwell (2013), Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), and Rubin and Rubin (2012) provided clear processes of practice in these methodologies with concrete examples on how to design, implement, and analyze findings. Maxwell (2013) also reminded us about the distinction between methods serving as a manner of addressing questions, not some sort of mechanical output or a literal translation of responses to these questions.

Working with participants in different types of Catholic high schools as well helped illuminate possible differences in school leadership and staff approaches, culture, and drivers of the personal characteristics of interest. For example, I sampled alumni (grouped by graduation decade) from the full cross-section of 18 schools that, by definition included groups of students of varying socio-economic circumstances in these Archdiocesan secondary schools. The system’s collective secondary school alumni database is accessed regularly by the schools’ administrators and the Office of Catholic Education (OCE) through its “Razor’s Edge” email communications system. I was assured to have a gateway to this same access, through the support of OCE’s and Faith in the Future Foundation’s advancement representatives for the purposes of this study.

**Participant Selection and Selection Criteria**

Demographically, I succeeded in fielding this research with alumni across diverse cultural and socio-economic communities, with an interest in understanding both the
aggregate learning and demographic differences. When selecting a site for Phase 2, I paid close attention to the settings of schools, in addition to the demographic characteristics of the alumni base, to help ensure representation of diverse economic and geographic attributes, vs. risking any potentially biased or skewed view of a given population. Maxwell (2013) discussed the importance of avoiding over-generalization – the presumption that participants in one setting share experiences and characteristics with those in another. I went on to find similarities and differences across genders, cultures, and socio-economic groups, as well as distinctions based on graduation years and life realities that served as the backdrop for alumni when attending these Catholic high schools.

Ultimately, I was to attract the greatest numbers of responses from alumni of schools whose leadership teams displayed the most active willingness to support this study and those who were fortunate enough to lead schools with strong, engaged alumni bases, with frequently scheduled events. By selecting in this way, our focus group and one-on-one interviews were able to be scheduled, confirmed, and successfully conducted with optimal support. With few exceptions, presidents of these schools responded readily to the invitation to involve their alumni and in many cases, created custom communications to highlight the importance of the study and boost response.

I was able to blend both urban and suburban schools across a variety of high school types, since “Catholic” does not constitute its own school system. I was fortunate to gain access to the alumni bases through the Directors of Advancement (DIAs) and school presidents with whom I have varying levels of pre-established professional relationships from my earlier consulting work with the Foundation. This appeared to
demonstrate a spirit among school leaders that signaled their embrace of the purpose of the research and seemed to demonstrate confidence in the study as a useful body of work, worth devoting professional time to, amidst competing priorities. I regard this gateway of access as vital to producing meaningful research. Perhaps most importantly, I was able to secure the support and endorsement of the Philadelphia Secretary for Catholic Education, Christopher Mominey.

In terms of school types, I focused primarily on co-ed schools, to minimize potential risks of any one “school type” to skew research results. In keeping with the Archdiocesan secondary schools’ composition, I was also able to gain strong survey response from its single-gender schools, including schools that are today, co-ed, but were single-sex decades ago. Importantly, the high school alumni bases surveyed are primarily, but not exclusively within Philadelphia’s Archdiocesan system and are geographically and socio-economically diverse.

Ultimately, a total of 30 one-on-one interviews with alumni were conducted across 18 schools, to provide sufficient insights. Recognizing that drop-offs in planned participant numbers would present a risk in recruiting, I over-recruited to a number of 50, to realize that outcome of 30 individual interviews. A focus group with representatives from three schools elicited perspectives from an additional seven alumni. I had hoped to conduct three separate focus groups, though ultimately, gathering alums from disparate schools, geographic locations, and graduation eras at a mutually agreeable time proved elusive. What was truly unforeseen, however, was the unanticipated volume of responses gained through the online survey. My previous goal of accessing feedback from a cross-section of participants across graduation decades was exceeded in Month One of a survey
I kept open for five months. I originally designed the survey as a point of access to gain topline insights on what service-oriented activities alumni recalled participating in during their high school years, potentially identifying links to their adult lives. Additionally, my hope was that in gaining their feedback, some modest portion of them would also offer to serve as one-on-one interviewees and focus group respondents. I estimated that if two to three hundred respondents participated in the online survey that might yield 20-30 participants for one-on-one interviews. As such, I envisioned my recruiting for participants in two ways: (a) I included a question on the initial online survey, to ask if respondents would be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview to occur during the months of November, December, and January at a date and time of their choice; (b) I planned to ask focus group respondents if any of them would be willing to do the same.

Alumni from the schools of study for focus groups were to be selected based on their respective representations of household compositions and settings, as indicated by Archdiocese of Philadelphia data, including average household income, home ownership status and property values, unemployment and education levels. Ultimately, the opportunity to achieve real diversity was elusive, with a more homogenous group resulting.

Research Methods

To address these questions, I began with a “pre-phase,” in which I was essentially understanding the backdrop and communicating the purpose and process of the research to be undertaken, with the goal of ensuring clarity for school leaders whose graduates would be my participants. This pre-phase began with a document review, then with this context on individual schools as background, in many cases, a follow-up phone call or
meeting was requested, to serve as an introductory session with school leaders, most commonly, Presidents and Directors of Advancement. The goal of these sessions was to provide an overview of the research approach, duration, and goals and to address any questions school leaders might have. Intuitively, it was my presumption that the clearer the picture I could crystallize up-front of the work I planned to field, the stronger the level of support and access I could expect to earn throughout the research process. These introductory meetings were also an opportunity to engage personally with the school leaders and instill a sense of trustworthiness and confidence in the process, so that as questions might arise, there would be continued support for the work. By the conclusion of these sessions, the school leaders had a transparent view of the research to come, they had copies of the abstract and a documented schedule of the events to unfold, managing expectation for the months to come.

Once I completed the “school leader tour,” I worked with them to arrange for and field the three-phase research. First, the online survey was distributed, with additional reminder emails issued, in the weeks following, to boost response with the goal of getting some representation from each school with no school left out. Second, I pursued the arrangement of focus groups, hoping to conduct these onsite (one group for each of three high schools), to extract rich, conversational detail, helping to shape impressions through shared narratives and interactive dialogue. Ultimately, I was able to confirm and conduct one focus group, with representatives from three schools. Finally, the third stage of the research was the series of one-on-one phone interviews with a representative sample of alumni, for a total of 30 completed individual interviews.
As I solicited participants for the one-on-one interviews, primarily from the survey, the yield of in-depth interview participants was representative across the 18-schools and across school types. I monitored this ongoing through the recruitment process, and supplemented with some additional school-level outreach, to smooth out the distribution of school types, in order to be most representative. Throughout the three-phase process, I maintained field notes and a research journal to capture observations beyond the verbal descriptions offered by participants. Finally, in a further effort to guard against sampling bias, and to optimize diversity, I used purposive sampling, as planned.

“In this strategy, particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to . . . questions and goals” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). This allowed me to glean information I cannot derive otherwise. Barbour (1998) described this technique as one that allows researchers to have a level of control over participants selected, and to seek out exceptions, in an effort to help attain the most well rounded sample possible. The intent is to increase the likelihood that respondents represent a spectrum of alumni, including those who could be considered more or less “successful” than others. This approach also helped ensure as much inclusiveness as possible in the cultural and socio-economic diversity of the alumni base. Ultimately, I sought and successfully achieved an equitable cross-section of participants, to fulfill the goal of being representative in findings across demographic groups and graduation eras.

Data Collection / Instruments

Pre-Step: Document review. As with my pilot study, I first searched for any documentation that speaks to the high schools’ positioning of their experiences and benefits to prospective students, course descriptions, student handbooks and alumni
communications / annual reports. The rationale for reviewing these documents in advance was that they began to paint an early portrait of the experience school leaders proposed to provide and the channels through which students would be learning and growing. In addition, these documents prepared me to be more articulate about the school when speaking with participants, providing a base of working knowledge and familiarity that helped engender trust.

As expected, the spectrum of knowledge to be gained through these documents and digital assets was of a foundational variety. Specifically, this presumed great benefit as I familiarized myself with selected course curriculum, special programs, and a strong sense of the learning environments. This contributed to my understanding of the culture and differentiation of each school, and allowed me to inform my developing interview probes to uncover the richest data.

I followed a two-step document collection / analysis process for each school. First, I reviewed websites and digitally accessible content, with particular attention to assets that illuminate student life, later life outcomes (academic, college acceptance statistics, etc.) and alumni communications. In some cases, I requested materials that are currently distributed to prospective families interested in understanding the school’s culture, offerings, and community, in addition to alumni publications. This focus allowed me to glean a richer portrait of what differentiators schools actively promote to prospective families.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommend taking care to treat documentary analysis and content as interpretations, not factual data, recognizing that the authors of each document have made editorial decisions of what to include and what to leave out. Rather
like referencing transcripts, these were viewed through a lens that recognizes this and provided opportunities to discuss some of what was discovered and reviewed with alumni during the one-on-one interviews.

**Phase 1) Survey.** An online survey was used as an initial screening tool to focus on potential themes in terms of values/service commitment and to provide guidance on terminology to be used in question formats for future data collection. This brief survey, consisting of 11 questions, was sent to all email-accessible alumni in most of the contact databases of the 18 Philadelphia Archdiocesan high schools, with the assistance of Presidents and DIAs. Follow-up reminder emails, to encourage optimal participation, were issued in some cases, to boost response beyond the initial request. To encourage greatest participation, the email content included assurances of confidentiality and referenced that the study findings will be made available to all participants at the conclusion of the research.

**Phase 2) Focus Groups.** A focus group conducted mid-way through the process included questioning deliberately similar to what I used for the one-on-one interviews, yet with consideration of what a group format provides that an individual interview cannot. All questions were piloted in advance. As anticipated, the focus group also revealed some unexpected themes for probing and provided guidance on the level and depth of detail to anticipate as each question is addressed. I envisioned five to six participants for the focus group and succeeded in attracting seven participants. While I planned to coordinate school leaders to identify potential alumni events that could provide ideal timing and venues for these sessions, to capitalize on convenience and efficiency for participants, the seasonality of my interviewing did not coincide. Instead, I
created an event of my own, drawing participants across three schools, and held a breakfast session at a mutually convenient location over the holiday period to gather their feedback. The duration of the group was 90 minutes, with sessions recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

**Phase 3) One-on-one phone interviews (semi-structured).** To select best options for collecting data, I gave extensive thought to the line of questioning and contemplated the best format(s) for administrating. In addition, I discussed options with educational leaders who served as executive sponsors, to help support the fielding of this study. In planning my research design, I referenced Maxwell’s (2013) Research Question / Instrument Mapping Matrix, which I use as my guide.

I conducted one-on-one phone interviews that ran 30-45 minutes in length. I selected one-on-one interviews as the main method, as they are a strong technique to identify how an individual feels about past occurrences and / or current events (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). A blend of efficiency and early intelligence gathering, these one-on-one telephone interviews allowed basic questions and answers to be exchanged. The phone format allowed responses to be recorded for transcription and eliminated the need for onsite appearances, which would have posed additional logistical hurdles for participants, as I learned first-hand in the focus group pursuits. In one case, an individual alumna preferred to conduct her session in-person, and with little effort, I was able to accommodate her.

I accepted participation on a first-come, first-served basis, though with a goal of no more than 30% of participants from any single graduation decade, to help ensure a representative sample across time horizons. I referred to the feedback alumni offered in
their survey responses, to tailor communication of potential interview timeframes. This pairing of their survey responses detailing convenient times for contacting them helped increase efficiency in what can often be complex, customized scheduling and appeared to validate that their responses were being read and respected individually. Interviews were semi-structured, enabling both collection of basic information, while inducing less formal, narrative conversation flow, to capture descriptive, experiential learning about various schools’ impacts on individual lives. I maintained an excel matrix of identifying characteristics to help me organize the data and insights, tied to my research questions. For example, the matrix reflected the school of the participant, gender, graduation era, and if possible, neighborhood of residence during high school years.

Considering that this study was fielded primarily through phone interviewing, the selected instrument used to gather data was in a Conversational Guide format. This is referenced in Qualitative Interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) as strongest for keeping the tone of sessions comfortable, natural, and interactive. The exploratory manner, yet structured sequence, seems most likely to be effective in encouraging substantive, insightful responses.

Topics included how these students came to attend their high schools, how they describe their experiences, what paths they followed after graduation, and what they are currently doing in life. The guiding theme threaded throughout the interviews was to understand the graduates’ impressions of how their Catholic high school education may have impacted the formation and/or cultivation of their values and how these experiences may be connected to their later life pathways. Rubin and Rubin (2012) also wrote extensively on how this approach of in-depth interviewing aids in recall of past events,
and allows participants to paint and share a picture of experiences unfamiliar to the researcher.

A discussion guide (not quite a script) directed the line of questioning and helped ensure that desired information was gathered, while also encouraging open dialogue on the central theme of each school’s life impact. In addition to drafting questions, some thought-starters were also developed and referenced in cases in which participants were not as forthcoming or if the dialogue did not flow naturally. Prior to delivering the questions, I set the logistical context for the interview. Introducing each call up-front with a reminder of logistics helped participants prepare for the time commitment and refresh on the discussion theme before sharing their stories.

I was sure to ask each participant for their permission to be recorded, and captured their affirmative responses as part of the recording, so that I could more actively listen during each interview and develop transcripts following. I used the Rev app and the related transcription service to document conversations, while also taking notes, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012). I had a second recording device in operation, as I have experienced multiple circumstances in which audio quality is not sufficient for transcription. I wanted to take great care to preserve quality recordings of each session, recognizing that it is always better to have more data vs. less, for a richer analysis and to guard against having to return to the data collection phase for additional input.

As I was playing the roles of facilitator, recorder, and data analyst, the guide was developed to be comprehensive enough to cover learning goals yet flexible enough to invite unplanned learning. This approach appears fundamental to gathering aggregate
responses and drawing conclusions following the study, since each participant has the opportunity to address the same set of basic questions from their individual contexts.

Data Analysis – Methods, Sequence

After review of all transcripts and listening sessions for each of the interviews, coding categories were applied to separate themes and to begin collecting and categorizing supporting data. I used the software, Atlas.ti, to create, capture and sort the data, and to keep all electronic documents well-organized and accessible throughout the process. Within this program, a coding strategy, both deductive and inductive, (see Appendix of this proposal document) was applied for the first of these interviews, then applied similarly to the others, with some adjustments made to theme categories as data analysis continued. Color-coding was used to indicate categories, bringing organization through visual cues (colors) to the verbal data across interview transcripts.

As Maxwell (2013) described, I used coding to identify similarities and differences along common themes (p. 109-111). I looked for contiguity, which Maxwell defined as the circumstance where one event has influence over another and appears to be causal. This refers to situations or stories relayed, where a past occurrence seems to have led to an outcome, lasting impression, or decision in the interviewee’s future. Maxwell described these as “contextualizing strategies.”

Preliminary Coding – Deductive and Inductive

The essential distinction between these two approaches is grounded in how each relates to the concept of theory in research. Specifically, deductive codes are developed to test a working theory, informed by relevant research and literature, whereas inductive codes are generated in an effort to capture emerging theories that the data appear to
describe. In the first instance, the deductive approach looks for a “fit” with a prior model, as a way of adding rationale for potential reasons why the phenomena we expect to observe or capture is occurring. By contrast, the inductive approach has the researcher openly looking at new, fresh perspectives on previously conducted research or reading the data looking for new explanations.

For this study, based on research previously conducted in and around this theme (Pilot study), in addition to my professional experiences, I expected to find alumni recounting experiences in categories and sub-categories that I was capturing as preliminary codes. I had loaded these originally in Atlas and cross-referenced them with relevant prior research. (See Appendix.)

Once I reviewed and coded transcripts, I organized and selected, relevant verbatim highlights into a matrix. I then summarized emerging categories or themes and built out the matrix, making revisions from there. I displayed themes first, with color indications following. Finally, I captured segments of quotes from interviews directly below each theme grouping. Ultimately, I built out a better, more robust matrix, with dimensions of column headings, allowing capture of outputs of multiple participants’ responses side-by-side, sorted by topic or theme, and by more practical categorizations, such as school, graduation era and gender. This approach is illustrated by Maxwell (2013) in the “themes x data” matrix.

**Researcher Role, Issues of Validity**

Byrne (2001) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed accepted strategies in qualitative research to establish validity or trustworthiness. Among these are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. For credibility, I began by documenting
my research experiences and points-of-view, being careful to stop short of infusing inherent bias into the study or into the future interpretation of its findings. Further, I employed the strategy of triangulation, to corroborate my findings. The use of specific sources included the online survey, introductory immersion discussions with school leaders, accompanied by field notes, a focus group (3 schools represented), and one-on-one interviews with alumnae (recorded and transcribed). The intent was to build in verification, as I conducted the research, with the goal of producing different facets of learning. I am hopeful that this has enriched the study’s findings.

Barbour (1998) warned of the limitations of triangulation in qualitative research, and pointed out how difficult it can be to perform well. Concerns are that it is limited in fulfilling the goal of internal validity. Barbour further summarized her position that none of the procedures aimed at producing rigor in research should be regarded as full solutions. By contrast, Patton (2002) was a proponent of triangulation, and discussed the positive impact of using multiple methods. Member checking is a technique I used to validate participant input and improve accuracy.

Maxwell (2013) advocated triangulation as the most effective way to avoid misinterpretation of findings, which can result from inherent biases, or simply, misunderstandings, of what participants are conveying. Further, Maxwell (2013) wrote about transferability and the idea of carefully documenting the research process, to allow others to determine how applicable findings may be to other, broader contexts. Advising on how to be most careful in the interpreting phase, I abided by Maxwell’s recommendations, as I am conscious of the need to avoid ascribing meaning to other contexts (i.e., school-specific findings to other Catholic high schools in the region).
sought to achieve the best level of neutrality, allowing participants to inform findings vs. any inherent bias I may have had going into the study.

Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) addressed the realities of researcher positionality, specifically in the context of who the researcher is in relation to the participants he/she is studying. This touches on issues of organizational hierarchy, group membership, and the rigor needed to “locate” oneself as a researcher. I approached the data collection phase as a doctoral student from Penn, with an interest in Catholic education’s growth and future. I mentioned my recent long-term consulting role as Chief Marketing Officer with Faith in the Future from early 2012 through late 2014, explaining The Foundation’s role in the Philadelphia Catholic school landscape. I remained straightforward with my identity as a practicing Catholic, a product of the elementary Catholic school system and a parent of children who have attended Catholic independent schools.

Still, I was able to foresee that through the outreach process of arranging and conducting research, some participants might regard me as an extension of the school administration, which could contribute to researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013) or reservations about trustworthiness. As with my pilot study, I committed to stay fully transparent about my former role and to reassure participants of my objectivity, their anonymity, and confidentiality.

When the occasion rose, I also disclosed that as a life-long Catholic, and a parent with children in Philadelphia-area Catholic schools, I was not claiming to approach this subject as a complete outsider. I resolved to be open-minded, committed to cross-checking input, verbatim statements, contexts and findings and generally to uphold the
principles of an academic researcher, as I looked for authentic learning to inform and benefit the field.

**Preparing the Questionnaire**

Bradburn, Sudman, and Wansink (2004) advocated an 18-step process to prepare an optimal questionnaire, crafted in a quality sequence. Using this as a guideline, I both solicited peer feedback and pretested in advance; the Appendix reflects my final instruments. In addition, I drew upon the advice provided by Ravitch and Carl (2016) in terms of how to effectively structure a questionnaire in a way that directly and efficiently addressed the study’s goals. Further, I actively leveraged my Penn GSE Mid-Career Cohort 13 Team Groups to assess the procedures and content of these instruments, once the proposal hearing was concluded and I submitted the MOU.

**Interview Protocol**

I designed the Interview Protocol as a semi-structured interview, to be delivered either by phone or in-person, depending on availability of participants. As the respondent sample is comprised of alumni across 18 Philadelphia-area Catholic secondary schools, the presumption was that disparate schedules and geographic residence realities of research participants would likely necessitate conducting interviews by phone. In all cases, with the exception of one interview and the focus group, phone interviews did serve as the selected “site.” When “live” settings were available, this allowed the additional advantage of participant observation, in which case I, as the researcher, became the instrument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), capturing field notes as additional data. In fact, even for interviews conducted by phone, I recorded observational notes to supplement respondent feedback and add context to the data for analysis.
Conversational guide format. Phone or live on site interviewing, +/- 30-45 minutes in duration was conducted and recorded with Rev app and then transcribed. To better ensure quality of analysis, I shared transcription drafts and my summary, synthesizing responses and sharing with my Penn Cohort team members, requesting member checks of the data and early insights.

Questions. These follow up-front, factual data collection, e.g. confirming name, graduation year, contact info specifics, in order to segment respondents by graduation era and easily reference follow-up details. Also, I asked each respondent for approval to record our discussion. Before initiating the line of questioning, I reminded participants of our discussion topic for the period to aid in setting context for the session. I was careful to avoid any researcher bias in the description of the interview’s intent. Specifically, I took care to avoid making any presumptions about the impact of the secondary Catholic educational experience on the participant, and instead, adhered to the line of refined questioning described above.

Mapping instrument elements to research questions. I layered a color–coding approach onto the sequence of questions within the semi-structured interview / discussion guide to distinguish which interview questions are intended to address which research questions. Prior to the list of questions is a brief script I used introduce the research to participants. The goal was to provide context and a level of comfort as to where the discussion was heading. By experience in fielding qualitative research in my consulting practice, I find this small technique can derive many benefits in reassuring respondents who are apprehensive. Even for those who are predisposed to openly sharing, participants
generally appreciate as clear an outline of the course of discussion as possible, as it seems to allow them to organize their thoughts and provide clearer, stronger responses.
CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW, DATA COLLECTION, & FINDINGS

Overview

This fourth chapter first shares several brief snapshots of the alumni survey, then describes findings and insights elicited from participant feedback, interviews, and focus group engagement throughout the six-month life of the study. Additionally, observations considered meaningful and perhaps inspiring of future study are captured in an effort to paint a vibrant mosaic. Whenever possible, I include direct quotes from alumni as their voices and recollections offer valuable perspectives that cannot justly be represented in summarized observations. Drawing upon their own lexicon, and the richness of their recollections allows unusual insight into connection points between their “then” and “now,” and arguably, addresses the questions of “how” and “why” school leaders and teachers practiced what they preached.

Whether the results are generalizable (Maxwell, 2005) is less a matter of rigor and stance and instead, may well rest in the beliefs of the reader. What I hope to address in these findings is a set of theories on why there may be such a strong connection between Catholic high school education and unusually high levels of service commitment and engagement into adulthood. Further, beyond even the core research question of why is how these schools inspired and directly cultivated that impact, and how school leaders in these secondary institutions continue to teach a not-so-hidden curriculum that appears to mirror that second classroom (Campano, 2007) discussed in Chapter 2.

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Section 1. Description of Data Sets

Alumni Survey. As noted earlier, the online survey was launched in October 2016 and had a goal of generating two to three hundred responses across seven decades of alumni from 18 schools, based on prior school-initiated communications efforts. In reality, the survey respondent base ultimately was ten-fold, yielding a rich data set beyond projections, with a total of 2,332 participants. Significantly, the first of the 18 schools alone had reached the participation goal for the entire system in the first two weeks. Subsequently, additional schools’ alumni bases began to respond in similarly strong numbers. I made the decision to keep the survey live for as long a duration as possible, still fulfilling the timelines for interviews, analysis, and findings. The survey closed on March 23, 2017.

In aggregate, the online survey reveals a seven-decade set of graduates, the largest number of them from graduation years in the 1960s and 1970s with an estimated twice as many of them female vs. male. Most of these graduates recollect having service exposure in their high school experiences (more so in the latter decades than earlier years). More than half report being currently active as adults in some sort of service activities. While the nature of the specific community service or civic engagement activities varies, the survey data appears to support connections between service engagement during high school and similar predispositions as adults.

Interviews. Thirty interviewees were successfully recruited from the survey pool, continuously throughout the 6-month period, with an intent to identify participants reflective of a set of diverse alumni (to the extent this could be discerned), in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Twice as many women participated as men.
Intentionally, the participant cohort mirrors the respondent population, and appears reflective of their high school service experiences and adult perspectives on volunteering. Phone interview contacts were drawn from the survey responses, and they are, as such, a sub-set of the larger respondent universe.

Question 11 on the survey asked if respondents would be willing to participate in a one-on-one phone interview, at a date and time convenient to them. Those who indicated “yes” (25%) and supplied their contact information for follow-up were considered for participation. Outreach by email was the method of recruitment, with willing participants receiving a confirming email and Outlook scheduling invitation to reserve the time. Interviews were conducted throughout the six-month life of the survey. All but one was by phone, with one respondent volunteering to meet in person.

Table 2

*Interview Participants by Gender and Graduation Decade*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Era</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the composition of the survey participants, the interview group is comprised of seven decades’ worth of graduates, with slightly more than twice as many women as men. By far, the largest representation of graduation decades is from the 1960s and 1970s, with a fairly even distribution of participants representing the balance of graduation eras. Because interview participants are drawn from survey respondents, there
is the added benefit of validating survey feedback during the interview process and then contextualizing responses for closer investigation.

**Focus Group.** To vary the qualitative research dynamics further, a focus group was held, with seven participants recruited from three schools, allowing conversational interchange among alumni, as they recounted their own experiences. Given challenges with recruiting for an in-person group, to be conducted during the holiday period, the composition of the alumni group represented a handful of high schools, with graduates of the 1970s and 1980s. Four women and three men participated. Much like the interview participant composition, this group appeared to be reflective of consistent experiences and predispositions voiced by the larger survey population.

From further available data, the group participants skew to Caucasian, educated, affluent, suburban profiles and in every case but one, are married with children. By observation, all appeared professional in their occupations, have been raised Catholic, attended Catholic grade schools in addition to Catholic high schools. Many have children currently attending Catholic schools, with a mix between parochial, Archdiocesan, and independent schools. Most seemed to come from large families, and most commonly of Irish, Italian, or other western European family heritages. What is factually known about each of them, directly from their introductions in the start of the session, appears below.
Table 3

*Focus Group Attendee Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Married/Single</th>
<th>Graduation Yr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average high school graduation year of the seven participants is 1978, largely due to a peer networking recruiting strategy, employed to overcome hurdles with attracting “cold” research participants for an in-person session. Because the nature of live research enables additional visual cues, ethnicity, admittedly presumed, is able to be captured as an additional data point. Further, marital status is available as well, as respondents offered this in their introductory remarks, even though there was no specific questioning on this topic during the group session.

Section 2. Survey Results – Descriptive Overview.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the largest majority of respondents came from those with graduation years in the 1960s, the height of Catholic education (Ziegler, 2011). Importantly, the voice of graduates from the 1950s, the earliest decade for which alumni emails are accessible, are included, as are the “middle” (1970s, 1980s) and more contemporary decades of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, providing more recent perspectives. For consistency and to maintain confidentiality, I attribute quotes by beginning with whether the graduate is either a survey respondent, an interviewee, or
focus group participant, following by their high school and graduation year or era, whichever is available from the data sources.

Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown, by graduation era, of the 2,332 participants who completed the survey. No incentives of any kind were offered for participation. The core research timing fell squarely in the holiday period, with 1,918 of 2,332, or 82% of respondents completing the survey in the November and December 2016 time-period.

Alumni participation is strongest overall among graduates from the 1960s and 1970s, with the lowest participation rates among those from the 1950s and 2010s.

![Q2 In what decade did you graduate high school?](image)

**Figure 1.** Distribution of area Catholic high school alumni surveyed by graduation era.

A relatively mature group, the alumni base has 59% of its representatives in the 60+ age range, 29% are in their 40s and 50s, and a light 12% in their 20s and 30s.
Figure 2. Age Distribution (estimated) of Survey Participants

**Self-reported descriptions of high school impact on adult lives.** The vast majority of respondents, 86.29%, rate their high school experiences as either “very important” or “life-defining,” with a mean score of 3.15 update on a 4-point scale. This finding was consistent across seven decades with no cohort of graduates yielding an aggregate score lower than 3 (“very important.”)

Table 4.

Survey Participants rate their high school experiences on scale of 1 to 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance on 4 point scale</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Life defining</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weighted Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>12.41%</td>
<td>55.86%</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When alumni were asked which high school experience factors they believe were most impactful on their adult lives, most selected (in this order) “influences of teachers,” “circle of high school friends,” “academics,” and “Catholic religion.”
Figure 3 displays Catholic high school experiences selected as being most impactful on alumni members’ adult lives.

Almost 2/3 of participants (62.75%) reported being active, often or occasionally, in service or leadership activities while in high school, with over 2/3 (64.40%) serving in leadership clubs or student government roles. Nearly half (49.47%) of those active in high school participated in religious retreats and more than one-third (37.74%) had experience with organized fund-raising.

*Figure 3. Catholic high school experiences.*
Figure 4. Participants active in service activities during high school.

Religious / Spiritual, School Fund-raising, Student Council / Student Government, and Working with Children rated most highly among the activities experienced.
Figure 5. Type of service activities recollected by respondents active in service during high school.

Further, more than half (51.15%) of the respondent base report being active in volunteer capacities and/or service roles today as adults. The number of hours for those who reported time commitments ranges from 2 hours per month to full-time. This evidence of a significant disposition to service emerges not only through the self-reported levels of engagement in the survey, but is validated further through open-ended responses and through the individual interviews and focus group.
Correlating adult service engagement with types of service in high school. Of those who report current engagement in service as adults, virtually all of them report having participated in either occasional or many service experiences during high school.

Figure 6. Participating Catholic high school graduates’ community service and/or civic engagement levels.

Figure 7. Percentage of graduates active in service as adults and their reported levels of service in high school.
Further, the survey data demonstrates patterns in various types of service experiences, offering a glimpse of associations between varieties of high school community causes and how they may inform later life pathways. Specifically, of those graduates who are currently active and who reported participating in service activities while in high school, the most frequently recollected types of service included religious events, work with children, and student government / council.

**Figure 8.** Correlation between alumni active in service as adults and their high school service experiences.

**Correlation between service types in high school and adult service engagement.** Of all of the above activities, when isolating participation in specific activities, only Religious / Spiritual retreats is shown to drive greater than average
participation (68.41% vs. the overall 51.15%) in service for these graduates in their adult lives.

**Figure 9.** Correlation between service types in high school and adult service engagement.

**Correlations by age groups.** Examining activity levels by graduation decades, variances are notable though perhaps not surprising, given presumptions of life stages. The most active groups are the graduates of area Catholic high schools from the 1980s and 1990s, with 57.45 and 57.81%, respectively, reporting current engagement in regular service work.
Figure 10. 1980s Graduates currently active in service.

Figure 11. 1990s graduates represent the cohort most active in service as adults.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this cohort of 1990s graduates also reported exceptionally high level of service engagement in high school, with over 77% of them occasionally or frequently active.
**Figure 12.** 1990s graduates show high service engagement levels in high school.

Most of the remaining decade cohorts, examined in aggregate, report current service activity levels within seven percentage points of the all-cohort number, with the exception of the two most recent decades, those having graduated in the 2000s (38.07% active as adults) and 2010s (30.59% active as adults) show notably lower numbers.
Q9 Are you currently active in any service activities or civic groups? (Examples could include volunteering at a soup kitchen, donating time at your children’s school or community gardening.)

Answered: 197  Skipped: 1

Figure 13. Adult service levels of graduates from the 2000s.

Q9 Are you currently active in any service activities or civic groups? (Examples could include volunteering at a soup kitchen, donating time at your children’s school or community gardening.)

Answered: 85  Skipped: 0

Figure 14. Adult service activity levels of graduates of the 2010s.
Cross-correlations: Then and Now, by Decade

Correlating graduates’ service activity levels while in high school with their adult levels of participation, we see two significant trends. The first pattern, focusing exclusively on reported engagement in service activities, shows marked increases in experiences offered during the Catholic high school years. From the earliest decades to most recent times, reported service levels jump at least five percent with every passing decade, and upwards of seven, 10 and up to over 16 percent in some ten-year spans. While the data reflects increased activity levels in those teen years “then,” the connections to adult volunteerism are not as evident. Specifically, those in the most recent cohorts of graduates, 2010s and 2000s have comparatively modest rates of service engagement, perhaps owing to other life stage factors. Even though their service levels were higher relative to earlier decades, perhaps due to increased service requirements in high school, or their early career pursuits, their activity levels of adult service did not increase.
Correlating Catholic high school graduates’ as adults with national averages.

By comparison, however, the national averages for volunteerism by age brackets (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015), demonstrate the relative strength of service commitment among Catholic high school alums in the region, including for those of these most recent decades. Patterns of comparison are dramatic, with the youngest Catholic high school alumni volunteers, on average, active at a 50% higher rate than their national counterparts, and the eldest volunteering at roughly double the rate, or slightly more, versus national counterparts.
Figure 16. Service engagement rate comparisons between general population (national) and participating Catholic high school graduates.

Section 3. Thematic Findings Across Datasets

Demonstrating the linkage: Specific themes and narratives connected to service motivation, consistent through alumni recollections. Four factors link service involvement in Catholic high school with service disposition and commitment as adults. These four major findings are drawn primarily from interviews, reinforced through focus group feedback and also complemented by the survey responses. With each finding, I first introduce the finding and clarify its meaning. Second, I cite the frequency of interview and focus group coding relationships. Third, I display graphs and statistics from surveys, and fourth, I illustrate linkage through verbatim quotes, attributed to alumni by high school and graduation decade or year.
Finding #1: Service Identity emerges as the primary motivating factor driving service commitment. The first and most consistent theme that emerges is that of Service Identity, a strong and resonant aspect throughout participants’ years of Catholic education. To clarify, Service Identity, for purposes of this study, is defined as the sum of several verbal patterns, each including references to Catholic school mission and values, which arise when probing for why graduates believe they are motivated or committed to community service or civic engagement as adults. There are continuous patterns within the interview participants’ comments in which this Service Identity, or references to what are understood to be the mission and values taught in graduates’ high schools, are voiced repeatedly as contributing to service commitment as adults.

It should be noted that nowhere in the line of my questioning about service motivations are the terms “Catholic,” “mission,” “values” or equivalent verbal cues provided. The respondents’ mentions of how their identification as Catholic school graduates inspires them to service engagement is an unprovoked, tangible element of feedback, consistently observed in frequent patterns across all three modes of inquiry, from surveys and interviews to the focus group.

When probed, three sub-themes of Service Identity appear to emerge. Combining responsibility (to give back, acknowledging what they’ve been given), moral codes (e.g. right vs. wrong, or conscience) and religious traditions (such as retreats and other rituals), participants describe specific examples of how their high school educational experiences, in a Catholic context, cultivated or reinforced these values and informed their adult life choices. Catholic Identity, while considered as a label for this phenomenon, is addressed as a sub-theme of Service Identity, as evidenced by the frequency with which participant
named distinctly religious or spiritual motivations for their service predispositions, as compared to those voicing more of a moral code, instilled by institutions and leaders who embody Catholic Identity.

While abundant literature references multiple dimensions of Catholic Identity, perhaps the most relevant to the context of this study is a description offered by one of this nation’s 28 Jesuit colleges, in which Catholic school standards are offered: “The Standards describe policies, programs, structures, and processes that should be present in mission-driven, program effective, well-managed, and responsibly governed Catholic schools that operate in concert with the defining characteristics. The standards address four domains: Mission and Catholic identity, governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and operational Vitality. (Loyola University Chicago, 2012). Focusing on the four standards entitled “Catholic Identity,” provides a glimpse into how institutions embody the core Catholic education mission, requiring not only the expected facets of academic excellence and faith formation, but an explicit service-driven mission. Of particular significance is the aspect of the standards, which not only creates expectations for Catholic school students, but encourages school leaders to foster service predisposition in their students as adults.

Standard 1. An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic identity rooted in gospel values, centered on the Eucharist, and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.
Standard 2. An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.

Standard 3. An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice.

Standard 4. An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for adult faith formation and action in service of social justice (Loyola University Chicago, 2012).

It is precisely this distinction between *institutional identities*, undeniably Catholic in heritage, mission and leadership and the *individual identities* graduates describe, that characterizes Service Identity. Importantly, Service Identity for individuals appears instilled in the Catholic schools of study, but non-denominational in its impact.

Across graduation eras, high school types and socio-economic circumstances, this Service Identity, voiced most often as a reinforcing extension of what families and home environments also provide, manifests itself “then” and “now” in distinct but related ways. This emergent code occurs 146 times in interviewing and focus group feedback, surpassing all other patterns identified. Contributing to the consistency of this finding is the repeated observation of data in the open-ended responses to the survey question probing for service motivation as adults.

As alumni recount their stories of Service Identity in the context of “then,” during high school days, personal narratives related to service and particularly, what types of service, were the most common of those they participated in, they most frequently cite
religious or spiritual activities (49.47%). This is an especially striking pattern when one considers that this category of activity is listed within a list of 10 possible responses, representing a diverse range of service types, from “fund raising for school facilities” and “working with children,” to “student government / council” and “leadership clubs.” Perhaps most interestingly, even though the activities named are undoubtedly spiritual or religious, the powerful lexicon used to describe impacts is largely secular. This appears indicative of the more holistic, values-oriented life lessons they recall learning through these experiences.

**Figure 17. Types of service activities participated in during high school.**
Of the seven decades surveyed, only one group of respondents, the graduates of the 1990s, demonstrates an exception to this pattern, with only 40.1% reporting religious/spiritual service activities as the most common, eclipsed by fund-raising (46.88%) and working with children (42.71%).

**Figure 18.** Types of service activities participated in by graduates of 1990s.

Of all seven decades, it is perhaps surprising to learn that the most current cohort of graduates ranks religious and spiritual activities in high school most highly of all service activities in which they were active, with alumni from the 2010s selecting this category most frequently (58.97%).
“Now” / Present day – Named Motivations for Service as Adults

Notably, graduates’ responses to “why service now?” show a distinct pattern within the data, as Service Identity references are raised by participants without any prompting around themes of a religious or spiritual nature. For example, the survey question designed to probe for motivating factors as an adult is simply, “If you answered ‘yes’ to above (“are you currently active in any service activities or civic groups?”), can you share a few words about why you dedicate your time to that cause? What motivates your commitment and action?” In fact, even the examples of service activities given in the question are decidedly non-religious (soup kitchen, children’s school, community gardening) to intentionally avoid leading the respondent to recollections of a religious nature.

As I continue to unpack which elements are inside of Service Identity, I identify three sub-themes I am labelling the “3 R’s”: Responsibility (giving back), Right (vs. wrong, or Conscience) and Rites (religious traditions or practices).

Service Identity Sub-Theme 1A: Responsibility to Give Back to One’s Community

When study participants are asked “why,” as adults, they choose to devote such time and energy to these service activities, the most frequently cited responses center on “moral values” (coded with frequency of 69 in interviews), “empathy / compassion” for circumstances of Others (coded 26 times in interviews) or “responsibility to give back to community” (coded 25 times in interviews). In the open-ended survey question #10, “Can you share a few words about why you dedicate your time to that cause?” these patterns are also consistent, supporting the finding and describing specific examples in open-
ended responses. Overall, in the survey, respondents cite giving back 312 times in their responses, more frequently than any other verbatim expression.

Specific to moral values, participants readily label those values, providing nuanced descriptions of how they manifest in their lives as adults. While terms such as morals, values, principles or behaviors are used, perhaps it is the descriptive verbs chosen to communicate the engrained nature of these characteristics that stands out most prominently. Terms such as “instilled,” “deeply internalized,” and “impacted” portray a picture of graduates who appear to view their motivations as inherent in their make-up rather than a choice about who they are and how they wish to be perceived by others.

Engrained in me is a mandate of service to my community. When I am not serving or giving back to my community in some way, I feel as though my life lacks purpose. (Survey Respondent #219, Bishop McDevitt graduate, 1990s).

Notably, this perspective is crystallized in a context almost tribal in nature, as graduates place themselves as individuals whose who identify socially as part of a larger community concerned for others, articulating from their selves outward, how they believe their motivations were formed. In offering rationales, many cite directly their Catholic high schools by name, associating those singular institutions with other like communities, where students are “Catholic-educated.”

I belong to a social group that donates to families in need. Approximately 90% of our members are Catholic educated as well. My reason for participating is directly associated with the morals instilled during my years at Father Judge. (Survey Respondent #106, Father Judge graduate, 2000s).

Moral values and a code of ethics surface with impassioned expressions, such as “deeply internalized,” bridging those foundational virtues with a developed sense of perspective on conduct and beliefs of others. Many graduates recall their Catholic high
school experiences as their first doses of “other,” in terms of beliefs, behaviors, and backgrounds. There are multiple recollections and references to first-time encounters and developing social relationships with students “not like me.” Sensitivities developed in that environment are communicated with descriptive phrases discriminating between judgment and acceptance.

Overall - humility, self-confidence, deeply internalized moral values. Deep sense of right and wrong, with the ability to see shades of grey, so as not to judge, but instead accept, the ideas and actions of others. (Survey Respondent #1,871, Little Flower Girls High School graduate, 1950s).

A further nuance is revealed by graduates who describe the effect their high school experiences had on their professional identities, crediting the schools with instilling a specific foundation and code of conduct. Importantly, this connects the “then” with “now” as this aspect of identity formation during high school is shown to correlate with later-life, and life-long professional identity.

Provided a base of principles and behaviors that impacted how I wanted to be viewed and respected by my work and business colleagues throughout my 42-year career. (Survey Respondent #2099, Archbishop Wood graduate, 1960s).

While not naming the virtues of empathy or compassion, several respondents offer concrete examples of how they diagnose needs in their own communities, without waiting to be called upon for help. Whether referencing their predispositions as “a calling,” an innate sense or commitments anchored to Catholic faith, the pattern of an almost gravitational pull to provide assistance to others who are needy comes through consistently. In some, this instinct is expressed from an individual’s internal perspective outward, articulating what motivations fuel a commitment to caring for not just other peers, but others’ children.
My wife and I have fostered kids. Fostered people who were in bad place with no options for change. . . We were fostering two teenagers. A teenage girl and a teenage boy for a while. We were directly led to do that, because we really felt like that was something that we were called to do. (Interview Participant #3, Bishop Egan graduate, 1970s).

While the notion of a calling is repeated and pervasive, there emerges yet another, more literal pattern of responses connecting a theological, overtly religious motivation describing the impact of a locus outside of oneself. This is not simply one’s described identity and perspective on the outside, secular world, but instead an inherently religious phenomenon, anchored to core principles of Catholic faith.

Commitment to help others less fortunate and to improve [our] own community [is an] important tenet of Catholic faith. (Survey Respondent #2.207, West Philadelphia Catholic Girls High School graduate, 1960s).

This sense of responsibility appears to also manifest itself in a reflective manner, as graduates impose expectations on themselves, voicing a responsibility that they describe as one which requires them to take active roles in service.

I need to do more to help. Jesus calls us to serve. (Survey Respondent #2.329, Bishop McDevitt graduate, 1990s).

Even when faith or spirituality is not mentioned explicitly as a driver fostering the sense of deep service responsibility, repeated patterns of graduates activating without hesitation, and with urgency are expressed. This sense of immediacy, lack of second-guessing and innate, driving force to “just do it” surfaces repeatedly.

There was that sense of pitching in. Not waiting, not like seeing what needs to be done, not waiting to be asked . . . You see the need, no matter where it is, and if you can, you just do it, you just do it. (Interview Participant #14, Little Flower Catholic High School graduate, 1966).

Lastly, there is the repeated pattern of the term, “give” or “giving back,” conveyed in multiple contexts, as part of the participants’ essence or being, expressed as
an aspect of their selves, both “then” and “now.” The notion is revealed in relationship to
the concept of “self” vs. “other,” as participants describe a compelling need to recognize
where their personal gifts can be useful to others not as fortunate. In each reference, there
is a voiced connection between Service Identity and teaching and an articulated
responsibility, even joy, in giving back to others who are not in positions to help
themselves.

The Franciscan priests taught us to be responsible people. To give back and be
part of your community. (Survey respondent #97, Bishop Egan graduate, 1970s).

A further nuance to this sense of responsibility appears to reference an element of
noblesse oblige, the French concept that an individual in a certain advantaged position
must recognize and attend to certain social responsibilities. Specific obligations are
referenced as examples of the types of expectations this responsibility carried and are
often discussed as influences bridging home and school lives.

It was instilled in me from my upbringing and Catholic education to help the poor
and visit the imprisoned . . . to give back. (Survey Respondent #1723, Lansdale
Catholic graduate, 1980s).

Responsibility to give back is consistently linked to gratitude for individuals’ life
circumstances, career achievements and families, as graduates credit their faith with
aspects of their adult lives for which they are appreciative. The notion of “giving back” is
anchored in a stated recognition, or deep-seeded belief that these individuals would not
have the many fortunes or “blessings” without the influences of their educational
experiences and that it is their duty to continuously signify that gratitude by actively
“giving back” to others in less fortunate circumstances. Many credit those educational
experiences directly for contributing to their successes in their personal and professional lives.

I truly enjoy participating in activities that give back. Though I may not be rich in money I feel that I am blessed with a healthy family, a great job I love, a home to go to every night and am surrounded by people I love . . . I feel that God has blessed me in more ways than I can count and I want to give back any way I can. (Survey Respondent #1,312, Father Judge graduate, 2010s).

This notion is further evidenced as graduates offer self-reflective statements of appreciation for their own life circumstances, linking gratitude with a sense of obligation to help others by raising money for or donating to charitable causes.

I am grateful for what I have in life and try to give back by donating new or gently used items often, also fundraise for several charities in addition to donating on my own. (Survey Respondent #204, Little Flower High School graduate, 1990s).

Many participants describe an intersection between Service Identity with “Catholic-ness” being a contributor to service predisposition, connecting that aspect of their individual selves with character traits that motivate that sense of responsibility to give back.

The Catholic-ness, the whatever of it, is a part of it. I think what it is, is it tends to attract people who have that honest character. Who have the character of wanting to give back, or pay it forward, or pay it again. Who are willing to serve, instead of be served. (Interview Participant #3, Bishop Egan graduate, 1970s).

Another important distinction has its core motivation in responsibility, and yet is offered as joyful, not obligatory in nature. Further, this nuance adds the layer of the next generation, one’s children, witnessing the “giving back.” A priority is placed on having children observe and model the behavior of parents, so that the pattern itself may be motivating and endures. This is related to but distinct from the legacy theme, discussed
separately, in that it is less about inspiring a next generation to give and centered more specifically on setting a visible, living example for one’s children, as a model of service.

I feel that we as community members should give back, it is our duty. I enjoy helping and it is important that my daughters see me volunteer. (Survey Respondent #292, Bishop Shanahan graduate, 1990s).

There is a demonstrated connection to participants’ local parishes, which serve as proxies for what, in secular circles, might be termed, “community centers.” Not coincidentally, the parishes most often were also the sites of the grade schools these alumni attended, with their local Catholic high schools pre-determined, in many circumstances, as the next logical steps in their educational paths. This further demonstrated the wider institutional relationship that motivates the alumni studies to service, both then and now.

In terms of community activities, we were more connected with Presentation, our local parish . . . Everything revolved around the local parish. We'd have food events, where we'd raise money for different groups. We would sell items. We would have a lot of fundraising activities out of the local parish to raise funds. (Focus Group Participant #7, Archbishop Carroll graduate, 1977).

A local or regional context arises repeatedly, as graduates describe their parishes in much the same manner as those in secular contexts might describe their hometowns. Frequent mention of how those original parish lines are commonly consistent with their adult life choices demonstrate further the commitment to parish communities decades later, informing the decisions on where to raise their own families.

Definitely local parish, I was from Saint Katherine's in Wayne. I haven't moved too far from there either . . . I have this similar type commitment with friends locally, as I did when I grew up. I guess in terms of outward with the community, it was definitely clothing drives and more things that were parish related. (Focus Group Participant #6, Archbishop Carroll graduate, 1978).
Language is yet another indicator that emerges, with specific verbiage reflecting invisible, dividing, perhaps even limiting geographical lines and the decided identity that binds those inside of, vs. outside of a given parish. Even the collective set of parishioners across those lines (“the Catholics”) are described as a singular, more macro and connected community vs. those not identified with, or an active member of a parish (“anyone else”).

Well, where we grew up, the communities were clearly defined by parish, so it was, “Which parish did you attend?” It wasn't anything else. Our communities were known as the parish of Holy Savior, of Epiphany . . . that's the way the Catholics communicated. I didn't know anyone else except for Catholics. (Interview Participant #26, Bishop Kenrick High School graduate 1980).

Once again, active concern for the next generation and the viability of one’s parish to sustain itself in the future is another recurring theme. Vitality of the parish extends beyond the parish life, and centrality of the church. There is a stated, overt concern for enabling continued Catholic education for other families. When described in this manner, references are to those outside one’s one family, to those considered part of the extended Catholic community, or even more broadly to those future potential families who may benefit from access to Catholic education.

I have always been an active member of our parish as sports coach, athletic director and member of the finance committee. I am committed to the sustainability of our church and school to insure that families today and in the future have the same opportunity for a faith based affordable Catholic education that I had . . . (Survey Respondent #52, Archbishop Wood graduate, 1960s).

Parish leadership, headed by in-residence priests, or Pastors, were commonly revered and familiar pillars of the community. Graduates describe how these church leaders garnered respect, were accessible to children and adults alike, and treated essentially, as part of their families. The frequently cited multi-dimensional, multi-
generational levels of involvement, combining school, volunteer activities, and proximity of home to church often combine to locate that pastor as a central figure in family life, placing him at the heart of the experience.

I grew up in a family where Father McCullough, who was the pastor of St. Albert the Great . . . would come to dinner. We knew him well. My father volunteered at the church . . . we were very steeped in that whole environment our whole lives. (Interview Participant #15, Archbishop Ryan for Girls graduate, 1978).

Service Identity Sub-Theme 1B: “Right vs. Wrong” (Conscience)

Many participants relay concrete examples of instances in which they were faced with difficult choices and drew upon their educational experience and moral values to drive decision-making, recollecting and describing a current commitment, often expressed as the obligation to “do the right thing.” Further, many describe a clear sense of expectations, as in, an ethical imperative to recognize the importance of understanding what is the right thing, or set of actions, required of a member of the Catholic high school community. This Service Identity sub-theme of “right vs. wrong” emerges 35 times in the coding of one-on-one interviews, and is expressed as a consistent pattern through survey open-ended comments related to why Catholic high school graduates feel disposed to service.

There were expectations . . . set on the values side . . . Be good. Be nice. Do what you can. We used to send, even after my parents passed, they used to send money to the priest every year. My brothers and I continue that. We're aware. I don't know how to describe it. I don't know. We just continue on those traditions. (Interview Participant #15, Archbishop Ryan High School for Girls graduate, 1978).

Reinforcement of what types of conduct are “right” appears, not surprisingly, to have roots in family and a consistent, repeated mantra of knowing the “right thing to do,” as part of a recognized moral code. There is an implied instantaneous, instinctive nature
about the way graduates describe this predisposition, framing it as what is expected of them, indelibly imprinted upon them, informing their choices and actions. Knowing what’s right appears to be innate and undeniable, never hazy or subject to judgment.

From the spiritual development standpoint, do the right thing and be morally upright. (Interview Participant #16, Father Judge graduate, 1958).

Not only was this engrained “then,” presumably by teachers, and shared as part of an understood moral code with other students, but it is continuously referenced as a quality and set of values that follow these graduates through their adult lives “now.”

A moral code of behavior was "stamped" on me that helps to define the person I am. Also, bonds of friendships were formed with both teachers and fellow students that still enrich my life. (Survey Respondent #2264, West Catholic graduate, 1960s).

Situational in nature, the idea expressed by many that when one is approached and capable, their innate sense of right and wrong informs their decision to follow this conscience, without question and with no formality, no grandiose, ego-centric senses of how valuable their contribution might be. Most often, these are also expressed in the voice of individuals who appear to almost understand their abilities, bringing the earlier referenced humility back into play.

Somebody came up to me and said, "We need you to help with this" . . . I'm like, "What do you need me for? I got nothing." But they're like, "No. You have a good heart, and you have a pickup truck." I said okay. How can I say no to that? I have a big heart, and I have a pickup truck. So I went down and I helped out. (Interview Participant #3, Conwell-Egan graduate, 1970s).

**Service Identity Theme 1C: “Rites, Including Retreats or Other Religious Rituals”**

Recalling the many specific experiences during the high school years that left lasting impressions, off-site retreats, holy days, masses, service trips, and basic religion classes offered instruction simply unavailable in any textbook. This is underscored in
Figure 17, with the most frequently mentioned service activity, among 10 options, being Retreats or other spiritual activities (50.6%). This pattern is consistent throughout graduation decades, reinforcing its original nature and current consistency. As alumni recount how these religious traditions or practices connect to their later lives, recollections blend both rigorous, disciplined learning environments with fun, carefree, more spirited experiences. These alumni are accustomed to both fun and spirituality simultaneously and recount tales that demonstrate the roles of reflection, religious events and community-building, whether on retreat, celebrating holy days or simply attending church.

When we were on our retreat, I remember they gave us these journals and notes to write about our thoughts of what we wanted next to be in the future for us. Then they separate the boys and the girls . . . for different team building exercises. Do trust exercises type of thing and then we came back at lunch for a pizza. (Interview Participant #6, Mercy Vocational graduate, 2009).

Retreats are often relished by graduates as one of very few, or perhaps the only times in their lives, both then and now, when the peace and quiet of reflection created what they came to recognize as needed time and space for actively being in touch with their spirituality. Recognition of retreats as a complement to high school’s academic curriculum is a repeated theme, as is the notion of developing agency, as one seeks one’s place and purpose in the world.

It was always nice to have that, to spend three days of silence and also listen to things. Going to a Catholic high school I guess, it was a lot of focus on the spiritual development as well as the academic one. (Interview Participant #16, Father Judge graduate, 1958)
Interestingly, the retreats are also referenced as not simply religious, but as experiences offering meaningful impact, regardless of one’s faith, as well as an appreciation for differences of others within a school community.

Kairos* is a big thing. the senior year retreat . . . there were some people that were very faith based, very dedicated, very religious. And then there were people that sort of waned, and people that didn't even identify as Catholic but were going to a Catholic school. So there is a whole mix. (Interview Participant #9, Archbishop Carroll graduate, 2004).

* Meaning “God’s Time” in Greek, Kairos is a student-run retreat program that allows undergraduate students the opportunity to step back from the many demands of life . . . in order to intentionally reflect on their relationships with God, with themselves, and with others. The retreat seeks to deepen or begin a student's connection to their spirituality and to further their understanding of God’s role in their lives. (bc.edu, 2017)

A retrospective, almost nostalgic theme presents itself in several recollections, as graduates reminisce about the years when being active in organized religious school ceremonies, class masses and holiday celebrations was core to the spiritual curriculum.

It was good because we went to church all the time and God forbid, I haven’t been to church in a while. It’s a disgrace. We did church all through school. We did the holy days. They kept us up on all that kind of stuff. That was awesome. (Interview Participant #8, Archbishop Carroll for Boys graduate, 1971).

Finding # 2: Legacy / Lifelong Belonging – the Circle of Life – “Catholic-ness” and Multi-generational Impacts

An overwhelming spirit of legacy, of belonging to a special and enduring community pervades the alumni narratives, communicated with a blend of nostalgia and gratitude, and yet, arguably a significantly more pervasive, life-course oriented phenomenon. As participants reflect on their Catholic high school years, many begin and end with the degree to which they value their high school communities and how teachers, friends, competitors and others colored their experiences and left lasting, positive impressions. As alumni, they recount the shared values, the teachings of those in
vocations and the indefinite nature of belonging to a lifelong community, describing participation in something that accompanies their lives and drives their motivations. This finding emerges through coding 85 times and is consistently supported as a pattern throughout the survey open-ended responses. Notably, much like Finding 1, Service Identity, there was no prompt for this in the line of questioning, no mention of the term, “legacy,” nor mention of any multi-generational aspect of their experiences, neither “then” nor “now.”

When articulating what drives this service motivation, repeated patterns of the longitudinal interests, of considering the needs of the next generation, culminating in the expression of legacy, though not in the usual academic terms. “Legacy,” in this context, takes on the meaning of acknowledging those who came before and future community members who will arrive as part of the next generation. It is open-ended, continuous and defining.

There's this legacy of service. There's this legacy of giving. You didn't get here on your own. You got here because of your parents or teachers or all these other ancillary people that got you here. You have this kind of duty to give back and to help the next bunch of people . . . it's just kind of like the circle of life. (Interview Participant #3, Conwell-Egan graduate, 1970s).

Similar to the legacy notion and description above, there is this repeated concept of a life-long, continuum of Catholic education. Not solely about academics, sports, clubs or any other school activity, the experience, many assert, then informs one’s life course. Terms such as “inbred” demonstrate how macro and influential the community both was, and now is, and how defining it is perceived to be in terms of later life pathways. There is a decided connectedness relayed through these alumni recollections and it has references across time and across generations.
You start in grade school in Catholic schools and then you have your parish community and then you go to high school . . . you get older and you raise kids and you bring them up into the same environment . . . It's what you want for your children and you just do it. It's inbred into you and that's the way you run your life. (Focus Group Participant #4, St. Joseph’s Preparatory School graduate, 1977).

The sweeping, communal nature of this legacy theme and sense of life-long belonging extends to social circles, as many describe how they view the generation before them and how that view aligns with their own experiences. As they set out on their adult lives, they appear to extend their own communities with purpose, intentionally adding new friends to their circles based on shared values.

I look back at my older family members and I see similar things. A lot of their lifelong friends are from high school . . . I think Judge laid the groundwork and . . . then as I . . . was willingly seeking out other people with these same values, I realized, “hey, this is actually something I want as a part of my life.” (Interview Participant #20, Father Judge graduate, 2013).

While treasuring new friendships, many describe their original Catholic high school classmates and their identity of life-long belonging as enduring through adulthood.

Some of the best an lifetime lasting relationships were made at Father Judge. Approaching 60, I am still good friends with a number of men I met at Judge. Also, there is a rivalry and a bond that going to a Catholic Boys school provides. Forever, I am a Judge Guy. (Survey Participant # 2,139, Father Judge graduate, 1976).

Catholic-ness also arises in the context of frequent patterns of graduates recounting how they are the next generations in their own families to attend a particular Catholic high school, and how often that fueled choices for further Catholic education at the college and graduate levels. “Growing up” or “being raised” Catholic is a common description offered, as if these terms might be as understandable as one’s nationality or ethnicity. Transcending the individual institution, this notion of connectedness reaches
across seemingly disparate realms of home, parish, church, and further educational pursuits.

My parents are both graduates of Bishop Kenrick . . . so we pretty much were growing up born Catholic, raised Catholic. That's what we did . . . I even went to college at a private Catholic school and graduate school at a private Catholic school. I think it's in my blood. (Interview Participant #25, Bishop Kenrick graduate, 1980).

Pride and intentionality also arise with frequency, as an almost badge of honor is claimed for the consistent choice of Catholic education. This is often paired with references to making sacrifices (most commonly financial ones) and doing without, in exchange for joining that community and having lifelong access to its benefits.

I sent all 4 of my children to Catholic School. In my mind there is no other option. People tell me my children are so good. It is no accident - I sent them to Catholic School. We had to do without other things but I would do it again (Survey Respondent #2099, St. Maria Goretti graduate, 1970s).

Strong emotions are offered by those who either have graduated, or were close to those who graduated Catholic high schools, which faced closure do to fiscal pressures and enrollment shortages. The regret for what once was, combined with sheer admiration for the loyalty continuous demonstrated, characterizes these sentiments.

North has been closed for four years . . . they still have their alumni association . . . It's amazing that a school that doesn't even exist anymore . . . in a few years there will be kids that never even heard of it, but you still have these people that . . . have the same passion for the school as if they went there yesterday (Interview Participant #20, Father Judge graduate, 2013).

A final demonstration of legacy and the sense of life-long belonging shows through in acts of school-specific tradition. Unique symbolic gestures are practiced from one generation to the next, in a given family, as their graduates pass the figurative torch, representative of the experience that was, and experience that is yet to be.
My whole family, we all went to Hallahan. We have a tradition that we hand over at the end, when somebody graduates, they hold it and keep it until the next person who is going to Hallahan. It is a gym bag with a lock on it. It is just symbolic for us. (Interview Participant 7, Hallahan graduate, 1968).

**Finding #3: The Generosity of Reciprocity: Giving to Others in Need (then), Demonstrating Gratitude (now)**

A prevalent theme in alumni recollections, aligning with their rationale for giving of themselves to community members in need is the sense of *reciprocity*, offered in a context of *gratitude*. This pattern of gratitude presents itself throughout the interviews, with 39 occurrences in coding and a plethora of examples throughout the survey. Similar to the recognized responsibility to “give back” mentioned above, this demonstration of gratitude goes beyond being grateful to one’s parents or guardians who may have sacrificed financially and is instead, a more sweeping gratitude, expressed to include the teachers and leaders of these schools.

The teachers were wonderful and I will always be grateful for the high standards they insisted on. Maintaining these standards helped me immensely in my work life and beyond. I continue to financially support them most years and feel a very real sense of loyalty to the school. (Survey Respondent #131, Little Flower graduate, 1960s).

Often, the gratitude emerges paired with an acknowledgement that the value of a graduate’s Catholic high school education was not evident at the time, but of great value now. The life-stage of many of the graduates offering this perspective makes it likely that they are parents today themselves.

I am grateful for my Catholic education. I’m sure that as a 17 year-old graduate in 1976, I didn't give it a second thought. However, with the hindsight of age and experience, I see that I am fortunate for the sacrifice of my parents who provided me (and my brother and two sisters) with an excellent Catholic education. (Survey respondent #1,359, Archbishop Ryan High School for Girls graduate, 1970s).
Several alumni specifically focus on the intertwined nature of religious environments within their families, at schools, and in social service contexts, expanding the experiences to include health advocacy and support for those who cannot support themselves.

Giving back is an act of gratitude. My family is motivated by the Catholic presence in the home and school promoting health, education and opportunities for children and families that would not be available otherwise. (Survey Respondent #825, Father Judge graduate, 1970s).

Decidedly religious terminology is a recurring pattern, yet without over mentions of religion, with participants instead choosing to paint themselves in a passive light, as grateful recipients of the gifts of faith, confidence and inspiration for further education.

Besides helping [me] to mature in my faith, Prendie reinforced in me the value of a good education beyond high school. I went on to college (being in the first class of women at what is now Widener with 30 women and 1500 men) and on to getting a law degree and ultimately becoming a judge. (Survey Respondent #971, Archbishop Prendergast for Girls graduate, 1960s).

Notably, aspirations for improving lives in the community often follows graduates into their career lives, with the selection of their professions and associated volunteer work rising to the level of vocation. One quickly gets the sense of an individual who is not focused upon merely doing a job or performing a set of occupational tasks, but instead of someone who takes personal responsibility for the longer-term welfare of constituencies he or she serves in that role.

As an oncology nurse, I have been dedicated to improving the well-being and survivorship of cancer patients so I have been actively involved in at least four different philanthropic cancer organizations . . . representing the perspectives of local nurses and community members . . . with our government officials. (Survey Respondent #1,709, Little Flower Catholic School for Girls graduate, 1960s).
Many graduates connect career choices and/or current professional roles by describing their jobs in a service context. They frequently credit the stances on how they perform their jobs to their Catholic high school education.

I am not active with a civic group, etc. but I am a career international civil servant with the UN, serving in humanitarian crises and I think the approach to my work is influenced by my Bonner education. (Survey Respondent #587, Monsignor Bonner High School for Boys graduate, 1960s).

Other alumni express a decidedly religious motivation and compassion for those less fortunate. In these instances, there is no reticence to place God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit as central to their personal service missions. In this era of continuous concern for political correctness, I observed a refreshing candor in participants’ willingness to simply “name” their motivations for serving others who might otherwise have no one.

I believe in the law of love. God is not an hour on Sunday, but a way of life. He is constantly sending people into my life with a very real need, but who may not qualify for a program. (Survey Respondent #560, Bishop Shanahan graduate, 1990s).

The identified notion that God has given these individuals a set of tools and special talents not available to everyone appears to inspire some to action, as they view themselves as selected agents of the service mission.

Sharing God given talents with others. Letting His light shine. (Survey Respondent #2,188, West Catholic graduate, 1950s).

Others recount how they consistently witnessed devotion from those who worked in and led their high schools. Graduates frequently describe a connection between teachers and leaders steadfast commitments to assuming formative roles in students’ lives.
I saw the dedication of the administrators, priests and staff who were determined to not only teach, but counsel, guide and form students in preparation for life. God touched my life through them. (Survey Respondent #1,359, Archbishop Ryan for Girls graduate, 1970s).

Not only do they name and arguably honor their inspiration in an openly faith-based context, connecting it with their high school education, but several go further and jointly cite both their Catholic faith and the Catholic high school that they credit with fostering their motivations. While they use present tense to describe their adult service predisposition, they reference the role these schools played in providing an experience that fostered that commitment and belief system.

I believe that what I contribute to my local community flows from the love that God has instilled in me through the faith that was matured at Bishop McDevitt. (Survey Respondent #269, Bishop McDevitt graduate, 2000s).

Further, many identify with wider group affiliations that extend their earlier “tribes,” providing rationale for what drives them to activate. There is no hesitation to label learned values as an element of their high school experiences, which they reference almost as it’s a known entity to others outside their communities.

Our group helps the homeless get into housing they can call their own and provides basic living needs. I feel that we are answering Christ’s call to "love one another." These Christian values were a part of the "Little Flower experience." (Survey Respondent #1965 Little Flower High School for Girls graduate, 1950s).

**Finding #4: Civic Engagement - Beyond Individual Service Identities, Catholic Identities of High Schools, and Learned Moral Codes: Insights on Civic Engagement**

From the earliest planning stages of this research, my primary concern has been to illuminate not simply whether and how service experiences in Catholic high schools could be connected to graduates’ adult lives, but importantly, to transcend religion and
contribute insights on the broader concept of “community service” in a secular context. Could Catholic secondary education be evidenced as a contributor of citizens, of any faith, prepared and intent on making positive contributions to the communities in which they lived and worked? “Catholic-ness” aside, are these graduates more likely to view themselves as obligated to contribute to society as a whole, given their experiences earlier in life? To gain insight into how these graduates might translate their high school experiences into visions of societal roles as adults, I looked at voting habits as one example.

My survey includes a question designed to assess voter registration rates as a proxy for civic engagement. A surprisingly high percentage of the alumni surveyed (97.49%) report that they are registered voters, and know their voting locations, with less than 2% (1.56%) responding that they are not registered voters. Of those registered, less than 1% (.95%) were unsure of their voting location. By contrast, on a national basis, close to 18% of voters are not registered at all, slightly more than 22% are registered but did not vote in the last election for which data is available, for a full 40% total not participating in this basic civic duty (Population Survey, U.S. Census, 2014).
Nonetheless, even registered voters voiced their own perspectives in advance of our recent Presidential election. Some took the opportunity during the interviews, while others saw an opening within the survey, when asked for their voting locations. Their
remarks were candid and often displayed clear distinctions between their perspectives on politics, making clear distinctions between civic and religious service interests.

I'm not politically active. The election's a joke as it is right now [referring to the November 2016 Presidential election]. We're kind of screwed either way. I'm active in my church, community service wise. (Interview Participant #6, Mercy Career & Technical High School graduate, 2009).

Rarely missing an opportunity to editorialize their political views, survey participants responding prior to, on and immediately following the U.S. Presidential election offered visibility into their alliances while avoiding references to their individual civic engagement or activities.

It’s Trump Nation, Baby. (Notably, this response was entered on the early morning of election day, November 8, 2017. (Survey Respondent #321, Mercy Career & Technical Institute graduate, 2010s).

In other observed patterns, alumni readily relay their seemingly endless examples of early civic engagement experiences that are devoid of direct religious connections, and instead, center on wordily events or recognition for the need for community assistance.

During the late 60's and 70's Viet Nam and civil rights were on the forefront. Because of the women (religious and lay) who taught us, we got to tease out (not told how to think!) the morality of those issues thru discussions in class, and other opportunities (Survey Respondent #2,296, West Catholic High School for Girls, 1970s).

Still others approached the topic of civic engagement, directly connecting their involvement in high school experiences with their current roles, offering proud, foundational declarations as to why they are motivated to participate, with references to the value of education in society.

Debate team and being grouped with other high ability students defined my hs education. [Currently, I am] active in voter registration and voter education through League of Women Voters because I think an educated electorate is
essential in our democracy (Survey Respondent #2,242, West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Girls graduate, 1960s).

A marked desire to help the communities’ least fortunate citizens and / or those in the direst states of need, often without viable alternatives, shines through, as alumni describe what they contribute and why they believe it makes a difference. There is an observable pattern of longevity in their narratives, as they color their stories with details beyond what was requested of them, adding either why they do what they do or how long they have been committed to their causes.

I do after school tutoring in a low income housing unit . . . I know that having an older mentor can really motivate kids to reach for their dreams. I also volunteer to mentor and talk with kids at a youth services center near campus because I want to help them get out of the center and find fulfilling lives. (Survey Respondent #1,099, Archbishop Carroll graduate, 2010s).

Others describe official leadership roles, often blending work at their local government level, with positions benefitting children and exhibiting personal interests that have the dual impact of serving the environment or general public.

I headed up my township’s emergency communications for 35 years; was a Civil Service Commissioner for 15 years; was a scouting leader for 59 years; provided FREE Public Address services for local civic groups at patriotic events; and I still am a member of SKYWARN as a certified trained severe weather observer. (Survey Respondent # 992, St. Pius X, Pottstown graduate, 1960s).

There is a consistent pride displayed in their narratives that appears to reflect a recognition that they are marrying their own individual beliefs with service motivation and action, notably also with references to long-standing commitments.

I work with an emergency food shelter that is very active and well-known in the community. I have worked there for almost 20 years because no one should go hungry. (Survey Respondent # 1,711, Little Flower graduate, 1960s).
Several respondents proudly served in our nation’s military and with years of service behind them, continue their missions in related directions.

Being retired from the Navy, I now give my time and funds to an organization that supports ill and wounded Navy and Coast Guard personnel and their families. I also volunteer with organizations promoting the US national security and global stability. (Respondent #1,020, Archbishop Carroll graduate, 1970s).

In many cases, the specificity with which participants relay their military service experiences lends a color and richness to their descriptions. Citing historical milestones and proudly referencing their local, current affiliations paints a clear picture of why they have remained involved in organizations so closely affiliated to their defining service experiences, extending “tribal” identities. The passion for remaining an active part of a community that so indelibly defines an individual’s identity resonates strongly as an impact factor for service motivation.

I proudly served My Country in the U.S. Navy in Guantanamo Bay Cuba during the Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis. I am now very active in the VFW Post 2493 in Mount Wolf, PA, and help with any duties that are needed. (Survey Respondent #842, Father Judge graduate, 1950s).

Auxiliary positions reflective of graduates’ interests in causes of meaning to them keep service commitments continuing over decades. Several local, regional and global initiatives are offered by graduates as examples of specific varieties of service that command their personal time.

I am a member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. I have a deep love for the ocean and a strong interest in serving the country in a volunteer role. (Survey Respondent # 2277, West Catholic graduate, 1960s).

Even those not personally playing those roles directly identify with important causes and define their respective communities by others who are in like positions. Once
again, that sense of generational responsibility is described, with a declared interest in serving a younger set of citizens in a defined society with shared values and needs.

I am a military spouse and supporting my community is very important to me. It's rewarding to mentor the younger/newer spouses and make sure they know and use their resources. (Respondent #1,603, Little Flower Catholic High School graduate, 2000s).

**Conclusion / Summary: Emerging Portrait of a Service-Inspiring Eco-system**

Together, the four findings identified crystallize how the combination of Service Identity, sense of life-long, multi-generational belonging, mission-driven service, and civic engagement combine to cultivate and advance a set of values that motivate service disposition and commitment. Significantly, these seven decades of alumni, across 18 Catholic high schools, frequently articulate consistency with their foundational family values, a sense of being grounded in tradition and a sort of membership relationship to a set of invisible yet omnipresent, enduring lifelong communities.

Notably, for these graduates, school is not described in merely academic terms, and while coursework, testing, grades, teachers, and friendships are repeatedly themes throughout this study, the indelible impressions made by service experiences are what naturally and consistently emerge in repeated patterns throughout the data. Further, in describing Catholic high school experiences, their identity formation, religious rituals, moral codes and senses of responsibility, these alumni most often directly relate those experiences to their current adult lives. It is precisely this life-long impact, the consistently articulated association of their high school service experiences and “second classroom” curriculum that effectively suggest that those who participate in a Catholic
education eco-system are more likely to be natural, invested, highly engaged community citizens as adults.

My goal was to address the study’s research questions by confirming evidence of multiple connection points between service experiences in Catholic high school students’ lives and service predisposition and engagement in their later adult lives. To examine this phenomenon alone introduces a new lens by which to potentially view the role, purpose and lifetime nature of Catholic education. Layering on to observed connections potential explanations for why and how this phenomenon occurs offers an additional dimension for consideration and inquiry.

Further research into the areas of Catholic early, elementary, and higher education, both regionally and globally, would likely introduce additional life-course aspects of the experience, enriching conclusions about impacts and outcomes at discrete levels of the learning process. A set of recommendations for further research into the motivators of service and their longitudinal impacts is detailed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study originated based on an interest developed over the course of a lifetime and informed by several decades of respected research. Drawing from personal experience, observations of family, friends and professional associates and my consulting experience of working with some of this region’s longest-standing most successful secondary schools and school leaders, I paired my instincts with over a century of literature. I examined works of the past century’s earliest educational experts, delving into studies of student achievement, teacher leadership practices, regulatory policy and citizenship development, to frame what is known and debated on the topic of community service predisposition and engagement. With a life-course lens, and a mission of evidencing potential connection points between student experiences at the high school level and possible impacts on adult life pathways, my goal was to ask both if there is a connection and if so, why. Further, I had an interest in understanding whether and how those connection points may have changed over time, as our schools, generations and local communities have changed over time.

Since that time, I have had the opportunity to meet with dozens of school leaders of Catholic institutions, survey 2,332 graduates from 18 schools and across seven decades or graduation eras. Thirty-seven of those graduates, dispersed over those graduation eras, made themselves available to me by phone or in-person for interviews or a focus group.

In connecting this work and grounding its findings in literature, I identified evidence of three themes:
Theme 1. Engaged citizens do not create themselves (Johanek and Puckett, 2005). Not only are individuals not born with the service gene, but unless it is introduced, reinforced and positively experienced over time, there is little that can be done to foster service interest in citizens who have no motivation to contribute to their communities. Why this matters more than ever in our regional, national and global communities has everything to do with addressing macro life issues from political strains and poverty to cultural clashes and conflict resolution.

Youniss and Yates (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000) extensive research on both civic identity and moral code formation, in addition to Youniss, et al (2000) and Youniss and John (2000) centered on similar themes in Catholic schools. In combination, their findings combine to anchor this current study’s discoveries in an historical context, yet do not reach to the breadth of sites and experiences recounted by Catholic school graduates in this region. While there is consistency in the self vs. other identification and awareness, what drives students in these individual circumstances differs significantly. We are also left to wonder about the lasting impacts of these experiences, as studies were time-bound, limited to durations of singular courses or other educational programs.

Theme 2. The second classroom (Campano, 2007) may well be more defining and enduring than the first, implying an entirely new framework for evaluating school effectiveness and measurement of “outcomes.” This is particularly pronounced and evidenced in multi-ethnic, multi-cultural communities where individual family heritage, dynamics and situational challenges require sensitivity and compassion, blended with a commitment to engage, recognizing a teacher-leader’s formative role in identity cultivation. There appears to be both an opportunity and perhaps even an urgency for
culturally engaging pedagogy, recognizing the roles that Catholic-led institutions could play near-term and over time. One might infer that these families are culturally pre-disposed to model and encourage service attributes within their family structures, embracing some of the very same values that this education appears to provide.

Cuando Somos Iguales! (When We Are All Equal!) (Campano, 2007) is just one example of the impact of teachers on developing perspectives of their students. The notion of equality, without the politically-charged or rhetoric-infused pressure, is one that stands at the heart of community service and civic engagement. If we agree that citizens are not innately civically inclined, and that our communities benefit by those in positions to give, doing so, then placing schools at the heart of service mission inspiration seems a valuable contribution to the cause. Matching families who value those values seems a natural opportunity to extend communities who share in like missions.

When examining prior research on the potential benefits of Catholic education, even experts who claim to refute a “Catholic School Advantage” (Hallinan & Kubitscheck, 2010) do so by concentrating solely on academic performance measures, while acknowledging benefits in community cohesiveness and values development. The authors of this study made a case for the trade-off between public school agendas of equality and Catholic (in that study’s case, middle school) environments promoting faith and cognitive skills. Wenglinski’s (2007) study, similarly, sought to take a longitudinal approach to assessing whether there is any type of “private school advantage” afforded students and claimed to find none. Job satisfaction, college attendance and civic engagement were among the results probed and analyzed. Interestingly, though it is covered only minimally in the study’s report, Jesuit high school students are reported as
having measurable advantages in civic-mindedness, educational attainment and career satisfaction. As readers, teachers and learners, we are still left to wonder why, as root causes and observable strategies were not examined, other than what we inferred. A consistency in teaching approach and emphasis of Jesuit student identity grounded in being “men and women for others” has perhaps yielded advantages that have followed these students for life. *Nothing like burying the lead!*

The research of Heckman & Kautz (2012), while noting no observable evidence of a “Catholic school advantage,” draws a connection between the cultivation of softer skills and later life advantages, recognizing parental influences, home environments and social settings. Unlike the recollections of this study’s graduates, Heckman & Kautz (2012) credit earlier education levels, such as elementary and middle schools for helping instill and foster these qualities, regarding secondary school experiences as “inconclusive.” It is my hope that this latest study of Philadelphia-area Catholic schools can be regarded as additive to that previous work. By no means is the intent to limit a future lens to high school only; further investigation at the earlier education levels presents a strong opportunity for learning.

Unlike educational policy agendas that drive other school-related directives, fostering community service is not a concept that requires a political sea change, heated debate or untenable fiscal pressures. Instead, this study evidences that there are already, and have been for decades, a set of school types who by virtual of their educational missions and leaders’ commitments are practicing what they preach. Civic and community engagement in these schools does not require sweeping shifts to required “service hours,” unreasonable infrastructure shifts or new models of teaching and
learning. Instead, the answer may be (literally) at our doorstep and with some modest further funding strategies to ensure access for all who desire this brand of education.

**Theme 3. Educational leaders play vital roles as models in instilling life-long, multi-generational impacts that transcend generations.** As such, there is support for to weighting the intrinsic, defining value of “teaching the student, not the subject.” Throughout the study, there are patterns of students themselves as leaders in high school settings, who assumed their parts in a distributed orientation to leadership. This collaboration appears to positively impact both teachers and students alike, fostering both relationships among each other and a shared sense of helping others. Student Government in this study, for example, is shown to rank among the top three factors impacting service commitment as adults.

One such model for extending the positive impact of teacher-leaders for the benefit of student learning and experiences is the Distributed Leadership approach (DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabbar, & Yoak, 2016). The Distributed Leadership (DL) Program of the Penn Center for Educational Leadership (PCEL) at the University of Pennsylvania exemplifies how teacher-leaders and school administrators collaborate, ideate and participate in joint professional development and innovative research practices to build leadership capacity that endures.

How to optimally develop leadership capacity in schools is one of the most pressing, relevant questions in education. (DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabbar, Yoak, 2016). While primarily conceived as a strategic approach for enhancing teacher-leader development and collaboration in schools for improved instruction, DL’s research-based approach has also been proven to consistently support positive change and meet the
challenges of adapting to that change (DeFlaminis, Abdul-Jabar & Yoak, 2016). Improved school cultures are shown to consistently increase a spectrum of performance measures and perhaps most importantly, cultivate the very types of relational trust factors in teacher-leaders that we are working to instill in our students, including integrity, respect and regard for others.

Newly revealed insights may demonstrate the value of these schools for the benefit of current and future students, regardless of their religious backgrounds, beliefs, or practices. Phrased differently, these graduates express an innate gravitational pull to answer a calling and to follow a path. While this language may be informed by religious and/or spiritual experiences and teachings, the pathways they choose in life and leaders they actively choose to follow appear to have been greatly impacted for decades to follow.

Today, Pope Francis has more Twitter followers with 32 million (Italy24, 2017) than Warren Buffett with 1.26 million (Twitter, 2017). It is unlikely that this is due to any individual’s questioning of Mr. Buffet’s expertise in business, finance or leadership. I would offer that a following has more to do with a calling and that those of us who actively choose to follow anyone in life do so because of innate, inspired will to model ourselves after that leader, not simply to passively admire them from afar.

On a distinct but related note, dimensions of the Catholic secondary school experience that have emerged as defining, consistently across these institutions are represented in the voice of the graduates:

Contribution to Identity: Through reflection and service experiences, I have developed a broader understanding of who I am and who I want to be in the world.
Gratitude: I actively appreciate the gift of education, recognize the sacrifice of others to allow me to be a well-educated person, and I humbly acknowledge its contribution to my professional and personal successes in life.

Sacrifice for belonging: I have come to recognize the sacrifices my parents or guardians are making to send me to this school.

Personal Moral Code: There are rules to live by, including how I look to conduct myself and why I come to expect from others.

Legacy: I am part of something larger. It started long before me and continues long after, involving generations of a community to which I belong.

Broadening my community or “tribe”: My education makes me a part of this community that promises a better life, both as an individual and for future generation.

Leadership – We know they serve, but do they lead?: A leader can be anyone at any level, as long as they instill faith and confidence in those around them and commit to benefitting others who are in positions to help themselves. To lead is actually to serve.

Reciprocity: There is a formed recognition that “to whom much is given, much is expected” accompanied by a sense of obligation to honor the call to service when needed.

Insights Connected to Value of Catholic Secondary Education

Anchored in research and further demonstrated by this study, I believe in the promise of Catholic-led institutions as an expanded set of educational options for families desiring that unique blend of academic excellence and service experiences that foster values and predispositions for service of all varieties.

Within these schools, graduates describe teachers who viewed their roles as vocations, to inspire students to be “on a mission.” This included core values of simply
understanding the responsibility to do the right thing, help others in need, and to be good citizens who made a difference in the world. Instilling these values while educating is the mission and the motivating factor. For these graduates and their families, attending Catholic school was a life choice, not simply a school choice.

Trading in a currency greater than money. The end game or purpose of these schools presents a refreshing change of pace, in an era of unsolved educational policy questions, insufficient funding and a seemingly endless quest for academic standards that equip our students for successful life pathways and positive contributions to society. These schools do not tout missions centered on the unilateral laser-focus on grades, but instead on the value of education itself and the service that demands. There is an intentional multi-dimensionality about the education. Their missions are not solely grounded in prestige, but instead about preparation, to extend their current communities, to which they have life-long memberships.

Opportunities for Further Research

While multiple opportunities exist for further investigation in this area, I will concentrate on four that focus on the goal of further evidencing the positive impact of Catholic secondary schools on community service and civic engagement predisposition and commitment, for the benefit of our wider society. Note the intentional emphasis on advocating for research that delivers the benefit of evidencing outcomes that do not simply manifest in service for service’s sake. Instead, the mission is to seek knowledge and insights grounded in service, inspired by purpose and resulting in active leadership stances. Uncovering and articulating what activates service engagement and mobilizes leaders of all varieties emerges as the elusive, defining driver that the strongest, most
enduring community members share as part of their identities. At the individual school and system levels, what more can be revealed about how these graduates come to be “called,” almost compelled, as if their value system leaves room for no other reasonable choices or actions? More specifically, is it likely that this phenomenon is not simply a “Philadelphia Story” but instead something much larger, more widespread? If so, what might this imply about the benefits of Catholic education, at any level, in any city, any nation throughout the world?

Establish longitudinal studies and/or data systems for institutional analysis in cases where service experiences are believed to be formative, as well as summative, methods of proving the model. Schools could choose to follow and document the paths of their students and graduates over time, with the goal of creating a longitudinal view of their pathways into adulthood. By establishing consistent measurement tools and committing to pursuing this mission, we can enable school leaders, teachers, families and students to capture strategies, milestones and yes, “outcomes” of service-oriented experiences in high school. We can then connect these to later life pathways, by depicting a richer, more expansive school- or system-specific view of the unique culture, pedagogy and environments that contribute to service, and resulting leadership roles in adult lives over time. Philanthropists and other advocates desiring visibility into this unique set of outcomes may also be interested in formative experiences that drive inspired students to become life-long, dedicated community members and leaders.

1. Investigate the power and positive impact of cultivating specific values and attributes that appear to drive service interest and commitment, and arguably leadership strengths. With an intention to isolate, identify and model service
motivation factors, building additional enhancements into the educational experiences may well result in the added benefit of attracting more families to Catholic-led, as well as other secondary schools that embody these leading characteristics and service-oriented principles.

2. *Many of the motivators revealed in this study, while arguably spiritual in nature, are also grounded in core human values and cognitive skills.* In each of these cases, future research in the area of how these schools play formative roles, supplementing family and community contexts, sharing common themes that transcend the individual self and can be beneficial for students of any religion or background. Examples such as Gratitude, Reciprocity, Responsibility, Ethics, Respect and Character, in addition to the wider concept of multi-generational / legacy appreciation, hold great promise as part of any educational experience.

4. *Further exploration on transcendent nature of how service connects people through an allegiance to a larger collective.* Perhaps if this larger educational community is one that students, and later graduates, come to regard as “their own,” then Catholic schools could act as agents of life-long community building, attracting more families who want to belong.

While we don’t yet know enough about how individual institutions or systems can make their roles in service cultivation clearer, we do recognize and share a civic call. Rather than regarding the “competitive advantages” of one school or system over another, what can be revealed about strengthening this capacity in more of our schools, regardless of religious or cultural affiliation? How can
we model for citizenship through our schools, to address a common interest in human flourishing? Recognizing that an overwhelming number of this study’s respondents recollect, recognize, and relish their Catholic school experiences, but describe their milestone moments and “heroes” in language that is more holistic life terminology vs. the purely religious underscores how meaningful this education could be for all students, of all faiths and backgrounds. Future research that investigates that nature of creating a bond in society for the common good of all, regardless of “tribe,” ethnicity, socio-economic status, religious or political affiliation would appear to answer a call few of us can deny has transcendent value.

Conclusion

While educational, career and vocational pathways of Catholic high school graduates, as indicated by this study, are diverse, there is an undeniable community service connection between graduates’ experiences “then” and adult lives “now.” Across the spectrum of schools, genders, races, ethnicities and age groups, one finding is clear: The overwhelming majority of these graduates credit a substantive part of their community service and civic engagement predispositions and interests to the experiences of attending Catholic high schools. Most regard their high school educations as ones of life-long impact, particularly as related to values cultivated and senses of unique identity and membership that has sustained active commitments to service engagement today.

Multiple examples and rich narratives chronicle instances in which individual pathways were initiated or cultivated by these schools, fueling life choices in the years that followed and continuing to influence those pathways in their present adult lives.
Dimensions of leadership, confidence, spirituality and community service commitments come through, with no perceptible differences across age groups. Whether they graduated in decades of war-and-freedom, tumultuous social change or economic downturn, views on the value of a Catholic education are relayed with energy, passion and gratitude.

Viewing the high school experience through a lens of something much greater than the sum of its traditionally academic parts allows insight for many, whether educational leaders, policy-makers or students themselves. This study demonstrates how diverse, well-led, well-managed Catholic high schools, customized in subtle but important ways, to meet the unique needs of their families, can create lasting life experiences and lessons that go far beyond the “first classroom,” comprising a rich and meaningful “second classroom.”

Perhaps the most significant finding in this study is centered on how many Catholic high schools are uniquely equipped to meet the needs of this city’s struggling families – hungry for educational alternatives but not always clear on how best to distinguish the value of these unique experiences. Factors such as limiting admissions policies and high tuitions often make charter and independent schools genuinely out of reach for the majority of this region’s working families, not to mention students not fortunate enough to have even modest financial means or supportive home structures.

Consistently in this study, most every participant, regardless of means, ethnicity, or family composition, has created a life that years later, appears fulfilled, self-supporting and stable. With few exceptions, each of the alumni surveyed directly connects his or her high school education to the success and confidence he or she has found in later life. Most often they describe their achievements with gratitude and a sense of responsibility
to give back to their communities and to help those in need, including their contemporaries and with great frequency, the generations yet to come. Many detail specific impact factors that were positive, defining influences for them, frequently admitting that they were unaware of most of these at the time. The loyalty engendered by the school is directly tied to its values, spanning academic, social, professional, and spiritual. The gratitude each of these graduates displayed, to the school, and many who are associated with it, addresses the research questions directly.

While this study is local / regional in scope, it is my hope that its findings may be regarded as an inspiration to other researchers, interested in exploring this topic further, either in Philadelphia, or in the broader context of other Catholic schools and systems in our nation and even our world. Perhaps, over time, expanded studies and data can be collected to help inform educational leaders, policy decision-makers, and families, of the compelling advantages Catholic high schools such as these present. Recognizing the challenges of tuition pressures, lack of awareness, and in many cases, lack of access, continued work in this field would appear to help support many deserving students and positively impact our region. With so many families looking for alternatives to public schools, unable to gain admission to charter schools, or afford steep tuitions of independent schools, perhaps area Catholic high schools with their vital alumni bases, could be an even more attractive option, helping to cultivate life-long service values into our next generation of citizens and future leaders.

The ability for a citizen to connect to a larger collective is not just a future aspiration, but a societal goal that is meaningful and present in our modern world. It follows that perhaps it makes sense to look to educational institutions and their very
nature of longevity, legacy, and distribution of leadership roles among students, family, and faculty as a pathway to achieving this goal.

As such it is worth looking further at such service motivating educational models, such as those in Catholic, independent, secular and public schools, to illuminate elements that are most effective at instilling values and practices that motivate community service and civic engagement. It is certainly not hotly contested that our world today, from the local communities in which we live, to the larger global society to which we all belong could be well served by identifying and unifying this shared mission.
APPENDIX

INSTRUMENTS

Instrument 1. Survey (delivered online through Survey Monkey). Link to Survey tool follows, with PDF version available:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Preview/?sm=vLipye_2B4nsLD0dEDY6SeRDntR0Sb44yS5oTcOiG7rLjjX9uer4WwbHfP0wTagwMCPE14Af1iygHtjL_2BW8jLBzOk qLA_2Fy48K97sPgKYkPh2w_3D

Instruments 2 and 3: Discussion Guide for Focus Group and One-on-one Interviews. (Please note that the below served as the base questionnaire. I have highlighted certain questions in a light grey background. I eliminated these light grey highlighted ones from the focus group and used them in one-on-one interviews only.)

Introductory Narrative prior to focus groups and individual interviews

“First, let me thank you for taking the time to participate in this research with me, as part of my work in the University of Pennsylvania’s doctoral program. I’m grateful to the administration of [school name] for supporting my outreach to alumni like you. None of this work could happen without volunteers like you stepping up to share your experiences. For optimal note taking and later analysis, I’ll be recording our conversation, if that’s OK with you? (pause and check to make sure ok, record participants’ stated agreement). Your identity will remain anonymous.

As you may recall, the research I’m conducting is part of a larger study. Ultimately, I’m looking to understand the perspectives of alums like you, as to how their high school years have impacted their later lives, and the specific experiences you recall as having a defining impact. Over the course of the next 30-45 minutes [60-90 minutes
for focus group], I’ll be interested in your recollections of your time at [school] and particularly, your views of how those experiences may have affected your later life pathways. The learning will be blended with responses from dozens of other alums of Philadelphia-area Catholic high schools. An analysis of all data collected will be performed and developed into a dissertation, to be published in 2017.”

Interview Protocol

Q1 I’d like to focus on your [school name] years and ask you to share some of your experiences as you entered high school and during your time there. First: Can [any of] you tell me a bit about how you came to attend [school name]?

Follow ups / prompts:
[I’m interested in knowing] Which elementary school[s] (did) you attend[ed]?
Was _____ the only high school you considered? Why or why not?
Anyone else in your family go to this high school before you or during that time?
Probe for any recollection of “the times”: Do you have any particular recollections about what was going on the world at that time? Anything you recall as being particularly influential for you, your family, your local community / neighborhood?

Q 2. Let’s start with your sharing some quick highlights about your current life, now _____ years graduated from [school name]. I’d be interested in hearing about your family, what line of work you’re in, and any ongoing activities outside of work or home … such as volunteer or community commitments.

Follow-ups: a) I plan to include the following probe if participant’s response includes current or past professional pursuits: Well, that sounds like interesting work –
how did you get into that business? What was your career path up until now? What are you hoping to do next?

b) I plan to include this probe if participant’s response centers on family life or individual/personal pursuits: Is this a direction you had in mind from the beginning? What are the best and most challenging parts of this for you?

Q 3. Before beginning your work/family (adjust based on the participant’s individual situation, gleaned from questions above), what type of education, training or volunteer experience did you have?

Prompt for connections between HS experience and choice of next stage education, work or service.

Specific Follow-ups: How did you choose to follow that path? I’d be interested in understanding whether your path was a route you took in preparation for your career (or if non-working, family / lifestyle).

Probe if needed: Or perhaps a route you followed, not yet knowing where it might lead? Do you recall how you felt making that decision, anything specific stick with you about what drove you to make that / those choice(s)?

Probe for influencers – family, friends, teachers, coaches, community leaders, idols / heroes

Q 4. May I ask if you and / or your family are Catholic by background?

If so, prompt for whether they consider themselves active, or practicing Catholics today. If they have children, are they raising their children Catholic? Sending their children to Catholic schools? If yes, probe for elementary, secondary, college.
If not, probe for perspective, then and now, on how important or not religious identity seemed to be while attending that school – did it matter, if so, when, why, how? Recall how usual or unusual it was to be a non-Catholic in that school. Do you feel that there were any school-related experiences missed as a result or did you have a sense of full participation in everything?

Q 5. When you think of your high school years, were there experiences / lessons / values at [school name] that you recall as particularly unique or defining? I’d be particularly interested in any school experiences that you valued as part of your development as a teenager and / or young adult.

Follow-ups / Prompts:

a) Did you have any specific leadership roles at [school name]? Participate in school government? How did you become involved in those activities?

b) Did you play any sports? Which ones, which positions?

c) Were you active in certain clubs or community service projects? Do you recall how you came to join those organizations or volunteer for those activities? What do you remember most about how those experiences made you feel? Do you see any connection to those types of interests then and now?

Q 6. When you think of your teachers, advisors and other administrators at school, were there any that stood out as having especially positive influences as it related to values? Any who were active or influential in community service or civic activities?

Prompt: If there are any who particularly stood out as influential, who were they and was do you recall about them? Still keep in contact? Know where they are now,
what they’re doing? What qualities would you use to describe them? What lessons do you recall learning as their student, player, mentee?

Q 7. Think of the 3 closest friends that you had during high school. Tell me about what was special about those friendships. Include any relationships you’ve maintained years later, since graduating.

Prompt: What qualities did you have in common? How were you different?

If friendships still current: What do you think keeps you together over time?

Q 8. Was there anything specific about the Catholic aspects of your high school experience that you believe impacted you in later life – or is still impacting you now?

Q 9. Was the Catholic-led and / or spiritual component of [school name]’s education, or specific teachings, a factor in defining your experience there? -- Or perhaps, a factor in your personal / character formation? Are there activities or pursuits that you connect to values that you developed then and kept with you over time?

Q 10. Closing question: Is there anything we haven’t covered today about your experience at [school name], specifically related to values, community, anything unusually meaningful in your education? Thank you for your time . . . closing remarks.
Analysis: List of Terms - Preliminary Codes

*Catholic Identity*

*Conscience (right vs. wrong)*

*Empathy*

*Gratitude*

*Humility*

*Leadership Development*

*Legacy (lifelong community)*

*Moral Values*

*Race, Culture, Ethnicity, SES*

*Respect*

*Responsibility (giving back)*

*Sacrifice for Belonging*

*Struggle, Loss, Grief*

*Teachers Teaching Citizenship*

*Tracking*
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No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, Public Law 107-11, Section 9101 (123), 2001.


