

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: SHADOWED BENEATH THY HAND:
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL AND THE
CULTIVATION OF ACADEMIC TALENT AT
A LOW-SES SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL

Montia Denee' Gardner, Doctor of Philosophy,
2021

Directed By: Associate Professor, Dr. Pamela R. Bennett,
Public Policy

Students from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds often have extenuating circumstances that impede their academic achievement. While many of the factors affecting these students have been concentrated in urban cities, in recent decades, the nation's suburbs have become home to more low-income residents than at any other time in American history (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). Research suggests that schools that give students from low-SES backgrounds access to social capital can reverse the disadvantages associated with that status (Galindo, Sanders, Abel, 2017; Malone, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Southland College Prep High School (Southland), a public charter school in suburban Illinois, shows evidence of unusual educational outcomes among low-SES students. For 7 of the last 10 years of its existence, its graduation rate, college acceptance rate, and standardized test scores have exceeded all other public schools in the local area.

This information suggests that Southland produces experiences for students that make a substantial difference in their academic trajectories. This qualitative case study of Southland seeks to identify the elements of its internal structure to explain the high levels of student achievement. To do this, the research is informed by social capital theory, and asks: what sources of social capital exist within the school and how that social capital functions to facilitate high achievement amongst the student population? Findings from the research suggest that Southland's organizational social capital exists and functions in the form of its family model, socio-emotional student care services, relational goods, and high transference of information; all of which contribute to the high academic achievement of its low-SES student population. The research implies that suburban schools looking to boost the academic achievement of their economically diverse student populations could implement these and other dimensions of social capital to mitigate the challenges they face.