# Creating communities amid crisis: Racial capitalism, school gentrification, and resistance in Seattle

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2024

Reading Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

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## Abstract

Creating communities amid crisis: Racial capitalism, school gentrification, and resistance in Seattle

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Metropolitan racial demographics in the U.S. are shifting. Racialized processes have brought more White people to urban areas, while suburbs have become more racially diverse, changing the racial composition of schools. Within, outside, in spite, and because of these processes, people "make place." Place-making is a political process in which people create places and their attached meanings within an uneven terrain of power (Manzo & Desanto, 2021), of which schools are significant factors (Lipman, 2011). This place-making occurs under racial capitalism, or a political economy organized around and productive of racial difference. This study investigates the nexus of residential zoning and schools to understand the work which sustains school communities. While education scholarship has paid much attention to issues of spatial equity like racial segregation, less attention has been paid to the ways shifting metropolitan demographics and housing affordability impact schools and possibilities for racial equity (Pearman, 2020). In response to spatial inequity, scholars have cited the need for community organizing to create equitable neighborhoods and schools (Anyon, 2014; Gilmore, 2022; Warren, 2005). This study examines these everyday actions by people connected to schools to understand how they respond to changing demographics.

The literature review and conceptual framework brings together literature on racial capitalism, critical spatial analysis, and schools in gentrifying areas. I aim to contextualize gentrification within longer histories of spatial injustice, relate this to spatial justice in schools, and the ways people and policy inform and shape these places. From this literature, I build my conceptual framework, which draws from racial capitalism, placemaking, and spatial imaginaries to trace how power flows in school-communities from macro-policy contexts to micro-everyday activities and back again in a dialectical process. This literature review and conceptual framework highlight how further research can illuminate the possibilities for just school-communities situated in racialized, capitalist systems.

Using Seattle as a case of school gentrification in a multiracial city, I investigate how policy and people's everyday actions have shaped school-communities across the city, but particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods with majority people of color. In terms of policy, I focus on the Comprehensive Plan, a major land use policy revision, with planning beginning in 2022 and the final policy due to pass in 2025. For schools, I focus on the district's enrollment policies, involvement in housing (and lack thereof), and the response to the school budget deficit. Seattle is one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the United States, with the White population growing rapidly (Balk, 2019). This case study uses racial capitalism to understand how long histories of place-making show up in the policymaking process for residential rezoning. I ask the following research questions:

1) *How has Seattle's housing and land use policy influenced schools and their political and economic contexts?; How do people on the ground conceive of schools' political and economic contexts?*
2) *Do people such as parents, teachers, or school leaders connected to schools in gentrifying neighborhoods engage in placemaking and surface racialized ideas about space? If so, how?*
3) *How does race and class shape people's placemaking in gentrifying school-communities?*

I find that city planners' and the school district's engagement with racist policy history does not create opportunities for change or repairing harm. Despite the ways housing and school policy mutually reinforce one another, SPS and OPCD do not collaborate across what I identify as a policy silo. This silo leads to a mismatch between rhetorical goals and actual implementation. I argue that, as Seattle policymakers fail to change exclusionary zoning and address its racist roots, they have contributed to the school enrollment crisis. Continuously increasing property values spurred by exclusionary zoning, coupled with the school enrollment and funding crises, show cracks in the logic of progressivism. I find people across Seattle engaged with both OPCD and SPS policy processes see schools as community anchors. This conception is racialized, with neighborhoods with more people of color more likely to describe their schools as community anchors. For interview participants, I find that they saw schools more readily as community anchors if families and teachers could live in close proximity to the school, if a significant amount of Black people were present at the school, and if schools had the cultural resources to support students of color. In terms of placemaking strategies, I find families rely on histories of experiencing racism to create a sense of belonging in the present, own a home, opt out of public school, and create parent networks. I find that principals and school staff in Seattle enact disruptive practices to keep schools accessible to students of color amid gentrification, but that these practices have limitations in their scope and reach.

This study provides evidence that the experience of gentrification, displacement, and enrollment decline are historical, racialized, and classed projects. These findings confirm that gentrification impacts school-communities, despite the lack of targeted policies to address this. This study extends analyses of gentrification and schools by considering schools within their historical, political, and economic contexts. This study has implications for school-communities, school districts, city planners, and community organizers. As most major metropolitan areas face school enrollment decline and many also face housing crises. These implications, while specific

to Seattle's political and economic context, could therefore be relevant to other school-communities facing similar or interrelated challenges.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the people who work to build their communities in times where it can feel like the carpet is being ripped out from under you. Thank you. I hope I have represented your stories with dignity here.

I also would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandpa, Gary Phipps, who played a monumental role in raising and educating me. He worked as an electrical engineer with Bell Labs for over forty years, but also loved writing—a love I hope I have done justice here. He was a source of constant support during my journey through higher education, reminding me that I am worthy with or without official accolades. He passed away on March 17, 2024, a few months before I submitted this dissertation. While he would have been a faithful reader, I am assured that his wisdom and heart are represented in these pages.

**Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to have so many people to thank for their support during this dissertation. First of all, this study would not have been possible without the participation of the parents, alumni, teachers, and principals at the heart of this study. It would also not be possible without all of the people who spent their free time attending public engagement sessions, imagining a better public school system and city. I am thankful for the study participants' vulnerability, candor, and willingness to discuss their experiences with me.

Thank you to my dissertation committee who have provided all kinds of feedback and support during this process. Thank you to my adviser, Jessica Rigby, for providing me guidance on this project and during my entire PhD (and Master's!). Your teaching deepened my love of theory, which certainly shows up in this dissertation. To Dana Nickson, I am so grateful you joined the faculty when you did and that I had the opportunity to learn with you. Your thoughtfulness and expertise in the content of this dissertation have been invaluable. Even more so, your kind encouragement was a constant source of resilience for me while writing. Thank you to Katie Headrick-Taylor, who believed in my project when it still did not make much sense to me. Thank you to Carrie Freshour, who opened my eyes to a new kind of incisive analysis in her Geography of Racial Capitalism class, and who continued to push me to think about my research in new and important ways. Finally, thank you to Karin Martin for her phenomenal writing instruction and for always making me feel like a real researcher.

During my several years at the UW College of Education, I have been lucky to work with professors who have pushed me to think differently and expansively about systemic issues in education. Thank you to Nancy Beadie, who taught my first class at UW—History of Urban Education—which directly shaped this dissertation. Her precise analysis and focus on place changed the course of my graduate career. Thanks to Jondou Chen, who created the Education, Equity, & Society certificate and welcomed me into the cohort, and for always making time for my questions. To Molly Shea and Maggie Beneke, thank you for teaching the qualitative methods course and providing feedback on the early stages of this project. Thank you to Julia Duncheon who provided detailed and thoughtful comments on my pilot study, which encouraged me to keep going. Thank you to Mark Windschitl, whose Scholarly Writing class provided me with both incredibly useful instruction and a community of writers. Thanks to my Masters adviser, Dr. Joy Williamson-Lott, who welcomed me into graduate school life and helped me become a better thinker. Outside of the College of Education, I have been taught by some excellent professors. Thank you to Jake Grumbach, Jelani Ince, and Megan Ming Sun. Your rigorous classes gave me new conceptual tools to use in analysis, and (lots) of new authors and texts to consider.

I have so much appreciation for my graduate school colleagues. In no particular order, thank you to my advisory, Brett Baldauf, Sarah Clancey, Carly Kaiser, Regena Pauketat, Jenn Nguyen, Xinyi Zhong, and Andrea Cobb. Thank you to Lamar Foster, our fearless leader, for always having my back and showing us how it's done. Thank you also to my cohort, including Jen Gaul, Fannie Martinez, Geo Yang, Mary Padden and Hassan Kirkland (HK1). To Katherine Chang, thank you for being my thought partner and for expanding my meme vocabulary. I have learned so much for you and am grateful for your mentorship (and jokes).

I am so appreciative of my experience teaching, which ultimately led me to graduate school and grounded much of the inquiry in this study in the real-life experiences of the students and families I forged relationships with. Thank you to these students, who I am grateful to watch grow into wonderful young adults.

Thank you to my mom and sister for their support not just during graduate school, but during the many years of school beforehand. Mom, you taught me to love books and to be curious and always ask questions, which undoubtedly led me to pursue a PhD. Thank you to my sister, Lindsay, for always listening and being a role model of hard work. To my Aunt Debbie, thank you for sending recipes, sewing advice, and good book recommendations. Thank you to my cousins and their partners for paving the graduate school pathway and providing a commiserating ear. Finally, although my dad did not see me complete most of my education, I hope he would be proud of this journey.

I am so grateful for my wonderful friends that have supported me in graduate school and in everything. Thank you for always believing in me, for letting me bounce ideas off you even if it was in a text in the middle of the workday, and for reminding me of the bigger picture when I needed it. Much love to Samm Rosenblum, Jaclyn Skurie, Liza Scott, Carly Rappaport, Molly Goldberg, Antonia Cereijido, and Devin Leary. Thank you to all my fantastic friends, who would take up multiple additional pages, who provided dinners, oyster harvesting, karaoke, gardening tips, playdates with your children—all the things that made this process a doable one.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my partner, Jesse, and our canine family, Yuki and Tilli. Your unwavering love and support have manifested in ways big and small throughout this process. I am so grateful for you.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Metropolitan racial demographics in the U.S. are shifting. Racialized processes have brought more White people to urban areas, while suburbs have become more racially diverse, changing the racial composition of schools. Within, outside, in spite, and because of these processes, people "make place." Place-making is a political process in which people create places and their attached meanings within an uneven terrain of power (Manzo & Desanto, 2021), of which schools are significant factors (Lipman, 2011). This place-making occurs under racial capitalism, or a political economy organized around and productive of racial difference.

This study investigates the nexus of residential zoning and schools to understand the work which sustains school communities. While education scholarship has paid much attention to issues of spatial equity like racial segregation, less attention has been paid to the ways shifting metropolitan demographics and housing affordability impact schools and possibilities for racial equity (Pearman, 2020). In response to spatial inequity, scholars have cited the need for community organizing to create equitable neighborhoods and schools (Anyon, 2014; Gilmore, 2022; Warren, 2005). This study examines these everyday actions by people connected to schools to understand how they respond to changing demographics. Understanding the process of enacting change can help us think of solutions to problems like school gentrification and displacement, as people on the ground change institutions like public schools, land use, and housing development, and make their own structures, such as parent networks, community organizing, and school choice (Gilmore, 2022).

Using Seattle as a case of school gentrification in a multiracial city, I investigate how policy and people's everyday actions have shaped school-communities across the city, but particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods with majority people of color. In terms of policy, I

focus on the Comprehensive Plan, a major land use policy revision, with planning beginning in 2022 and the final policy due to pass in 2025. For schools, I focus on the district's enrollment policies, involvement in housing policies (and lack thereof), and the response to the school budget deficit. Seattle is one of the fastest gentrifying cities in the United States, with the White population growing rapidly (Balk, 2019). Housing prices have skyrocketed in the past decade as the city has become a booming tech center home to highly paid workers. All of this has occurred in a progressive city, with stated goals toward racial equity by policymakers. In effect, this case allows for an understanding of the possibilities and limits of progressive policy goals as related to neighborhoods and schools.

This current policy context is borne from Seattle's history of Indigenous genocide and erasure, redlining, and racial covenants. At the same time, a thriving community of organizers, parents, and youth have staked their claim to the city, forging connections between their schools and communities. These factors coalesce in an ongoing residential rezoning process, the Seattle Comprehensive Plan, which will set a plan for city zoning for the next 20 years. Beginning in 2022, the city planning office began drafting a rezoning plan which will set the stage for all residential zoning for the next twenty years in the city. The last plan, adopted in 1994, led to the "urban village strategy," which people of color in the city largely recognized as hastening gentrification and displacement despite its initial promise of creating equitable development (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2021). Acute housing unaffordability, a feature of gentrification, is often exacerbated by exclusionary zoning policies which limit land use to single-family homes. Because of this ostensible policy failure, the city has identified anti-displacement strategies and community engagement with marginalized communities as central to the current planning process.

This case study uses racial capitalism to understand how long histories of place-making show up in the policymaking process for residential rezoning. I ask the following research questions:

1) *How has Seattle's housing and land use policy influenced schools and their political and economic contexts?*
    a. *How do people on the ground conceive of schools' political and economic contexts?*
2) *Do people such as parents, teachers, or school leaders connected to schools in gentrifying neighborhoods engage in placemaking? If so, how?*
    a. *Does this placemaking surface racialized ideas about space? If so, how?*
3) *How do race and class shape people's placemaking in gentrifying school-communities?*

In a progressive, wealthy city, how do policy processes and people attend to crisis? I use Gilmore's (2008) definition of social crisis, where she cites Hall and Schwartz (1988), saying a crisis occurs when "the existing social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations." The school budget deficit, falling school enrollment, and the housing crisis point to the existence of a social crisis in 2024 Seattle. In the spirit of Gilmore (2002), I try to untangle the "dynamic processes that renovate race and state" (p. 16). I attempt to understand the "dynamic processes" that shape the racial and spatial relationship between housing policy and schooling, understanding the space between policy and people, the active and the archive. In this dialectical analysis, structures and people shape one another, with the past as a necessary antecedent to this construction.

This study aims to center the experiences of people experiencing gentrification during their everyday lives in school-communities and yield information about what these experiences mean about changing systems of racial capitalism towards spatial justice. I also highlight ways progressive policymaking does and does not uphold its promises at creating racial and spatial justice. By focusing on people, policy, and their overlaps and ways they intertwine, I elucidate

mechanisms by which change can occur. I do this by tracing a narrative from the history of land use policy and exclusion to today's actions of resistance by school-community members. This study adds to extant research by contextualizing the actions of school-communities more holistically in their political and economic contexts (i.e., community organizing for change, access to housing).

Currently, the Seattle Comprehensive Plan only tacitly connects to schools. This study generates data and analysis at the intersection between the city's land use and housing policies and schools, examining connections and divergences between people concerned with equitable schools (parents, school staff, and alumni) and city and school district policies. Additionally, entering the 2024-2025 school year, Seattle Public Schools faces a $150 million deficit. This study investigates these dual, linked phenomena—the school budget deficit and the city's rezoning process—as potential sites of placemaking.

*Overview of literature and conceptual framework*

The literature review and conceptual framework bring together literature on racial capitalism, critical spatial analysis, and schools in gentrifying areas. I aim to contextualize gentrification within longer histories of spatial injustice, relate this to spatial justice in schools, and the ways people and policy inform and shape these places. From this literature, I build my conceptual framework, which draws from racial capitalism, placemaking, and spatial imaginaries to trace how power flows in school-communities from macro-policy contexts to micro-everyday activities and back again in a dialectical process. This literature review and conceptual framework highlight how further research can illuminate the possibilities for just school-communities situated in racialized, capitalist systems.

*Overview of research design*

I employ a case study guided by the tenets of critical place inquiry to understand how people shape their school-communities amidst gentrification, and how policy contributes (or does not) to this process (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). To understand the relationship between power, place, race, and class in school-communities, I observed public focus groups and planning meetings, interviewed members of school-communities (parents, alumni, teachers, and principals) and collected policy documents related to school geography and city planning. Ultimately, the core goal of this study is to extend the understanding of placemaking by people impacted by school gentrification and displacement.

*Dissertation roadmap*

First, I describe the relevant literature and the case of gentrifying schools in Seattle. Then, I outline my conceptual framework and research methods for this study. The first findings chapter, chapter 6, covers the placemaking of policy, arguing that policy ties the housing market to school enrollment in a way that limits the agency of Black people, people of color, and low-income people who have historically and presently been shut out of the housing market. I also argue that city planners and the school district have been unable to cooperate to form a cohesive policy solution. Chapter 7 builds off this understanding of the interconnected ecosystems of housing and schools to argue that school-communities form community anchors meriting analytical attention, particularly in considering possibilities for creating equitable neighborhoods. The final findings chapter, Chapter 8, analyzes how school-community actors—school staff and parents—resist and enact placemaking within this policy and school-community ecosystem to respond to gentrification and displacement. I end with my conclusions and implications.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review and conceptual framework brings together literature on racial capitalism, critical spatial analysis, and schools in gentrifying areas. I aim to contextualize gentrification within longer histories of spatial injustice borne from racial capitalism, relate this to spatial justice in schools, and the ways people and policy enact placemaking. From this literature, I build my conceptual framework which traces how power flows in school-communities from macro-policy contexts to micro-everyday activities and back again in a dialectical process. This literature review and conceptual framework highlight how further research can illuminate the possibilities for just school-communities situated in racialized, capitalist systems.

Throughout the literature review, I highlight three key contributions of this study. First, I take a spatialized racial capitalism lens, which is a new approach in education research. This lens highlights the production of racial difference, and to what material ends these differences produce. It highlights the material and spatial consequences of changing metropolitan educational landscapes, and the way people react to and move beyond these consequences. Second, I conceptualize schools within their contexts. I build on research that sees schools as important collaborators in addressing broader social problems (Anyon, 2014; Green et al., 2022; Warren, 2005). Finally, I consider the placemaking of policy and people, adding to research on placemaking in schools by considering a variety of school-community members and a housing policy.

The literature on racial capitalism and placemaking together allow for an understanding of spatial injustice and justice in gentrifying cities and schools, while also situating schools in their broader temporal, political, and economic contexts. I begin with the macro context of

geographies of racial capitalism. I describe the literature on racial capitalism and gentrification as a process of racial capitalism. This provides the system-level context necessary to understand how policy and people interact in racialized, classed school-communities. Next, I describe the literature on schools and gentrification, how schools figure into place-making, and where this study adds to the literature on making place in schools in changing metropolitan contexts. Finally, I describe the role of people in creating spatial justice, including just schools, and demonstrate how this focus on people's placemaking shows up in the literature and this study.

## The geography of racial capitalism

### *Defining racial capitalism*

Research across several disciplines, including education, has undergone a "spatial turn" (Green, 2015a; Soja, 2009; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).[1] This growing "spatial turn" in education research connects schools to their spatial contexts using critical, racialized frameworks (Butler & Sinclair, 2020; Green, 2015a; Green et al., 2022; Jenkins, 2021; Nickson, 2021; Nickson, 2022; Posey-Maddox, 2014; ross, 2021; Shange, 2019; Tate, 2008; Yazdiha, 2022). This line of inquiry sees race and class as embedded in place, people and institutions as place-makers, and schools as part of these spatial processes (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Education research broadly has also considered the political and economic contexts of schools as mediated by their unique geography (Anyon, 2009; Horsford et al., 2019). While authors interchange between "space" and "place," I draw from Tuck and McKenzie (2015) who delineate "place" as inscribed with meaning and shaped by human and non-human (animals, the land itself) behavior. Therefore, I use "place"

[1] As a point of clarification, place-based research differs from place-based education scholarship (Siskar & Theobald, 2008) which is mainly concerned with place and community as used in pedagogy and curriculum, rather than in empirical research methods.

when discussing agentic or political processes (i.e. “place-making"), as is the case in my findings.

Racial capitalism highlights how racial difference across places creates capital accumulation (Pulido, 2017). Analyzing racial production through a spatial lens can illuminate structures or processes that create inequitable racial outcomes, rather than just a study of the outcomes themselves (Pulido, 2017). Robinson (1983) originally coined the phrase “racial capitalism” in *Black Marxism*, describing the historical links between racism and feudalism in Europe that pre-dated capitalism and provided its genesis. W.E.B. DuBois also provides much of the theoretical foundation for racial capitalism, despite never employing the term specifically. In *Black Reconstruction in America*, DuBois (1935) explains how the labor of enslaved Black people built the U.S. Southern *and* Northern political economy, tying capitalism to chattel slavery. Stuart Hall (1980) similarly connects the roots of capitalism with chattel slavery:

> The common assumption that it was attitudes of racial superiority which precipitated the introduction of plantation slavery needs to be challenged. It might be better to start from the opposite end: by seeing how slavery (the product of specific problems of labor shortage and the organization of plantation agriculture, supplied, in the first instance, by non-black, indigenous labor, and then by white indentured labor) produced those forms of juridical racism which distinguish the epoch of plantation slavery (p. 212).

The conditions of slavery and capitalism provided the rationale for racism. He puts the relationship between race and class in succinct terms: “race is the modality through which class is lived” (Hall, 1980, p. 216). As described by Robinson, DuBois, and Hall, racial capitalism is defined as an economic system of profit-making and investment which occurs along racial lines and *produces* difference (Kelley, 2002; Leong, 2013; Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 1983; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). That is, capitalism produces racial difference by using these differences to capture profit. As Melamed (2015) states, “Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating,

and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups" (p. 77). Race does the ideological work of naturalizing class differences, pitting groups against each other in the interest of capital, accumulation, and profit.

***Racial capitalism as a place-based concept***

Racial capitalism impacts places, as these racial differences often are captured in differential land value (Pulido, 2017), which is valued and re-valued to produce capital (Harvey, 2003; Soja, 2010). For instance, White gentrifiers, city government, large employers, and real estate developers "revalue" low-cost land at the expense of low-income residents of color who live on this land (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Racial capitalism highlights the goals of accumulation, dispossession, and exploitation in the valuation of space. Scholars using critical geography recognize the similarities between place and race (Brand & Miller, 2020; McKittrick & Woods, 2007; Neely & Samura, 2011). Both space and race are essentialized, while also complex, socially constructed categories (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). In this sense, using a racial capitalism lens highlights the ways systems produce racial difference across place.

Because of the importance of place as a central feature of racial capitalism, I conceptualize place as an "active archive" in which racial projects build on one another and change over time, but necessarily reference their antecedents (Knowles, 2003). Racial capitalism also positions present-day forms of racial inequity as legacies of historical processes (Pulido, 2017) with a spatial component, "as processes of racialized valuations accumulated and calcified in a geographic temporality that dates back centuries and dates forward in the imaginary of future cities" (Brand, 2022, p. 278). People imbue space with meaning and create possibilities, and cut off others, through their actions. The "archive" is "active" in that people attach meaning, often through telling stories, about place that attach race to place (Knowles, p. 82). These stories

encapsulate histories of place, enmeshing place "with people and their activities as an ongoing set of possibilities in which race is fabricated" (Knowles, p. 83). People's "selective operation of memory" ascribes meaning to place, and interprets past meanings anew (Knowles, p. 97). In the case of gentrifying school-communities, people tell stories about school quality, personal histories in schools, and past and present connections to their neighborhoods and schools that link people's present-day placemaking with the past, creating place meaning. Policymakers and policy documents also tell stories about place, which contribute to these place meanings.

Place itself is a political "process," where places can change "capital accumulation and income distribution" (Agnew, 2011, p. 321). For instance, Sahn (2021) found that historical residential zoning patterns are linked to modern gentrification, because these patterns led to new development concentrated in under-developed, low-income communities or previously industrial areas. Inevitably, conflicts emerge in the social construction of place as people interpret histories differently and attach different meanings to place (Knowles, 2003). These differences in meaning and place attachment highlight possibilities for new social constructions of racialized place—potentially towards freedom. In this sense, racialized place is not just the product of systemic factors, but rather by people's actions (Knowles, 2003) and non-human actions (Bang et al., 2014). A historical lens focused on present-day distributions of power across place illustrates the "active archive," and the ways policies over time have entrenched inequities. These distributions of power and capital exist today as part of historical processes.

Critical studies of space from Marxist theorists like David Harvey, Edward Soja, and Henri Lefebvre, describe the "spatial dialectic." This dialectic sees place as impacting social relations and social relations impacting place (Harvey, 1973; Soja, 2009). So, understanding social relations requires an understanding of place, as they are mutually constitutive. Place is a

process, and it is political (Lefebvre, 1996; Soja, 2009; Harvey, 2003). As spatial politics morph, they change our social relations in the process and vice versa (Soja, 2009). Gentrification provides an extreme example of these changing relations, where place valuation can disrupt social relations, including in schools. For instance, in urban areas, real estate developers often use predatory practices that create inequitable places (Safransky, 2023). This can lead to schools with declining enrollment (Pearman, 2020), or an increasing proportion of White students (Posey-Maddox, 2014). Harvey (2003) argues that the socio-spatial dialectic creates inequities specifically because of capitalist accumulation. That is, the cycle of developing and re-developing urban space sustains capital accrual, while also sustaining spatial injustice. New analyses can shed light on how shifting political and economic contexts shape schools. While we understand how White flight and urban renewal projects of the 70s and 80s shaped schools—a distinctly spatial process, where spatial relations shaped political ones—recent gentrifying urban areas represent a shift in school demographics that also require analysis.

Capitalism finds a "spatial fix" when faced with a crisis of lack of capital (Soja, 2010, p. 93; Gilmore, 2022). Redevelopment, gentrification, and suburban expansion are all "fixes" to crises of capitalism to generate new capital. Logan & Molotch (1987) similarly identify cities as "growth machines" that generate capital (p. 2). They describe the "exchange value" of land as the capital gained from it, and the "use value" as non-capital assets like its value to a community or the experiences it provides. "Exchange value" spatial practices can create predatory conditions, like real estate developers valuing underinvested neighborhoods for development (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). These distinctions between valuing of land have important implications for education, as research has identified the non-quantifiable value of schools as community

institutions, like people's psychological and historical connections to schools (Fullilove, 2004; Lipman, 2018; Nickson, 2022).

Within this spatial dialectic, abstraction also occurs. I describe the origin of this term, and then explain how it applies to this case specifically, focusing on its role in policy creation. Marx originally used this term to refer to both the abstraction of labor and the abstraction of theory. In the first case, abstraction refers to the process by which the worker becomes disconnected from the product through abstraction; this allows for exploitation such as wage theft, time theft, and other modes of profit extraction by the upper classes (Marx, 1867). In the latter, Marx refers to the way theory is often abstracted from reality and not grounded in the material relations of specific historical circumstances (1861, *Grundrisse*). Gilmore (2002) takes abstraction and applies it to racial capitalism specifically. She defines racism as "process of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of differences into hierarchies that organize relations" (p. 16). In processes of abstraction, the "thing" or the "problem" at hand gets moved, divided, organized, split, and reformed into something else, disconnecting its social reality from its expressed form. Gilmore argues that "the abstraction of class conflict" across multiple policymaking sites creates institutions that "widen (or narrow, or sometimes both at once) the distance between categories of social actors and their capacity to realize their own freedom (p. 16). This case looks for instances of abstraction in school-gentrification and attendant policymaking, understanding where misunderstandings, stops and starts, and other policy processes abstract lived realities of racism from their policy ends.

### *Gentrification as racial capitalism*

Scholars have recently argued that gentrification is a "modality of racial capitalism," which racializes land and property towards exploitation through dispossession and displacement

(p. 8, Dantzler, 2021; Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Exclusionary zoning "removes housing (and as a result, neighborhoods) from being attained or occupied" (p. 9). Therefore, it is a form of dispossession. Gentrification typically involves White, wealthy residents, real estate developers, and other private actors accumulating capital and power to dictate new social constructions of place in previously under-invested neighborhoods (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2022). Gentrification can displace long-term residents, especially low-income residents and residents of color (Zuk et al., 2018). However, gentrification varies based on the racial composition of the neighborhood and gentrifiers. For instance, Patillo (2007) found in her study of Black middle-class gentrification of Chicago that Black people heavily invested in the preservation of community institutions, like schools. While some research has found that longtime Black and Latinx residents do not view gentrification as a unilaterally negative phenomenon (Freeman, 2006; Smith & Greer, 2018), a significant body of research has identified residential, political, and cultural displacement as negative consequence of gentrification (Fullilove, 2004; Hyra, 2008; Newman & Wyly, 2006).

Imperialism and colonialism are founded in this connection between space, place, and race. Tuck & McKenzie (2015) and Bang et al. (2014), expand critical spatial analysis in considering indigeneity and decolonization. This more expansive definition pushes research to consider the ways non-human factors shape place and recognize and uncover the legacies of settler-colonialism in places (as Bang and colleagues put it, "land is, therefore we are") (p. 45). Place, therefore, is essential to understanding colonization and decolonization, and necessitates historical context. This context imagines Indigenous futures in metropolitan areas, including in gentrifying areas that include the stolen lands of Indigenous people. Therefore, addressing displacement of current residents also necessarily involves addressing longer histories of displacement of Indigenous people and their eventual return to this land, along with the

recognition that Indigenous people have always, and continue to be, part of urban places. While this recognition of Indigenous displacement was largely absent in the data I collected (something I address throughout the findings and discussion), I include this history in the case background and make connections to it throughout the analysis.

**Gentrification and school-communities**

Education research highlights the tight coupling of systems of housing, education, and local economic development and their impact on resource distribution (Green, 2015a; Noguera & Wells, 2011). Structural and spatial conditions, like poverty, racism, and geographic inequity shape access to schools (Anyon, 1997; Green & Gooden, 2014; Milner, 2013; powell, 2013; Warren, 2005). Multiple interlocking systems—schools, housing affordability, zoning, land ordinances, transportation, public parks, job opportunities, community spaces—shape neighborhoods (Erickson, 2016; Rury & Mirel, 1997). Horsford, Scott, & Anderson (2019) explain the political economy of education with a quote from Jean Anyon: “schools occupy both the physical and the psychological center of neighborhoods and communities" (p. 13).

Scholars have also increasingly used racial capitalism to understand schools, which I build on in this study. For instance, Henry (2021) puts Anyon’s concept of the political economy of education in conversation with racial capitalism to understand the systemic factors that “delimit (Black) mobility and reproduce inequality” in New Orleans and its charter school system (p. 131). Scholars have also linked neoliberalism in education (lack of education funding, privatization, and marketization) to racial capitalism (Fabricant & Fine, 2007; Lipman, 2018; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Green (2022) uses racial capitalism to understand school districts’ response to gentrification, finding districts market schools along racial lines. These studies emphasize how the political and economic contexts of schools in racialized and capitalist

economies shape education. I build upon these studies, particularly Green (2022), to look at schools in tandem with housing policy.

Research on gentrification and its impact on schools surfaces gentrification's racialized features and disadvantages for racially minoritized students, highlighting the ways it harms schools as community institutions. The literature on schools and gentrification highlights its harmful aspects to communities of color, such as physical displacement from schools, cultural erasure, funding instability, and community fragmentation (Cucchiara, 2013; Diem, et al., 2019; Freidus, 2020; Green et al., 2020; Lipman, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Pulte, 2019; Quarles & Butler, 2018; Roda, 2020). Access to schools is also shaped by the racialized process of gentrification. Since the 1990s, cities have undergone a new wave of urban renewal leading to increasing gentrification of cities and the suburbanization of poverty (Anyon, 2014; Covington, 2015; Diamond et al., 2021; Howell & Timberlake, 2014; Hyra, 2012). Racial and class demographic changes influence schools, like their racial composition, enrollment policies, and engagement with parents (Lacy, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Changing political and economic forces leading to gentrification necessitates an understanding of schools as part of their political and economic contexts. Pearman (2019) suggests that future research should consider the "broader contexts in which gentrification occurs" to understand how political and economic context moderate gentrification's impact on schools (p. 154).

Research has also considered school leaders' role in the context of larger systems by advocating for equitable resource allocation across systems, not just within schools (Butler & Boggs, 2023; Green, 2015a; Green, 2015b; Green & Gooden, 2014; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa, 2012; Roda, 2020). This research notes that schools and communities can collaborate on social issues beyond the school walls. Additional research can help better understand the cross-

system power dynamics (like those in zoning processes) that control resources impacting schools that school-community organizing can address (Green, 2015a, 2015b).

Scholars have begun to pay more attention to what parents, students, community members, and school staff do in the face of gentrification at their schools (see Roda, 2020; Green, 2022; Gordon, 2021). A study of NYC principals working in a gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn found they work to increase enrollment of students of color that historically have attended the school (Roda, 2020). These NYC principal practices also included resisting neoliberal marketing strategies that typically attract White parents (Roda, 2020). Alternatively, Green (2022) finds that principals in Austin exacerbate gentrification, marketing their schools to White parents to secure more funding (whether through raised enrollment, because they perceive White parents have the resources to move to attend schools, or through extra funds via the PTA). In this study, I similarly focus on the practices of principals, while also considering those of parents and teachers, analyzing how these practices respond to gentrification and come up against barriers to doing so.

This study adds to extant research by considering the role of parents in this resistance against gentrification and contextualizing the actions of school-communities more holistically in their political and economic contexts (i.e., community organizing for change, access to housing). This study contributes to a growing body of research that focuses on school-community collaboration which envisions school leaders and parents as collaborative organizers that address community-wide, not just school-wide, issues (Anyon; 2014; Green et al.; 2022; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Warren; 2005).

**People's placemaking amidst racial capitalism**

Critical geography and education scholars argue for the need for collective power to create spatial justice, often phrased as "the right to the city" (Anyon, 2014; Francis, 2014; Gilmore, 2022; Harvey, 2003, 2006; Lefebvre, 1996; Marcuse, 2009; McKittrick, 2011). Soja (2010) defines spatial justice as coalition-building, with investments made in places to repair social problems (p. 109). "Investment" could mean guiding time or resources towards school-communities. Education research similarly highlights the need for the material conditions of oppressed people to change along with pushes for educational equity and for marginalized community members to lead this change (Anyon, 2014; Horsford et al., 2019; Oakes et al., 2006; Noguera & Wells, 2011; Sampson & Horsford, 2017; Warren, 2005). Education scholars identify the need for education reform efforts to connect to broader social issues (Anyon, 2009; Green, 2015; Horsford & Sampson, 2017; Shirley, 2009; Warren, 2005). Anyon (2009) argues that education reformers should tie local educational issues to other social issues, like housing, to build a broad-based social movement. Scholars have examined the relationship between schools and community development, finding that schools play important roles in community organizing (Butler et al., 2012; Green, 2015b; Ishimaru, 2019; Valli et al., 2016; Warren, 2005).

A focus on the racial and class dimensions of spatial-social relations can center analysis on the people experiencing spatial injustice and possibilities for spatial justice (Gilmore, 2002; Woods, 2009). Marcuse (2009) theorizes spatial *injustice* as involuntary confinement in a space, like ghettoization or segregation, or the inequitable distribution of resources according to space, as is the case in gentrification. The "spatial enclosures" produced by racial capitalism (Woods, 2009) are often countered, resisted, and reshaped by alternative placemaking practices of those experiencing the enclosure. Research, like this case study, considering racial capitalism therefore can highlight the practices of people which shapes place. Considering race and place together

highlights possibilities towards justice (Gilmore, 2022; Lipsitz, 2011; Soja, 2009). Black geographies, Black spatial imaginaries, and White spatial imaginaries describe these racialized processes of place-making towards justice (McKittrick, 2011; Lipsitz, 2011). I explain these concepts in greater detail in the following sections. These processes often take place with acute power differentials, or in "contested spaces" (Low & Lawrence-Zuninga, 2003). These contested places, like those under consideration in this study, can be particularly fruitful to understand possibilities for change because the power dynamics are particularly heightened (Low & Lawrence-Zuninga).

This connection between residents and place, known as "place attachment" in urban studies, highlights the psychological ties that bind people to places (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2019; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place-making is also a political process in that places and their attached meanings are controlled by people within an uneven terrain of power (Anderson, 2020; Anderson & Jung, 2023; Manzo & Desanto, 2021). When I refer to placemaking, I mean the actions of people and policy across time and scale that construct these social relations (Lipsitz, 2007). As Gilmore (2007) says, "'agency'…is too often used as an exclusive attribute of oppressed people in their struggle against an opponent called 'structure'" (p. 40). Rather than conceive of placemaking as a binary, aligned to the spatial dialectic, I think of placemaking as bottom-up and top-down forces interacting to shape place.

Research addresses placemaking by examining community resistance to housing displacement due to gentrification (Betancur, 2002; Lipsitz, 2011). These practices can look like organizing for de-commodified housing and protection of permanently affordable housing that allows people of color and low-income people to maintain their communities (Betancur, 2002; Lipsitz, 2011). This research does not consider the role of schools, despite their role as

community anchors (Anyon, 2014; Lipman 2011). I add to this work by examining how staff and parents incorporate an understanding of housing precarity—or do not—in their discourse and in action on unjust spatial distributions of resources in school-communities.

***Place-making in gentrifying schools***

Schools are significant factors in place-making (Anyon, 2014). Both policy and people engage in placemaking. That is, education policy shapes school-communities as places, as do the people connected to these communities. I avoid the binary of policy vs. people to capture the complexity of the policymaking process, and the ways people both resist and co-opt policy goals. With a racial capitalism and Black spatial imaginaries lens, I emphasize the community-building power of Black people and people of color (Lipsitz, 2011). Because of historical inequities in private property ownership and investment in collective participation, Black people and people of color have higher stakes in collective institutions like schools (Lipman, 2018; Lipsitz, 2011). For instance, Nickson (2020; 2022) demonstrates the place-making and spatial imaginaries of Black families moving from Detroit to its suburbs. She finds that Black families navigate complex relationships with their urban homes in choosing to move to the suburbs, drawing upon histories of Black placemaking and resistance in pursuing educational opportunity. Green (2015a) considers education and place through mapping community assets in partnership with students and community members, locating schools as important community centers. Quartz, Geller, and McQueen (2020) work with a "failing" urban school to historicize its role in Black politics, reimagining it as "an anchor democratic institution" (p. 2). Lipman (2018), in studying education in Chicago, argues that public schools are "anchors" in communities, "and defending them is essential to staunch the loss of public and private resources and displacement" (p. 5). She summarizes the complex relationship between the racial politics of schools and place:

> On one hand, public schools in many Black and some Latinx neighborhoods are exemplars of drastically inequitable school systems…On the other hand, they carry rich legacies of intellectual and cultural accomplishments forged in the face of racial segregation (p. 5).

Schools occupy significant emotional, cultural, and physical places in neighborhoods. Gentrification can interrupt and roll back the placemaking of people of color within and adjacent to schools. This study investigates this organizing work at the nexus of residential zoning and schools, understanding what work sustains school communities.

This study takes a middle ground in considering the role of policy–both skeptical that policy can change deeply rooted social problems (Shange, 2019), and hopeful that policy can address some of the harms itself created (Gilmore, 2002). Research describes the lack of coherent policy response to gentrification's impact on schools (Finnigan & Holme, 2013; Green et al., 2020; Green et al., 2022; Sikes & Green, 2021). Decoupling housing and schooling through charter schools and increased choice (often a proposed strategy to spatial inequity in education) has been empirically shown to do little to improve racial equity in schools (Holme & Finnigan, 2018; Scott & Holme, 2016). Less research focuses on how "the tsunami of gentrification 'washes away' the work of community organizers as schools' racial composition shifts" (Anyon, 2014, p. 122).

The changing demographics and system conditions caused by gentrification point to the need to better understand how communities and schools resist these dynamics and make place. As neighborhoods gentrify, the influx of wealthier residents often shifts power and control over resources in schools from long-time residents of color to White residents (Freidus, 2020). Indeed, much of the research on school gentrification focuses on the role of White parents in gentrifying schools (Lipman, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Walton, 2021) and the ways school districts often

try to attract White families to obtain more resources (Diem et al., 2019; Green et al., 2022; Posey-Maddox, 2016). White people organize, often towards shaping schools toward their own interests, particularly in gentrifying schools (Freidus, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2014). Moreover, White parents are more likely to gentrify a neighborhood with more school choice options (Pearman & Swain, 2017), further illustrating gentrification's destabilizing effects on neighborhood schools. Relatedly, schools located in gentrifying neighborhoods are associated with *declining* enrollment (Pearman, 2020), pointing to the potential for gentry families to opt out of the public school system altogether, weakening these public institutions. Another complexity of gentrification and schools concerns the pursuit of racial diversity, which may appear at face-value to be justice-oriented but can reinscribe whiteness. Education (Freidus, 2022; Posey-Maddox, 2014), urban studies (Curran, 2018), and legal scholars (Leong, 2013) have drawn attention to the deleterious effects of White people seeing diversity as an "asset" or "resource." In this dynamic of White people seeking racial diversity, this diversity can end up serving White people's interests of social mobility, multiculturalism, and multilingualism, rather than creating justice in material conditions for people of color. More research is needed to understand how neighborhood and school communities react, resist, and create within gentrifying neighborhoods.

Education reform initiatives have instituted place-based policies to address the link between spatial inequities and education. These initiatives include community schools, the federal Promise grant, and public housing-schooling partnerships. Overall, these reforms recognize the linkages between education quality and surrounding community assets, like access to transportation, healthcare, and jobs. However, these reforms tend not to consider access to affordable housing. For instance, in a systematic review of community school strategy

documents, Holme et al. (2022) found that most community schools proposed intertwining healthcare and job training at school sites. Moreover, Butler et al. (2022) also finds community schools can provide neighborhood resources but can also be a "harbinger of gentrification that will ultimately displace incumbent residents" as they improve neighborhood conditions (p. 22).

Promise Neighborhoods, an Obama-era Department of Education grant program, also addressed schools in the context of their neighborhoods. These grants differed from community schools in that they included funding explicitly to build community partnerships. Horsford & Sampson (2014), in a qualitative analysis of one failed Promise application, found that low-income communities often lacked the funding, staff, and leadership necessary to procure federal grant funds. Therefore, while the Promise funding model could build neighborhood capacity for equitable policy initiatives, the history of underinvestment in these neighborhoods made it difficult for communities to build the partnerships necessary to get funds in the first place (Horsford & Sampson, 2014). This points to the necessity of understanding how communities of color engage in placemaking at the local level to effect change.

**Spatial imaginaries and schools**

The racial quality of place and placemaking emphasizes how different racial groups shape place towards their own goals. McKittrick & Woods' (2007) theorization of Black geographies elaborates on the generative possibilities of critical spatial analysis focused on Black radical politics. "Black geographies," they argue, "see place as the location of cooperation, stewardship, and social justice rather than just sites to be dominated, enclosed, commodified, exploited, and segregated" (p. 6). Lipsitz similarly theorizes about the spatial qualities of race, delineating between the "white spatial imaginary" and the "black spatial imaginary." The Black spatial imaginary emphasizes democratic practices, "public cooperation," and "radical solidarity"

(p. 56). Nickson (2020; 2022) uses spatial imaginaries and Black geographies to explain how schools can be sites of Black agentic place-making. Indeed, educational historians have documented the ways all-Black schools are places of love and nurturing for Black communities (Anderson, 1988; Morris, 2004; Siddle-Walker, 2000). While the White spatial imaginary emphasizes the "exchange value" of space, the Black spatial imaginary reimagines private spaces for public use and political mobilization (Lipsitz, 2011; Tyner, 2007).

Black geographies and spatial imaginaries, however, are not without the possibility of contradiction and complexity. As Lipsitz (2011) explains,

> When confronted with egalitarian and democratic social movements, people in power always hold out the lure of individual escape for selected individuals. The logic of the system encourages potential rebels to instead seek positions as administrators of austerity, apologists for corporate power and white privilege, or political shills for redevelopment schemes certain to exacerbate the very problems they purport to solve. There is never a shortage of Black people auditioning for these roles. Yet given the enormous rewards potentially available to those who identify with whiteness, the enduring popularity and power of Black radical democracy needs explaining. The explanation is not so much a matter of race as a matter of place (p. 57).

In this study, I address this complexity by considering the impacts of individual placemaking of people of color on the systems with which they engage. For instance, all participants of color mentioned home ownership as a goal. While this could be viewed as buying into a "redevelopment scheme," I also considered how acquiring generational wealth and stability works against centuries of racist land use policies. I present the evidence of these complexities throughout my analysis, inviting the reader to struggle with me to consider how people engage with oppressive systems. Anderson (2020) addresses the complexities of organizing against spatial enclosures, explaining in his case of gentrification in New York City, that people sometimes align with the hegemonic order not out of ideological concern or even intentionally,

but because of their desire for an easier life based on their own individual concerns. They respond to their feelings of scarcity in an increasingly precarious economy where the social welfare state has been replaced by individualism (Anderson, 2020). In attempting to make the everyday actions of people critical (Gilmore, 2002), this study wrestles with these actions "may be playing into the very dynamics that organizers…are working to confront and dismantle" (Anderson, 2020, p. xiii).

The White spatial imaginary capitalizes on spatial inequality, emphasizing consumerism, privatism, and homeowner rights (Lipsitz, 2011) while relying on race-neutral neoliberalism to obfuscate the operationalization of racism (Pulido, 2015). The White spatial imaginary "seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them" and gathers resources in the private sphere for individual gain (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 29). Given the allure of escape from the inequities of racism and capitalism, Black people can enact White spatial imaginaries for their own gain; but, even in the face of rewards for shedding the ethos of Black radical politics, the Black spatial imaginary remains as a lasting and sustaining feature of Black life in the U.S. (Lipsitz, 2011; Nickson, 2021).

Public policy shapes place and has often done so towards the White spatial imaginary, particularly in considering land use. Gentrification, for instance, isn't just the proliferation of private investment—public investment and policy make it possible, typically benefitting White people (Betancur, 2002; Pedroni, 2011). Empirically, this means that gentrification is a public policy issue. Urban planners play a particularly important role in gentrification, as they manage public space and land use laws. Urban planners have historically created and continue to create disparate racial outcomes (Brand, 2022) even while trying to use equitable lenses (Anguelovski et al., 2020). Public institutions and policymakers also make place, and therefore the

policymaking process is a site of inquiry for this study. I argue that examining policy outside of education, like urban planning and zoning and land use laws within a critical geographic framework can expand understanding of spatial inequity and equity that shapes schools.

Black geographies expand on this conception of community-led political change, specifically tying community organizing to long histories of Black resistance. For the purpose of this study, this definition pays attention to the spatialized, raced power dynamics at play in gentrification and its impacts on schools. Understanding community organizing through a racialized, spatial lens provides an analytical tool to interpret place and its practices and differentiate between actions that repair and seek collective justice (Black spatial imaginary) and those that seek individual gain or hoarding (White spatial imaginary). People of color, and specifically Black people, create places and structures beyond fighting racism: "resistance to racism [is] not the sole defining feature of a Black sense of place" (McKittrick, 2011, p. 949). Black people develop ways of being in solidarity with each other that represent alternative social relations and possibilities (Cox, 2015; Lipman, 2018; Lipsitz, 2011; McKittrick, 2011; Nickson, 2020; ross, 2021; Shange, 2019). For instance, research captures how Black families mount serious political challenges to spatial injustice rooted in histories of such organizing work (Ewing, 2018; Gordon, 2021; Nuamah & Ogorzalek, 2021; Wilson, 2009). Nickson (2021) describes the "democratization of educational care"—how Black families push for changes in schools that benefit all students, not just their own, a feature of the collective nature of the Black spatial imaginary. Nickson (2022) also describes the place-making practices of Black families in suburban Detroit that connected them back to their Detroit community through "alternative

mapping."[2] Similarly, when Black people participate in urban planning, Bates et al. (2018) describe that "something shakes loose" and a spatial imaginary is often utilized that is "not merely anti-colonial or anti-racist, but…entirely otherwise" (p. 254). This study investigates where and how this Black spatial imaginary shows up in Seattle.

Part of the work of this study is to understand the racial dynamics of gentrification and schools in a historically and geographically specific site—in this case, Seattle. Cheng (2013) calls this attention to geographically specific racial projects, "regional racial consciousness." Her work on Los Angeles racial formations found that regionally specific ideas about race do not always mirror national ideology or the Black/White binary. Seattle is also a city which, given its relatively low population of Black people presently and historically, does not follow a clear Black/White binary in racial consciousness. However, scholars have used Black geographies to investigate the place-making of other racial groups, like under-documented Latinx youth in Georgia (Freshour & Varela, 2023). Under racial capitalism, movements not specifically concerned with the Black/White binary, like anti-immigration policies, Indigenous displacement, and the dispossession and asset-stripping of multiracial working and poor people can all be understood as technologies of white supremacy (Freshour & Varela, 2023).

In this sense, while Seattle's Black population is comparatively small among U.S. metropolitan areas, Black spatial imaginaries and Black geographies are still intertwined with the city's past and present subjugation of multiracial working-class and poor people, and the ways

[2]Another example of this broad community-building comes from Lipsitz (2011): "To stave off gentrification, Project Row Houses [in New Orleans, which] formed a non-profit housing and community development corporation to hold down land and housing prices, move bungalows and shotgun houses from other parts of town to the Third Ward, and promote community control over neighborhood development. Consistent with the collective and community-oriented vision of the Black spatial imaginary, they realized that their success in refurbishing and rehabilitating one group of houses on one block would be undermined if they lost control of the neighborhood around it to speculators and gentrifiers" (p. 159).

multiracial coalitions have created new and alternative spaces. For instance, during school desegregation, a multiracial, working-class coalition of citizens, including Black, Latinx, Asian-American, and White people, advocated for job and school desegregation, including the creation of Freedom Schools (Karcher, 2020). Lipsitz (2011) explains that the Black spatial imaginary "reveals particular dynamics that have been central to the general construction of racialized space for everyone" (p. 12). He goes on to explain, "a focus on Black spaces reveals particular dynamics that have been central to the general construction of racialized space for everyone" (p. 12). So, given Seattle's context, I use Black geographies and spatial imaginaries as a jumping off point to understand the ways multiracial groups work to create liberatory space.

One reason for the inherent creativity and alternative nature of the Black spatial imaginary and its attendant practices is the ignorance of these practices by policymakers and the state (Einstein, 2021; Gabbe, 2018; Levine, 2017). American democratic practices, such as participatory processes, have coexisted with and shaped racial inequities (Levine, 2017; Woods, 2007). Racialized structures allow for race neutral policies to continue racist histories (Ford, 1994; powell, 2013). In other words, the existence of democratic participation does not always foster equity. Brand (2015) points out, in line with the difference between Black and White spatial imaginaries, White residents often use the language of neoliberalism and Black residents use the language of community in participatory planning. She suggests that urban planners need to differentiate "between legitimate and illegitimate claims and sacrifices" in participatory processes based on racial identities and histories of exclusion (p. 261). The differences in spatial imaginaries, and the results of invoking them, necessitates "more nuanced and fine-grain analysis of the relationships between people and places" (p. 261) to understand spatial imaginaries, place attachment, and paths forward which adequately consider the history and need for reparations.

Given the overlap I demonstrate between placemaking in neighborhoods and schools, I argue that this type of analysis when applied to schools and their place in neighborhoods can highlight the "legitimate and illegitimate claims and sacrifices," making policy more equitable.

## Chapter 3: The Case of Gentrifying Seattle and its Schools

This case study description seeks to historically contextualize the case of Seattle's gentrifying schools. It also describes the current political and economic contexts that shape Seattle's schools and their broader communities. Overall, this chapter describes Seattle as a complex place—majority-White, but with a long history of multicultural political collaboration; massive amounts of wealth, but high levels of inequality; racially inequitable, but with stated goals to implement racially equitable policy. These complexities provide critical context for understanding the ways racial capitalism continues to shape school-communities.

Seattle's top-down placemaking—the policies of city planners and private development—has always involved racialized conceptions of land value, often harming the minoritized people living on that land. These harmful practices have a deep-rooted history in colonization, segregation and redlining, and redevelopment which have created the conditions that allow gentrification and displacement to occur. At the same time, these conditions also fomented resistance and alternative placemaking by people of color and working-class people. This case description briefly describes these histories, as well as the current political and economic context that shapes the case of Seattle's gentrifying schools.

I illustrate the history of placemaking in Seattle to its current, rapid gentrification. The attendant housing crisis is caused by zoning policy, an influx of highly paid workers, and lack of affordable housing development all nested within historical land valuation with uneven development based on race. I link this policy history to Seattle's school enrollment policies, which have historically been linked to race and place. By demonstrating the historical connections between land use policy and enrollment, I contextualize gentrifying schools at the center of this study within a longer history.

This case description has two overall sections–historical context and today's current policy context. To provide historical context, I first recount Seattle's history of settler colonialism, highlighting how this history illustrates Seattle's racial capitalist roots and led to current gentrification. I explore Seattle's history of land use, housing policy, and schools to unpack the "archive" of the "active archive" upon which current placemaking practices are built. I connect this to histories of land use policies that have created White places in Seattle, including schools. Lastly, I highlight the ways people of color in Seattle have organized throughout Seattle's history to resist and create their own places. To describe Seattle's current political and economic context, I describe Seattle's mixed commitment to progressive policy. I then explain the housing crisis and school budget deficit crisis to contextualize the macro-level barriers facing school-communities.

**The history of creating Seattle's White places**

Indigeneity and urbanity in Seattle have been linked since the time of settler colonialism (Thrush, 2007). As the city urbanized, settlers forced Indigenous people out of the city increasingly to the margins in present-day International District and South End (Asaka, 2022). Labor needs created racial segregation and placemaking excluded people of color (Asaka 2022). In this sense, Seattle has always been a city with racialized placemaking, spurred by economic development. Settlers simultaneously viewed Indigenous people as "signifiers of urban disorder," even as their labor built much of the downtown infrastructure (Thrush, 2007, p. 41). White settlers of Seattle saw a "racial destiny" of Indians, of "place-stories inhabited by the 'vanishing Indian'" (Thrush, 2007, p. 91). White Seattle settlers depended on the labor of Indigenous people to build the city, while also forcibly removing them from their homelands.

The development of Seattle, geographically and economically, evolved into an urban center and is necessarily linked to Indigeneity. As Seattle became more urban and White settlers stole more and more land, neighborhoods quickly gentrified, and settlers displaced Indigenous people. For instance, settlers virtually erased Skid Road, a neighborhood of poor Indigenous people, to make way for new development (Thrush, 2007).

Seattle's White settler colonists continued to be concerned with expanding White places. This violent removal, ultimately codified in land use policies, maintained wealth for White people with access to land while stripping people of color of this wealth. I highlight the racist origins of Seattle's current land use laws to demonstrate how the desire to control land use is rooted in a goal of protecting and hoarding White wealth.

As the city of Seattle developed in the late 1800s, more people of color migrated to the region to seek out jobs. As Seattle became a more multiracial place, White settlers continued to use violent tactics to maintain their dominance and create White places. One of the city's most infamous incidents of racial violence was the 1885 White-led riot, where White workers entered Chinatown and forcibly removed Chinese people from their homes, marching them to board a ship to be deported to China (Karlin, 1948; Lee, 2010; Taylor, 1994). Like the history of violent Indigenous removal, Chinese workers were also exploited for their labor.

By the 1880s, Black migration increased westward and the Black population in Seattle grew, leading public officials and real estate investors to create policies policing the boundaries of Black settlement (Taylor, 1994). Measures to create White places included racially restrictive covenants, redlining, and zoning laws. While segregation in Seattle had been prevalent without any formal policy, it wasn't until the 1930s that restrictive housing covenants codified informal practices of sequestering Black people in certain neighborhoods into law, and became a common

legal practice (Taylor, 1994). These covenants, written into housing deeds, excluded anyone but a White person from buying homes in most neighborhoods in Seattle, excluding the Central and International District. While these covenants became illegal in 1948, Seattle's open housing ordinance was not passed until 1968 and was unofficially enforced throughout the 1970s ("Seattle segregation maps," n.d.). Between 1948 and 1968, Seattle had "voluntary agreements" between homeowners and realtors to exclude Black people from certain neighborhoods and remove those who had already purchased homes (Taylor, 1994). Alongside housing covenants came redlining, where the federal Home Owner Loan Corporation (HOLC) delineated federal housing loan amounts by neighborhood (Rothstein, 2017). These maps guided investment in the form of home loans and mortgage rates, effectively barring neighborhoods with majority people of color from acquiring housing wealth at the same rate as White people (Rothstein). In addition to restrictive covenants and redlining, Seattle's zoning laws created racially segregated neighborhoods that encoded into law the segregation since the original White colonization of Indigenous land (Asaka, 2022). In 1923, Seattle created its first zoning ordinance and implemented single-family zoning (Twinam, 2018). These policies together policed the boundaries of wealth and race in the city.[3]

With the state's population growing, state policymakers passed the Growth Management Act in 1988 to manage the state's residential growth. This act required all large cities in Washington to create "Comprehensive Plans" that included zoning regulations. These plans, while written by city planners, are required by the state to be reviewed in a public engagement process and voted upon and implemented by local government. The Plans were designated for a

[3] Books covering the history of Seattle's policies of racial segregation in more depth (some which I have the chance to cite, others I do not) include [INSERT HERE] (include Indigenous history)

twenty-year period. Washington cities authored their first Comprehensive Plans in 1994, when Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, the city's first Black mayor, instituted the Urban Village Strategy, which resulted in maintaining 80% of Seattle's usable land for single-family zoning.

***Persistent spatial inequities in Seattle schools***

Historically, White residents in Seattle have resisted decoupling housing and schooling. Moreover, school enrollment has always been political, and tied to neighborhood investment and city and school district policies. The city implemented various iterations of school desegregation policies, ranging from small-scale voluntary policies involving a few schools, to district-wide busing (Karcher, 2020). Black students participated at a higher rate and were bused further from their homes than White students (Statement by the Seattle School Board, 1963). Much of this imbalance came from school district policy, which focused on making sure no schools were majority-Black, rather than addressing the majority-white schools on the North end of Seattle (Intergroup Relations Department, 1967).

From the 1960s through the *Parents Involved in Community Schools vs. Seattle School District No.1* (*PICS*) case decided in 2007, White parents organized against school desegregation policies. These fights highlight the connection between housing and schools. For instance, a White school board member, Ellen Roe, said in 1977 that Seattle's busing plan had "alienated hundreds of parents and other residents by robbing children and families of time…but mostly the freedom to send their children to the school near the family home they have chosen. The freedom of choice is obviously important to me and many other people, Black, White, Yellow, and Red" ("School Board minutes," 1978, as cited in Pochop, 2014). School-communities have always been forged via access to neighborhood and housing, and this has always been racialized.

Seattle's desegregation plan, due to its racially disproportionate implementation, moved more students from southeast Seattle to the North end. This meant that less school construction occurred in the South end, as the desegregation plan steadily drained the neighborhoods of students (Kohn, 1996). As Seattle's overall population grew, this meant that the predominantly Black and Asian students of the South End *had* to leave their neighborhood schools, as these schools were overcrowded due to lack of investment during busing (Kohn). The enrollment challenges facing Seattle today echo these politicized and racialized choices of school construction and placement.

**Histories of multiracialism: API, Black, Latinx, and White organizers in Seattle**

Colonialism and White supremacy created an uneven distribution of resources and power across space. While White supremacy is deeply ingrained in systems, multiracial groups of Seattle residents have organized for more just places, including access to economic opportunity, high-quality education, and housing. This history of organizing and coalition-building highlights how groups have navigated complex racial dynamics and power structures to advocate for shared interests. Additionally, the stories of organizing demonstrate despite the inequitable distribution of resources, people of color have marshaled their collective power to thrive and make place. I briefly highlight some of these stories to demonstrate the multitude of ways (that are not all captured here) in an effort to paint a picture of how people of color have systematically thrived and resisted within Seattle.[4]

Throughout Seattle's history, multiracial groups of people have worked together to usher in rights for the working class and people of color. In the early 1800s, Chinese, Japanese, and

[4] Additional sources that cover this [include CD podcast, cite articles from Carrie about organizing].

Filipino migrant workers worked alongside Indigenous people (Asaka, 2022). Laborers in the early 1900s in Seattle, including White workers, organized together in the IWW union against the racial hierarchy enforced by lumber companies (Asaka, 2022). Jumping forward over a century to the 1960s and 70s, the Black Panther Party in Seattle had a significant number of Asian members who advocated for Asian-American and Black rights alongside their Black counterparts (Dixon, 2012). Asian community leaders also helped recruit Asian community members to the cause of desegregation led by Black activists (Siqueland, 1981). Multiple community-based organizations and nonprofits included multiracial groups advocating for school desegregation (Karcher, 2020)[5].

During the era of school desegregation, multiracial groups set up Freedom Schools to boycott the lack of desegregation policies (Singler et al., 2011). These Freedom Schools led to increased funding for busing (Singler et al.). Predominantly Asian and Black neighborhoods border and mix with each other, from the International District and the Central District to Beacon Hill and Rainier Beach. Residents from the Central District discuss in an oral storytelling project the Japanese restaurants and Asian grocery stores in the CD growing up (*Shelf Lives*). In this sense, the historically Black and Asian working-class neighborhoods of Seattle merge and inform one another, creating a distinct sense of place that draws from multiple cultures.

Racial groups have also formed strong activism movements. In 1972, Latinx activists formed the community center El Centro de La Raza in 1972, which still stands today in Beacon Hill. These activists were led by Roberto Maestas, a Franklin High School teacher, when they

[5] The NAACP, ACLU, and other civil rights organizations such as Civic Unity Committee, the Seattle Urban League, Christian Friends for Racial Equity, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC) ramped up civil rights advocacy efforts beginning in the 1950s and throughout the 1960s related to fair housing, employment, and school desegregation

occupied Beacon Hill School (University of Washington, n.d). Maestas also created the South Seattle Community Center for Adult Basic Education (University of Washington, n.d.). Latinx activism at UW also increased during the 1960s and 1970s (University of Washington, n.d.). In the 1980s, Seattle was a "center of pro-Indian and pro-environmentalist sentiment" (p. 190, Thrush, 2007). Native activists like Cecile Hansen, chairwoman of the Duwamish tribe, resisted White stories of Native history (Thrush). The Real Rent Duwamish campaign, and the active presence of the Duwamish Tribe in Seattle today, speak to the legacy of her earlier organizing. In 1960, seven Native women created the American Indian Women's Service League to support the large numbers of Indigenous people moving to cities after the passing of the 1956 Indian Relocation Act (Thrush). Native Americans occupied the military base Fort Lawton in the Magnolia neighborhood in 1970 for multiple weeks (Thrush, 2007). This occupation ultimately led to the creation of the Daybreak Star Cultural Center, which exists today as an Indian event center, daycare, and community services hub.

In 1967, Black Power advocate and Black Panther Stokely Carmichael spoke at Garfield High School in the Central District to an audience of 4,000 people (Taylor, 1994). After this meeting, a Seattle branch of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed, as did a Seattle Black Panther Party chapter (Santos & Iwomoto, 2015). Gradually, the Black Power movement gained traction with more Black Seattleites (Taylor, 1994). The Congress of Racial Equity (CORE), an interracial organization in strong support of desegregation, adopted a Black Power stance (Singler et al., 2011).

**Seattle's mixed commitment to progressive policy**

Seattle is a progressive city, in a blue state, with stated goals toward racial equity. In the urban studies and public policy literature, Seattle is cast as a progressive example of a modern

city because of its high-paying industries, temperate climate, “safe haven” status for immigrants, and attention to climate policy (Abel & White, 2015; Morrill & Sorruners, 2005). At the same time, the politicians and their favored interest groups often represent the interest of capital. For instance, Seattle’s mayor Bruce Harrell campaigned on a platform of progressive policies, and often referenced his personal history growing up in the redlined Central District as a mixed-race Black and Asian kid (Bruce For Seattle, n.d.). However, his administration’s gutting of the Comprehensive Plan and his reluctance to embrace upzoning led to public outcry (Cohen, 2024). So, while the city consistently has all-Democrat lawmakers, these individuals often are biased on their positions on housing, police, and climate action (Krieg, 2024).

Washington has the second-most regressive tax system in the country, in part because of its lack of income tax (Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 2024). Therefore, while vast private wealth has accrued in the region with the increase of high-paying tech jobs, much of this wealth is not captured for public use. These high-paying jobs, while not significantly raising public revenue, fundamentally changed the region’s demographics and housing market. Home prices rose by 85% between 1990 and 2000, displacing residents of color in Seattle to less-expensive neighborhoods within the city and suburban areas (Morrill, 2013). In the last decade of the 20$^{th}$ century, the Central District became predominantly White as gentrification displaced longtime Black residents while young, White and Asian highly educated professionals sought the convenient access to the redeveloped downtown Seattle (Morrill).

Seattle also has a complex history of acknowledging race and racism in policy. Washington state eradicated its affirmative action law in 1998 through Initiative 200 (I-200). I-200 began at the Center for Equal Opportunity, a conservative think tank in Washington D.C. (Taylor, 2009). This same think tank had also helped eliminate affirmative action in California

and Texas in 1996 (Taylor). Ward Connerly, the Black businessman-turned-organizer behind California's anti-affirmative action ballot initiative, Proposition 209, sponsored I-200 in Washington (Eason, 1998). John Carlson, UW alum, conservative Seattle radio talk show host, and President of the Washington Policy Center, a think tank focused on "free-market solutions" joined Connerly in I-200 efforts as chairman of the campaign (Eason). He formed the I-200 Civil Rights Compliance Committee, which eventually investigated the school district's racial tiebreaker policy in *Parents Involved* (Eason).

In 2004, six years after I-200, Seattle adopted a citywide "Race and Social Justice Initiative" to "undo institutional racism and race-based disparities in City government" (City of Seattle). The strategy embeds racial equity in the work of all city departments, requires the use of "Racial Equity Toolkits," or heuristics for policymaking and equitable budgeting, and deepens community collaboration (Race and Social Justice Initiative, 2022). Similar policies have been adopted in Portland, Minneapolis, and Madison. Research has found that Seattle's imitative has mixed results in ushering forth institutional change, often reiterating already existing inequities due to the complex, time-intensive nature of participatory, transformative change (Anderson & Jung, 2023).

Seattle's mixed commitment to progressive policies demonstrate the possibilities and limits of policies to redress past racial harms. Political and economic policies in Seattle often conflict and are implemented by politicians concerned less with equity than they are with economic development and wealth concentration.

**Seattle's current housing crisis**

From Seattle's beginnings as a port city during White settler colonization, the function of Seattle's economy and politics has influenced power relationships across place. The lens of racial

capitalism and the active archive connects these historical relationships between land and race to Seattle's current distribution of resources across place. The U.S. currently faces an unprecedented housing crisis, exacerbating gentrification. Within this context, Seattle is the third-fastest gentrifying city in the county (Balk, 2019). Multiple factors create this housing crisis. Compared to the 1980s, the U.S. adds less housing yearly to the total housing stock, in part due to the Great Recession of 2008 (Schuetz & Murray, 2018). Land use and zoning laws also contribute to the housing shortage as single-family zoning makes housing more expensive by restricting supply (Brenna et al. 2019).

Planners and business interests originally used zoning as a tool to create and maintain racial segregation (Rothstein, 2017). Zoning continues to have racially imbalanced impacts today, despite the end of formally race-based zoning restrictions. Policymakers have recognized the racist impacts of these policies; cities such as Minneapolis, New York City, and New Orleans have either eradicated single-family-zoning or mandated inclusionary zoning (Green & Gonzalez-Hermoso, 2019). From 2022 to 2023, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Montana, Maine, Utah, and Washington have passed state legislation on zoning reform, mandating that localities transition to inclusionary zoning. Eradicating single-family zoning is a political lightning rod. Whether due to concern about their home's value or racism (or both), residents (usually White) often protest the construction of affordable housing in their neighborhood (Brouwer & Trounstine, 2024). "NIMBY" (Not-in-my-backyard) advocates protest the construction of affordable housing near their homes, fearing a drop in property values, increased crime, and other racialized (and racist) assumptions (Brouwer & Trounstine).

Beyond the extensive literature on suburban and urban education, residential zoning is increasingly a topic of interest in education research, but often narrowly focuses on

desegregation. For instance, anti-density zoning has been found to be the most important policy maintaining metropolitan segregation (Rothwell & Massey, 2009; Rothwell, 2011). Brookings (Rothwell, 2012) reports that exclusionary zoning can keep students out of what they define as quality schools, defined by test scores which may or may not correlate with school quality, based on an analysis of zoning patterns and test scores. Education economists connect zoning to school finance, finding that single-family residential zoning tends to make schools more exclusively composed of wealthy students (Fernandez & Rogerson, 1997; 1999). While these analyses focused on school segregation as a product of land use policy demonstrates the connection between place and education, it also risks deficit-based analyses of schools with majority students of color, assuming that schools with majority students of color are at face-value deficient. A critical, historicized analysis connects zoning patterns to patterns of disinvestment and envisions liberatory paths forward and equitable distribution of resources.

Gentrification in Seattle is spurred, in part, by the overall unavailability of housing and the high price of available units—phenomena that are mutually reinforcing. As housing becomes scarce, it also becomes more expensive (Albouy et al., 2016). According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Seattle has 337,361 households and around 368,000 housing units. The median household income is $105,391. Seattle's rental vacancy rates have hovered under 5% for several years, compared to a national rate of 5.8% (U.S. Census). The homeowner vacancy rate is 0.9%, compared to a national average of 1.4% (U.S. Census). While low vacancy rates are a national problem, Seattle has a particularly low vacancy rate, indicating its housing crisis is acute.

Seattle has added 60,000 housing units since 2010, which is the third-highest rate of growth in housing among the 50 largest U.S. cities (Balk, 2023). However, this rate of development has not been sufficient to meet the demand for housing. In an April 2023 Seattle

City Council meeting about the 2023 housing levy, the Seattle Office of Housing stated that for every 2.6 jobs added to Seattle, only one new unit housing was built. To fix this lack of housing, Seattle needs to construct an additional 112,000 units of housing by 2044 (Groover, 2023). However, this would only address a lack of units, not necessarily build enough housing to drive down prices. Moreover, without widespread zoning reform, this scale of construction is not possible. Over 70% of Seattle's land is zoned for single-family zoning. While accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are permitted on these lots, the small scale and rate of construction does not meet Seattle's housing needs.

***Seattle policies addressing the housing crisis***

As mentioned in the section on the history of Seattle's land use, Seattle's Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year city planning strategy that focuses mainly on land use policy. The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) runs the process and monitors the implementation of the plan. The staff includes a mix of urban planners and community development experts. Several staff have worked at OPCD long enough to have worked on the original Comprehensive Plan in 1994, which cemented single-family zoning. Other staff have worked on progressive policy, like the Equitable Development Initiative, which puts city funds directly into the hands of community groups and businesses run by people of color. In this sense, the staff represent a range of viewpoints as to what an equitable Seattle looks like.

From 2020 to 2022, OPCD drafted five "alternatives" to be studied under the Environmental Impact Study (EIS). These five alternatives put forth different possible zoning changes. Any potential zoning change must legally be studied under an EIS, so potential change is limited by the five alternatives put forth. Therefore, much of the public comment phase on the draft plan centered on adding different alternatives to the plan so they could be added to the EIS.

In the EIS–a highly technical, over 1,000-page document, OPCD studied the impact of these five alternatives on factors like projected housing availability and racial demographic change.

Beginning in 2022, Seattle opened public engagement and review for its planning process, with a draft plan to be released in April of 2023, and the final plan to be published in 2024. These five alternatives presented to the public included various upzoning plans, from "no change" (Alternative 1) to combining all the upzoning into one plan (Alternative 5). Responding to these plans, Puget Sound Sage, a local advocacy group, created an "Alternative 6" on the OPCD Engagement Hub. This Alternative 6 includes upzoning the entire city, effectively eradicating single-family zoning. It received the greatest number of upvotes on the online engagement hub, and local left-leaning publications like *The Urbanist* and *The Stranger* covered it extensively. In this sense, the Comprehensive Plan is the clearest statement of land use policy goals in the city.

As part of the planning process, OPCD engaged with community liaisons representing marginalized groups. These groups collected feedback themselves, then presented this to OPCD, which OPCD then included in the draft plan. The city summarized the feedback from community liaisons and an explicit goal towards racial equity as follows:

> That is, what was important to BIPOC communities—things like access to more equitable housing, transportation options, and climate change adaptation strategies—was also important to other respondents as well. The central task of the One Seattle Plan, therefore, becomes a question of how to deliver access to these amenities in a more equitable way than has been done in the past (City of Seattle, 2022, p. 18).

The plan, therefore, has stated aims to make the city more equitable rooted in direct community feedback. This study considers how the Plan's policy goals changed over time and ultimately what these changes means for school-communities.

The Comprehensive Plan is just one lever the city uses to craft housing and land use policy. In the rest of this section, I briefly outline the policies at the city, state, and federal level that address the housing shortage and therefore work in tandem with the Comprehensive Plan. Overall, these policies demonstrate that the land use policy environment is complex, and policies often work towards conflicting goals. In addition, multiple public agencies manage land use and housing policies, and often do not collaborate. For instance, since 2019, the Office of Housing has managed the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) policy that requires all new commercial or multifamily developments to either include affordable units in construction or pay into a pooled public fund. The Office of Housing manages all affordable housing construction in the city not directly constructed by the city itself (which the Seattle Housing Authority manages). Therefore, affordable housing implementation is split across OPCD, the Office of Housing and the SHA in a complex web of policy.

At the local level, Seattle voters chose a progressive new option for constructing affordable housing. In 2022, Seattle passed a ballot initiative to create a social housing developer. In 2024, a new campaign began to fund social housing using a tax on businesses that pay employees more than $1 million a year. In social housing, rent is income-dependent, with no residents paying more than 30% of their income on rent. Residents with higher incomes in effect subsidize rent for residents with lower incomes. Similar initiatives have been passed in California and Maryland (Meyersohn, 2023). This type of housing effectively removes housing from the speculative market, basing rent not purely on market rates but on affordability for residents. The passing of this initiative demonstrates the public desire in the city for more options for affordable housing.

Federal policy instituted under President Trump also works to exacerbate gentrification in the region. Most recently, under the Trump administration, "Opportunity Zone" policies have identified neighborhoods that are "disadvantaged"–a race-neutral, yet racially inscribed term–allowing for special tax breaks for developers who built in these neighborhoods. Of the 11 companies investing in Opportunity Zones in King County, only one lists affordable housing as one of their potential property types. An Urban Institute report found that the developers funded by the tax breaks rarely connect community members with wealthy investors, pointing to the potential for windfall profits for developers ignorant of community needs (Theodos et al., 2020). In effect, this is a pro-gentrification policy. See Appendix 1 for a map of the Opportunity Zones. The neighborhoods of interview participants–the southeast and southwest of Seattle and surrounding suburbs–are recognized as eligible for Opportunity Zone tax breaks. This policy speaks to the limited scope of the Comprehensive Plan: even if the plan upzones formerly single-family neighborhoods, similar federal tax breaks do not exist for developers in these areas. Developers may still choose to develop mainly in previously under-invested neighborhoods, exacerbating gentrification.

**The place-based problem of the Seattle school budget deficit**

Seattle's rising cost of living and housing crisis is coupled with a secondary crisis of capital–the school budget deficit. The connection between housing and schools impacts school finance. Higher progressive funding (detached from property taxes) leads to more equitable school funding (Baker, 2018). However, because residents often choose their homes based on perceptions of neighborhood school quality, the redistribution of public funds is politically unpopular (Holme, 2002; Lareau & Goyette, 2014).

In 2024, the Seattle Public School district faced a budget deficit of over $110 million (Superville, 2024). A mix of factors contribute to this deficit. Like other urban areas across the country, declining student enrollment and the projected end of federal American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ARP ESSER) funds distributed nationally during the pandemic contribute to this deficit (Roza & Silberstein, 2023). Since 2018, Seattle has lost about 1% of its student population each year, or about 500 students annually (SPS Enrollment Planning Office). Within this context of declining enrollment, public school populations in Seattle are becoming, on average, Whiter (SPS Enrollment Planning Office). Seattle's Assessment of Fair Housing indicates that between 2000 and 2010, the number of children of color in Seattle increased by only 2% compared with 64% in the balance of King County. This declining enrollment, and the disproportionate decline in families of color is at the heart of the research problem of this study. Declining school enrollment points to systemic issues like the affordability of the city for working-class and low-income (and even middle class) people.

Washington state's funding formula contributes to Seattle's budget deficit, both in terms of lack of state funding and the funding formula itself. Local school districts raise funds through levies–voter initiatives where citizens vote directly on tax rates for public school funding. To try to make funding equitable across regions with different levels of property wealth, the state has different types of caps to local levies. The state revenue or rate-caps districts' per-pupil funding based on the level of taxable property in the district (Knight & Plecki, 2022). Districts with less property wealth are rate-capped and wealthier districts are revenue-capped. The rate cap ensures that less wealthy districts do not have unreasonably high tax rates, while the revenue cap ensures that wealthy districts do not raise a very high amount of funds. These caps are meant to ensure

funding across different districts is equitable. However, these caps make it so that revenue-capped districts like Seattle lose funding when enrollment declines, as they cannot raise per-pupil funding due to the revenue cap.

State funding comprises the largest portion of school funding. Seattle's annual school district budget is $1.17 billion dollars, with most funding (61%) coming from the state (Seattle Public Schools, 2023). Yet, Washington allocates little of its total revenue towards education funding. The state received an "F" in the Farrie & Sciarra (2022) "Making the Grade" report for funding effort. Effort indicates the proportion of total public revenue states allot towards education. They earned a C for funding level (state and local revenue by student enrollment) and D for funding distribution (do states provide more funding to districts as poverty at the district level increases) (Farrie & Sciarra). This means Washington has a regressive school funding system (Knight & Plecki, 2022).

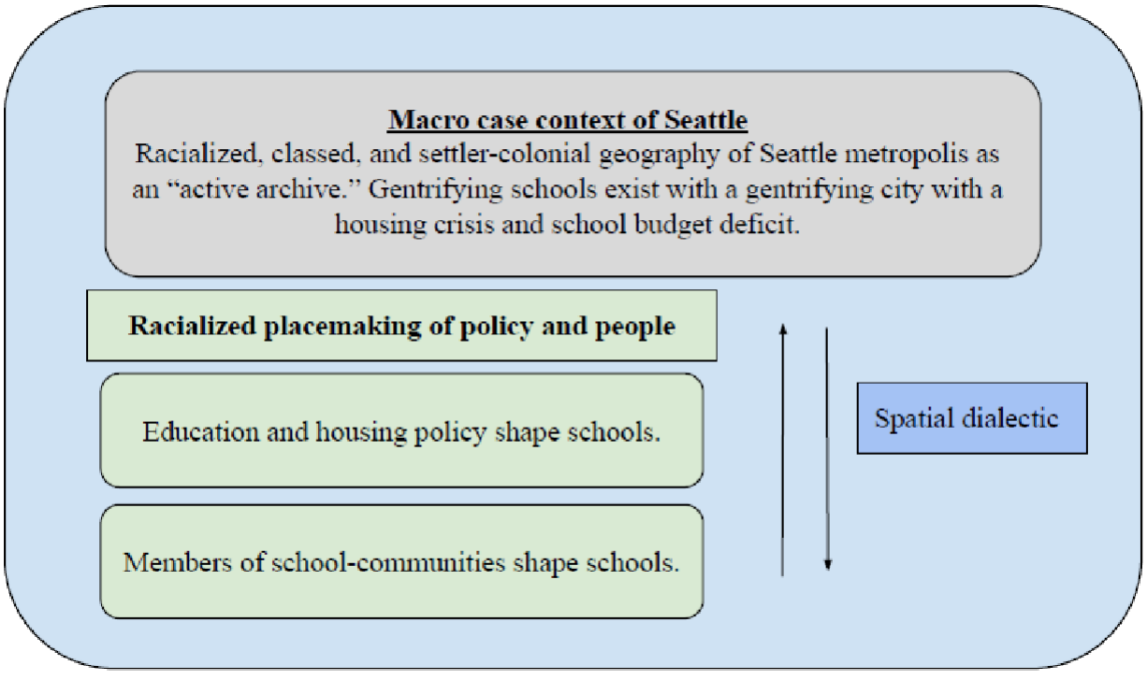
**Conclusion**

This case description describes the intertwined history and policies that shape school-communities today. The city has a long history of settler colonialism and White placemaking, which has shaped access to resources for centuries. At the same time, people of color have mobilized and made place amidst this history of not-so-progressive policy. The following chapter connects the literature review and the case, explaining how the theories at work in this study apply to the specific dynamics described in this chapter.

## Chapter 4: Conceptual framework

Using the literature described in the literature review, I present a conceptual framework (see figure 1) that links the empirical and theoretical literature with my methods and particular case. This conceptual framework visualizes the bounded case under consideration in this case study and the processes I seek to understand. At the macro level, I observe the way political and economic forces shape place by observing public meetings and analyzing policy documents related to the Comprehensive Plan. At the meso- and micro- level, I interview participants and observe focus groups and public meetings to understand how people shape place from the ground up within these macro contexts. In the below sections I operationalize the theoretical concepts described in the literature review to the specific case of Seattle.

**Figure 1. Conceptual framework**



### *The macro case context of Seattle*

My conceptual framework demonstrates that place shapes political and economic realities that schools exist within, and these realities also shape place. Seattle schools exist within racialized, classed, and settler-colonial geographies (Anyon, 2014; Gilmore, 2022; Harvey, 2003; Soja, 2010). In the case of Seattle, the Comprehensive Zoning Plan is an example of a potential "site of contestation" where people with differential power engage to continue the status quo, redistribute resources, or create something new altogether (Neely & Samura, 2011). So, my analysis situates interview and policy document analysis data within the political and economic spatial contexts of Seattle's schools through background and historical context, interview questions, coding, and analysis. While I focus on Seattle's schools, data also includes policies and participant's thoughts on the metropolitan area as a whole.

Seattle is a case of a gentrifying city with gentrifying schools. I use a racial capitalism lens to understand the twin crises of the school budget deficit and the housing crisis. This spatialized, racial capitalism lens highlights the ways these crises are racialized, historical, and related to each other. Amidst these crises of capital, Seattle's school district has increased its proportion of White students by 4% since 2006 (Seattle Public Schools Enrollment reports). Green (2022), based on a case study of Austin, Texas, developed a typology of gentrifying schools on a continuum from "non-gentrifying" to "gentrified." Schools in Seattle fall along this spectrum, with several at the "tipping point" designation where students of color and low-income students have been displaced, but not completely. Relatedly, the Comprehensive Plan is a policy process with the potential to reconfigure Seattle's residential landscape over the next twenty years. Within this political context and public rezoning process, people advocate and can reimagine what Seattle neighborhoods look like over the next twenty years.

I use the concept of the "active archive" (Knowles, 2003) to understand how Seattle's history of land use policies and spatial politics shape its spatial relations today. In the case background, I provide context on the racialized placemaking of policy and people since Seattle's colonization by White settlers. This history contextualizes the current crises as part of a long line of racialized, spatial projects in Seattle's education and housing landscape. Throughout the findings and discussion, I note where the data brings up historical ideas of place and the significance of these cross-temporal relationships.

***Placemaking of policy and people in a gentrifying city and school district***

Within these larger political and economic contexts, people and policy shape place. I situate placemaking as a means to achieve spatial justice. I argue that schools play a crucial role in spatial practices, where people make place through organizing for education reform, spending time in school as a student, staff, or parent, and contributing to the school in other ways. Principals, teachers, parents, students, and community members (e.g., staff of community-based organizations who work in schools) all contribute to this school-community placemaking. People engage, as viewed through spatial imaginaries, in placemaking that coopts, resists, and sometimes takes a middle ground in resisting gentrification and displacement from school-communities. People rely on their personal histories, life experiences, and current relationships to inform their placemaking practices.

I follow the lead of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who 'renovates and makes critical already-existing activities' of both action and analysis to build a movement'" (p. 359, Gilmore, 2022). I focus on the placemaking of the "already-existing activities" of everyday people to understand possibilities for systems-change. Lipsitz (2011) theorizes the placemaking of Black spatial imaginaries as creating places with high use value, and "little exchange value" (p. 19). In other

words, Black placemaking focuses on community use (e.g., availability of resources for communal gain, like parks, public art, libraries, affordable housing) rather than for their capital value for exchange (e.g., housing as capital investment, privatization of public space). I analyze how and under what conditions people make place in gentrifying schools.

The placemaking of official policy often receives disproportionate attention when compared to these more localized, community-driven practices. Policies shape place, and therefore shape schools as places. They direct the flow of capital and can enshrine the placemaking of people into policy. For instance, throughout the era of school desegregation policy in Seattle, the school district's attendance policies and differentiated enforcement of them shaped schools as places, often prioritizing the well-being of White students (Karcher, 2020). The school district moved students of color more often, putting the onus of busing long distances on students of color (particularly Black students) while White students more often stayed at the neighborhood schools (Karcher, 2020). These enrollment practices drained Southeast schools of students as they were bused to whiter, North End schools, which led to fewer schools being constructed in the South End (Karcher, 2020). Seattle, as seen in the case background, is known for its progressive policies across multiple domains. This study sees policy as an important part of placemaking. However, I remain skeptical that progressive policy can right its wrongs. Because progressive policy rarely upsets the structures that uphold racial capitalism, it is not a panacea for racial inequity. As Shange (2019) puts it, Black people are "always in excess, uncivil, and marked by…incongruity with the progressive project, to which we remain narratively central, yet materially surplus" (p. 4). She goes on to explain that "progressivism is fundamentally a reconstructionist politic embedded *within* liberal logics—it aims to hold the state accountable to its promise of democracy and justice…'social justice' means living happily

ever after with the antiracist, distributive state" (p. 4). In this sense, this study considers policy as a part of shaping place within the spatial dialectic, and pays attention to the ways these policies do or do not upset racial and class power dynamics. This idea of the spatial dialectic shows up in this study in analysis of the relationship between policies, people and their impact on place.

## Chapter 5: Research Methods

This study aims to better understand how land use and housing policy shapes school-communities, and how, if at all, people connected to gentrifying school-communities conceive of and work towards spatial justice. I pay particular attention to how race and class shape this process of placemaking, both from a top-down policy direction and from bottom-up actions of people. To understand the ways housing and land use policy have shaped school-communities**,** I take a historicized approach, framing place and its attendant power dynamics as an accumulated, "active archive" of racial projects (Knowles, 2003). I employ a case study guided by the tenets of critical place inquiry to understand how people shape their school-communities amidst gentrification, and how policy contributes (or does not) to this process (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). To understand the relationship between power, place, race, and class in school-communities, I observed public focus groups and planning meetings, interviewed members of school-communities (parents, alumni, teachers, and principals) and collected policy documents related to school geography and city planning. Ultimately, this study extends the understanding of placemaking by people impacted by school gentrification and displacement. To do this, I addressed the following research questions:

1) *How has Seattle's housing and land use policy influenced schools and their political and economic contexts?*
    a. *How do people on the ground conceive of schools' political and economic contexts?*
2) *Do people such as parents, teachers, or school leaders connected to schools in gentrifying neighborhoods engage in placemaking? If so, how?*
    a. *Does this placemaking surface racialized ideas about space? If so, how?*
3) *How do race and class shape people's placemaking in gentrifying school-communities?*

In the following sections, I describe my research strategy and the methods I used to generate and analyze data. Then, I describe my positionality and its impact on my methods. Finally, I detail my analytical approach.

**Research strategy and design**

This case study responds to calls for critical spatial methods in education that "reveal counternarratives of place and how systems of power function in places" (Butler & Sinclair, 2020, p. 80; Tate, 2008). I illustrate systems of power in gentrifying schools through policy analysis and people's response to policy in findings chapter 4. I intentionally selected participants of color who might highlight these "counternarratives of place" and the power of these counternarratives—the foci of findings chapters 5 and 6. These findings, along with the case background, comprise this critical case study. To guide data collection, analysis, and the creation of my conceptual framework, I used Tuck & McKenzie's (2015) concept of "critical place inquiry." This approach takes up,

> critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action in responding to critical place issues such as those of globalization and neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation (p. 2).

To understand the embedded nature of place in schools and neighborhoods, I consider the placemaking of policy and people together, interrogating the power dynamics that arise amid gentrification. This approach focuses on local understandings of place and social practices and the political and economic forces that shape them. This project seeks to be a form of action in highlighting the pitfalls and potential of progressive policy. It attempts to make critical and apparent the power of everyday people's placemaking activities. This everyday placemaking can

serve as a model for collective action as people continue to resist, make place, and thrive in Seattle's neighborhoods and schools, and other gentrifying U.S. cities.

Tuck and McKenzie (2015) outline seven key principles of critical place inquiry. Under critical place inquiry: 1) place shifts through social practices, 2) place influences social practices and is influenced by them, 3) place is dynamic due to "time-space characteristics," 4) people's different realities and identities inform place, 5) inquiry interrogates colonization and settler colonialism, 6) inquiry considers land beyond human inhabitants, and 7) includes a "relational ethic of accountability to people and place" (p. 3). Critical place inquiry highlights the connections between capital accumulation via land theft and settler colonialism. In this study, I operationalize these tenets methodologically by asking research questions that consider place and social practices, interview participants with realities tied to gentrifying neighborhoods and schools, and collect data via interviews about people's experience of place. Through reflexivity and reciprocal relationships with participants, I strived for a relational ethic with place.

Within this critical place inquiry framework, I focus on one "detailed study of a single social unit" of a gentrifying city in a housing affordability and school budget crisis (Payne & Payne, 2004). This planning process provides temporal (2022-2024) and geographic bounds (Seattle metro) for the case. A case is bounded by the number of people that theoretically could be interviewed about the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998), which in this case includes people connected to Seattle schools as staff, parent, or alumni. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, meaning they give insight to the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of case study research is to "explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies" (Yin, 2014, p. 19). As I argue in the first findings chapter in particular, the racialized geography of education and

housing are mutually constitutive. This complexity lends itself to case study methods, which is "particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). In this case, historical, social, and political context provide rich data for understanding the relationship between gentrification and schools. Case study research is also useful for understanding processes, rather than outcomes alone (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 1991). The goal for these case study findings is to create a rich case description that captures the complexities of the relationship between schools, land use policy, and gentrification (Flyvbjerg, 2006). While I use mainly qualitative data in the form of interviews, observations, and document analysis, I also bring in quantitative data to substantiate my claims about the distribution of resources across space.

By using a critical methodology, I not only examine inequities in socio-spatial relations but also look to ways people actively intervene towards justice. This approach follows Tuck's (2009) call for "desire-based research, which avoids the 'binary' between 'reproduction and resistance'" (p. 419). This "third space" of desire seeks to understand the ways marginalized people work to create new social conditions (Tuck, 2009). McKittrick (2011) similarly cautions against research on spatial and racial inequities which can lead to "our collective replication of, and thus implication in, descriptive statements that profit from racial violence" (p. 954). Focusing on inequities follows the logic that we can "apparently 'fix'...the plight of the other by producing knowledge about the other that renders them less than human" (McKittrick, 2011, p. 955). Rather than only describing inequities, I acknowledge them and move beyond by focusing on hopes and strategies for change. As a White person, I consistently used theory, like the Black and White spatial imaginary, to parse and understand participant's responses. I also consistently memoed about my own positionality in relation to participants to track my thoughts and potential

biases throughout the research process. This creates critical distance between myself and participants, while also illuminating where my biases may arise.

Critical place inquiry requires an interrogation of histories of settler colonialism, but also moves beyond this. Bang et al. (2014) explains the harm of "zero-point epistemology" (ZPE)—the understanding of history as beginning with the written word, erasing much of Indigenous history. Even when researchers recognize Indigenous history as part of their research site, or their own role in colonization, they can still "presume settler stability and the absence of decolonized sovereign Indigenous futures" (p. 42). Tuck & Yang (2012) similarly call out that "decolonization is not a metaphor." In other words, the acknowledgement of Indigenous history itself can work to absolve researchers from their settler guilt. To work past mere recognition, I include the historical context of Indigenous history and colonialism and examine how participants further (or not) Indigenous presence in Seattle and surrounding suburbs. I wrestle with the invisibility of Indigenous history in many of the policy documents I examined and participant interviews throughout the findings section and in the discussion.

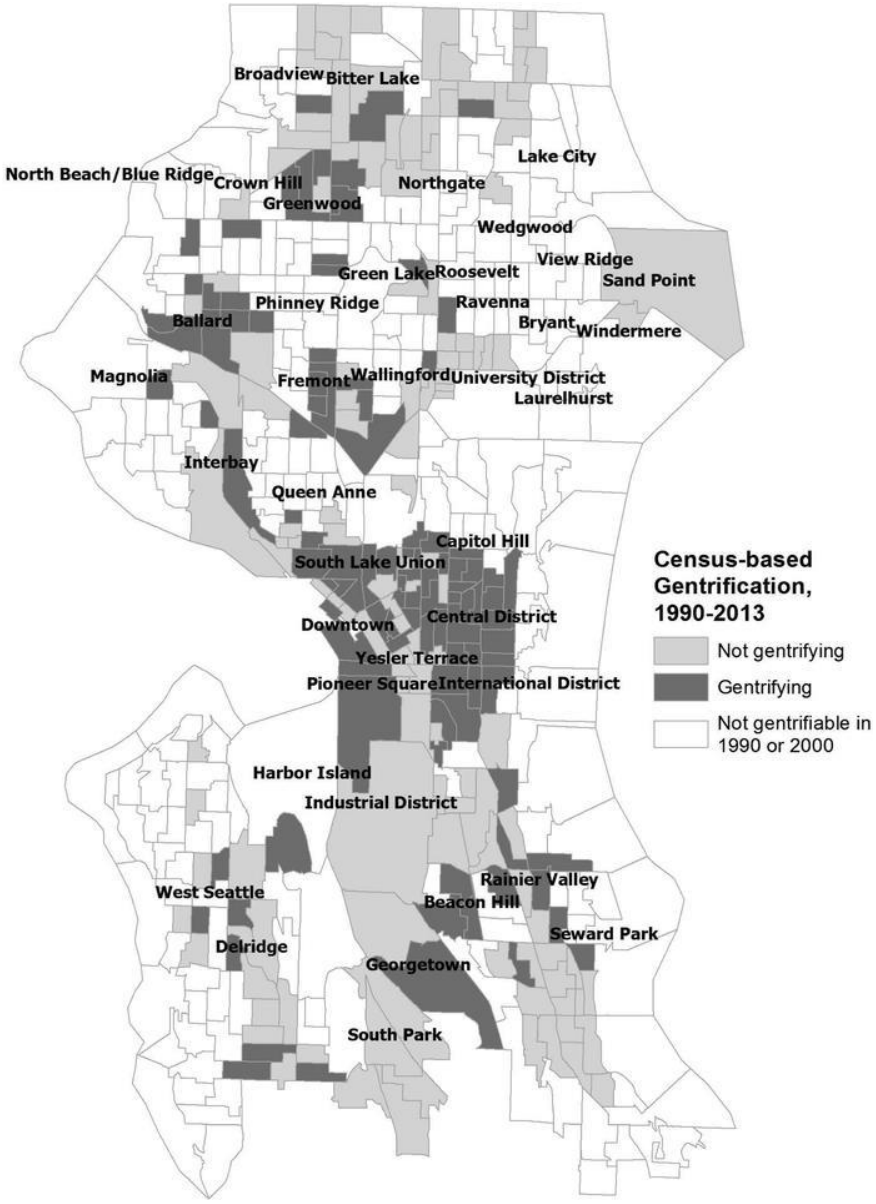
**"The last frontier:" Seattle as a case study of school gentrification**

I purposely sampled interview participants from neighborhoods that the city of Seattle identifies as gentrifying and "at risk" of displacement. The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) used these "risk" designations in their Comprehensive Plan process. The boundaries of these places shift and change depending on the participant the time they refer to, and the event. For instance, some participants think of Southeast Seattle as the Rainier Valley area, while others include the Central District in this designation. These neighborhoods include the South End (Southeast Seattle), Highland Park in Southwest Seattle, and the southern suburbs of Seattle, mainly Renton and Highline. These different geographical areas allow for analysis of

how gentrification impacts schools in different neighborhoods within the same metropolitan area. Participants had also moved between these neighborhoods, both physically and rhetorically, comparing neighborhoods they had lived in at different times in their lives. For instance, three participants had moved out of the South End to the suburbs but talked about their children attending schools in the South End and their meaningful experiences there as children themselves. In this sense, these neighborhoods are connected by people's life histories and placemaking, all within the broader history of gentrification in the Seattle metro.

Southwest and Southeast Seattle are considered neighborhoods "at risk of displacement" by Seattle's city planning office. Maciag (2015) mapped gentrification across the entire U.S. using the 2013 American Community Survey. Typical measures of gentrification include median rent or home value increase above the city median, an increase in college-educated people, and an increase in household income above the city median (Hwang, 2020). For a census tract to be considered gentrifying, it needs to be "gentrifiable"—be below the area median income and home value. The map below from Hwang (2020) uses these measures to identify gentrifying census tracts in Seattle from 1990 to 2013. This map shows the gentrification in the Central District, and emerging gentrification in the Rainier Valley in the South End and in Southwest Seattle.

**Figure 2.** Seattle gentrification, 1990-2013

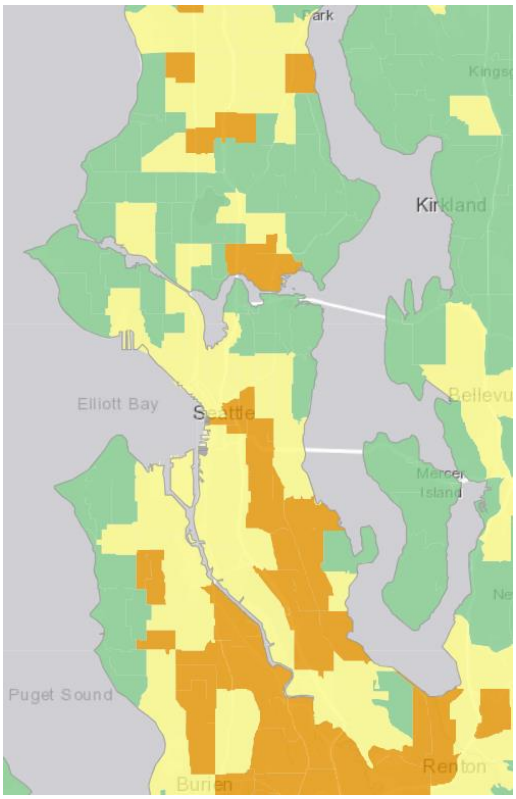



From: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7546340/?scrlybrkr=56c01ea0

The Puget Sound Regional Council created the below map, which captures "displacement risk" indicating by the yellow and orange coloring. This map takes into account data from the American Community Survey among other sources to map the likelihood that residents in these neighborhoods will be displaced. The majority of Southeast and Southwest Seattle are in yellow

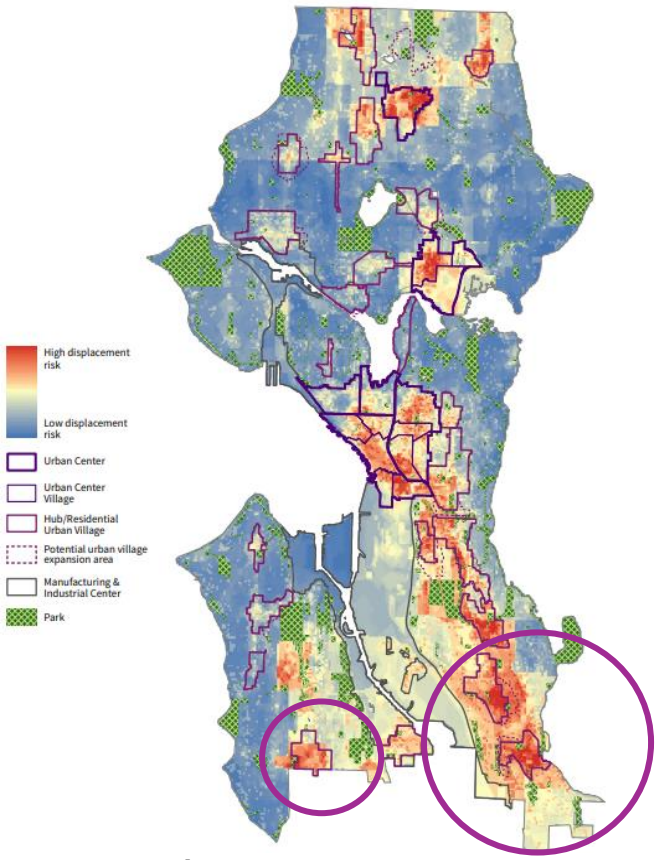
or orange, indicating a moderate or high risk of displacement, respectively. This extends to the suburbs south of Seattle, like Renton and Burien, as well.

**Figure 3.** Seattle metro displacement risk map




From Puget Sound Regional Council, "Displacement Risk Mapping."

**Figure 4.** Seattle city planning office "displacement risk" map




From Office of Planning and Community Development

The displacement risk map above similarly shows that the southeast and southwest Seattle neighborhoods face high displacement risk. The areas in yellow and red indicate a higher displacement risk. The focus areas of this study are outlined in purple circles. These neighborhoods have high displacement risks as identified by the city.

**Seattle racial demographics**

The Seattle metro area has seen population growth of around 15% between the 2010 and 2020 census (U.S. Census, 2020), and Seattle specifically growing by 21%, the third fastest-growing city in the U.S. (Frey, 2011). I define the Seattle metropolitan area as Seattle and its surrounding suburbs (see Appendix D for a suburb demographic information). The planning literature does not agree on the definition of "suburb," (Forsyth, 2012). The spatial ordering and

boundaries of cities and suburbs are socially constructed just as much, if not more, than certain features might define them. Suburbs are typically defined as "low-density primarily residential areas" or "within a metropolitan area (not rural) and outside the central cities (not core)" (Forsyth, 2012, p. 272). Therefore, I define areas south of Seattle as suburbs.

Seattle is a predominantly White city, that is growing and becoming, on average, Whiter. I use Black spatial imaginaries to investigate the possibilities for radical spatial re-imagining in a city that is predominantly White. Unlike other major metropolitan areas where over one-third of residents are people of color, like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago, Seattle has 1) mostly White residents and 2) a very high average household income. Building multiracial, working-class coalitions, then, is complex work. According to 2020 census data estimates, the population of people of color in King County has grown by 53% by 2010. However, most of this growth has been outside of Seattle. At the same time, Seattle is one of 14 cities in the U.S. that saw growth of more than 100,000 people from 2010 to 2020.[6]

**Table 1. Seattle population, 2022**

| | |
|---|---|
| Black | 6.8% |
| Native | 0.5% |
| Asian | 16.3% |
| Pacific Islander | 0.2% |
| Latino | 7.2% |
| Mixed race | 8.8% |
| White | 64.9% |

Data from U.S. Census Bureau

[6] Cities include: Seattle, Columbus, New York, Denver, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, Houston, Jacksonville, and Charlotte.

Seattle's school district, Seattle Public Schools (SPS), is also becoming Whiter. In 2000, students of color represented 60% of the student body. By 2022, they accounted for 55%. Meanwhile, the school district has been steadily losing students since 2019.

**Table 2.** Racial and class demographics in Seattle school enrollment

| | **2000** | **2010** | **2022** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total enrollment** | 47,980 | 47,058 | 51,474 |
| **% Low Income** | N/A | 40% | 34% |
| **% American Indian** | 3% | 2% | 0.3% |
| **% Asian** | 24% | 22% | 12% |
| **% Black** | 23% | 21% | 15% |
| **% Latinx** | 10% | 12% | 14% |
| **% NHPI** | N/A | N/A | 0.4% |
| **% Two or more** | N/A | N/A | 13% |
| **% Students of color** | 60% | 57% | 55% |
| **% White** | 40% | 44% | 46% |

Data from SPS and OSPI. I combine students of color into one group to account for the fact that OSPI did not consistently disaggregate student racial subgroups since 2000.

**Suburbs south of Seattle**

Five of 17 participants either lived or worked (or both) in the suburbs south of Seattle. Suburbs south of Seattle, including Renton, Kent, Federal Way, and Highline, all have more racially diverse populations than Seattle and lower housing prices. These suburbs lie south of the border of SE and SW Seattle. These suburbs have been historically White but have diversified in terms of race and economic status in the past decade, potentially in response to the rising housing prices of Seattle (Balk, 2020). These suburbs are more affordable in comparison to the Eastside and suburbs north of Seattle. Tables 3 and 4 below demonstrate the difference in housing prices across the Seattle metro region, and the relatively small district size of suburbs south of Seattle.

Generally, the suburbs south of Seattle (Kent, Federal Way, Burien, Auburn, and Renton) have less expensive housing than suburbs on the East (Issaquah, Bellevue) and North (Redmond, Bothell) sides of Seattle.

**Table 3. Average home price in Seattle metro's largest school districts**

| School district | 2021 |
|---|---|
| Seattle | $850,175 |
| Lake Washington (Redmond) | $1,256,539 |
| Kent | $609,244 |
| Northshore (Bothell) | $930,644 |
| Federal Way | $560,968 |
| Issaquah | $1,079,519 |
| Bellevue | $1,335,698 |
| Highline (Burien) | $597,060 |
| Auburn | $573,186 |
| Renton | $708,992 |
| Washington overall | $560,400 |

Data from Washington Office of Financial Management and Zillow

The school districts south of Seattle also have considerably fewer (less than half) the number of students in Seattle.

**Table 4. School district enrollment**

| School district | 2022 Enrollment |
|---|---|
| Federal Way | 21,604 |
| Highline | 18,379 |
| Kent | 25,530 |
| Renton | 15,277 |
| Seattle | 51,474 |

Data from OSPI

**Southeast Seattle**

Ten of 17 participants either lived in the South End at the time of the interview, lived there for most of their lives and sent their children to school there for some time, or taught there. The South End typically refers to neighborhoods South of I-90 along Rainier Avenue, including

Mount Baker, Beacon Hill, and Rainier Beach. Most participants living or working in these neighborhoods also grouped the Central District generally in this area, particularly because of the bus routes that connected the neighborhoods and the prevalence of Black people and businesses along Martin Luther King Drive that bisects the Central District and continues down into the South End neighborhoods. At the southernmost end of the South End is the small, unincorporated neighborhood Bryn-Mawr Skyway, bordered by the suburb Renton.

The Central District is a historically Black neighborhood in Seattle. Gentrification and displacement have made it now predominantly White. However, many Black legacy homeowners still live there, and Black-owned businesses and nonprofits make it a center of Black cultural life in Seattle. All of the Black parents interviewed had grown up in the Central District and had either moved to Rainier Beach or the suburbs as adults. Currently, Rainier Beach is the most racially diverse neighborhood in the city. Four high schools sit in the CD and South End—Garfield, Cleveland, Franklin, and Rainier Beach. Four middle schools and fourteen elementary schools are located in these neighborhoods. These high schools have and continue to serve most of Seattle's students of color. As such, participants often mentioned them together as a unit of schools they had friends at growing up or traveled between for sports and hanging out with friends.

**Southwest Seattle**

Three participants either lived and taught (or both) in Southwest Seattle. About a twenty-minute drive or hour bus ride from the South End is southwest Seattle. These neighborhoods sit across the Duwamish waterway, bordering highway 509, both separating West Seattle from the rest of the city. Southwest Seattle borders White Center and Highline, two racially diverse suburbs. This neighborhood faces many of the same displacement pressures as the South End.

However, it rarely shows up in policy documents or media reports. One reason is the relative lack of organizing groups and nonprofits focused on the area compared to the South End. West Seattle has two high schools, with one, Chief Sealth, in Southwest Seattle. Four elementary schools serve this general neighborhood and one middle school.

**Data generation**

In this section, I give a broad overview of the data collected for this study and the timeline for collection. The following sections provide more detail in terms of collection process and content for each data type. Table 5 summarizes the data collected for this study in chronological order. I took a "fieldwork first" approach to this study which Yin (2011) describes as an approach that can help guide data collection and allows people's experiences to define the earliest stages of the study. I began conducting observations in November of 2022, when OPCD began their community feedback sessions on the Comprehensive Plan. These initial observations helped me understand people's general attitudes toward the Comprehensive Plan and gave me insight into some of the racialized contours of the plan and the attendant planning process. These initial insights helped me create my interview protocol. I also garnered from this process that schools were not included as primary part of the plan in content or process, which informed my sampling strategy for interview participants.

After conducting these initial observations and collecting data from the feedback summaries and comments published by OPCD, I collected policy documents. I describe these data in more detail in the policy document section. After getting a broad sense of the policy documents available from OPCD and SPS that discussed zoning, land use, and housing, I conducted informational interviews with three SPS central office staff, two OPCD staff, and two leaders of a community-based organization focused on southeast Seattle schools. These

interviews helped me understand where I might find additional policy documents, if any, and who might be a good interview participant. I also used data gathered from these interviews for the case background section.

I then began recruiting interview participants, which I describe in detail in the next section. While I was conducting interviews during the summer of 2023, SPS announced their "Well-Resourced Schools" meetings, held in August and September of 2023. I attended the meetings in the Central District, southeast, and southwest Seattle. Finally, after delaying for a year, OPCD published their draft Comprehensive Plan in April 2024, which I added to the data corpus.

**Table 5**. Data collection summary

| Time range for collection | Process, event, or data type | Total data collected |
|---|---|---|
| November 2022-June 2023 | 5 observations of OPCD public meetings and focus groups, 4 in-person and 1 online | 10 hours of observational field notes and photos of focus group notes |
| | Public comments on Comprehensive Plan engagement site<br>OPCD public feedback summary | 3,000+ online comments<br>7 documents; 63 pages |
| December 2022-May 2023 | Analysis of policy documents from SPS and OPCD (from 1994-2024) | 31 OPCD documents; 1,200 pages<br>10 SPS documents; 92 pages |
| January-April 2023 | Informational interviews:<br>3 SPS central office employees (enrollment department and community partnerships department; .5 hours each)<br>2 OPCD employees (5 hours)<br>2 community organizers (.25 hours each) | 7 hours of informational interviews to guide data collection and case description |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| June-September 2023 | Individual semi-structured interviews (16 total) | 18 hours of video-recorded interviews |
| August-September 2023 | 4 observations of SPS "Well-Resourced Schools" public meetings, 3 in-person and 1 online | 7 hours of observational field notes and photos of focus group notes |
| September-November 2023 | SPS "Well-Resourced Schools" community feedback survey results and public comment | .25 hours of SPS presentation and 10 pages of feedback summary |
| April 2024 | Final draft of the Comprehensive Plan | 198 pages |
| | **Total:** 17 hours of observations<br>18 hours of interviews<br>7 hours of informational interviews<br>48 policy documents; 1,563 pages | |

*Participant recruitment and sampling*

I recruited participants with a mix of purposeful and snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I recruited participants by flyering in neighborhoods relevant to my study, sending emails to relevant listservs of community-based organizations, and by attending community meetings relevant to my topic. Meetings included school-community organizing meetings and public engagement meetings held by the city and SPS (discussed in the following paragraph). At these meetings, I introduced myself and the topic of my research and collected potential participant's contact information. I also recruited people through personal connections, asking people in my professional and personal network if they knew school staff or parents. I also used snowball sampling, asking participants at the end of interviews if they knew anyone who would participate. Overall, I recruited three people through listservs and flyering, two

people from meetings, seven people from personal connections, and four people through snowball sampling.

Selection criteria included people connected to southeast and southwest Seattle schools based on their demographic information and or those that had moved from these neighborhoods. I had difficulty recruiting Seattle-based principals, so I also interviewed two principals of a neighboring suburban school district with a high percentage of students of color. These principals worked in neighborhoods that some of the parents I had interviewed moved to after leaving southeast Seattle. Their perspectives provided insight into their experiences and that of families moving from Seattle that populated their schools. While this study mainly focuses on Seattle, because gentrification is a metropolitan-wide phenomenon, interviewing people with experiences in surrounding suburbs gives a more complete picture of the phenomenon of school gentrification. I reimbursed participants $40 for their time to strive for reciprocity in the study process. I recruited interview participants beginning in May of 2023 and conducted interviews from June 2023 to October 2023, performing 16 interviews total.

Table 6 below summarizes the interview participants' characteristics (using pseudonyms). I interviewed four parents, one recent high school graduate, three principals (two middle, one high school), six school staff (three of whom are also parents), one teacher who had been elected to union leadership, and one director of an afterschool program. This group included five Black people, eight White people, one Filipino person, and two Latinx people. In the final column, I define the neighborhood in which participants' either lived or had lived. I based this off what neighborhood participants worked at, enrolled their children in school either currently or while their children were growing up, or described having lived in as a child. For instance, Mariana grew up in southeast Seattle, had enrolled her children in school there when

they were young, and then moved to a suburb south of Seattle when her children were in elementary school. So, her interview included descriptions of both southeast Seattle and her current suburb.

**Table 6.** Interview participants

| Name | Role | Racial/ethnic identity | School neighborhood |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Leslie** | Parent | Black | SE Seattle and suburbs |
| **Florie** | | Black | SE Seattle and suburbs |
| **Sarah** | | White | SE Seattle |
| **Isaiah** | | Black | SE Seattle and suburbs |
| **Jared** | Recent graduate | Black | SE Seattle |
| **Emily** | Principal | White | Suburbs |
| **Molly** | | White | Suburbs |
| **Lauren** | | White | SE Seattle |
| **Aaron** | Teacher or paraprofessional | Black | SE Seattle |
| **Mike** | | White | SE Seattle |
| **Carly** | | White | SE Seattle |
| **Samantha** | | White | SW Seattle |
| **Miriam** | | White | SW Seattle |
| **John** | | Filipino | SE Seattle |
| **Luis** | Teacher's union elected seat | Latinx | SE Seattle |
| **Ivy** | Afterschool program coordinator | Latinx | SE and SW Seattle |

*Participant profiles*

I detail the interview participants' life histories as relevant to this project. I highlight their similarities, as these points of similarity informed my analysis.

Parents and recent graduate

*Marianna*, *Florie*, and *Isaiah* are all Black people who grew up in Southeast Seattle. All three had moved out of Seattle—Marianna to Kent, Florie to Kent and then Auburn, and Isaiah to Houston, Texas. Florie and Isaiah's children went to school in Southeast Seattle. Marianna's two

sons went to school in Kent. All three attended Seattle Public Schools. Marianna went to private high school in Seattle. Marianna works for a research hospital, Florie is an attorney, and Isaiah leads a philanthropy. All three participants own their homes.

*Sarah*. Sarah is a White woman who grew up in the Madrona neighborhood of Seattle. She lives in Rainier Beach in Southeast Seattle with her two children and works for a nonprofit She attended Garfield High School. Her oldest child is in Kindergarten in Rainier Beach.

School administrators

*Emily* and *Molly* are White women who are school leaders in the Highline district south of Seattle. They have been principals for over three years in their respective schools. They live in the Highline district with their families, and Emily's child attends Highline Public Schools. Molly has a recent newborn.

*Lauren*. Lauren is a White woman who used to be an assistant principal at a high school in Southeast Seattle. She worked as a school leader for multiple years. She lives with her partner and child in Capitol Hill and described herself as a "lifelong renter." Her child attends Seattle Public Schools.

Teachers and staff

*Aaron, Mike, Carly, John,* and *Luis* are all teachers in Southeast Seattle. Aaron is Black and grew up in Rainier Beach and is a paraprofessional there. He lives in Kent, as he described, so he can afford rent more easily. Mike and Carly are both White. Mike is a paraprofessional at several schools throughout the Central District and South End. Carly has taught for over 20 years and two different South End high schools. She moved to Seattle after college to complete her student teaching. Her daughter attends Seattle Public Schools. She lives with her family, including her mother-in-law, in mixed-income housing in the South End and owns her home.

John is Filipino and has taught in the South End for over 20 years, mostly at the same elementary school. His children attend Seattle Public Schools, where he was also educated. He lives with his family in Rainier Beach. Luis is a teacher at a South End high school and was elected to the teacher union's leadership. He lives in a multigenerational household in the South End. Aaron, Mike, Carly, and Luis all have held or currently hold organizing roles within the teacher's union.

*Miriam* and *Samantha* and teachers in Southwest Seattle. They are both White women. Miriam grew up in Seattle in the Rainier Valley, and lives with her family, including her husband, child, and parents, in the house she grew up in. Samantha moved to Seattle from San Francisco, where she worked at a non-profit focused on affordable housing. She lives with her partner in a house she owns in Southwest Seattle. Both have worked at an elementary school in Southwest Seattle for over five years. *Ivy* works as an afterschool program coordinator that serves schools in both Southeast and Southwest Seattle. She lives with her partner in a rented apartment in Capitol Hill.

*Observations*

Observations focused on understanding the ways people responded to the policies of focus from OPCD and SPS, namely the Comprehensive Plan and policies in response to the school budget deficit. From December 2022 to September 2023, I completed nine observations, five of OPCD meetings and four of SPS meetings for a total of 17 hours of observations. For initial fieldwork, I attended four in-person OPCD-run Comprehensive Plan engagement sessions and one online meeting, all lasting about two hours each. Each meeting consisted of a gallery walk of posters on different facets of the plan and a focus group run by an OPCD employee. The first 20 to 30 minutes of the meeting included walking around the view the posters about the plan and write comments on post-it notes. Then, OPCD would convene the focus groups for the

remainder 1.5 hours of the meeting. Multiple focus groups happened concurrently, and I chose a group randomly, trying to avoid groups comprised of all White people. I took field notes by hand during the entirety of the meeting, doing by best to capture people's responses verbatim in focus groups. An OPCD staff member moderated the focus group (questions included in Appendix X), and another staff member wrote down discussion notes on chart paper. OPCD collected all these notes at the end of each meeting and digitized the comments and posted them publicly, which I included in data collection. I also took photos of the gallery walks that preceded the focus groups, where meeting attendants commented about their desires for the Plan.

In August of 2023, SPS announced that in response to their budget deficit, they would hold a series of community engagement sessions called "Well-Resourced Schools" meetings. I attended four of these meetings, choosing the three in the southeast and southwest of Seattle and the one online meeting. These meetings included a brief introduction by school district leadership that was the same at each meeting, lasting about two hours total. They gave directions for focus groups led by a school district staff member. A second staff member typically sat in on each group and took notes. Like the OPCD meetings, I took field notes by hand. I also similarly chose focus groups with racially diverse members. During the focus groups, our moderator advised us to record our responses to three prompts regarding buildings, academics, and extracurriculars on post-it notes independently. Then, we discussed as a group. Finally, we put our post-it notes on a large piece of chart paper, which the district collected at the end of the meeting. I took photos of the post-it notes from the gallery walk.

Within 24 hours of each meeting observation, I transcribed my handwritten field notes digitally. I added details and noted any follow-up questions or actions I should take at future observations. During this additional notetaking, I scanned through the photos of the focus group

photos and took notes on what I saw as emerging themes or confusions and added these to my field notes.

*Policy documents*

Policy documents mainly aided in answer research question one regarding the ways policy created racialized school-communities. To narrow the scope of the study, I focused mainly on policy documents regarding the Comprehensive Plan. I created the corpus of policy documents by searching on OPCD's website for any policy documents related to the 2023 Plan. This included documents directly involved in the creation of the plan, like public-facing explainer documents and policy proposals. Additionally, OPCD conducted analysis leading up to the 2023 plan to inform its policy process. I also included these documents which date to 2018. I also collected documents from the 1994 original Plan to add this information to the case background and provide contextual information in the findings when necessary. Because SPS had fewer policy documents overall related to housing, the policy documents from SPS include any documents from 2016-2023 that discuss housing and land use. I similarly scanned their website, focusing mainly on the enrollment planning department that manages enrollment projections and resource allocation. The last document to be added to the data corpus was the final Comprehensive Plan draft. OPCD initially promised this plan would be released in April of 2023. They delayed publication for almost a year, publishing it in 2024.

Towards the first research question on the political and economic context of Seattle schools, I also collected media and archival data from a prior study I had conducted on the history of Seattle school enrollment. I used data from the Seattle Public Schools archives on Seattle's various desegregation and school choice plans. I also used media coverage on the Comprehensive Plan and school enrollment to understand the current political debate on the

zoning and the school budget deficit, as both were covered at length in popular Seattle news sources from 2022-2024. I used these data in the case description and the findings to understand the "active archive" of place-making in Seattle and how place had been historically constructed.

*Semi-structured interviews*

Interviews served to answer research questions two and three, providing rich detail on people's placemaking in school-communities. I used two slightly different interview protocols based on the participant's role: one interview protocol for parents and one for school staff. Interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and took place over Zoom or phone. I audio recorded interviews and used Zoom transcription services or Otter.ai to transcribe interviews. Interviews focused on people's experiences in their school and its neighborhood (see Appendix B for the interview protocol). To consider place in data generation, I use Tuck & McKenzie's (2015) guide, which explains how interviews can capture the affective or abstract orientations to place, so I ask about their connections to their neighborhood and schools. I began interviews with introductory questions that helped build rapport and understand relevant biographical information, like their family structure and how long they had lived in Seattle. Then, I asked about people's perspectives on their neighborhoods and schools. I then asked about their perspectives on Seattle more generally as a place and housing. I had a few additional questions I asked school staff about the ways they felt their school interacted with housing policy or played a role in gentrification.

During interviews, I used Small & Calarco's (2022) concept of "cognitive empathy." I often would follow up with a prompt like, "So, if I'm understanding you correctly, you're saying…" and would restate their point in my own words. This helped me confirm that my interpretation of participant's answers was correct, and often gave participants an additional

chance to use an example or story to illustrate their point. I sometimes explicitly asked for an example to illustrate a point. For instance, a participant talked about "institutional barriers" to equity in their school, and I prompted them to give an example. This gave me confidence that we had reached a common understanding about their experience, and I could represent it faithfully in future analysis. It also provided richer, more specific data necessary for a case study.

Immediately after interviews, I completed a contact summary form about my major impressions from the interview and what data I did and did not collect from the conversation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). These memos answered the following questions: What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?; Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact; Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, or illuminating or important?' What new (or remaining) target questions do you have? I then used these summary forms while writing memos to understand common themes in the data during analysis described in the analysis section.

*School enrollment data*

I used Seattle Public Schools records on enrollment from October 2023, the most recent enrollment data available. I filtered the data to include only elementary schools because this enrollment is more closely tied to geographic attendance area. Seattle middle schools and high schools have much larger catchment areas that span multiple neighborhoods. Therefore, showing relationships between neighborhoods, housing, and school enrollment is not as fine-grained in upper-level schools. These data included each school's current enrollment and the enrollment capacity of each school. I calculated the difference between the actual enrollment and the capacity to create a new variable representing the percentage of seats filled at the school. This allowed me to compare enrollment about schools of different sizes. Then, I used geographical

data on the SPS website to determine if schools' attendance areas overlapped Urban Villages. I added these data into the dataset using a binary variable.

**Positionality**

I offer some of my personal history here to explain my own positionality and how it might have influenced this project. I taught at a "no-excuses" charter school in Newark, NJ, where I wrestled with the school's anti-Blackness. I credit my undergraduate studies and relationships with students and their families for leading me to problematize my experience and ultimately leave. My shifted opinion of charters is an example of my continued unlearning of anti-Blackness and racism. In conceptualizing this study, I drew on my experience working with young people of color and my efforts to build relationships with them, which involved sharing about myself and spending time to notice their uniqueness, hopes, and challenges (Tuck, 2009; Paris, 2011).

I know my presence as a White person in my neighborhood is a sign of the gentrification I study. I live in Columbia City, located in the Rainier Valley in between the Central District and the Rainier Beach. In this sense, I am implicated and involved in the dynamics of gentrification. In Anna Livia Brand's (2020) writing on gentrifying New Orleans, she wrestles with a similar dynamic as a White woman in a Black neighborhood. She describes the neighborhood's residents: "They held a Black landscape intact through everyday acts of a spatial praxis of mutuality and love" (Brand, 2020, p. 20). I similarly respect and admire the "spatial praxis" of people of color in my neighborhood and in Seattle generally who hold it down in an often-hostile city. Moreover, I know I am a guest in the schools, neighborhoods, and community organizing spaces I hope to understand. At the same time, I am mindful of McKittrick's (2011) warning to "look at geographies of dispossession and racial violence not through the comfortable lenses of

insides/outsides or us/them, which repeat what Gilmore calls 'doomed methods of analysis and action,' but as sites through which 'co-operative human efforts can take place and have a place'" (p. 960). I see this research and myself as in solidarity with participants because I care about this city, its people, its schools, and its future and push against my participation in the White spatial imaginary as I seek more communal ways of being.

Beyond using critical theory and centering community members as participants, I remain accountable to participants in my research process through reflexivity and consistent relationship-building with relevant community groups. I trace my reflexivity and am transparent about my confusions, or as Pillow (2003) calls it, engaging in "reflexivities of discomfort" (p. 188). Milner (2007) offers three steps for researchers to understand the "seen and unforeseen dangers" (p. 394) in inquiry: researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, and engaged reflection and representation. I developed many of my political beliefs on schools, zoning, and place from theory and a desire to be in solidarity with people of color, rather than lived experience. However, I see my struggle to make place in Seattle as bound up with my participants. At the same time, I recognize that this stance of solidarity can be a way for me to neatly assume what Tuck and Yang (2012) calls "settler innocence." I see the project as contributing to this solidarity I sought by highlighting stories of school-communities that news outlets and the school district often do not hear in soliciting feedback because of the large percentage of White students in the district. I also see the project as critical I continuously wrote memos throughout data generation and analysis about my assumptions to track where my "self" and beliefs may have overshadowed those of participants. In communication with community organizations, I began from a place of learning about organizations and their needs. With this understanding of the goals of organizations, I presented my research methodology and findings

aligned to these goals, adapting when necessary to the theory-in-use of organizations (Wilson et al., 2017).

### *Activist stance and collaboration*

Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I built relationships with interview participants, community-based organizations, and city employees at OPCD. The goals of these collaborations were twofold. First, I learned about relevant policy documents and the overall policy process regarding the Comprehensive Plan. Second, I shared my findings with community organizations, OPCD, and interview participants as was relevant to their organizational and personal needs. This collaboration, particularly with community-based organizations, was important to me given my positionality as a White person. These relationships helped keep me grounded in the real-world priorities of interview participants and their communities. On a practical note, they also helped me keep informed of a convoluted and often-delayed Comprehensive Planning process.

I mainly collaborated with the Office of Planning and Community Development, Rainier Beach Action Coalition (RBAC), the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SESEC), and House our Neighbors (HON). At the Comprehensive Plan community engagement meetings, I connected with OPCD employees and told them about my project. This connection developed into an informal relationship with the community engagement manager of the Comprehensive Plan. We met roughly every month to discuss OPCD plans for community engagement. They solicited feedback from me about their "anti-displacement framework" and generally gave logistical updates about the plan release, which helped point me to any new documents I needed to add to my analysis. This relationship also gave context for the political tensions between OPCD and the mayor's office. While this relationship was not central to my research questions

or data collection, this informal look at the behind-the-scenes work at OPCD helped contextualize the delayed release of the Comprehensive Plan and provided me with hunches about the delayed release I followed up on in document analysis.

Collaborating with OPCD, even if it was not part of my formal interview data, gave insight into the way the public process functioned. At one point my contact noted how much time I had spent on my project, saying that "I had a lot of capacity to keep going" and noting their own fatigue and desire to "start doing and stop planning." This illustrated how the policy process of the Comprehensive Plan felt constantly mired in the preparation phase for city employees, who felt they had to juggle the politics and their own policy expertise in crafting the plan. The ability to do transformational work, rather than hampered by ideologically motivated city employees bent on keeping the city a wealthy enclave, had as much to do with banal processes and negotiations that slowed the work. This background shaped my understanding of the policy process behind the scenes and helped me distinguish in the plan between rhetoric and plans for action, which my collaborator at the city office highlighted.

After spending the summer of 2023 coding the policy documents, I reached out to three community-based organizations for which I volunteered and generally been an active member for several years to share my findings. I did this in the spirit of reciprocity, wanting my interview findings to be applicable to struggles for spatial justice at the center of my study. Gilmore explains, "[scholars] have the precious opportunity to think in cross-cutting ways and to find both promising continuities and productive breaks in the mix of people, histories, political, and economic forces, and landscapes that make up forgotten place" (Gilmore, 2008, p. 31). In this vein, I engaged with community groups throughout my project, offering insight and asking questions that aimed to connect the Plan with the school budget deficit, provide historical

context, and substantiate people's hunches with any findings I had developed. I worked to summarize my findings into advocacy materials to help educate people about the Comprehensive Plan, since all but one of my participants had not heard of the plan. Specifically, I worked with two community-based organizations—the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition and House Our Neighbors—to present ongoing findings from my dissertation, describing the impact the planning process could potentially have on schools. I shared my findings to organization members and answered questions around the Comprehensive Plan and school enrollment.

**Analytical approach**

In this section, I explain my overall analytical approach, how this translated to my coding scheme, and then explain my coding process for each type of data. I use an abductive analysis approach, which allows researchers to test data against multiple theories "within the contexts of [theory] justification and discovery" (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 60). This analysis lies between inductive and deductive approaches, with analysis neither rigidly tied to theory nor entirely open, allowing for flexible, new understandings of the phenomenon of study (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). With this approach, transcription, coding, and memoing are acts of "defamiliarization" (Tavory & Timmermans, p. 55) to see the phenomenon of interest in a new light, rather than as supporting or refuting an *a priori* theory. I analyzed interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and analytical memos to identify themes that both refuted and upheld previous theoretical literature. This approach aligns with my conceptual framework, which highlights race and class in the process of gentrification, but also lifts up the theories-in-use of participants based on their experiences. For example, many Black residents opposed upzoning in their neighborhood. My theoretical assumptions led me to believe this would not be the case, because single-family zoning has historically been a tool to exclude people of color from

neighborhoods. However, by using low-inference, descriptive coding in my initial round of coding, themes in participants' responses surfaced the way the attachment to homeownership for Black residents represented a complex desire for stability and community. I used ATLAS.ti to organize the data types into folders, code the data, and organize analytical memos. While writing memos, I also used an Excel spreadsheet to track and organize emerging claims into sections and ultimately chapters.

Yin (2014) describes case study data analysis in five stages: compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting, and concluding. These are not linear but happen in tandem once the data corpus is created and sequentially added to. The two phases of coding, which I describe for each data type below, involved "disassembling" and "reassembling" data, comparing across data types, time periods, participants and events. In the interpreting and concluding phases, I wrote analytical memos, which included comparing themes, codes, and code co-occurrences across interviews and documents. I outline this process for each data type in the following subsections. The result of this case study data analysis is to have a comprehensive understanding of the case from which claims can be made (Yin, 2014).

I triangulated data by speaking to multiple participants across different organizations and different schools who see housing differently based on their geographic context (Stake, 1995). I also used multiple theoretical viewpoints to parse through the data and observation, interviews, and document analysis to access the phenomena from several empirical vantage points (Stake, 1995). By interviewing participants from different organizations, I collected multiple sources of evidence to substantiate the same set of findings (Yazan, 2015). I compared findings from different "categories" of participants to triangulate data.

***Phase one coding***

Using Saldaña's (2021) qualitative coding manual, I generally separated qualitative coding into two phases. The first phase of coding included with descriptive, process, and In Vivo codes. Descriptive codes assigned a word of phrase that described the content of the text, staying close to the original data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). This type of coding is low inference, meaning they capture the data without much interpretation (Saldaña, 2021). Process codes captured activities—like different placemaking activities, or the policy process. Saldaña (2021) describes these codes simply as ending in "-ing." In Vivo codes captured particularly important verbiage by making codes from verbatim text. I used these codes when I wanted to most closely preserve the word choice or phrasing of the data. For example, participants' descriptions of place were often laden with emotion with I wanted to capture verbatim. One participant described the Central District, saying, "I think it's gone," which I used as a code.

By beginning first-cycle coding with low-inference, descriptive coding that sticks close to data, I got a sense of the data before generalizing (Saldaña, 2021). This first-cycle coding allowed me to identify themes in the data that may not have been identified with an *a priori* set of codes alone (Saldaña, 2021). Even though this coding aligned more so with an inductive method, it was still influenced by my research questions and theoretical orientation, as "we have to know whether it is worth coding the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Table 7 gives examples of different codes in different phases of coding and example quotations in phase one.

**Table 7.** First phase code types

| Type of code | Example codes and definition | Example quote |
|---|---|---|
| **Descriptive** | City-district collaboration<br>*Instances of collaboration, planned or completed, between SPS and OPCD.* | "Strengthen partnerships to align School District planning and capital investments with the City's planning for growth in family-friendly urban neighborhoods." |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Process** | Creating place for families<br>*Actions taken to make a place suitable for families* | "The safety of the neighborhood and presence of a quality, public neighborhood school within walking distance, and the presence of other families are among most important ingredients." |
| **In Vivo** | Verbatim code from data | "What they think of when they close their eyes and think of home." |

***Phase two coding***

In the second phase of coding, I used the codebook to do categorization and thematic coding, coding deductively and categorizing inductive codes by similarities (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2021). Table 8 gives examples of second phase code types and examples. I used a codebook I had developed based on my first cycle of coding. This codebook covered types of city and school district policies and their goals; reference to race, class, or place in the data corpus; the impacts of gentrification on schools; placemaking activities of individuals; the perception of school quality, and place described as a community. Guided by the techniques of abductive codebook codes might apply to determine where theoretical concepts I was interested in exploring in the data might arise. For categorization codes, I looked for codes that were similar and could be collapsed together, or grouped under one parent code (Saldaña, 2021). For instance, I had several different codes from my initial round of coding about the things that made their school a "good" school and what they wished they had more of at their school. I categorized these codes under a parent code: "school resources." After categorizing codes, I continued to thematic coding, where I identified patterns in the codes and categories of codes and paid particular attention to how ideas from my conceptual framework and literature review came up in the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For instance, several codes clustered

around home ownership, both from policy documents and interview participants. Using my conceptual framework as a guide, I created a thematic parent code called "housing as wealth," which captured how people described housing as a wealth-building tool amidst an environment of scarcity and a personal history of individual and structural racism.

I then wrote analytical memos about thematic codes, exploring contradictions and confusions in the data and reviewing potential themes for connections to each other and my conceptual framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For instance, while I paid attention to policy goals and barriers throughout the coding process, it was not until after I coded all the data that I connected the policy silo to the process of abstraction from my conceptual framework. Specifically, the common theme of the PTA as a marker of geographic inequity initially seemed like an outlier theme that did not fit with my research questions. However, by looking at all instances of discussion of the PTA, and comparing these mentions across identities, neighborhoods, and roles, I could better understand where these activities fit in terms of my conceptual framework.

**Table 8.** Second phase code types

| Type of code | Example codes and definition | Example quote |
|---|---|---|
| **Categorization** | Descriptions of school-communities<br>*The different ways people described their school-communities* | "In Seattle, throughout the South and Central District community, there's a lot of pride for folks who attended those schools and graduated over the years. And so there is some really, just, wonderful and long-lasting community connections." |
| **Thematic** | Placemaking in schools<br>*Ways people connect to their schools and create a sense of belonging* | "I was the person who brought food before the game, who made sure that they had deodorant. If the girls needed, I took them to buy new sports bras." |

Overall, this coding strategy allowed for an understanding of the relationships between people, policy, and place in school-communities, balancing the ways people experienced place and the ways theory and literature assume these power relationships take place. By sticking close to the data at first, and then using theory more directly to analyze categories and themes, I developed an understanding of the placemaking activities of people in school-communities and how their racial identities, professional roles, and background informed these connections. In the following sections, I describe how I analyzed each type of data specifically.

*Document analysis*

After compiling the core dataset of policy documents, I began coding them with In Vivo, process, and descriptive codes. This low-inference coding allowed me to get a sense of the policies overall, including the general policy goals and rhetoric present across the city planning department and the school district. This helped me gain an initial understanding of the city and school district's policy priorities and strategies for achieving them. Process coding aided in the latter—how policy documents discussed achieving the goals they discussed.

After this initial round of coding, I categorized and themed policy document data to understand what patterns and concepts emerged from the initial round of coding. I began with a list of codes and an eye for patterns that inductively emerged from first cycle coding. This list of codes included policy barriers, city-school collaboration, purpose of development, race and class in zoning, and history of place. I consolidated initial codes into categories, including policies toward equity, policy outcomes, and policy strategies. I also categorized all the initial codes that mentioned exclusionary or inclusionary zoning. This allowed me to track how these mentions of each type of zoning changed over time. I also compared the differences and similarities between

stated policy goals toward equity and strategies and outcomes. This categorizing allowed me to identify trends across documents and select the codes and related excerpts that most closely represent the trend (Saldana, 2021). By comparing codes across time and goals, outcomes, and strategies, I could build claims about how the city's progressive policymaking did or did not sustain over time or across the policy process.

I wrote memos about the different policy strategies and outcomes the policy documents outlaid. I compared memos on OPCD and SPS, understanding where their strategies overlapped and diverged. I also wrote memos about different themes, like the prevalence of inclusionary and exclusionary zoning mentions over time, to parse and makes sense of potential arguments. Merriam & Tisdell (2015) say policy documents in a case study can help reveal "things that cannot be observed" and "that have taken place before the study began" (p. 164). In this case, policy documents revealed the city and school district's stated goals and priorities for policy that may not have appeared in public meetings or news coverage. This memoing allowed for an understanding of the formation of policy goals over the Comprehensive Plan process and past collaboration between the school district and the city.

*Interview and observation analysis*

Interviews and observations data included how participants talk about place, their strategies and capacity for placemaking, the way they hope to change their school-communities, the new structures they build or hope to build, and the ways they resist (or do not) racial capitalism. I followed a similar coding strategy as described in the document analysis section. In second phase coding, I specifically looked for instances of the White and Black spatial imaginary that came up in first cycle coding. Other deductive codes included: placemaking, descriptions of racism and class, impacts of gentrification and displacement, and response to the city.

For second-cycle coding, like the document analysis, I categorized initial codes based on similarities. Because I had already coded the policy document data, I also looked at the parent codes from the document analysis as potential category codes. I categorized initial codes into the following parent codes: perceptions of school quality, strategies and barriers to creating a school community, PTA participation, place as community, scarcity, school resources, and housing as wealth and/or stability. This included some overlap with document analysis codes, including in the housing as wealth, perceptions of school quality, and placemaking codes.

After coding the policy documents, I wrote analytical memos about the codes, looking for relationships between thematic and category codes. I wrote memos based on themes that came up in the data, such as placemaking in schools, resistance to policies, school resources, and the idea of stability vs. mobility. Within these memos, I compared memos across participants to understand what common themes arose (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018). From this comparative standpoint, I wrote memos addressing differences and similarities in people's placemaking activities, conceptions of school quality, and other themes and contradictions that arose. This analysis speaks to all three research questions about how the political economy and gentrification impacts schools, how people engage in placemaking (and how this differs/overlaps with the placemaking of the state) and the limits and possibilities of the policy process and community engagement in addressing people's needs.

*Looking across data types*

The thematic codes and memos crystallized ideas that arose throughout the coding process by allowing me to compare themes across data types, participants, and geographies. This analytical strategy allowed for comparison across the policy documents and people's lived experiences to understand where overlaps, gaps, and convergences occur between policy and

experience. After I coded the document, interview, and observation data, I sorted through the codes to see where high-level category and thematic codes included multiple types of data. This allowed me to see where concepts arose across data types. For instance, interviews and in the Neighborhood Council Plan documents both included the idea of schools as community anchors. After locating this similarity across data types, I wrote analytical memos about why this theme may occur across these types of data.

The fact that certain codes did not overlap across data types also provided useful information for analytical memos. For instance, interview participants very sparingly mentioned inclusionary or exclusionary zoning specifically, while this was a main feature of policy documents. Meanwhile, policy documents rarely mentioned schools as community anchors. These differences across data types allowed me to make claims about the different values and priorities of policymakers and the participants in interviews, public meetings, and focus groups.

## Chapter 6: Housing and zoning policy as education policy within crises of capital

The New Deal marked the advent of "progressive" U.S. policy—policy intended to reform governance and systems to be more equitable and to equitably distribute wealth (Gilmore, 2002; Katznelson; 2005). This origin of progressive policy maintained racial inequities through exclusion of Black people, namely, from newly powerful labor unions, federal benefit programs, and access to jobs (Dowd Hall, 2005; Katznelson). The "long Civil Rights movement" originated in this racist New Deal policy, which achieved progressive policy gains like the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act (Dowd Hall, 2005). Because of progressive policy's original goal of reforming government systems, progressivism is seen as a policy platform linked to racial, class, and gender equity, despite its tenuous origins in racist policy.

However, scholars of racial capitalism point to the shortfalls of progressive policy in transforming racist systems (Gilmore, 2002; Shange, 2019). I similarly question the possibility of an "antiracist, redistributive state" that progressive policies promise (Shange, 2019, p. 4) in this chapter. These scholars wonder whether the U.S. state—which has been and continues to be the arbiter of intertwined systems of colonialism, racism, and imperialism—can use progressive policy to repair these past harms (Gilmore; Shange). I examine housing and education policy, and the attempts by policymakers to rectify racist policy, and how people on the ground respond to these attempts.

I argue that the state, as exemplified in this case study of Seattle, struggles to realize racial equity in gentrifying school-communities, even when it supports progressive policy. I analyze policy and people's conceptions of policy in this chapter to try to find interventions toward spatial justice, or the equitable distribution of resources across place and freedom of movement (Soja, 2010) in the meantime. Over the past twenty years, Seattle has ushered in a

"distinctive political culture, heavily democratic, and liberal on environmental and social issues, and willing to be taxed for good causes and projects" (Morrill & Sommers, 2005, p. 364). Seattle, like Austin and San Francisco, has embraced the "new economy" of high-tech corporate and health care jobs (Abel & White, 2015). However, this progressive environment is coupled with rising wealth inequality along racial lines (Morrill & Sommers) and questionable commitment to progressive implementation of policy (Abel & White, 2015; Scott, K., 2019; Scott, S. November 2023). I document this crisis as it unfolded (and continues to unfold) by examining the before and after of the residential rezoning process in Seattle, and how people connected to schools grapple with its impacts.

I explain the varied ways the city (OPCD) and the school district (SPS) discuss housing and education to highlight how each entity does not meaningfully engage with its pattern of historically racist policy, does not collaborate across policy silos, and does not take community engagement into consideration in policy implementation. Instead, they focus on technical ways they could collaborate (like data sharing).

First, I argue that city planners' and the school district's engagement with racist policy history does not create opportunities for change or repairing harm. Over time, resources and power dynamics in places form an "active archive" of place (Knowles, 2003), including in school-communities. People's day-to-day lives—the "active"—exists within this history of layered racial meanings in places—the "archive." People can access this active archive and seek to change it. As an analytical tool, the active archive puts policy in its historical context, and draws attention to who forefronts what history, and to what ends. I use this framework to argue that people—policymakers and school-community members—experience school gentrification

as part of a historical relationship to place, particularly in times of crisis and in a city with a stated commitment towards racial justice in policymaking.

Second, despite the ways housing and school policy mutually reinforce one another, SPS and OPCD do not collaborate across what I identify as a policy silo. This silo leads to a mismatch between rhetorical goals and actual implementation, which I argue is a process of abstraction. Marx used the term "abstraction" originally to refer to the abstraction of labor—the ways capitalist labor systems break labor apart into pieces for the sake of efficiency (i.e., the apprentice to the factory worker) to alienate workers from the means of production (Marx, 1894). I use this term in the same vein as Gilmore (2002), who uses it to describe racism as a "process of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of differences into hierarchies that organize relations" (p. 16). In processes of abstraction, the "thing" or the "problem" at hand gets moved, divided, organized, split, and reformed into something else, disconnecting its social reality from its expressed form. Gilmore (2002) argues that "the abstraction of class conflict" across multiple policymaking sites creates institutions that "widen (or narrow, or sometimes both at once) the distance between categories of social actors and their capacity to realize their own freedom" (p. 16). I argue that school enrollment decline is a process informed by multiple sites of abstraction of class conflict across the city. In other words, wealth inequality, as produced by racialized land speculation, is present across multiple policy processes. I use this idea to analyze how the abstraction of spatial inequity in school-communities across multiple policy domains makes it more difficult, but not impossible, for people to organize towards spatial justice.

Third, OPCD collected a large amount of community feedback. However, the actual Comprehensive Plan neglected to meaningfully include the results of the community feedback. Research has shown that urban planners often elide commitments to racial equity using

community engagement as a prop to block criticism (Dantzler, 2021; Safransky, 2023). I compare data from community feedback sessions and online comments to OPCD's final draft plan to demonstrate the gap between the priorities of people on the ground and city planners. This gap demonstrates the difficulty, under racial capitalism, of seeing equitable policy from conceptualization through implementation.

Finally, I argue that, as Seattle policymakers fail to change exclusionary zoning and address its racist roots, thus contributing to the school enrollment crisis. Continuously increasing property values spurred by exclusionary zoning, coupled with the school enrollment and funding crises, show cracks in the logic of progressivism. Gilmore (2002) describes "crises of capital" that occur when patterns of public and private spending no longer create more capital. Applying the idea of a "spatial fix" to Seattle, I argue exclusionary zoning in Seattle protects the property wealth of single-family homeowners. However, zoning policies attempting to maintaining this capital have contributed to a crisis in falling school enrollment, spurred by the lack of affordable housing. The Comprehensive Plan represents an opportunity to either exacerbate or address this crisis—to double-down on exclusionary zoning, therefore attracting wealthier residents and widening wealth in equity, or to open up opportunities for more housing construction. While COVID exacerbated enrollment decline, it cannot be entirely blamed for decreasing enrollment, which has been in process for the past decade in Seattle.

To pursue this analysis, I generally focus on the Comprehensive Plan, Seattle's 20-year roadmap for land use policy created by OPCD. This plan represented a chance for the city to revamp its "Urban Village strategy," the zoning plan in place without significant revision since 1994. This strategy relegated development to small patches of land—urban villages—and preserved two-thirds of Seattle for single-family housing.

The policies analyzed in this chapter include all the policy documents published from OPCD from 2021-2023 related to the Comprehensive Plan in addition to the past Comprehensive Plans. These documents included the 2000 and 2016 (last updated in 2022) Comprehensive Plans, the 2023 and 2024 Comprehensive Plan drafts and environmental impact statements, public issue briefs; and community engagement reports. Related to schools, I included SPS comments on the Comprehensive Plan, two reports on enrollment projection methodology that discussed housing, and the Seattle Planning Technical Team report. For the final section on enrollment numbers in differently zoned neighborhoods, I use SPS enrollment data.

I coded these documents by first broadly paying attention to mentions of race or equity, policy goals, policy outcomes, and policy strategies. After an initial round of coding, I grouped codes thematically. These themes included city and school collaboration, creating a place for families, inclusionary zoning commitment, commitment to equity, and mentions of historical policy. From there, I approached analysis by understanding how the plan changed over time from its drafting to its final form and how the city and school district compared in discussing policies. I also coded community engagement meetings and interviews for discrete mentions of policy, specifically zoning and land use.

I divide the chapter into four sections. First, I examine OPCD policies, explaining their reference to historical land use policy, their Comprehensive Plan process, and the eventual results in the final draft plan. Second, I do the same analysis with SPS, explaining their lack of historical analysis, their plan for collaboration with OPCD, and its failed result. Third, I compare these two initial sections to the OPCD community engagement and interviews with two teachers who explicitly discussed policies. Finally, I use descriptive statistics to demonstrate how exclusionary zoning constrains school enrollment.

## OPCD's lack of policy change amidst conditions of crisis

### *The promises and pitfalls of the active archive*

The city has not enacted policies that respond to and repair racist distribution of resources of past land use policies. Policymakers and people re-historicize the past, actively picking the histories that resonate with them or their policy goals. I highlight throughout where school-communities do and do not show up in historicized understandings of place to underlay how the silo between housing and education policy entrenches inequities. Appendix E summarizes the ways the "archive" informs place today according to OPCD, community feedback collected by OPCD, and interview participants (and the lack thereof from SPS). This section outlines how city planning documents invoke the racialized history of housing policy to explain their current understanding of Seattle's spatial politics and how, if at all, schools fit in.

City planning documents invoked the city's history as both a lesson for the harms of racial exclusion and the possibilities for a more just future. The city identified policy as capable of enacting placemaking towards more just neighborhoods. I analyze these claims of potential placemaking both to emphasize the city's explicit recognition of historical wrongs done by policy and to understand the lack of impact of this recognition of history in the final draft plan.

In the planning process for the Comprehensive Plan, the city published over twenty documents between 2021 and 2023 on its website. These include racial equity analyses of previous Comprehensive Plans, public-facing materials on policy priorities, and summaries of community engagement. I focus first on the city's Comprehensive Plan brief titled "Centering Equity" because it condenses the planners' approach to equitable policy in one central location.

The city acknowledges the historical impacts of policy without linking them to potential policy changes. The brief acknowledges "Seattle's planning history is marked by racist land use

and housing policies and practices that created and perpetuated the exclusion and segregation of people along lines of race, ethnicity, and class" (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2024a, p. 1). This brief goes on to say, "The effects of this history remain visible today through persistent segregation and disparities. Current land use regulations reinforce these outcomes by limiting the availability of lower-cost housing choices in many neighborhoods." The brief connects the active to the archive, linking the history of policy to the city's present racial landscape. It ties "current land use regulations" to limited capacity for affordable housing construction. However, OPCD stops short of identifying exclusionary zoning itself as a vestige of these past policies. Without identifying how they will change policy to repair historical harms, city planners do not adequately consider the relationship between the "active" and the "archive." This widens the distance between these historical policies and present-day impacts and potential for change, rather than closing them (their stated intent).

The process by which the city plans to address these harms is technical, focusing on tracking "racial equity outcomes." In a presentation on "centering racial equity in the One Seattle Comprehensive Plan, OPCD outlines their plan for community engagement with historically marginalized people, but do not outline structures or decision-making processes that will embed this feedback and expertise into the plan itself. The city claims it will develop a plan that "reflects Indigenous history, voices, and values" and that "communities of color see their priorities reflected in the updated plan" (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2023, p. 22). They also state that "growth" should be "shared more broadly across the city" and that this includes "looking at how the [Urban Village strategy] has benefitted some people and burdened others in inequitable ways." In OPCD's plan to address racism, the link between the active and the archive muddies. Vague phrases like "racial equity outcomes," "looking at,"

"reflecting Indigenous history," and "see their priorities reflected" have a sheen of progressivism without a concrete commitment to ending racist policy or providing reparations for the city's racist history. Commitment to community engagement and tracking racial equity outcomes makes the active archive connection more abstract. In other words, given the city's claim that racist policies are reflected in today's policies, ending those policies, and creating ones that repair harm could be a solution. However, the city turns to technical language about community engagement, tracking outcomes, and analysis, effectively outlining a commitment to understand rather than a commitment to act.

### *Preparing for the Comprehensive Plan*

Across multiple policy documents—the plan for community engagement with people of color, the one-pager brief on racial equity, the anti-displacement strategy, the Equitable Development Implementation Plan, the Housing Choices Background Report—OPCD explicitly noted the racist history of land use policy in the city and committed to ameliorating its effects, albeit limitedly. During the Comprehensive Plan process, OPCD rolled back its commitment to inclusionary zoning, impacting school-communities in the process. In this section, I chronologically trace the city's stated commitments to inclusionary zoning and their inclusion of schools in this effort to demonstrate the shift in policy priorities to protecting single-family zoning that occurred later in the planning process.

Related to OPCD's recognition of the past policy harms, they outline in their planning materials for the Comprehensive Plan the need to create denser housing to make the city more affordable, stem displacement, and make the city more racially equitable. The city identified the links between housing and schooling but did not move beyond the policy silo to act upon it. The Seattle Planning Commission, a group that advises the mayor and city council, published a

policy analysis in 2016 in advance of the Comprehensive Planning process which identified that the Urban Village strategy does not produce an adequate amount of family-sized housing (defined as 2 or more bedrooms) and stated their priority as a city to make this family-sized housing more available (Seattle Planning Commission, 2014). In doing so, they identified the school district as a key factor in creating "family-friendly neighborhoods" as a potential partner to OPCD in building housing near schools. This white paper demonstrates the lack of family-sized housing and the need for a dramatic increase in this type of housing. They recognized that "the presence of a quality public neighborhood school within walking distance" makes a neighborhood "family-friendly" (Seattle Planning Commission, p. 10). In this sense, the city explicitly understood that attracting families to the city means building affordable housing near public schools. Yet, wide scale upzoning or connections to schools did not explicitly get taken up in any further Comprehensive Plan materials. The white paper identified several action items to address the lack of family housing, seven of 11 dealt with different intricacies of upzoning. One suggested action is: "strengthen partnership to align School District planning and capital investments with the City's planning for growth in family-friendly urban neighborhoods" (p. 20). This suggestion included calling for "ongoing collaboration" between SPS and OPCD. While the zoning suggestions were all specific and detailed, this suggestion did not get more specific than this call for collaboration, which never panned out. The abstraction of the spatial inequity across multiple venues—in this case, OPCD and SPS—makes collaboration and change difficult. The suggestion of a "strengthened partnership" between the two public agencies did not come to successful fruition, stunting any coordinated efforts to create livable communities for working-class families.

OPCD officially critiqued single-family zoning in two instances before the official planning process began (and included these documents in their dossier of official policies on the Comprehensive Plan site). First, a report authored in 2019 before the official Comprehensive Plan process began focused on the different housing choices available across the city based on zoning laws (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2019). In this report, OPCD claims single-family zoning limits housing choices, drives up costs, and creates a "very high bar of financial entry" for people to move into certain neighborhoods (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2019). More bluntly, in a 2021 memo from the interim director of OPCD to Dan Strauss (the city council chair of the land use and neighborhood committee), the OPCD director outrightly stated, "the city must end the prevalence of single-family zoning" (OPCD, 2021a). OPCD repeatedly stated its commitment to significantly changing the prevalence of single-family zoning before the Comprehensive Planning process began. However, its plan for policy change did not mirror this anti-single-family zoning stance. This rollback suggests that the policy process widened the distance between policymaking and transformative change.

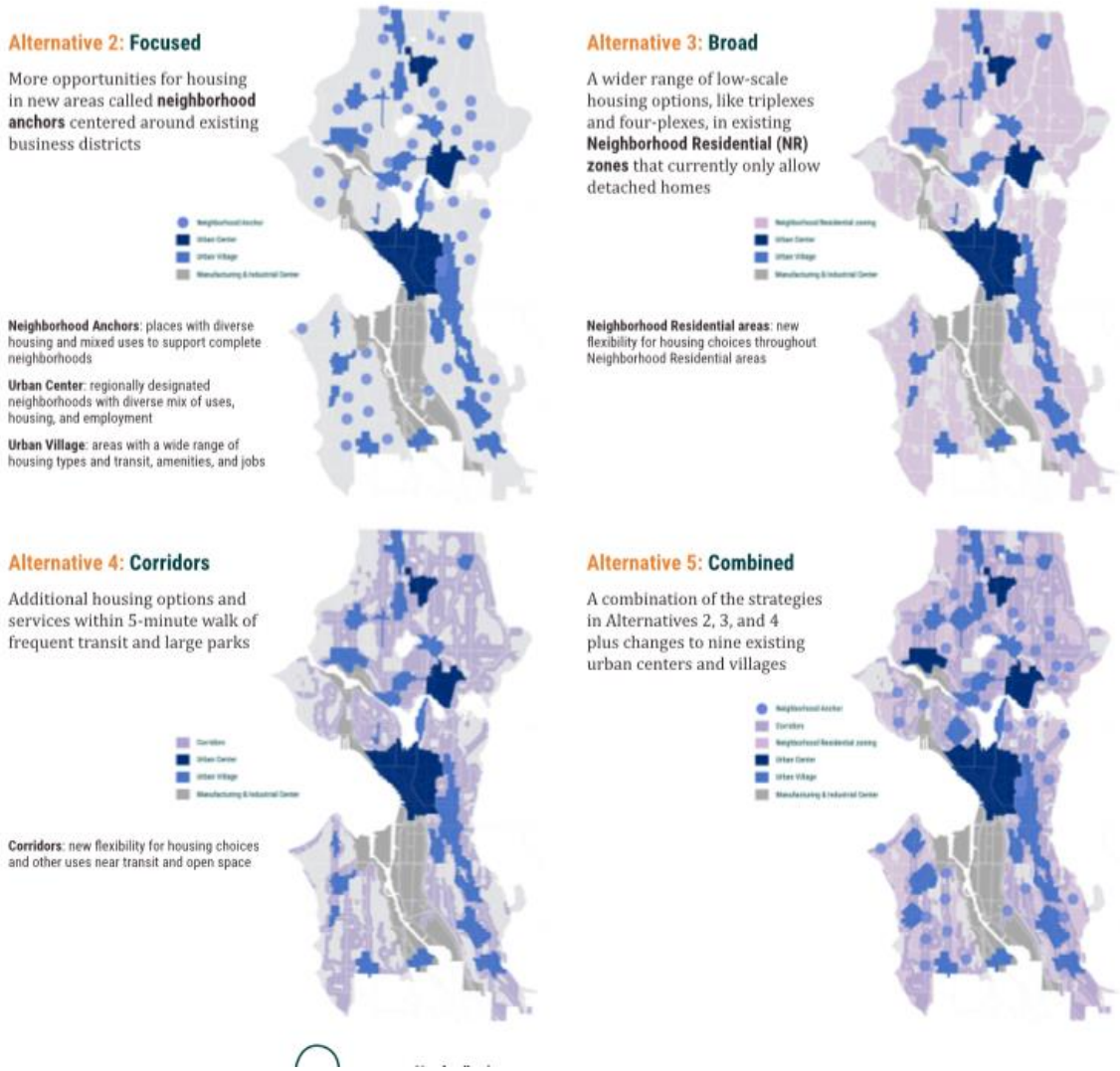
This commitment to fundamentally change Seattle's zoning laws still stood in the earliest stages of the Comprehensive Plan process. In 2022, OPCD began officially preparing for the Comprehensive Plan update due in 2024. These initial Comprehensive Plan materials defined equitable development and described what the city needs to do to achieve it. For instance, the city's one-pager geared towards public audiences titled "Centering Equity" meant to concisely convey how the city considered equity in the Comprehensive Planning process. This brief labeled single-family zones as a "detriment to housing choice." They recognized that displacement and lack of affordable housing is "reinforced by current land use regulations that

limit the availability of lower-cost housing choice" (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2022). They explicitly connected the city's spatial inequity to current land use policy, indicating that for the city to pursue equity, they must upzone neighborhoods. In this one-pager, OPCD mentioned the use of the "Equitable Development Framework" developed by OPCD to guide development. This framework identified policy priorities to prevent "community displacement," including: "equitably distribute housing growth, equitably distribute the burdens of rising rents, protect community anchors and culturally appropriate goods and services, and protect social networks of marginalized communities." Again, OPCD directly identified the negative consequences of inequitable housing growth and named solutions for mitigating displacement. While they did not explicitly mention schools, the reference to community anchors and social networks points to an understanding of the community bonds that play a role in school-communities.

Once the city published the proposed land use policies they would study under the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) mandated by the state, the progressive idealism of upzoning downsized to something much less expansive. The city presented five possible land use designations studied under the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) called the EIS Scoping Report for the Comprehensive Plan in 2022. These five alternatives are pictured in the Figure 5 below. Alternative 1 (not pictured) changed nothing in the zoning code. This was effectively a continuation of the Urban Village strategy, maintaining single-family zoning in two-thirds of the city. Alternative 2 created small pockets of upzoning called "neighborhood anchors." These are pictured in the small blue dots throughout the city. These allow for low-rise commercial development (i.e., a coffee shop) and denser housing. They cover small areas, usually busy intersections. Alternative 3 upzoned single-family areas to fourplexes or sixplexes. Alternative 4

upzoned along transit corridors, meaning that multi-family housing (not limited to sixplexes) would be permitted along areas with access to public transit. Alternative 5 combined elements of all of these plans, including upzoning single-family zones, developing along transit corridors, and neighborhood centers. So, while the city came out against exclusionary zoning, its approach to the Comprehensive Plan began from a state of tepid upzoning, if any.

**Figure 5.** OPCD's potential zoning plans studied under the EIS



The city's analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement (of housing construction capacity across the five plans demonstrates that only Alternative 5 had the potential to increase housing supply, and did not meaningfully address displacement (page 1-71 of DEIS). Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 purported to have limited impact on creating affordable housing. On the online Comprehensive Plan engagement website, where people could publicly comment on the plan, over 60% of the comments were in support of Alternative 5 or an even more aggressive upzoning option, often called "Alternative 6" by commenters.

**Figure 6.** OPCD analysis of housing construction across comprehensive plans

**Exhibit 1.6-21. Population, Housing & Employment Summary of Thresholds of Significance**

| Metric | Threshold | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 | Alt. 4 | Alt. 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Increase the supply of market-rate housing.[1] | — | △ | △ | △ | ▲ |
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Increase the affordability of market-rate housing.[2] | — | △ | △ | △ | ▲ |
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Increase the diversity of market-rate housing.[3] | — | △ | ▲ | △ | ▲ |
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Increase the supply of income-restricted housing.[4] | △ | ▲ | △ | ▲ | ▲ |
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Reduce residential economic displacement.[5] | ▽ | △ | △ | △ | ▲ |
| ☒ Equity & Climate | Reduce residential physical displacement.[6] | — | ▽ | ▽ | ▽ | ▽ |

Note: Impacts are considered either unavoidable adverse (▼▼), adverse but able to be mitigated (▼), impact but less than adverse (▽), limited or none (—), moderately positive (△), or positive (▲).

Figure from the Draft EIS of the Comprehensive Plan

In thinking about the "active archive" of racist land use policy, the city's commitment to creating a more equitable city in recognition of past wrongs stands in opposition to the city's proposed Comprehensive Plan updates. These largely keep in place most single-family zoning created to exclude people of color and low-income people from most neighborhoods. The continuation of exclusionary zoning also limits the creation of family-sized affordable housing, another stated policy goal of OPCD, that directly impacts school enrollment.

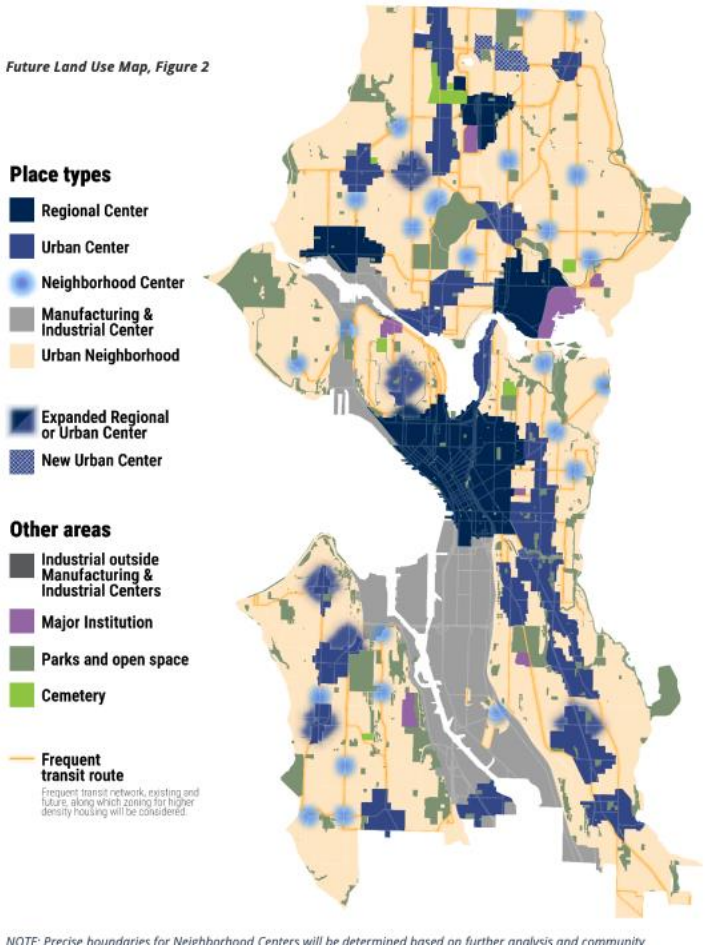
### *The Final Draft Comprehensive Plan*

Despite the city's understanding of the historical and present harmful impacts of exclusionary zoning, the final draft plan did not include wide scale upzoning nor did it explicitly mention creating family-sized housing or affordable housing near schools. In other words, the initial policies had the intent of progressive policy—to create an "anti-racist, redistributive state" (Shange, 2019). Instead, the proposed plan continued the same patterns that have been in place for the past century. This lack of policy action to rectify the "archive" of unjust policy points to the limits of progressive policy under racial capitalism to undo and rectify attendant crises, particularly concerning school-communities. This lack of action was coupled with anti-racist, progressive language throughout the plan which makes the plan appear more effective at reducing disparities than it is.

The logistics of the final draft plan also demonstrate the ways progressive intent in policy gets erased. The final draft plan was supposed to be released in May of 2023, but was actually released a year later in April of 2024. Local news uncovered that the result of this delay was largely because of Mayor Bruce Harrell's administration significantly amending the plan (Barnett, 2024). This delay in the release of the plan resulted in a condensed engagement timeline. Originally, May 2023 through July 2024 was planned for multiple rounds of community engagement, all of which has to be condensed into a 3-month timeline. The city widely publicized the timeline for the Comprehensive Plan as part of its community engagement in-person and on its online engagement hub. By not publishing the plan on time, the city cut short the opportunity for additional comments by a full year, with no stated plan to address this shortening.

The final draft plan's key policies include changing single-family zoning to allow fourplexes and sixplexes (in name only, as I explain), creating a new zoning type called "neighborhood centers" that allow for denser housing and commercial development, and adding one urban village (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2024d). The map below in Figure 7 illustrates these policies as codified into zoning types. When compared to the Alternatives studied in the planning process, this final plan is closest to Alternative 2, except it has fewer neighborhood centers. The light yellow—the majority of the map—will likely remain mostly single-family homes given restrictive requirements for new construction. Comparing this map to the more expansive Alternative 5 demonstrates how the city chose a more conservative, watered-down approach to upzoning.

**Figure 7.** March 2024 Draft Comprehensive Plan Zoning Map




The limited zoning changes proposed in single-family areas to allow fourplexes and sixplexes do not "pencil out," to use housing developer language meaning that the proposed zoning changes are not financially or practically feasible. In other words, while the single-family zoning designation changed to "Urban Neighborhoods," this new designation will likely not result in more housing. The cornerstone of the update in current single-family zoned neighborhoods—the allowance of fourplexes and sixplexes in single-family zones—does not include concurrent policy changes that make this possible. The floor area ratio (FAR)

requirements and setback rules (illustrated in Figure 8) allow three small (approximately 1,200 square feet) townhouses to be built on single-family lots (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2024d). Based on the city's FAR requirements listed in Figure 8, a sixplex on a single-family lot could only accommodate 650 square feet units. This small unit size will not accommodate families. The *Seattle Times* interviewed state representatives who sponsored H.B. 1110, and they questioned whether the policies followed the new law and would allow for denser construction. So, while earlier plan drafts noted the importance of family-sized hosing and upzoning, the technical details of upzoning included in the final draft plan do not allow for these policies.

**Figure 8**. New zoning rules in upzoned single-family neighborhoods

**Key standards in updated Neighborhood Residential zones**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Maximum density** | 1 unit per 1,250 square feet of lot area except that, consistent with state law, at least four units are allowed on all lots, regardless of lot size, and six units within a quarter-mile walk of major transit or if two units are affordable |
| **Floor area ratio (FAR)** | • 0.9 FAR for density of at least 1 unit per 2,200 sq ft (e.g., three or four units on a 5,000 sq ft lot)<br>• 0.7 FAR for density between 1/4,000 and 1/2,200 sq ft (e.g., two units on a 5,000 sq ft lot)<br>• 0.5 FAR for density below 1/4,000 sq ft (e.g., one unit on a 5,000 sq ft lot) |
| **Lot coverage** | 50 percent |
| **Height limit** | • 3 stories for market-rate development<br>• 4 stories for development with income-restricted affordable homes |
| **Minimum open space requirement** | • 20 percent of lot area<br>• The minimum dimension for usable open space is 10 feet or, if the open space includes a circulation pathway serving multiple buildings, 13 feet<br>• Open space may be private or shared |
| **Minimum setbacks and separations** | • Front: 10 feet<br>• Rear: 10 feet without an alley and zero feet with an alley<br>• Side: 5 feet<br>• Separation between buildings within property: 6 feet<br>• Covered porches may extend up to 6 feet into setback, with up to 100 sq ft per porch allowed in setback<br>• Bay windows and balconies may extend up to 2 feet into setback if limited to 8 feet in width<br>• We are considering reduced setbacks for development meeting a higher standard open space |

Figure from City of Seattle (2024)

The projections the city makes for the number of units needed do not accurately cover the housing backlog, nor do they consider the need to build an excess of units to this projection to

make housing more affordable. They project, “estimated growth targets for the 2024-2044 period are 80,000 housing units and 159,000 jobs” (Office of Planning and Community Development, 2024d, p. 16). On average, Seattle has built around 5,000 new units per year over the past twenty years (Seattle Open Data, 2024). By the city’s projections, this would mean the city would *decrease* unit construction by about 1,000 units a year. Again, the city uses technical details—population projections—beyond the scope of everyday people’s understanding. OPCD effectively takes the audacious goal of increasing housing affordability, and then in getting to the material implementation, diverges from that goal.

Like earlier draft plans, the final draft plan includes progressive rhetoric about the necessity for zoning changes and more housing without matching policy changes. For instance, the plan states, “The shortage of quality, affordable family-sized homes is pushing too many young families out of our city” (p. 3). The plan goes on to promise “we must align our housing plans to meet this specific need…Housing near schools, day care, transit lines, and other services can help stabilize neighborhoods, improve enrollment in our schools, and keep Seattle a city that protects and supports kids and families” (p. 3). This promise acknowledges the policy failure to provide affordable, family-sized housing, and the impact this has on schools. As the zoning map—with limited upzoning--the promise to act on it without matching policy to realize these changes makes it more difficult for regular people to intervene against the city’s failure. The city’s policies do not plan to include more housing for families—no provision for larger units, or intentional increase in housing production (the two most direct means to make larger housing more affordable) exist in the plan.

Finally, in addressing historical land use policies, the city maintains its nebulous ties between the “archive” and the “active.” They mention “policy decisions, lack of investment, and

discriminatory housing practices…have led to the displacement of BIPOC communities" (p. 4). The plan goes on to state, "This Plan takes steps towards addressing these harms" (p. 4). However, they do not mention what these steps are, and at no point in the document do they tie a specific policy to undoing historical harm. As the map of the proposed zoning shows, single-family zoning—the policy that led to displacement and preserved discriminatory housing practices—is widely preserved across the city. Again, this invocation of addressing historical harms without the actions to back this up makes intervention more confusing and difficult. Especially when land use policy is technical and not understood by most everyday people, this mismatch between rhetoric and proposed policies makes any attempt to hold the city accountable challenging.

OPCD demonstrates a mismatch between their stated, progressive goals and their final policy proposal. They neglected to change the city's orientation to land use as a result of historical analysis. They also did not focus on family-sized housing or housing near schools. Throughout the policy process, the policies became more disconnected—or abstracted—from the goals through the Mayor's delay of the plan and the inclusion of technical requirements to preserve single-family zoning. While the planning process repeatedly mentioned the importance of community engagement, the policy process itself showed otherwise through the delay of the plan.

**The school district's ambiguous commitment to spatial justice**

*The school district's shirking of policy action*

Policy documents published by the SPS enrollment office demonstrate their understanding that housing policy and school enrollment are mutually constitutive. Yet, like OPCD, this progressive language does not translate to action. The enrollment office, in addition

to regularly publishing demographic trends and student attendance maps, had five key policy documents related to housing policy on their website. First, I focus on a document called the "Housing and Enrollment Methodology Study" (2015) that explains how the city analyzes housing density, land use, and future housing construction projections to model school enrollment projections. Then, I examine the "Seattle Planning Technical Team" findings summary document, a collaboration between the school district and the city planning offices in 2018. I argue these documents demonstrate the school district's understanding that housing and enrollment are tightly interconnected, but that this relationship is not something the school district seeks to influence. This lack of policy action on the part of the district is an example of spatial injustice abstracted across policy domains, leading to a widening between spatial injustice and the possibility of change. Because schools are removed from housing and land use policy through bureaucratic divisions in policymaking, the opportunity for either policymakers in the school district or the policy itself to intervene is made more difficult.

The Housing and Enrollment Methodology study (2015) identified that certain neighborhoods are "saturated" with school-aged children. They attribute these differences in saturation to the "natural aging of housing" and "natural fluctuations" in neighborhood demographics. The analytical lens used to understand school enrollment was race-neutral and did not pay attention to the political and economic factors that drove demographic change in the region. At the same time, they recognized the connection between the housing market and the cost of housing (housing becomes less expensive theoretically as it ages) and school enrollment. In this analysis, the district did not tie different levels of saturation to any school district goals for equity, nor did it identify that the district should play a role in impacting neighborhood saturation levels.

The report identified the connection between housing type and cost and enrollment but stopped short of taking a role in advocating for more affordable housing for families. The study also found that most enrolled students live in "aging" or "less expensive" (defined by SPS as under $600,000 in 2015 dollars) single-family homes and "larger apartments." The SPS study noted that while students often live in single-family housing, "with single-family housing becoming increasingly scarce (in relation to the total population), things must change." In this sense, the district acknowledged unaffordable housing will cause a decline in student enrollment. However, they did not outline what specifically would cause change, and how they could influence that change. The report also predicted that the increased construction of multi-family housing will make "prized" single-family homes increasingly occupied by families with students. However, this assumed that families with children will continue to afford those homes, and that those families will invest in public schools. As the cost of housing rises for single-family homes and gentrification accelerates, findings from studies such as Pearman (2020) point to the possibility of *declining* student enrollment in gentrified areas. Again, the enrollment office identified a problem–the increasing lack of housing appropriate for families–but did not tie this to race or class, nor did they indicate they have a role in advocating for affordable housing for their students by bridging the policy silo between the school district and city planners (as Sikes & Green, 2022 argue is possible) creating change.

In addition to the Housing Methodology study, the other major school district effort to address the connection between housing availability and school enrollment came with a joint task force between the school district and city planners. The Seattle Planning Technical Team, now defunct, brought the SPS enrollment office and OPCD city planners together in 2018 on a co-planning team to focus on sharing data on growth and enrollment projections. However, this

co-planning never led to established policy changes to address the inequitable distribution and unaffordability of housing they identified as impacting schools.

The SPTT report (2018) outlined the policy silo between the school district and city planners, while also describing the ways housing policy influences school enrollment and therefore demands collaboration across the two agencies. The SPTT team identified that the lack of connection between city planners and the school district led to gaps in understanding about school enrollment. For instance, they detailed how city planning in the Comprehensive Plan did not always yield clear understanding of student enrollment: "adding 70,000 housing units by 2035 does not provide understanding of school enrollment growth" (SPTT Initial Report, 2018, p. 7). The enrollment planning team cannot adequately plan for student enrollment without more detailed data about residential patterns. The SPTT identified this as a problem of lack of information, rather than a problem of policy. They outline how they will work together to share data and analysis to understand demographic shifts and where families of students move to and from, but not create policy changes.

The SPTT report identified gentrification and displacement as a problem even though they do not label it as such. They stated, "there is a concern that the younger adult demographic groups driving Seattle's growth may leave the city when they start families or their children reach school age. SPTT also understands the concern about a shortage of multi-family accommodations large enough for families" (p. 10). However, the report did not mention capacity to address either of these concerns, nor does it provide evidence of why families are leaving the city. The city and district recognize gentrification impacts school enrollment: "there is evidence that family movement from areas such as Southeast Seattle may be associated with neighborhood gentrification and may be the result of indirect economic displacement of families.

SPS and the City will continue to seek data and insights into this issue" (p. 8, SPTT report). This marked the end of formal collaboration between the departments without any action because of this understanding—the committee did not meet again.

The SPTT did not identify new policy solutions or ways to collaborate to address rising housing costs and their impact on school-communities. Rather, they listed already-existing policies that each agency separately handled, without addressing how the agencies might combine forces or seek new solutions to a hastening crisis. The team identified vague solutions for displacement, including mentioning the Seattle Housing Authority-Seattle Public Schools partnership and McKinney-Vento, the state's program for funding educational services for students experiencing homelessness. The SHA-SPS partnership provides supplemental tutoring services and counseling to students living in public housing. This does little to make housing available for families displaced by rising costs, nor does it increase the amount of housing available for families near schools. In other words, the partnership provided a direct service to improve families' experiences within the system, rather than changing the system. Similarly, McKinney-Vento provides funding to aid students experiencing homelessness. This policy similarly provides a direct service, rather than making housing more widely available for families. Beyond these programs, the report included a table of OPCD policies meant to mitigate displacement, like housing affordability requirements in new development, and zoning changes for accessory-dwelling units. The report recognizes the connection between displacement and schools and the connections across the two agencies, but does not suggest policy changes to address these overlapping issues.

After the pandemic accelerated dropping enrollment, SPS continued to not act in response to the Comprehensive Plan. The senior facilities planner for SPS wrote a letter to

OPCD in 2022 to comment on the EIS scoping report. The letter did not support any specific option studied under the plan. Regarding displacement, they said:

> Consider housing types that support schools. The neighborhood school model supported by SPS is based on having enough family affordable housing units within the boundary area of each school to maintain student enrollment to keep the school open. The District can provide support to this effort by estimating the impact to student enrollment to each of the alternatives considered. Consider the benefits of housing affordability for student families and staff within each school capture area. Make school proximity a key determinant in each alternative approach.

While this comment identifies the connection between schools and housing, it does not specifically name a policy priority for OPCD to consider other than "affordable housing." Nor did the school district do any follow-up work with OPCD to determine if they followed these suggestions. Based on the analysis of OPCD policy, these recommendations were not taken into consideration on a detailed level, as there is no evidence that school proximity or school enrollment was a determinant in zoning decisions.

OPCD and SPS's lack of action demonstrate the ways the policy process in a progressive environment can unravel towards a lack of change. While policymakers in both organizations focused on progressive rhetoric and intent, the impact of this language was minimal. This serves as an example of the unfulfilled promise of progressive policy towards racial reform and spatial justice. These sections identified that one way this occurs is the lack of direct policy action to rectify historical wrongs. Instead, this recognition of history, if it happens at all, is a symbolic gesture. OPCD and SPS, while recognizing the shared reality of spatial injustice across their departments' purview, did not meaningfully collaborate. This abstraction of the social problem of spatial injustice across public policy processes and attendant silos made unified action difficult.

## Community engagement

*Making the archive active: history as a call to action in people's re-historicizing*

In this section I describe how OPCD-run focus group participants and interview participants discuss the history of policy as it relates to their everyday lives in their neighborhoods and schools. Everyday people were better able to use their understanding of the "archive" to imagine just policy changes in the present. In contrast to OPCD and SPS, these people shape historical narratives that more clearly link to current policy realities. The "active archive" they constructed illustrates a "narrowing" between people's imagination of justice and action. They close the gap between historical harm and potential for repair in their narrations and calls for action. They trace more concrete lines between historical spatial inequities and their day-to-day experiences. In the case of the teachers, they also connected the impact of these policies to their material conditions of families they worked with in schools. First, I outline how the city's own community engagement summary demonstrates these tangible active-archive connections (and highlight how OPCD did not consider these in their policymaking) and then highlight how interview participants also connected policies to history.

In addition to OPCD recognizing itself that the Urban Village strategy was a present-day vestige of racist policy, they collected community feedback that supported this claim. The city conducted six targeted community feedback sessions in 2022 with historically marginalized groups to understand how the urban village strategy impacted these groups with the stated goal to incorporate this feedback into the Comprehensive Plan. This engagement, summarized in a report published by OPCD, surfaced widespread disapproval of the urban village strategy due to its connection to the archive of segregationist policies. In its write-up of the feedback, the city noted residents said,

> Urban villages were built on a history of redlining and [the city] still chose to direct most growth to these areas, thus accelerating economic pressures on existing communities. Areas outside of urban villages need to be part of the growth conversation if we are going to tackle racial inequities.

In other words, residents felt concentrating growth in certain neighborhoods preserved the impacts of historically racist policies like redlining. In contrast to OPCD's policy documents, this feedback specifically targets the Urban Village policies and puts forth more specific solutions like single-family neighborhoods taking on their fair share of development. This direct connection narrows the distance between inequitable policy and action.

This community feedback connects historically uneven development to present-day displacement pressure. A piece of feedback cited in the report discusses the Urban Village strategy, saying, "The current plan is rooted in a vision from the 1990s when we didn't value race and social justice to the degree we do now. Why are we starting from that legacy of planning instead of restarting with a question of what is racially just?" The history of residential zoning has made people suspect of the city's actions. This draws a clear line between redlining and the urban village strategy. Moreover, this feedback turns planning on its head, questioning how the planners even conceive of development to begin with. This focus group participant calls for a re-historicized imagining of just development not rooted in the Urban Village strategy.

Interview participants similarly invoked specific historical instances of inequitable policy, and then directly connected these to inequities they saw in their school-communities today. All eight interview participants of color, and three of the White participants, acknowledged witnessing changes in housing affordability and experiencing or witnessing displacement, explaining this by illustrating Seattle's changing housing affordability and cultural fabric. These participants referred to these changes in one of three ways: gentrification, rising

home prices, and more White people moving to Seattle. Two participants mentioned specific past policies—a federal program called "Weed and Seed" and redlining—in discussing historical impacts on spatial injustice in schools today. While specific policy recall was not common among participants, I highlight these examples to compare to the city's recognition of historical harm from past policy.

Aaron, a Black teacher at Rainier Beach, named a specific policy he experienced growing up in the Central District. This program, called "Weed and Seed," was a 1991 federal program with the goal to "weed out" crime and "seed" economic development (National Institute of Justice, 1999). An evaluation of Seattle's program published by the Department of Justice identified community opposition to the program against "proposed weeding programs…and the fear that they were simply measures to harass and control persons living in the proposed target area" (DOJ report, p. 13). The report also notes that most of the "seed" efforts had minimal impact given the funding only lasted for two years. Aaron locates the origin of gentrification in his memory of this program in the Central District, and then connects this program to the dissolution of school-communities as a result of displacement.

> It wasn't explained as gentrification where the White people woke up and decided they wanted to move in and now they're taking over the neighborhoods. This was because of…the tech boom. They saw that these people were willing to come here because of these businesses. At that time, the gang violence was horrible in the South End… communities were suffering, jobs were bad. It was just a bad time in Seattle, especially for Black people…They wanted to seize this prime land close to downtown. They began to weed out the crime and issues and people. I always looked at it as weeding out the Black people, because at that time, that was the only thing that was there. It was gangs, it was Black people, it was poor Black people…There were no White people here. If you walk through the city, all the way to Columbia City, the White people that you see maneuvering throughout the city, when I was here, those were all Black people.

Aaron connected Weed and Seed to the rise of tech companies and ensuing gentrification, where the political economy of Seattle legitimized a program targeting Black people who lived on "prime land." Like community engagement responding to the Urban Village strategy, Aaron recalled a specific policy and named its specific impacts on his home neighborhood. Aaron saw policy as historically aimed at replacing Black communities for capital gain. He connected this program to the fragmentation of school-communities, arguing that neighborhood schools allowed "new tech" workers to gentrify neighborhoods and displace long-time South End residents.

> When busing ended, that was where the change began. Because now we're going to make the schools so that when you all [tech workers] come over here…you can have neighborhood schools…in the South End, where we don't have that kind of money, we ended up moving away. It was the start of weeding the weeds. The plan incorporated the makeup of the neighborhood schools. Technically speaking, neighborhood schools are a good plan. It's a good idea. But it was not necessarily done for the community that was there, it was done for a community we're trying to bring in.

Aaron highlighted how the macro impacts of the political economy trickle down to schools, where racialized and classed ideas about school-communities impact who can stay and who must leave their community. Major economic and political phenomena like the rise of the tech industry and a federally funded program created local changes in Aaron's home neighborhood and schools. He described how policymakers who ushered in Weed and Seed and the end of busing understood the value of the "prime land" of historically Black neighborhoods in the Central District and the South End. This differs from the city's acknowledgement of past harm in its level of specificity and local focus. The "active" part of his understanding—how school-communities continue to experience inequitable resources along racial lines—is informed by his understanding of the "archive." This is significant because his analysis narrows the distance between past harm and the potential for action. He reconceptualizes how we can handle spatial

injustice—by questioning who is the "community" at a school, who is for, and how we can remember who schools used to serve before Weed and Seed in our imagining of spatial justice.

While the city's rhetoric documented broad impacts like disparate distribution of resources, Aaron's reference included a specific policy, a particular time and neighborhood, and a clear impact tied to schools. The throughline is much easier to trace. This makes sense given the difference in scope and scale between a policy document about land use across the city and one person's recollection of their neighborhood. However, given the city's stated goal of using community feedback in shaping the plan, these specific, localized throughlines that trace the active archive of policy can have an important place in the city's policymaking.

Another participant, Mike, a White paraprofessional at multiple schools and a teacher organizer for the I-135 social housing initiative, connected gentrification to redlining.

> If you look at our city's history…at redlining maps, and then compare them to schools, the number of their students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, it all just tracks. The redlining map really shows you just how much Seattle is still segregated by race. And then the racial segregation has led to a serious income gap, and that impacts families in these different neighborhoods, their ability to support their kids to this day. It plays heavily into gentrification, because you've got these folks who have been segregated in certain neighborhoods and now those neighborhoods are "up and coming." All of a sudden, those families are having to make choices about their finances, can they afford to stay here and be in their community or do they have to move to Tacoma, Federal Way?

Mike connects redlining, a federal policy which rated neighborhoods for bank loans along racial lines, to present-day gentrification. He explains that redlined neighborhoods are now "up and coming," and long-time residents must decide whether they can stay or move out of Seattle. He highlights the importance of families being able to "develop with their community staying in place." Both city policy documents and Mike mention redlining. The city policy documents tie this to the "current racial disparities in quality-of-life outcomes." Because of Mike's experience

working with families of color and low-income families, he can reference the specific types of choices these families make about leaving their schools for suburbs outside of Seattle. The "active" for Mike connects to actual families being displaced, rather than vague language about tracking racial equity outcomes or listening to families of color in community engagement sessions. By considering people on the ground and not in formal positions of power, the distance between the archive and the material effects on people today is narrowed.

Progressive policy can widen the space between recognition of historical wrongs and repair. The more direct, close connections between the active and the archive made by Aaron and Mike demonstrate an alternative to the official policy document rhetoric and a line of solidarity across racial lines. Historical analysis and its connections to material conditions of everyday people—neighbors impacted by Weed and Seed, school-communities impacted by demographic change—provides a tangible, real way to think about and imagine future possibilities that rectify the impacts of racist policy. The "active archive"—the interpretation and re-historicizing of public policy is one way to "renovate race and state." In other words, people—both policymakers and not—interpret historical policy, dredge up their experiences, and use these to understand current pathways for intervention.

**Exclusionary zoning constricts material conditions of school-communities**

The gaps between the stated goals of OPCD and SPS towards collaboration realizing spatial justice feed the cycle of underinvestment in schools in part constituted by housing unaffordability. To understand the material impact of increasingly expensive housing on school enrollment and the policy silo between the organizations, I compare the number of unenrolled seats at elementary schools in attendance zones that overlap neighborhoods that allow denser housing and those that do not. Because the problem of affordable housing for families is

abstracted across multiple policy domains, the social reality of a gentrifying city—fewer school-aged children attending public school—is disconnected from the potential policy solution of collaborative city and school policy. I find that exclusionary zoning has contributed to a school enrollment crisis. While SPS enrollment reports demonstrate that COVID contributed to a steep enrollment drop, enrollment in younger grades has been declining for the past 10 years. This school district uses the enrollment data of younger grades (K-2) to predict capacity needs for the upcoming decade. The drop in kindergarten enrollment between 2019 and 2020 was 700 students, while the drop between 2014 and 2016 was just over 300 students. While COVID has a significant impact in enrollment decline, the pandemic alone does not explain the stagnating or declining enrollment over the past ten years. Additionally, the number of students of color has significantly declined between 2000 and 2023. In 2000, SPS had 60% students of color, compared to 46% in 2023 (Seattle Public Schools, 2024). The linked policies making Seattle unaffordable have impacted the enrollment of Seattle Public Schools, and relatedly, its racial composition.

Seattle has 106 total schools; 93 of these have attendance areas overlapping urban villages. I focus on elementary schools, as these typically capture information about enrollment trends into the future as students age. There are 55 elementary schools with attendance areas in urban villages and 14 in single- family zoned neighborhoods. The table below shows the total capacity for students in all schools, and the unenrolled seats. Schools in upzoned neighborhoods are 82% enrolled on average, while schools in single-family zoned neighborhoods are 75% enrolled.

**Table 9.** Comparison of 2021 urban village and non-urban village elementary school enrollment

| Urban village schools | | | |
|---|---|---|---|

| | Enrollment capacity | Actual enrollment | Empty seats | % enrolled |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 22,415 | 18,347 | 4,068 | 82% |
| Average | 423 | 346 | 74 | |

Non-urban village schools

| | Enrollment capacity | Actual enrollment | Empty seats | % enrolled |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 6,241 | 4,665 | 1,576 | 75% |
| Average | 480 | 359 | 113 | |

Data from Seattle Public Schools School Enrollment dashboard. Zoning information from SPS maps.

These data and OPCD and SPS policy analysis of the connection between housing and schools demonstrates how denser neighborhoods provide more housing options for families, and these families send their children to public school. While these data do not allow for a causal explanation, they demonstrate that Seattle school under-enrollment relates to residential home prices and the zoning and housing policies that impact these prices. Urban Villages are more likely to have families that send their children to SPS schools, whereas single-family zoned neighborhoods are less likely to do so. At the same time, the overall decline in the number of students points to the insufficiency of urban villages to meet the housing needs of students overall. As racial capitalism and active archive lenses point to, power is mapped spatially and across time. Historical distributions of resources across place impact today's resources, as seen with these enrollment numbers. Over time, the commitment to exclusionary zoning has changed the makeup of Seattle's schools, making living in Seattle more unaffordable, and therefore Seattle schools more inaccessible for working class families. Neighborhoods with more expensive housing as indicated by exclusionary zoning are coupled with less-enrolled schools.

The lack of action by the state to alter this historical relationship between neighborhoods and schools point to the fraught, seemingly set-in-stone nature of land use policies and their impact on schools. However, as Gilmore (2002) states, conditions of crisis can also reveal

opportunities for renewal and change. These data demonstrate that inclusionary zoning and denser housing could lead to a more family-friendly city with a school system at capacity.

## Conclusion

Progressive policies, while claiming to bring about racial equity, do not unilaterally lead to progress (Shange, 2019). In other words, OPCD's attempt at progressive policies do not automatically lead to a change in the material conditions of students and their communities, even when they "engage" communities in the process. Seattle is an example of a city where public and private activity have led to rocketing land values. While this increasing value has helped Seattle become a center of economic growth and one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S., this has also led to a crisis in public schools. As evidenced by the inability of the Plan's final draft to address its meticulously collected historical analysis and community feedback, and the policy silo between housing and education, I argue that school enrollment decline is a process informed by multiple sites of abstraction across the city. The social problem of spatial injustice gets chopped up and divided across policies, technical reports, organizational divisions, and entire departments. Given the progressive rhetoric and goals stated across OPCD and SPS, this process of abstraction is more difficult to uncover because policies with racist outcomes are masked in progressive, anti-racist language.

In this chapter, through analysis of policy documents, I argue a chasm exists between progressive promises and progressive action. I build on this claim in the following chapters with a closer analysis of people's placemaking in the face of disjointed policy systems. The following chapters emphasize how people connected to schools, rather than policymakers, saw housing and schools as interconnected parts of their school-communities.

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## Chapter 7: Understanding schools as part of a place-based community in gentrifying neighborhoods

Education literature references schools as community anchors (Green, 2015a; Lipman, 2011; Morris, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2000). This chapter expands upon this claim, analyzing the conditions under which people connected to schools—principals, staff, parents, alumni—consider schools a community. "Community schools" conventionally refer to schools that provide social services onsite, like healthcare (Holme et al., 2022). These types of schools provide an example of ways schools can partner with other institutions to provide students with their basic needs. This chapter focuses on the ways schools endure as communities without these structural supports, and in times of gentrification, as both were the case in Seattle.

In this section I identify the different features that gave schools in Seattle's gentrifying neighborhoods a community feel, and the ways housing unaffordability and inequitable distribution of resources threatened this community. I do this to underlie the import of placemaking of people of color (Lipman, 2011; Morris, 2004), especially in times of scarcity. I answer the research question: *Do people such as parents, teachers, or school leaders connected to schools in gentrifying neighborhoods see schools as part of their communities? If so, how?* Having argued in chapter six that Seattle's housing policy influenced school enrollment, I explain how communities see schools as central in their understanding and experience of displacement.

This chapter relies on three types of data: community responses to the Comprehensive Plan and the SPS Well-Resourced Schools feedback sessions (field notes and summary documents), the 2020 Neighborhood Council Plans used in preparing for the Comprehensive Plan process, and the 16 participant interviews. The feedback session data were gathered

primarily from 10 2-hour long feedback sessions across OPCD and SPS at which I observed and took field notes, and from document analysis of OPCD and SPS-authored feedback synthesis. As described in chapter three, The Neighborhood Council Plans began with the original 1994 Comprehensive Planning process to get local feedback on the planning process (Scott, 2023). However, these councils ended up watering down the equity-minded upzoning of the 1994 plan, stymying development and protecting large swaths of single-family zoning (Scott, 2023). I provide this context to situate the plans in their historical lineage as upholders of the White spatial imaginary. In this chapter, I present analysis from comparing the most recent iteration of the plans from 2020, looking at neighborhoods with majority people of color (Rainier Beach, Beacon Hill, the Central District, and Southwest Seattle) with majority-White neighborhoods (everywhere else) to understand how schools show up, if at all, in their plans. I find that neighborhoods with majority people of color are more likely to mention schools and their role in community-building in their neighborhood visioning.

Together, the Neighborhood Council Plans, which stated neighborhoods' goals in city planning, and the meeting engagement data provide a broad overview of Seattle residents' conceptions of school-communities. The interview data allows for a more detailed look at what school-communities mean to participants. I coded the data using initial inductive codes such as "schools as community" and "proximity to school"—both concepts that arose repeatedly in the data. Then, I used second-phase deductive codes derived from my conceptual framework such as Black and White spatial imaginaries, collectivism, and scarcity, categorizing inductive codes into these thematic buckets. I cross-referenced these codes with the racial identities of participant where applicable. This mix of inductive and deductive coding led to themes about how and under what conditions people described schools as communities. For instance, I did not originally

imagine describing teachers' ability to afford homes as related to school communities—I saw this as a policy issue. However, this theme presented across interview and field note data demonstrated how the proximity of school staff and families substantiated people's concept of a school community.

I first outline how data from OPCD and SPS community engagement meetings from December 2022 to August 2023 demonstrate the role of schools as community anchors. Then, I compare Neighborhood Council Plans from 2020 based on racial demographics to highlight the differences in the reliance on schools as community anchors along race and geography. Finally, I describe the ways interview participants described schools as central to their communities.

## Schools as community anchors

### *Connections between schools, housing, and neighborhoods*

I argue people across Seattle engaged with both OPCD and SPS policy processes saw schools as community anchors. In OPCD and SPS public meetings between December 2022 and August 2023, participants raised the importance of schools as central parts of their community. OPCD digitized answers to their focus group questions from their six in-person and one online focus group on the Comprehensive Plan. This digitization yielded 3,545 unique comments OPCD published on their website. As described in the methods, these focus groups generally asked about what people loved, and lacked, in their neighborhood. I searched for the word "school" in these comments, finding 46 comments (1.3% of the total comments) in this search. These comments are not necessarily tied to individual people (theoretically these one person could make multiple comments). While there were relatively few comments, no questions directly asked about schools and discussion focused more so on housing development. When coupled with the SPS meeting feedback, I consider these comments indicative of the importance

of schools in people's conceptions of their community. Comments on schools most frequently arose in response to the prompt, "what do you love about your neighborhood?" These comments fell into five buckets: schools as community anchors, housing affordability near schools, desire for housing proximity to schools, schools as amenities, and need for teacher housing. Table 10 below summarizes these themes.

**Table 10.** OPCD Comprehensive Plan comments

| **Code** | **Example** |
|---|---|
| Schools as community anchors (n=4) | Q: How can we make our parks and open spaces more welcoming and usable?<br>A: "Provide…opportunities for students to learn environmental skills- make schools the neighborhood anchors" |
| Housing affordability near schools (n=6) | Q: Where would you like to see more housing?<br>A: "affordability surrounding schools" |
| Housing near schools (n=24) | Q: What do you love most about your neighborhood?<br>A: "near schools" |
| Schools as amenities (n=8) | Q: What do you love most about your neighborhood?<br>A: "Two bus lines, an elementary school and a dozen or so restaurants, bars and a couple of convenience stores are within 10 minutes." |
| Teacher housing (n=2) | Q: What is missing from your neighborhood?<br>A: "Housing for school district staff" |

Most often, meeting participants said they loved the proximity to schools in their neighborhood (n=24 comments). Additionally, they also commented on the need to build housing close to schools, specifically highlighting the need for family-sized, affordable housing near schools (n=6). The questions prompted people to think of amenities they either live close to or would want to live close to, and eight respondents discussed schools as amenities akin to

living near grocery stores or restaurants. Four respondents discussed schools explicitly as community anchors, describing them as central features in the neighborhood. Two people identified the need to build housing specifically that teachers could afford. These comments demonstrate how, when thinking about what makes people feel connected to their neighborhoods in a conversation about housing and zoning, schools arise as central parts of this connection for a very small number of people. Given OPCD's stated policy focus on building housing near community anchors, this focus on proximity to schools shows a potential opportunity for designing neighborhoods with schools as central components.

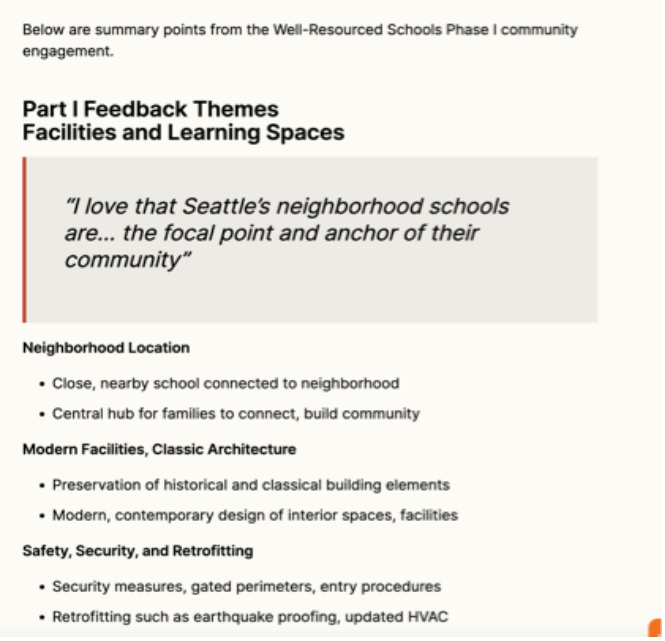
OPCD, in their narrative summary of focus group feedback, presented the theme across feedback sessions of a desire for "'third spaces,' or spaces outside of work and home to build community with others." Specifically, participants asked for free third spaces (i.e., not businesses). OPCD provided potential ideas such as "parks, community centers, and playstreets" in their feedback summary document. Participants' desire for third spaces separate from commerce points to the broader desire for different community anchors. While schools are workplaces to a certain extent, they have the potential to fulfill this free, third space role. In a city undergoing rapid gentrification, a focus on building up schools' community anchor potential could create stronger community ties that can work against the cultural fragmentation which accompanies gentrification.

SPS community meetings similarly raised community members' view of schools as central to their neighborhoods. The school district held community engagement meetings in response to their budget deficit, aimed at collecting feedback on what makes a "well-resourced school." While the superintendent repeatedly stated at the introduction of the meetings that the district did not have immediate plans of closing schools to address the deficit, the topic of school

closures arose at every meeting in focus groups I observed. In addition to these meetings, SPS conducted an open, online survey targeted towards community members, parents, and school staff. The district reported that 3,800 people participated in either the engagement meetings or the online survey. The majority (2,267) of this participation occurred via the survey. 32% of survey respondents identified as people of color (the district total is 54%). As I will describe in the next section, people of color are more likely to identify the community benefits of school. These survey data, then, are potentially skewed towards less emphasis on schools as community anchors because of the racial disparity in participation. School district staff summarized comments from their five in-person meetings and online survey and posted these summarized findings on the district website.

SPS's published summary of the survey findings show that people relied on schools as community-building hubs, in part due to their proximity to the school. The picture below captures the district's summarized findings, using a pull quote claiming schools are "anchor" and "focal points" of their communities. The summary also described people's appreciation of schools "connected to the neighborhood" and a "central hub to connect [and] build community".

**Figure 9.** Screenshot of summarized findings from SPS survey



Below are summary points from the Well-Resourced Schools Phase I community engagement.

**Part I Feedback Themes**
**Facilities and Learning Spaces**

> *"I love that Seattle's neighborhood schools are... the focal point and anchor of their community"*

**Neighborhood Location**

- Close, nearby school connected to neighborhood
- Central hub for families to connect, build community

**Modern Facilities, Classic Architecture**

- Preservation of historical and classical building elements
- Modern, contemporary design of interior spaces, facilities

**Safety, Security, and Retrofitting**

- Security measures, gated perimeters, entry procedures
- Retrofitting such as earthquake proofing, updated HVAC

While the raw survey data is not publicly available, these summarized findings demonstrate that one major theme of the survey findings was that a well-resourced school acted as a community anchor.

SPS focus groups broadly covered three main topics: facilities and learning spaces, academics, and extracurriculars and support services. I elaborate on the discussion on facilities and learning spaces, as this was where schools as community was most frequently raised. Focus group participants recorded their comments and posted them on large chart paper. As I expand on in my methods, the number of comments on chart paper ranged from 15 to 30 sticky notes, often with several ideas. The Central District meeting had the most attendees and comments—around 130 attendees. The Rainier Beach meeting had approximately 70 attendees. Finally, the southwest Seattle meeting had around 60 attendees. Because I could only sit in on one focus group per meeting, I also coded the responses left on chart paper as indicative of the meeting's responses. In each meeting, between five and fifteen people (out of all meeting attendees) left comments on the chart paper which explicitly noted their appreciation of their schools as a

community anchor. This topic also arose in the focus group I participated in at the Central District meeting.

At the Central District meeting, posted comments on what people appreciated about their school included "sense of neighborhood and community," "embedded in neighborhood," and "historic building that gives kids a feeling that they are part of a long-standing community." At the Rainier Beach meeting, comments included appreciating "big community spaces," "school and community connected," and "access for all community members." Finally, the southwest Seattle meeting included, "the fact that my student can depend on a school that is part of a community," "can be a place for families to gather," "community spaces," and presence of "family rooms." While the response lacks specificity as to what happens in these community spaces, or what makes a school feel "embedded in a neighborhood," they demonstrate the prevalence of schools as community anchors across the Central District and South Seattle.

The focus group I observed at the Central District meeting specifically raised the idea of schools as important community features. One participant who identified herself as a person of color said she loved Garfield High School because "my family went there…we survived gentrification." She described how it was meaningful to her family that they had long-held ties to the neighborhood and its school. Two other participants discussed appreciating the proximity of Garfield High School to the center of the Central District. Another participant discussed the school's history—the attendance of famous alumni like Quincy Jones and Jimi Hendrix—as giving it a strong community presence. Finally, a participant outrightly stated, "schools are central to community." As mentioned in the case background, Garfield High School has a particularly important role in Seattle's history as the first majority-Black high school in the city. It is unclear how displacement impacted (if at all) the meeting participants. However, this

discussion does highlight how its status as a neighborhood anchor remains important even as, and perhaps because of, the gentrification of the Central District.

***Neighborhoods with more people of color see schools as community anchors***

To understand the racialized and place-based differences in schools' role in communities, I analyzed the differences in Neighborhood Planning Council planning goals in their most recent iteration from 2020. While this has not been formally stated anywhere in the current Comprehensive Planning process, OPCD has eliminated these plans from their current planning process. In its place is the targeted community engagement with historically marginalized groups. So, while these plans are not currently employed for planning purposes, their recent publication (2020) demonstrate neighborhoods' attitudes towards development. Neighborhoods with significant populations of people of color (e.g., Rainier Beach) more often (n=5 of 32) focused on supporting community youth and building community connections with schools, coupled with increased construction of affordable housing. Majority-White and wealthy neighborhoods (e.g., Queen Anne) did not mention schools or community empowerment, and instead focused on preserving neighborhood aesthetics and single-family zoning.

I compare these plans across geographic areas with different racial demographics. In total, 32 neighborhoods created plans. I focus on the subset of 13 neighborhoods below in Table 11, which include all seven Seattle neighborhoods with a significant population of people of color and a geographically diverse sample of majority-White neighborhoods. Of these neighborhoods, I categorize seven neighborhoods as "neighborhoods of color" (Beacon Hill, Central District, Highland Park, Othello, Rainier Beach, and South Park) and the 6 remaining neighborhoods as "majority-White neighborhoods." While the Central District is now a majority-White neighborhood, given its prevalence in interview findings as an important Black cultural

center and its history as a prominently Black neighborhood, I group them with the former. From my connections with OPCD staff, I understood that their neighborhood plan has involved several community organizations representing Black people and people of color in its drafting. Because every neighborhood had to submit a local plan, comparing the texts from each neighborhood gives an understanding of local priorities and how they differ geographically in a way that regular news coverage or race-neutral community engagement may not highlight.

The city planning department created the Neighborhood Planning Councils during the 1994 Comprehensive Planning Process. Each neighborhood contributed to the planning process, outlining their neighborhood goals as far as economic development, housing, transportation, and community building. White and wealthy residents used these plans as a form of protest of then-Mayor Norm Rice's progressive vision of upzoning (Scott, 2023). The story of White people protecting their property rights through local political participation at the expense of people of color, and particularly Black people, is not new (see Lassiter, 2006; Trounstine, 2018; Yamahtta-Taylor, 2019). This type of protective localism is a hallmark of the White spatial imaginary (Lipsitz, 2007). Often these White, wealthy voices are not only the loudest in debates about zoning, but also the most valued by politicians, who hope to earn and keep the votes of White landowners (Lassiter, 2006). I focus on plans from neighborhoods with majority people of color to understand the different visions of school-community connections they put forth.

The two tables below summarize the community-school connections and housing policies suggested by the plans of the focal neighborhoods. I include the neighborhood name, the percentage of residents of color in 2023, how the plans mention youth or schools, if at all, and the housing policies the plans advocated. Table 11 includes the focal majority-White neighborhoods. All but one of the neighborhoods excluded any mention of youth or schools in

their neighborhood plans. Roosevelt included one mention of schools under their economic development section, asserting that schools could "contribute to economic diversity." The housing policies across these neighborhoods emphasize "preserving" and "maintaining the character" of single-family neighborhoods. In neighborhoods with majority-White people, Neighborhood Council plans served to preserve exclusionary zoning. At the same time, these neighborhoods neglected to mention goals of involving school or youth in their ideas for community development. This focus on preserving private wealth via exclusionary zoning exemplifies the White spatial imaginary and its tendency to hoard resources for individual use. I argue that this type of hoarding is coupled with the White spatial imaginary's elision of community benefit—neglecting schools and youth in visions of future development.

**Table 11.** Summary of Neighborhood Council Plans of majority-White neighborhoods

| Neighborhood | % people of color | Community-school connection | Housing policies |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ballard | 23% | No mention of schools or youth. | "Maintain the physical character of the single-family-zoned areas in the Crown Hill/ Ballard plan area." |
| Eastlake | 21% | No mention of schools or youth. | "A neighborhood that values and preserves its traditional diversity and scale of development, and that respects its ecology and environment." |
| Queen Anne | 25% | No mention of schools or youth. | "Preserve the character of Queen Anne's single-family and mixed-use neighborhoods." |
| Roosevelt | 23% | One mention of schools as they "contribute to economic diversity." | "Protect and maintain the architectural heritage of Roosevelt's Craftsman, bungalow, and Tudor-style housing while embracing growth of well-designed buildings of an appropriate scale." |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wallingford | 28% | No mention of schools or youth. | "A neighborhood that feels like 'a small town in the big city.'" |
| West Seattle Junction | 20% | No mention of schools or youth. | "Maintain a character and scale in historically single-family areas similar to the existing single-family housing." |

Racial demographic data from 2018 5-year American Community Survey

Plans from neighborhoods with majority people of color demonstrate the fluid boundaries between "the school" and "the community," with each reinforcing the other. These neighborhoods depicted schools as community hubs, service providers, and youth as central parts of the community. Overall, neighborhoods with majority people of color were much more likely to mention community-building as an important part of their community organizing goals and to include schools and youth as part of this goal in comparison to majority-White neighborhoods. Only two of seven neighborhoods with majority people of color in Seattle did not mention schools or youth in their community development goals. Relatedly, these neighborhoods' housing policies prioritized affordable housing for families. Columbia City was the only neighborhood with majority people of color that did mention youth or prioritize multi-family housing. This focus on embedding public spaces into the cultural fabric of communities and developing places for multigenerational learning exhibits qualities of the Black spatial imaginary. Similarly, the focus on providing family-sized affordable housing undergirds these neighborhoods' desire to prioritize accessibility and stave off displacement over protecting individual profits.

**Table 12.** Summary of Neighborhood Council Plans of majority-POC neighborhoods

| **Neighborhood** | **% people of color** | **Community-school connection** | **Housing policies** |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Beacon Hill | 76% | "A civic gathering space appropriate and flexible for the diversity of cultures living in the neighborhood." | "Encourage affordable, family-sized homes through incentives, requirements on development, direct City funding, and/or surplus property programs. In particular, strive to preserve, or when needed, replace affordable family-sized apartments." |
| Central District | 39% | "Encourage local institutions, community-based organizations, and other agencies to provide lifelong learning opportunities needed by the Central Area's diverse community." | "Ameliorate the potential impacts of gentrification and displacement of existing residents through a variety of affordable housing programs including preserving existing multifamily affordable housing and producing new affordable housing." |
| Columbia City | 68% | No mention of schools or youth. | "A community with healthy and attractive single-family residential areas." |
| Westwood/Highland Park | 55% | No mention of schools or youth. | "Encourage new housing development that serves a range of income levels." |
| New Holly/Othello | 88% | "Encourage local institutions to meet the needs of the residents through opportunities for lifelong learning in the neighborhood." | "Encourage development of housing available in a range of prices and sizes, including affordable family-sized homes with amenities for families." |
| Rainier Beach | 72% | "Recognize the importance of actively programming, strengthening connections to the community, and maintaining the Rainier Beach Community Center and South Shore Middle School to help foster a civic core." | "Encourage attractive multifamily development, affordable to the neighborhood's economically diverse population..." |
| South Park | 65% | "A community inviting to households with children, where people value children's safety and education." | "Work in partnership among various levels of government to address low-income housing needs..." |

These neighborhood plans emphasize the need for multigenerational community building and place belonging, need to stably house families, and the use of schools as central community hubs. For instance, the 2020 Central District neighborhood plan set a goal to "Identify activities and spaces for people with diverse cultures, ages, and backgrounds to meet, share, learn, and strengthen community ties." While this goal does not specifically mention schools, the idea that learning is a communal activity and something that can "strengthen community ties" points to the educational spaces as community anchors. The Highland Park, Othello, South Park, Rainier Beach, and Central District plans all emphasized the need for community-based programs involving youth to give them a "pride of place," as the Central District plan stated. Each of these plans also noted the need for family-sized affordable housing; the Rainier Beach Plan stated they needed, "homes appropriate for different family sizes, so that residents are able to stay in the neighborhood." Each plan noted that school buildings offered an opportunity for community-building activities. Rainier Beach said they needed to "strengthen connections to the community and maintain the Rainier Beach Community Center and South Shore Middle School to help foster a civic core." They also spoke of the role of community-based organizations in "community education issues." Youth empowerment and education is envisioned as happening within and outside the school walls, with schools acting as multigenerational community-building spaces.

The Neighborhood Council Plans demonstrate a racialized approach to school-community building and housing policies. Neighborhoods with majority people of color, and the people connected to their schools, have important perspectives on placemaking that can

demonstrate the power of creating connected school-communities. The following section explores these qualities participants named as making schools feel like community anchors.

**Features of schools as community anchors**

In addition to OPCD and SPS focus groups and the Neighborhood Council plans, this study's interview participants described schools as part of their neighborhood communities. These participants described in interviews the ways schools were part of their communities and bolstered their sense of neighborhood belonging. The table below summarizes the different features of schools that made them feel like communities, particularly for families of color. Participants saw schools more readily as community anchors if families and teachers could live in close proximity to the school, if a significant amount of Black people were present at the school, and if schools had the cultural resources to support students of color.

**Table 13.** Ways schools are community anchors

| **Characteristic** | **Example** |
|---|---|
| Families and teachers living in proximity to the school (n=15) | "Where we are in the neighborhood, they can hang out with their friends. They're close to the school. It's just a little easier to keep that community together."<br><br>"It would really be nice if you could live in the community you work in." |
| Place to build relationships with other Black people and people of color (n=8) | "there were so many Black people in the [school] building, trying to uplift young men…being a part of that program, I'm connecting with other Black men…I still go back to my friends at Aki [Middle School]. We made those lifelong connections." |
| Cultural resources (n=11) | "If you go to Othello Park, and you just see lots of kids from all over playing from the apartments and from the houses and they're all having a fun time and lots of parents are watching, you have enough of a vibrant milieu that parents say 'I can afford to let my kid go out and play in the park." |

***Living in close proximity to the school***

Both parents and staff mentioned the living close to their school as a critical piece in making the school feel part of their community. Three Black parents—Marianna, Isaiah, and Florie—John, a Filipino teacher and parent, and Aaron, a Black teacher, remembered the ways schools had been central gathering spots as youth. All of these participants grew up in the Central District or South End. Aaron described growing up in Rainier Beach and how schools were places for his community of friends throughout the year. He said,

> Even when I was out of school, like I had graduated from high school, everybody would say 'what do you want to do?' and we'd start down at Rainier Beach [High School] …We'd park and everyone would meet there. If you were going to the Central District, you'd go to the Garfield…Schools, they were like the beacon in your community, kind of like the Black church, it was just there.

Even after graduating, the school acted as a "beacon" in Rainier Beach, particularly because everyone lived nearby and could meet up. Similarly, Marianna said she appreciated her sons' school because "where we are in the neighborhood, they can hang out with their friends. They're close to the school. It's just a little easier to keep that community together." The social aspect of living near the school and the community created with the school at the center made proximity a key part of maintaining schools as community anchors. John described that Seattle as a city needs to "promote family life." When I asked what this would look like, he said, "feeling like you're safe, like your kid can actually like, walk or bike to school and go home at you know, like my son can walk from his middle school and make it home, alive and safe." In this sense, this safe proximity to school can promote a sense of ease among families. Like Marianna and Aaron, John attested to the ways school-communities thrived in a geographically close-knit neighborhood.

Florie and Isaiah mentioned that proximity, and specifically the ability to afford a home near the school, created community. Florie similarly remembered her time growing up in the

South End, and that schools had been important community landmarks. She said that the community feel of Garfield had changed since her youth due to the increasing unaffordability of the Central District and South End:

> We don't live in close proximity to any of those schools. Nobody can afford to live in Rainier Beach. Nobody can afford to live near Garfield, nobody can afford to live near Franklin. It's more just a place they go in the morning. And then they leave out of the community and go back home.

She describes how people's displacement from the Central District and the South End had fractured what had once been a school-community. However, she described that Franklin High School maintained its "community vibe" because "they have been a big alumni presence that lives around the school. I feel like it's a big community." She still noted, though, that a lot of the homes around Franklin are "one-million-dollar homes," making it increasingly difficult to afford to live there. The ability of people to maintain homes near the school kept its community feel intact. Isaiah said that people owning a home near schools can "impact commitment to the school." He said families that owned in a neighborhood were more likely to stay there long-term, potentially over multiple generations. He included teachers in this calculation, saying that this longevity of teachers living near a school gave the school "traction" and improved its quality. According to him, the institutional knowledge built over time by families and teachers living in the neighborhood made the school a community, which improved its quality and made the school resilient to policy changes.

The idea that living near school creates community adds to the argument that housing and schools are mutually constitutive: access to affordable housing in school neighborhoods can create more closely knit school-communities. Moreover, these participants describe something intangible about living near the school that had amassed in their psyche over years of living in

Seattle. Rather than discussing tactile benefits like quick commutes, they describe community benefits from the condensed geographic scale of school neighborhoods. As Florie alluded to, gentrification can interrupt these tightly knit communities built over years, fragmenting them.

***Teachers living near schools***

All eight teachers and three school leaders noted housing affordability as impacting their ability to be involved in their school-communities. The two principals in suburbs to the south of Seattle noted school staff had moved to these suburbs because they could afford houses. Seattle-area teachers all had an experience with housing unaffordability, albeit on different scales. The six current SPS teachers and one afterschool-program director and teacher discussed the difficulty of affording a home in Seattle. Two teachers, both paraprofessionals, explained their tenuous housing scenarios or their need to move out of the city entirely. Three of four teachers who owned a home noted that they would not be able to afford one had they not bought decades ago, or they could only afford one because they had a multigenerational arrangement and could split the mortgage payment across more people. They noted that being able to live near the schools in which they taught helped build closeness with students and families, as they saw them outside of school like at trick-or-treating or the grocery store.

Aaron and Luis, both teachers of color, specifically highlighted that teachers living in their neighborhood have more time to spend with students in and out of school and can build relationships more easily throughout the community. They argued teachers' access to housing can build community in schools, and specifically can keep teachers of color in schools. Aaron described a teacher at his school that had to commute from an hour away because of inability to find affordable housing near the school. He explains,

> It would really be nice if you could live in the community you work in. Not only for teachers, but for the students…if the students were able to have a teacher in the neighborhood, they would have more time with their students. Because that hour ride home, an hour ride in can now be time with [students] before and after school.

He imagined communities where teachers lived in the neighborhoods, which would allow for more community-building time between teachers and students outside of the classroom. Similarly, Luis described housing unaffordability for teachers as a barrier to creating community. He relates this to the rising cost of living and rent in Seattle.

> I would say many, many, many [teachers] are concerned about housing affordability, especially when you think about those who are community-minded thinking, 'how are we going to get educators that reflect the communities that serve that lived experience.' I know many educators who have lived in Seattle for generations and have family houses. Now they live in Kent and Des Moines, but they still commute back into those schools where they went, or their family did. They want to work with their community, but they don't get to live in the community anymore…students at [Rainier] Beach brought up this concept of you want to know which teacher cares. Sticks around. Stays after class…But I imagine there has to be a certain amount of privilege to this.

Lack of housing affordability and ensuing displacement made it difficult for Seattle teachers to live in the communities they serve, especially teachers of color and those that "reflect the community." Luis also mentioned that most school staff of color are "our support staff, paraeducators, and bus operators." These staff, due to their lower pay, face more barriers to living near the school they serve. He then related this to solidarity teachers of color have with students who struggle, saying,

> I might be dealing with racism in the building, might also be dealing with the fact that I don't have much money, and I need more, and you need more. And wow! What can we do? The implications of folks working in the building and not being able to live near it. And the additional stress and cost of living far away from your workplace puts into your life. And all those families that own businesses or shops in this community—now we're taking our money, and we're not spending it in our community as well. We are spending it in other communities that we live in that benefit from us.

Teachers having to live outside of Seattle fragments the school community, despite many of the shared struggles between students and teachers Luis describes. He relates the struggles of racism and class, implying that living outside of the school neighborhood is a result of the racialized experience of class difference. Aaron similarly discussed the community payoff for teachers living near schools. He wondered why the district did not explicitly try to keep teachers in the district by helping them with affording a place to live:

> Being able to help a young teacher, saying, 'I'm going to help you have a place to live for five years, and after five years if you truly want to stay, I'm gonna help you purchase by giving you a stipend or giving you something so that every month you will have some help. So you can live in the community that you work in, to better serve the students...Now I have time to make those real connections. And not only that, as I'm going to the local grocery store or going to the local tire store…I see parents I get to build a relationship with them.

Visibility in the community, which Aaron argues can help teachers "better serve students" comes with affording housing in the neighborhood.

The benefits of having teachers of color teach students of color has been the subject of extensive research (Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2019; Redding, 2019; Sutcher & Darling-Hammond, 2019). A key part of maintaining staff of color's place in school-communities is their continued ability to afford homes in school neighborhoods (Davis, 2017), as evidenced by participant responses. A historically inequitable private housing market that has stripped wealth from Black people in particular make this equitable access to affordable housing even more difficult (Yammahta-Taylor, 2019). While much of the research on retaining staff of color focus on organizational conditions inside the school building, these participants add that material conditions, like wages and access to housing directly impact this retention as well.

***Being around Black people and people of color***

All four Black parents and one alum described being around other Black people at school or their child's school as a central feature of its community feel. The three other participants of color—Luis, a Latinx man; Ivy, a Latinx woman; and John, a Filipino man—also noted the importance of people of color in schools as community-building. They described the importance of the presence of Black people and people of color not as important for diversity's sake, but as creating a feeling of belonging and safety. I distinguish between Black people and people of color, noting how Black people specifically mentioned Blackness as the foundation for community.

First, I focus on four Black families and alumni and their discussions of the importance of friendships and community with other Black people at school. These participants described the sense of belonging, or place, that came with a community of Black people at school. Marianna described how her sons mostly hung out with other Black students: "How does the world see you? How does the world treat you? For my young African-American boys, this means their experience walking into the world walking in our neighborhood is very different because of how they look…they feel community with people who have a similar experience." Similarly, Jared, a Black recent graduate from Cleveland high school and SPS central office employee, said his relationships to other Black people defined his middle and high school experience amid the tension caused by the influx of White people. When asked why his South End high school felt like a community to him, Jared put it simply: "I was always surrounded by Black folks." He explained in middle school that the My Brother's Keeper program defined his experience: "there were so many Black people in the building, trying to uplift young men…I still go back to my friends at Aki [Middle School]. We made those lifelong connections." He understood these connections were tenuous, though, saying,

> But I'm not blind. I'm not gonna say that there's not a lot of White folks that are coming in. Because just everybody's getting gentrified. The dang houses are a million dollars now. It's wild. But my experience was pretty dope.

These relationships defined his belonging at school. At the same time, he understood that, due to rising housing costs, more White people had moved into his school's neighborhood. Jared described he has considered moving out of Seattle after college because of the lack of Black people. He described visiting family in Louisiana: "I went to a random restaurant. So many other Black folks…you don't see that here. I love Seattle, but I really want to experience more Black culture." In this sense, as gentrification displaces Black people from Seattle, the city becomes makes less of a welcoming place to Black people. As Jared notes, this has a direct impact on school-communities. The opportunity to build relationships with other Black people, for families and students, meant their school was a welcoming place. Rather than pursuing racial diversity, these families specifically thought of Blackness as essential to community-building. Seattle's changing racial demographics—specifically it become a Whiter city—threatened this community.

Florie similarly described her friendships with other Black students as paramount to her sense of belonging growing up in the Central District.

> Like we would ride the seven [bus] downtown, and then just ride back to South Seattle. Like the seven was like a club…Sometimes you did it twice…There used to be just, people you knew barbecuing and you could go over there because you knew them and you went to school with their son or daughter you know. And, frankly, there was a lot more people in the communities, in the apartment complexes, that were Black people and the houses had Black people. And I'm talking about all the way from where Rainier Beach, you know, kind of turned into Renton all the way to Franklin and the CD.

Her sense of place came from knowing the Black people from school and their families in the neighborhood, which constituted her social life outside of the school building. Like Jared, she

also notes that this community has been displaced, using the past tense to describe how the apartment complexes and houses all belonged to Black people. She noted that Franklin and Garfield used to have a lot of Black-centered student traditions, but she explained, "because we're dispersed, we really don't have that Garfield-Franklin kind of rivalry. Displacement fragmented the Black school-community that characterized her upbringing.

Luis, a Latinx teacher and union organizer, and Carly, a White teacher in the South End, highlighted the tensions that arose from a majority-White teaching force in neighborhoods with mostly students of color, and the need for teachers who can connect with students of color. Luis noted that their teacher union is mostly White, middle-class women, and "that's a very narrow experience that many of our kids don't share." He noted specifically that Black educators connect well with Black students, and that the union is working to better support these educators to stay in the profession. Carly further critiqued White teachers in her South End school, saying, "This seems to be the place where a lot of White people go to work out their racism, instead of becoming part of the community and really engaging with the community." She called these White teachers "diversity tourists." Carly delineated being "part of the community" as a marker for White teachers to aspire to. According to her, this engagement meant spend time in the neighborhood outside of school hours and seek to understand students' experiences once they leave school grounds to build connections with students and contribute to a sense of school-community. Similarly, according to Luis, the shared experiences of Black teachers and students made this work more natural and inevitable.

This section adds to the body of research on teachers of color as being effective for students of color by taking a place-based lens, rather than focusing on academic achievement. For Black participants, building school-communities involved being around other Black people.

The influx of White residents that accompanied rising home prices threatened this community in a material way. In thinking about how to create equitable school-communities, creating spaces with predominantly people of color challenges the traditional ethos of racial integration. Rather than focus on racial diversity as a goal unto itself, these participants specifically focused on the community-building quality of schools with significant populations of people of color.

***Cultural resources***

Participants described the cultural resources of the neighborhood as making schools community anchors, bolstering these central institutions. John and Ivy, both educators in the South End, described how and why they felt their schools contributed to a sense of community. Collective use of public spaces, diverse options for foods and businesses, and connections between community-based organizations and schools made neighborhoods feel like a community. John described the need for policymakers to prioritize making Seattle a place for families. He explained this would look like:

> Enough richness of culture, community, a sense of people that are looking out for all the kids. If you go to Othello Park, and you just see lots of kids from all over playing from the apartments and from the houses and they're all having a fun time and lots of parents are watching, you have enough of a vibrant milieu that parents say, 'I can afford to let my kid go out and play in the park.'

This intangible quality of a "richness of culture" is rooted in kids playing together outside. John implicitly mentions racial and economic diversity–kids from both apartments and houses and a "vibrant milieu"—as part of this richness. He ties this to the shared use of public space across from the local high school. This imagining of a family-friendly neighborhood from John demonstrates that shared public spaces can create community.

All teachers and school leaders discussed school-based community engagement as creating community, like culture nights and academic nights for families to attend. Research has

demonstrated that these school-based community events do not always attract families from historically marginalized backgrounds (Ishimaru, 2019b). Ivy described a more nuanced approach in the Beacon Hill neighborhood, where schools work with community organizations to create a sense of "warmth."

> There is a great amount of difference there. You can see it just by walking. The different foods, the different markets. The people that are getting on and off the bus with their families. It's warm. It's a place that I tend to see more people walking about. I think there are specific businesses there that have been there so long that speak to why that population is around. You have El Centro de La Raza. They have a whole square devoted to a low-income housing development, devoted to just keeping them there. Keeping that cultural infrastructure there. And we work pretty closely with them: 'Do you have spots? Can I refer you a family?'…They have wonderful cultural events on the weekends, at night…there was a Thai society festival. The school itself put on a multi-cultural festival at the end of the school year at one of the parks there. There's just always some kind of event going on.

The "cultural infrastructure" of long-time businesses, affordable housing, community-based organizations, and schools creates a community feel. In this view, schools are one part of an ecosystem of relationships where people collaborate to uplift one another. Collective participation in public spaces created a sense of community for John and Ivy that made schools in the neighborhood also have a community feel.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I identified ways people conceive of schools as part of their communities, from participants in public engagement meetings, to Neighborhood Council plans, to interview participants. Public engagement with OPCD and SPS demonstrated the widespread idea that schools function as community anchors. Data from the Neighborhood Council plans and participants' responses demonstrated that these ideas of school-community belonging are racialized. People of color were more likely to value their schools as community centers and had

specific ways they saw schools as central to their communities. These descriptions of school-communities spoke to the sense of belonging that arose from living among other people of color, building a geographically close-knit community. These participants highlighted the collective use value of place, aligned with the Black spatial imaginary. Rather than seeing schools as ways to hoard opportunity, they depicted them as collective resources with far-ranging benefits.

This idea of schools as community anchors can counteract narratives of failing schools or under-resourced schools by recasting schools as important community centers, even if the system does not provide them with adequate resources (Ewing, 2018; Green, 2015, 2018). Because schools are "anchors" in their neighborhood (Lipman, 2009), they are uniquely positioned to hold communities together amidst threats of residential displacement caused by rising rents and housing prices. Housing affordability and displacement was named repeatedly as a detriment to school communities. Neighborhoods with majority people of color prioritized affordable housing in their plans. In this sense, housing affordability and school-community building go hand in hand, despite, as noted in chapter four, this connection eliding most official policymaking.

## Chapter 8: "What they thought of when they closed their eyes and thought of home": Placemaking in school-communities

This chapter adds to research by looking specifically at people's placemaking in a gentrifying city, and specifically placemaking in school-communities. Typically, research has examined one of these sites, but not both. This chapter is also meant to counter the narrative of powerless people facing the specter of gentrification and displacement. While I take this threat seriously and give it due attention in chapter 1 to make the point that the current economic system purposefully and systematically deprives people of school-communities, I also highlight the ways people creatively work around and through these systems. This is meant to highlight the ways these exploitative systems can be undone, and how schools can be integral to this work.

I divide this chapter into two sections. First, I explore four main placemaking strategies of the four parents interviewed, one graduate, and four teacher-parents (all primarily people of color), using spatial imaginaries to analyze the racialized contours of these strategies. I also weave in findings from observations and community engagement document analysis. I find families rely on histories of experiencing racism to create a sense of belonging in the present, own a home, opt out of public school, and create parent networks. Then, I explore three key placemaking strategies of the eight teachers and three school leaders. I find teachers and school leaders disrupt official enrollment rules to keep students of color enrolled, reorganize school resources to create a sense of belonging, make curricular choices that give students a sense of place, and organize for more just housing policy. Finally, I discuss overlaps and differences between parents and school staff. All of these practices tend to be informal in that they are not institutionalized or supported by a larger organization (except, in some instances, the teacher's

union). However, attention to these informal practices demonstrate the potential for future organizing within and across school-communities for more just neighborhoods.

**Placemaking practices of community members**

I analyze racial differences in placemaking across Seattle geographies to understand how people with different place attachments and day-to-day experiences discuss and act against gentrification and displacement. Parents described different ways they build community in their school-communities. Table 14 outlines these varying practices of nine total participants. I also bring in findings from city planning and school district meeting observations, where participants explicitly discussed racialized placemaking. Three Black parents, one Asian-American teacher-parent, and a Black graduate of SPS discussed ways they work around traditional systems that they saw as White-centric (like the PTA, or home ownership) to build community. I compare these practices with those of White parents (one White interview participant and three White teacher-parents). These parents recognized their privilege as White parents navigating their selection of neighborhood and school. At other times, they lacked awareness of inequitable dynamics in school-communities.

The table below summarizes families' placemaking practices, distinguishing between participants of color and White participants where applicable. This division is not meant to indicate that data show an immutable difference across racial backgrounds. However, this analysis of difference across race points to gaps and possibilities for organizing towards more just neighborhoods and schools. For instance, participants, regardless of race, identified inequities in the PTA. This similarity across groups points to the PTA as an effective starting point for dismantling racial inequities.

**Table 14.** Community placemaking practices

| Placemaking practice | Description | Racial identity | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Relying on history of racism to build a future** | Building a sense of connection based on a shared history of racial struggle | Black | "We took our kids on a 7-month journey across the U.S. And that allowed us to spend time in places where our community, the Black community, has lived, thrived, and struggled." |
| | Lack of understanding of historical place-based struggle | White | No knowledge of families displaced by lack of housing affordability |
| **Home ownership** | Preserving culture and history by not being displaced | Black/POC | "I'm a survivor of gentrification in the Central District." |
| | Preserving wealth | White | "I don't want townhouses wherever so developers can profit."<br><br>"I don't care what the housing looks like, I just want to stay in the neighborhood." |
| **Opting in or out of public school** | Homeschool children | Black | Avoiding teachers "learning on the job" about teaching Black children |
| | Proximity to racial diversity in public school | White | "We are a family with resources who can also support her learning along the way." |
| **Parent networks** | Opting out or critique of the PTA | All | "Those parents who are very affluent, they're going to donate a lot of money. They're going to donate gyms, donate equipment." |
| | Creating informal parent networks outside of the PTA | Black/POC | "All the Latinx moms decided, 'we're gonna start our own committee.' We're not a PTSA, but we're going to start our own parent group." |

### Relying on a history of racism to build a different future

When describing their school-communities and ties to them, Black participants (n=3) brought up their childhood in Seattle. They raised instances of racism they faced growing up in a majority-White city, and how that history informed their desires for their own children's education. Part of building their sense and/or children's sense of self and connection to their

neighborhood school was understanding and teaching what had come before them. Their school-community had value to them because of their history of community in that place—an example of prioritizing the use value of a place and communal ties to place. These families chose certain schools, or felt their child could belong in a school, because of their work to educate themselves and their children on a shared history of Black struggle.

This knowledge of the history of racist land use in Seattle varied clearly by race. All eight participants of color across parents and school staff knew people in Seattle who had to leave schools because they had been displaced by rising rents and housing costs. This understanding of displacement as an undoing of racial diversity in the city was distressing for these participants. On the other hand, while all participants, regardless of race, recognized geographic inequities in the school system, the six of the eight White participants did not have knowledge of displaced families or connect this displacement to what they recognized as changing racial demographics of Seattle over time (exceptions include Carly and Lauren). Carly has a mixed-race child and grew up poor; Lauren is a "lifelong renter" and queer person—their marginalized identities and class consciousness may contribute to their greater understanding. Sarah, Samantha, Taylor, and Molly—all White women—had limited knowledge, if any, of families that had moved to or from their school because of rising housing costs. Sarah and Samantha compared housing costs here to Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively, noting that Seattle was more affordable than these places. Most White participants did not recognize the history of racism in the housing market as connected to displacement or school access presently.

In contrast, Jared (Black SPS grad), Florie (Black mom), and Isaiah (Black dad) described how they experienced racism growing up in Seattle. Florie described direct interpersonal racism. Jared experienced changing racial demographics in his school as the city

became more expensive. Finally, Isaiah described his resistance to the racism he experienced as a child, and that his children experienced, by using history as a tool to educate his children, place histories influenced their current conception of belonging in Seattle (and their children's).

Understanding their place in the history of gentrification and displacement motivated placemaking towards belonging in a school-community. For instance, Jared, the Black graduate of Cleveland, described learning from "OGs in the Central District" about gentrification and how Black people had suffered displacement from the area. He reflected on his own neighborhood near Cleveland, and how it also had begun to experience gentrification as he noted "more White people" attending the school over his four years there. This understanding of the history of displacement and gentrification allowed him a new lens to see his own educational experience at Cleveland. He saw his uplifting of students of color at Cleveland as an elected student leader as a response to this history of adversity. His befriending and leadership of students of color was inspired by his understanding of the adversity faced by people of color in Seattle.

Florie, a Black mother of four children, shared her own struggles growing up being seen as "just another Black person" as a student in Seattle Public Schools. She explained her involvement in her children's education and her decision to send them to a school other than Rainier Beach, where she had been expelled, as giving them a better schooling experience. Her kids had mainly grown up in Seattle near where she had lived in the South End, but she moved to Auburn, a suburb south of Seattle, when her youngest child was in high school. She described that even though they had lived in a mix of environments, "They were suburb kids." A "suburb kid" was as much a state of mind—a sense of security—as it was an actual geographical designation. They did not have the "street smarts" she grew up with, as she explained. Being a "suburb kid" was a state of mind, where her kids did not feel constantly defensive of their own

worth and physical safety at school, like Florie had felt. Florie explained that she had a "real chip on [her] shoulder" because people would challenge her academic success throughout high school, college, and law school. She explained, "Finally, I just thought, I'm not explaining to these White people why the hell I'm here." This sense of self informed how she communicated with her children's teachers—she unapologetically advocated for them. She described repeatedly going to the college counselor at Franklin to advocate for her youngest daughter, informed by her own unapologetic advocacy for herself in law school and her successful advocacy for her two older children already in college. By advocating for her children and selecting schools that she felt best fit their needs, her experience of adversity formed place attachments for her children where they felt safe at school. Staking her place meant using her history of experiencing anti-Blackness to make systems work for her children. This points to the inherent, hard-to-quantify knowledge of people minoritized by systems—often referred to as "lived experience." In this case, Florie's lived experience of racism gave her tools to make schools work for her children, and to allow them a place in a school-community that she struggled to achieve as a kid.

Isaiah similarly used his knowledge of the history of anti-Black racism as a means of resistance and placemaking, particularly in a school district that they saw as insufficient in educating Black children. Isaiah and his wife spent time "creating a narrative to reinforce" a sense of belonging and Black culture for their children outside of school. He explained,

> We took our kids on a 7-month journey across the U.S. that allowed us to spend time in places where our community, the Black community, has lived, thrived, and struggled. We stood on the spot where the Emancipation Proclamation was declared in 1865…We went all the way up to Chicago where Fred Hampton was. We stood at the Tyree Nichols Memorial…in Memphis. And we were in Tulsa, Oklahoma and did the Black Wall Street tour. We were in Jackson, Mississippi listening to a Freedom Rider. We were in New Orleans. We went to spend time, experience the environment for our own learning in ways that books can't tell you. And the news can't either.

He explained that schools did not necessarily provide this sense of Black placemaking and struggle to their children. So, Isaiah and his wife took it upon themselves to teach their children this history themselves by being in historic Black places. Isaiah emphasized this type of historical understanding was particularly necessary in Seattle, where fewer Black people led to less obvious presence of Black history.

Rather than emphasizing that experiencing racism can lead to a beneficial impact, these experiences serve to ground school-community placemaking as a historicized and racialized practice. The rest of this chapter uses this understanding as a jumping-off point, considering participants' different histories, positionalities, and understandings of race and class to analyze their placemaking. Moreover, these practices represent a generational feature of school-community placemaking. Florie and Isaiah passed on their understanding of race and racism to their children, creating new futures for them. Jared learned from a neighborhood elder, weaving this into his understanding of his school experience and his role as a Black student. The lack of this understanding and knowledge of displacement from White participants across parents and school staff, including Sarah, who grew up in Seattle, also indicates how race impacts people's sense of place.

**Home ownership as stability**

Families and staff connected school communities to ideas of stability. Owning a home came up across 14 of 17 interviews, as well as observations, as a key to creating stability in school-communities—the contours of which I describe in this section. Similarly, the Comprehensive Plan policy states its commitment to "race and social equity policies that emphasize community stability in the face of displacement pressures" (p. 6, EDI Implementation

Plan, 2016). Access to housing could stabilize or destabilize families' place attachments, which they described as impacting their school-community. Stability meant being able to avoid displacement and stay in a neighborhood, creating longer-lasting connections to schools.

In this section, I analyze claims of the importance of home ownership to understand how school-communities serving majority students of color envision home ownership as placemaking. With no citywide rent control policies and construction of affordable housing that does now keep up with demand, access to de-commodified housing (such as rent-controlled units or permanently affordable housing) in Seattle are limited. White people have used homeownership, aided by compounding generational wealth, the private market, and public policy, for decades to achieve economic security, often at the expense of people of color (Lassiter, 2006; Korver-Glenn, 2021; McCabe, 2016; Yamahtta-Taylor, 2018). Systems of bank lending, real estate speculation, school construction, and zoning all have historically contributed to the inequities in people of color, and particularly Black people (Dougherty; 2008; Yamahtta-Taylor, 2016), from owning a home.

One way to interpret the desire for people of color to own a home is that they take on the White spatial imaginary's propensity to acquire capital for individual gain (Lipsitz, 2011). However, participants' responses did not fit neatly into this understanding. While home ownership for participants of color meant acquiring economic security, they often contextualized owning a home in communal terms—emphasizing the use value, rather than exchange value (Logan & Molotch, 1987)—that do not fall within typical White understandings of home ownership (i.e., defensive localism, capital gain, pursuing racial segregation). I parse the differing motivations and goals of home ownership, which has important consequences for

policymakers and school-communities, like creating pathways to affordable home ownership, and working towards a system where home ownership is not necessary for place stability.

Based on their own experiences growing up, three Black parents discussed their desire to own a home. For interview participants, owning a home meant being able to guarantee their right to stay in their neighborhood, and to guarantee their children access to that neighborhood and school as well. It also meant securing their financial well-being. Florie described her move to the suburbs to purchase a single-family home as tied to her desire for stability and what she perceived as a good school district. She said,

> We lived in that house for 20 years…When we're talking about the house that [my kids] grew up in, I wanted to give my kids–because my mom's drug addiction and my dad dying–I didn't have a childhood home. So I wanted to give my kids a childhood home. And that was home. That is probably always going to be home. Renting…it's like the in-between.

For Florie, owning a home meant giving her children stability that she felt she did not have as a child. Owning a home was an investment in her children's sense of belonging and security. At the same time, owning a home also meant moving from Seattle to be able to afford it. While she appreciated being able to give her kids a single-family home with a yard, she also discussed the drawbacks of moving to the suburbs. This description displays the importance of living in communities with other Black people. In this sense, home ownership is more complicated than acquiring economic security—it also carries goals of community connection aligned with the Black spatial imaginary.

> I don't think Renton, Kent, and Auburn are set up in a way Seattle is. Seattle was set up to be a community. Auburn is weird because, back in the day, would have been a sundown town. It's weird, because now Auburn is like the second largest city. It's started to be very diverse. My son goes to school in a very diverse environment. But it's not diverse enough. It still has that stigma of being Auburn…there's not enough cohesiveness. There are patches of people who own homes and then patches of apartment complexes. It's not one cohesive unit.

> Tacoma has an environment like that, and Hilltop. But even those places are being taken over…I know people who grew up on Hilltop that are losing what they thought was their spot…what they thought of when they closed their eyes and thought of home. We can't just move to Tacoma. For a while it was cheap, and I was like, 'Oh, you can go buy a house.' But it's not like that anymore.

Florie's understanding of the lack of services and culture for people of color in the suburbs mirrors research on the inability of historically White suburbs to meet the needs of new residents (Lacy, 2016). Moreover, she connects this to the diversity of her son's school, which isn't "diverse enough." She compared Auburn to Tacoma, which has historically been the working-class, more racially diverse cousin of Seattle. It has also been caught up in rising rents and housing costs. Her description, "what they thought of when they closed their eyes and thought of home" points to the cultural and psychic change wrought by gentrification and displacement. In the ecosystem of gentrification and displacement, people's housing choices are mediated by the broader housing market. As people try to pursue belonging, they are also trying to outrun a changing, tight, scarce market. Owning a home is a way to stake a claim within this environment.

John, an Asian-American elementary teacher in the South End for over 20 years, connected this issue of owning a home and stability to his school's budget. The school relies on student enrollment to determine its level of local and state funding. Every year on October 1, SPS adjusts funding levels based on differences in projected and actual enrollment. John explained that this led to several teachers being moved out of his South End elementary school where he teaches. He tied this issue to stability:

> When you have a high mobility population like ours…people are just coming into those apartments in the middle of the school year. And it's typical for a South End school, where kids are coming and going based on gentrification. We do not have an exact October 1 count that can be as reliable as neighborhoods that are predominantly home-owning neighborhoods.

He explained that the number of students fluctuates throughout the year due to the mobility of students' families in and out of rented apartment buildings. This led to unstable school funding and disruption to their staff. More stability in living arrangements–like through home ownership–could lead to more school funding stability. Home ownership could lead to a more stable population of students, with community benefits.

Marianna, a Black mom, characterized her decision to move to Kent because she could own a home and her children could attend what she saw as a good school. She specifically avoided living in a "house on the water" in Rainier Beach because she did not want her children to go to high school there due to what she perceived as its low quality. She described growing up in Seattle driving by the majority-White Laurelhurst: "all of the lawns are perfect, and everything looks like it's a storybook." This desire influenced her move to Kent where, "everybody's out walking, and things look nice. People come to the neighborhood, and they say, 'you live in a really nice neighborhood.' And I appreciate that…I didn't grow up like that. It's the contrast. You would pick this every time, but who wouldn't?" Her desire to live in Kent, a "nice neighborhood," came from her lack of that experience growing up, and her desire to give her kids' access to a quality school. In some ways, Marianna takes on the White spatial imaginary—using her capital to acquire individual benefits in the form of school quality. On the other hand, she also derives her desire for home ownership from her own racialized upbringing in Seattle. Marianna's reasoning points to the complexity of placemaking in a White-dominant society—escaping its reaches is difficult. As Anderson (2020) notes, people's placemaking can support the hegemonic order because people strive to make their lives easier, rather than for some ideological bent. With home ownership as the primary way Americans accrue generational wealth, pursuing it for this purpose, and for the school-related benefits it bestows as Marianna

describes, points to the limited options Americans, particularly Americans of color and Black Americans, have for achieving financial stability.

These three parents also discussed how living in a community of people who owned homes impacted the neighborhood and the school. Florie described the Kent-Meridian school as having a "transitional" student population, living mostly in apartments, which made the school less of a community. Isaiah similarly talked about the "duration that families remain in the neighborhood, if the families own" as changing the quality of schools geographically. He explained that if families owned home,

> Then they are likely to remain in that neighborhood. Multiple generations end up going through schools in that neighborhood. And as people grow and stay and remain in those neighborhoods, those are the same people going to work for the school system, so they have a long-term perspective. Not just generations, but multiple ages of students within a particular school. And teachers that are there for 10, 15, 20 years, 30 years. All those things play a factor in how well the schools are rated. And then people move to neighborhoods based on if they have kids or expecting to have kids, how are the schools? It's a continually reinforcing piece. When those things are continually reinforced you know you get a good rating.

More stable living arrangements, like home ownership, led to more stable school communities that ultimately led to a better "school rating," which then could attract more families to buy homes in that neighborhood as "continually reinforcing." School ratings have been proven to be closely tied to a school's racial demographics, reinforcing racist narratives about schools with majority students of color (Power, 2023). In one sense, Isaiah's focus on ratings plays into this problematic narrative–that the goal of a school should be for it to improve its standing. However, his attention to the system and community level–how students, teachers, and community members live and work with each other–aligns with a pragmatic, Black spatial imaginary stance. His main concern is the collective, and how the school-community will sustain itself into the

future, rather than the mobility of an individual child. Relatedly, he brought up a family he knew growing up whose parents had been imprisoned in the Japanese Internment camps during WWII, asking, “If all those generations would have remained there, Rainier Beach might have a different rating.” In other words, historical displacement from communities had long-standing impacts on schools.

These participants highlight that home ownership is a racialized form of placemaking, where participants weave complex rationales for owning a home as a form of stability in what feels like unstable times. Home ownership was raised in all six Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) sessions as necessary to stem displacement and create equitable development. One argument in a community engagement session hosted by OPCD highlights the tension between increasing density and affordable housing on one hand and homeownership on the other. While these people are of unknown race due to the digital nature of the session, they identify as “growing up in the Central District” and repeatedly mention racial equity throughout the chat. So, they are concerned with race as it relates to housing and have some proximity to Seattle’s historically Black neighborhood. Iskra and Shirley engaged in a back-and-forth about density and development. Iskra was anti-development, in favor of single-family homes. Shirley was in favor of increased development. Iskra said,

> Shirley, I'm sorry but I just don't buy the sugar-coating of development…and low-density neighborhoods as "anti-racism". I grew up in the Central District: we had yards. Nobody lived in apartments. The greatest source of section 8 housing for families is in single family houses--nearly erased by upzones…. Upzoning and gentrification have destroyed the CD and the ID as far as affordability.

Iskra referred to her childhood in the CD where “we had yards.” The connection to single-family homes as a staple of the CD makes Iskra wary that development will actually help avoid

gentrification and displacement there. Shirley responded to Iskra: “My POC family and I were displaced from Seattle to Renton…I would've loved to have been able to live in the CD with my fam. My parents had to commute >3 hours every day.” Shirley backed up her advocacy for more dense and affordable housing with her own history of displacement. While Iskra and Shirley both saw unaffordability in the CD as a problem, they have different ideas about how home ownership figures into this issue. Iskra saw single-family homes as necessary, while Shirley advocated for more density.

While they do not explicitly mention schools, this tension over the role of home ownership and single-family homes points to a larger tension in the role of density and development in creating equitable neighborhoods. To many YIMBY advocates, single-family homes and home ownership stand in opposition to equity (Tretter & Heyman, 2021). However, rather than see this attachment to home ownership or tension between affordable housing and single-family home ownership as fatal flaws, as Gilmore (2022) says, gaps, contradictions, and confusions are inroads for organizing. This disagreement offers a chance for productive discussion and organizing around the perceived benefits and pitfalls of the private housing market. In what follows, I highlight another conversation about the tension between affordable housing and home ownership. These dialogues elevate the possibility for coalition building across race to organize for greater home affordability and community stability.

I focused on dialogues from two OPCD-hosted focus groups which elicited themes of housing affordability on a community scale. One meeting was held in the Central District (CD)–historically Black and heavily gentrified. The other meeting was held in Ballard, a historically single-family zoned neighborhood with more recent upzoning and development that is primarily White, and historically home to Norwegian fisherman who migrated to Seattle in the 1800s. The

Central District meeting was primarily attended by Black people and people of color. The Ballard meeting was primarily attended by White people.

At the CD meeting, the focus group included five longtime Black residents of the CD. They discussed their ability to own a home as central to their belonging in the community, both because it could help them stave off displacement (opposed to battling rising rents) and because owning a home had been a legacy project of their families. Home ownership, while tied to their individual future in the neighborhood, was a collective enterprise in that they wished for more ownership for Black people in general. They lamented the loss of Black people in the neighborhood; one Black woman noted, "people are now making me feel like I'm the odd one out" where she had once felt at home. One Black homeowner, Sonya, who had inherited her parent's home said that, as White people moved into the houses around her, they would not greet her on the street. Sonya wondered, "Do you feel guilty? About living here?" and said she was "a survivor of gentrification in the Central District." Home ownership meant taking a stand against displacement pressure. So, while Black people in these focus groups mentioned preserving the aesthetics of the CD, they did so in tandem with calling to preserve cultural institutions and overall, the Blackness, of the CD, through affordable home ownership for Black people writ large.

The Ballard meeting differed from the Central District meeting, both because of different rationales for home ownership and different histories relied on to legitimize these claims. For instance, an older White woman, Carol, commented, "I don't want townhouses wherever so developers can profit from this" and lamented the loss of "mom-and-pop landlords" to corporate real estate companies. However, she later identified that she owned investment properties and was a landlord. She uses an argument of progressives–that real estate developers are pernicious–

to apply to a protectionist mindset about her own property. She did not mention cultural resources, or people in her neighborhood, maintaining focus on property values. Unlike the Black residents in the CD, who may also be against the development of townhouses, her rationale was not a preservation of a historically marginalized culture or history. Without explaining why she did not want developers to profit, one explanation is that she wanted to profit instead. Kathleen, a White woman who worked as a nurse at the King County Jail and had grown up in Seattle, spoke directly to Carol. She said, "I don't care what the housing looks like, I just want to stay in the neighborhood." She said she needed a "circle of affordability" near her son's school so he could continue to attend. Finally, she commented that her "small landlord had still raised her rent" and ended her comments with the question: "are these homes worth not being able to live in my hometown?"

This dialogue between these two White women with different class statuses (landlord and jail nurse) show contrasting rationales for home ownership and affordability, and contrasts with the rationale of Black Central District residents. Kathleen saw housing affordability as stability for herself and her son, who could stay at his school and their family could remain in the place in which she had grown up. Carol saw housing development as a threat to her profit. The longtime Black CD residents like Sonya wanted to preserve a historically Black neighborhood from White-washing and cultural loss. Both Kathleen and the Black Central District residents invoked the past to make meaning of the current plight of displacement–they mentioned growing up in Seattle, and how the housing market had become more exclusionary since then. Central District residents brought up the need to preserve the culture and aesthetics of their neighborhood, while Kathleen questioned what protection was "worth" in comparison to her struggle to afford housing and keep her son at his school. This represents a productive tension and possibility for

solidarity. The desire to preserve culture and history through affordability and options for ownership could lead to cross-organizing across schools and neighborhoods, where parents like Kathleen could join with residents like Sonya to understand each other's unique place histories and shared need for affordable housing access.

Interview and focus group participants expressed complicated ideas about home ownership, which they tied to connections to important cultural places and their schools. The history of the private housing market points to its inability to act as a lever of equity for people historically shut out—namely, Black people (Yamahtta-Taylor, 2016). However, these beliefs about the stability that comes from owning a home, for families, schools, and neighborhoods, speak to the desire of people, particularly people of color, to remove themselves from the commodified, unstable world of paying rent and wondering if a tie to a school might be severed when the rent raises.

Owning a home is a way to access something akin to rent control in an increasingly expensive, financialized real estate market. People's equation of home ownership to stability speaks to the desire of people to remove themselves from the predatory housing market. Schools are central to people's conceptions of stability, both in terms of individual home ownership and as community anchors.

**Parent networks**

Every participant cited the PTA as an engine of geographic inequity. Research has explored the enduring whiteness of PTAs (Syeed, 2019). At the same time, they have the potential to act as important conduits between the school and its community, potentially toward more just, responsive school systems (Ishimaru, 2019). School-community collaboration, then, was imagined in alternative ways; I explore these parent networks as placemaking strategies in

this section. First, I show how parents described the PTA as an ineffective and wealth-based way of placemaking in school-communities. All 10 parents and teacher-parents described the PTA as inequitable, varying geographically, and tied to Whiteness and wealth. I describe the ways teacher-parents discussed the challenges of underfunded PTAs, and the ways parents felt distanced by the ineffectiveness of PTAs to create equitable school-communities. These strategies of "opting out," whether through not joining, or seeing the PTA as ineffective, undergirds the idea that parents saw geographic inequity in schools as widespread and seemingly intractable. Then, I explain the ways the three Black parents interviewed created informal parent networks to supplant what they saw as inequitable PTA structure and Ivy, the Latinx afterschool manager, described a network of Latinx, undocumented mothers. These informal networks offer ways of creating school-community connections that are often not "officially" recognized by schools or administrators but serve as valuable connectors for parents. I argue these informal parent networks create a sense of belonging tied to the community anchor of school and is therefore an act of placemaking. I also argue that opting out of the PTA and the creation of informal networks disrupts the script of racial capitalism, where private wealth is mobilized for individual gain even in the public sphere (like school).

Knight & McMorris (in press) find that PTAs in Washington schools raise on average $140 per student based on 2017-2018 school year data, which increases school funding by about 3%–relatively small. Schools with lower poverty rates are far more likely to have a PTA (Knight & McMorris). Their case study of Seattle area schools finds PTA funding can raise wealthier schools up to the average per-pupil expenditure. In other words, PTAs can "make up" for the difference in funding between wealthier schools and Title I schools. PTAs often use these funds to hire support staff, substitutes, extracurricular staff, and specialists. Given that PTA wealth was

one of the main markers of geographic inequality identified by participants, it is necessary to further unpack this funding source. Regardless of PTA's actual monetary impact on school funding, the perception of PTAs among parents is that they create tangible, place-based inequities. In an environment of economic scarcity of the budget deficit, well-funded PTAs made this lack of funding feel acute, even if the fiscal impact is small.

***Opting out of the PTA***

Parents described the PTA as a primary source of geographic inequity between schools, and therefore framed the PTA as separate from their own collaboration with the school. Teacher-parents (and school staff in general) described the PTA as fueling inequities. Miriam, Aaron, Mike, Taylor, and Molly all agreed that PTAs at schools other than their own—those with Whiter student bodies—could raise money to fund extra teachers, support staff, and "extras" like art education and field trips. Similarly, parents saw PTAs as a key source of geographic inequity in Seattle schools. PTAs in general stood in for the wealth and resources parents might use to impact school quality.

The underfunded nature of South Shore's PTA led Sarah to feel disconnected from the PTA's role and function. She described the funding inequities in the PTAs as "appalling," and that she volunteered for the South East fundraising alliance, which pools funds from PTAs in the South End. She described the conundrum, though: "I know it's not a ton of money because there's not a lot of money in South Seattle, unfortunately." Therefore, she did not see redistributing funds as effective. She also said, with a laugh, that the PTA meeting was "boring" and she did not understand its role. While she was a tacit member, she did not see her PTA membership as key to her involvement in the school, particularly because it was underfunded.

While Sarah was attempting to get involved in the school-community, the PTA did not present an opportunity to organize or forge relationships.

Marianna, a Black mother, described what she saw as the connection between neighborhood wealth, parent wealth, PTAs, and schools. She described schools varying geographically because socioeconomic status varies by place. She described the PTA as something for other schools to use to capture private resources for public use, not something that she participated in at her children's school. The PTA was emblematic of inequitable school-community collaboration that favored wealthy parents.

> Those parents who are very affluent, they're going to donate a lot of money to the PTA. They're going to donate gyms, donate equipment…The power that those people have, if they're mayors and lawyers and doctors, they're going to have more control over making things happen, over changing policies…A school where their moms stay home all day, you're going to have all these moms coming in and volunteering because they have time. But if you have a school where there's two working parents, how are you going to come too? Like the 10 am back- to-school day that I went to. I have flexibility…so I could [go]…But that was a whole day of me figuring out working remotely.

The PTA symbolizes the ways schools are not organized to effectively collaborate with working, middle-class parents who do not have time to come to the school during the day or money to "donate gyms." This reliance on parent wealth to fund schools and fill gaps made parents feel that a school without a wealthy PTA and "those people" were losing out. This mindset of "losing out" points to the scarcity created by capitalized, racialized systems. When resources are scarce, participants feel that schools require additional resources to keep up. This focus on PTA wealth also draws attention to the specter of the White spatial imaginary—the way that wealthy parents, often White, inject capital and influence into places to accrue individual gain. The PTA, then, becomes a symbol for this type of capital.

Isaiah, a Black father, described the way the PTA and parents in general could be insular, rather than organizing for equity for all students. Like Marianna, he stated as a fact that parent networks influence a school's ability to secure resources:

> Your neighborhood school depends on your network to get the resources it needs. The missing factor is whether everyone is organized…or whether it's just the folks on Next Door, a closed group, self-interested, self-promoting, but also able to show up at school board meetings.

He explained how wealthy neighborhoods may be "organized" but in a "self-promoting" way. On the other hand, he described how he and his wife used their network to "look out for Black and Brown kids:"

> I can call up Brent [the now superintendent] and say, 'I'm having this issue. Who do I talk to?' I already know that's all I had to do…We're looking out for Black and Brown kids, but not everybody has that. That's how a lot of folks can get results. When you're involved and you have the capacity to invest not just financially, but with your time and with your talent. When you can do that, you get people's attention. But again, not all families have the bandwidth to do that.

Like Marianna and Sarah, he recognized that not all families have the resources to devote time and funds to schools. He also added that the parents that do have the time and money to do this are not always organizing on behalf of equity. He opted out of the PTA in the sense that he uses his own network to advocate for his children, His focus on "looking out" for students of color using his "time" and his "talent" suggests the Black spatial imaginary. He used his connections to create collective solidarity to advocate for public institutions to be accountable to be people of color.

One possible explanation for the prevalence of PTAs as an explanation for differential school quality is that PTAs could be a proxy for all kinds of resources, tangible and intangible,

that benefit schools with high percentages of economically advantaged students. This PTA represented the time and resources White families bring to White-dominant institutions like schools. While research has addressed the ways schools privilege White parents in engagement (Ishimaru, 2019; Lewis-Durham et al., 2023), policy analysis and participant responses uncover an additional place-based component to school-community collaboration. The city's policies that created uneven development and wealth concentration contribute to this perception of PTA wealth in other neighborhoods. Because the PTA contributes a small amount of funding to a school's overall budget, they are not always a priority for policymakers (cite Vivian Song Maritz here). However, as participant responses demonstrate, the PTA has symbolic power in interpreting geographical inequities in a city with inequitable housing and distribution of wealth. PTA inequities may also de-mobilize parents, making them feel like they cannot surmount the wealth of other neighborhoods. As the following section on informal parent networks demonstrates, community-school collaboration not centered on wealth could increase the collective mobilization and efficacy of community members organizing for equitable neighborhoods and schools.

### *Creating informal networks*

Parents described the PTA as a lever of inequity; rather than engage in this existing school structure, parents organized alternative modes of engagement by parents. These informal parent networks (in the sense that they were not recognized by the school officially) connected parents to their school-communities and demonstrated their investment in them. Information-sharing in these networks ranged from academics, to understanding school policies, to staying connected to direct services. These networks reflect desire-based ways parents of color, who felt ostracized by the PTA, engaged in school-community building and placemaking.

Isaiah talked about wanting to be in parent groups where he "felt invited," and that the PTA was not a place where a "neighbor says come to the PTA." Instead, he talked about parents he knew who acted as "proxies." They relayed information from the school back to him and his family. Parent networks provided alternatives to traditional family engagement where information was shared in ways that were more comfortable and made more sense to parents. He described his own network as crucial to his school choices for his children. They knew principals at various schools and spoke with them about teachers who would be good for their Black children. He described his social connections with Black people as integral to this school choice-making. For instance, he knew the principal at an elementary school through church who told them, "don't send your kids to my school…we don't have teachers that are going to deal with behavior issues right." Isaiah's family's school choice came from informal parent networks focused on teachers that understood racism and how to treat Black children. These connections informed his perceptions of place.

Ivy described Latinx moms banding together at one of the schools her afterschool program serves, and how she wants to make Launch a hub where parents feel empowered to connect with each other.

> All the Latinx moms decided, 'we're gonna start our own committee.' We're not a PTSA, but we're going to start our own parent group. 3 undocumented women… we're just gonna make sure that we're information sharing…I don't know if it was because the school set up a culture of connection of that it's okay to ask questions that this place is safe…We can help you here to get your needs met…Maybe there's a correlation. I don't think we could take a hundred percent of the credit. At [the afterschool program], that's what they're trying to do…how can we make this a hub of safety? …I think community schools help to nourish ecosystems.

Ivy described that the conditions of the school may have made it easier for the parents to form their informal group. Like Isaiah, parents with a previous relationship and

something in common made for an effective strategy. This informal parent network, although only understood secondhand through Ivy, is an example of parents placemaking at school, forging their role and sense of belonging in the school-community.

Jared talked about his informal network of friends and him being himself as an "act of resistance." He said he would go to a social event at Rainier Beach High School called Late Night at Rainier Beach: "I had all my clothes and my whole durag on and look comfortable, look like me." At that point, he was already a student leader at Cleveland and described himself as having a lot of friends. He said he would talk to younger students from his middle school in the My Brother's Keeper program and at his own school, saying, "It's cool to get good grades. It's cool to just get by, it's cool to just not be out there. It is cool to do stuff like that. And I think like me just showing me showing us better be some you showing up to different schools like this, straight up like this. How I am…to be in the community." Through informal peer networks, he built community, not just for himself but for his peers as well. He used both school-based structures—My Brother's Keeper and Late Night—and his own friendships to do so. His fluid and creative community-building demonstrate the way schools can support informal community-building.

Florie similarly described not being a PTA member, but still being heavily involved in her daughter's school life. She called herself "the basketball mom…I was the person who brought food before the game, who made sure that they had deodorant. If the girls needed, I took them to buy new sports bras." This role as "team mom" connected Florie to her daughter's school and friends. This felt more meaningful to her than participating in the PTA, which she opted out of.

Marianna described choosing not to participate in the PTA, and instead building a network of friends from the parents of her two sons' groups of Black friends. She explained, "There's one of the moms who does the Black Student Union and so she had an event, and she said all right boys, you guys are all coming to this. She told the whole group of moms, our little network, and so we all came and supported. And there's someone who works for the school board and so sometimes we'll have discussions about issues and then she'll be able to bring that back. It's my chosen community at the school." Connecting with her sons' friends and their parents provided a more organic way to be involved in the school. This was especially true because these parents were also Black; not only did their children share a bond, but they had shared interests and concerns as parents.

These informal networks highlight the alternative modes of placemaking people of color engage in in school-community building. These alternative modes focus on building social connections and spreading knowledge, rather than investing capital like the PTA. These alternative networks center on collectivism and joy, features of the Black spatial imaginary. In environments of scarcity, where traditional school structures feel like agents of inequity, structures created by people experiencing these inequities have potential to create school-communities that respond to their needs.

**Opting in or out of public school**

While choosing public school over private school only came up extensively in two parent participants' responses, I highlight these two examples of parent's school decision-making which exemplify how racialized histories of school access shape school-communities. Even though these data are limited, the research on school choice, particularly in response to the pandemic, has noted the prevalence of Black families opting out of the public school system via home and

pod schooling (Fields-Smith, 2020; Harrison Green, 2019; Puga, 2019). Research also shows that gentrification is often associated with decreased school enrollment (Pearman, 2020), so Sarah, a gentrifying, upper-class, White mother in Rainier Beach offered an example of a White parent opting in to public school. Additionally, teacher and school leaders' repeated claims that schools in areas with more resources are better equipped to educate students, and that these areas are usually White, bears further investigation. Sarah's family offered one example of how these differential family resources impact their school choice.

While only one parent—Isaiah, a Black father—opted out of public school altogether, I contextualize this with information on the wider trend of homeschooling in Seattle during and after the pandemic. Isaiah homeschooled his youngest two children (of four) after trying multiple public schools and a private school. He described that teachers were often "learning on the job" in terms of how to teach Black children and create a community for them. Homeschooling could represent a severing of the school-community—school becomes synonymous with the private, home sphere. However, for Isaiah, homeschooling allowed his family to center Blackness in a way they did not find in public or private schools.

On the other hand, Sarah described her intentional choice to enroll her White children in public school, and her efforts to build community with her neighbors. She voiced discomfort with this community-building, as several of the middle-class Black families from their neighborhood sent their children to a parochial school rather than the public school. She wondered whether the public school was even the right place for her daughter to be educated in a multiracial environment. Sarah noted that sending her child to a racially diverse public school was an explicit goal of her family's, even if this meant sacrificing on other qualities:

> I don't know that it's been the most academically enriching experience for her. But having gone to Garfield [which] wasn't an academically enriching experience, I feel…I learned about the inequities of the world and that all the White kids were in the AP classes and all the Black kids were not and lived in the local community. The White kids were bused. Learning about the way our society functions and all the things that are wrong with it…made me who I am today. More than anything, I hope that that's what my kids will get out of South Shore. So far that's happened, and I she's learning to read on the way and getting the academic piece she needs. We are a family with resources who can also support her learning. She's made friends of all different backgrounds and it's been interesting and a challenge for me to try to navigate building friendships too.

Sarah felt she could sacrifice some of her expectations for a school academically because she knew her family could make these up, and therefore opted into public school. Sarah framed exposure to inequities as an accrued skill, along the lines of diversity as an "asset" (Leong, 2013). Her commitment to the public institution of school comes with the caveat that she can supplement it with private resources. Rather than a unilateral critique of Sarah, this exposes the difficulty of organizing for equitable school-communities—Sarah wanted to build connections and wanted her daughter to do the same. Her family could potentially put her time and money towards effective community organizing. At the same time, her family could also continue to benefit from this exposure to diversity without having to make a sacrifice or contribute to changing the material conditions that led to the inequities she learned about that "made her who [she] is." In this sense, her opting into public schools sits perhaps at the periphery of the White spatial imaginary. She understands the community good of public school, but also sees racial diversity as a source of personal gain. However, her willingness to "give up" the benefits of private school point to the potential to move towards a more collective sense of school-community.

The juxtaposition of these two examples demonstrates how material conditions of race and class impact placemaking and the composition of school-communities. Both Isaiah and

Sarah, despite their different racial identities, came from upper-middle class, professional families, and used their resources to support the learning of their respective children. Their different experiences—one opting out of the school system altogether and another proudly opting in—point to the ways racialized histories of place impact school-communities today. Sarah rejected the opportunity-hoarding behavior of the White spatial imaginary and looked forward to her child "learning about inequities" like she did growing up. However, her actions did not necessarily lead to a material change in conditions at her school or in her neighborhood, beyond the school funding attached to her daughter's enrollment that would be lost if she was enrolled elsewhere. Her enrollment could lead to cultural displacement (Posey-Maddox, 2014), or the phenomenon that families of color experience when their once majority-of-color school becomes Whiter. Similarly, Isaiah's solution is individualized, with little stretch beyond his family. However, his example of divesting from public school altogether is reminiscent of kiana ross's (2021) idea of school abolition and "educational reparations" ross expands on Ladson-Billings' idea of the educational debt, saying that in the "afterlife of school segregation," educational reparations could look like Black education separate from mainstream schools (p. 232). While circumscribed to one family, homeschooling offers an example of Black radical action towards creating Black school-communities. The experiences of both Isaiah and Sarah point to the ways, often limited, people can act within systems they see as unjust towards justice.

**Teachers and school leaders' placemaking**

School leaders and teachers have ideas and existing practices towards creating more just places, particularly amidst gentrification and displacement. Because of teacher and school leaders' position within the school system, this affords them a proximity to schools' organizational structures. This proximity resulted in placemaking strategies that are more system

and policy-oriented compared to families. Table X below summarizes these strategies: disrupting school enrollment rules, housing policy organizing, reorganizing school resources, and place-based curriculum use.

**Table 15.** Summary of school placemaking strategies

| Practice | Who | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Disrupting school enrollment rules and job boundaries | Lauren<br>John<br>Samantha<br>Ivy<br>Carly | Keeping families in school-communities by working around enrollment rules<br><br>Maintaining school-community cultural connections by recruiting students of color |
| Organizing for just housing policy | Aaron<br>Mike<br>Luis | Organize for policy that addresses gentrification and displacement |
| Curriculum choices tied to place | Lauren<br>John<br>Carly | Create place belonging in schools |

**Disrupting school enrollment rules and job boundaries**

Teachers worked to maintain school-communities in the face of displacement through creative disruptions of school enrollment rules. Lauren, a past Cleveland principal, explained how dozens of students at Cleveland moved out of Seattle during her tenure, and she and the administration team worked with them to keep them enrolled.

> The State law says that you can't let an out of city kid [in the school] if the school has a waiting list. Now we have this wait list. One thing we tried to do to work around it is to keep our senior waitlist non-existent, so that we wouldn't have so many students who had to spend their senior year somewhere else, which was so nightmarish.

School leaders kept the senior waitlist down by selectively advising students to enroll at Rainier Beach or elsewhere, rather than be on the waitlist. Manipulating the waitlist is outside of the regular school administration practices, which allowed displaced students to stay enrolled even if

they moved out of city boundaries. Lauren shared a post she made on Facebook from 2011 while she was still assistant principal, urging her students to contact the school directly if they had received a letter from the SPS Enrollment office telling them they were no longer enrolled. In the post, she noted the school staff is "already working Enrollment to get our students back with us." The staff worked within and around the bounds of the system to keep their school-community intact.

John described knowing parents who broke enrollment rules by using a family member's Seattle address to stay enrolled at Dunlap after they were displaced to suburbs South of the city. He could have reported these students to the administration or district. The fact that parents told him about this points to a level of trust, perhaps based on his long-standing tenure at the school and his connections to multiple generations of students. Other teachers—Carly, Luis, Mike—mentioned knowing students lived outside of the city and used address manipulation to attend in Seattle. However, they described it as a much more hidden practice and did not have evidence of it. While these teachers did not have as intimate knowledge of families "breaking the rules," they described the practice as acceptable, often explaining this practice by noting how expensive Seattle housing had become. This acceptance of families breaking enrollment rules represents a way teachers and administrators used their authority to serve students in the here and now. In other words, these practices do not change systems through enrollment policy change, or more broadly, more affordable housing. Yet this kernel of resistance in protecting students and families from the central office's response demonstrates the possibility of a systemic response.

One reason for the secrecy around these rules could be the general discomfort around discussing money and housing with families. Samantha, Lauren, and Carly—all school staff—discussed how they had not brought up something like housing insecurity with families because

it was uncomfortable and outside the scope of their teaching responsibilities. Lauren put it this way: “I can’t ask ‘did you get gentrified?’” Rebecca, a teacher in Highland Park, was the only teacher to described directly helping a family find housing in the neighborhood. She described how a mother of a student called her cell phone, asking to walk around with her and try to find an apartment to rent. She said of the situation, “I couldn’t really do much, because the situation [finding an affordable apartment] is pretty bleak. And I’m sure the social worker feels like that as well.” Without the skills or knowledge to assist this particular family, Rebecca’s support did little to assist the family. This reticence and inability to discuss housing, and more broadly, class, keeps from effective policy solutions, even in a school like Lauren’s with strong community ties and trust between parents and the school. This hesitancy to address access to housing speaks to the lack of school infrastructure to make sure students’ basic needs are met.

School staff also discussed going beyond the professional bounds of their job description to address families’ displacement pressures. For instance, Ivy discussed how her afterschool program site managers worked to create connections between families, school staff, and housing offices. However, this was out of their responsibilities of managing school aftercare. These cleaving moments—where staff finds opportunities to work within and outside of the system—are flashes of opportunity that could turn into larger movements. Similarly, Ivy described Launch’s partnership with the Beacon Hill middle school as an example of school-community placemaking that supersedes typical job boundaries. The principal and assistant principal of the school are both Black women, and they had a commitment of growing the population of Black children at the school because they felt they could create a welcoming community for them. Often, these students lived in transient or unstable housing. They worked with Ivy and Launch to secure aftercare for these students at low- or no-cost. School leadership worked outside of their

professional obligations to create a welcoming school community in spite of scarce housing for students. John similarly described his school's recruitment of students of color with the variety of services the school had—a Head Start program in the building, a reading specialist, a math specialist, a multilingual learner program. Lauren similarly talked about the importance of Cleveland being a school for students of color, and the administration actively recruiting students of color as they have become more popular and attractive to White families.

John, Carly, and Rebecca also discussed partnering and communicating with families outside of the minimum school requirements, going beyond their basic job responsibilities. Rebecca communicated regularly with families, something she said had picked up during the pandemic and the chaos of online learning. She explained, "During the pandemic, it was cool to see people be creative with communication. I wonder if we could emulate that energy and try to connect with families, even if the schedules are busy." She wondered if this creative communication could become more systematic across the staff but is not sure how to do this in a systematic way beyond her own individual actions. Both John and Carly discussed holding parent conferences differently than their school organized them. Carly held hers on Saturdays so working parents could more easily attend. John did additional conferences in the beginning of the year where he devoted time to getting to know families, rather than updating them on their child's academic progress. Both Carly and John situated these practices in what made their school feel like a community.

School staff worked outside their job descriptions and school rules to keep students in school and create a sense of belonging. The need to work around rules puts these rules into question in the first place. However, maintaining school boundaries on its surface appears to be a benign, basic rule. The boundaries themselves allow school districts to exist in the first place.

SPS could have a more critical role in addressing housing insecurity and displacement of students, but, as noted in Chapter 4, this role is currently outside of the district's purview. However, in a district with declining enrollment, paying attention to the families that are displaced, as school staff do, point to a more sustainable, equitable district. In this sense, these teacher practices, while defecting from district rules, offer a potential avenue for SPS to make their district more equitable. A more normalized relationship between schools and city planners could help schools more systemically address gentrification and support teachers doing this work.

**Choosing place-based curriculum**

Teachers and school leaders described curriculum choices they made intentionally to support community-building and a sense of place. They also described how these unique curricular options set them apart from other schools. They did so, however, without the marketized language often seen in discussion of extra or novel curriculum to attract families to a certain school (Green et al., 2022). Rather than describe how this made their school popular, or able to attract students, they described how these curricular choices made the school a place of belonging for students.

Lauren explained that at her school, where students had access to a special curriculum and course of study, displacement out of the school posed even more risks than for students at a more traditional school. Students who had to move out of her school attendance area would lose access to this specialized course of study. Access to this course of study had implications for students' access to professions and colleges. She described how this specialized course of study and attendant curriculum choices they made created a community among students.

> Students who had experienced other high schools would talk about how much quicker you make friends and build community at Cleveland because of the project-based learning and the constant group work. It's just normal that you're thrown into a group and build community with folks.

While project-based learning is not specifically "place-based," Lauren described how it built community among students, contributing to these schools as community anchors.

John and Carly described place-based projects that helped foster a sense of place among students. John described multiple projects he did with his students with the nearby salmon run, urban gardening down the block from the school, and neighborhood asset-mapping walks where students drew maps of the places they appreciated in their neighborhood. These projects outside of the school also allowed students to meet and talk with neighbors. Carly described a project that engaged students on the history of redlining near Cleveland that ended with planting fruit trees on formerly red-lined land near the school. She described older residents in the neighborhood who walked by and met students, and their discussions of the history of Cleveland. This project-based learning gave students a knowledge of their school's place in the community and fostered connections with place.

**Organizing for affordable housing**

While only Mike had knowledge of the Comprehensive Plan, several teachers (Carly, Luis, Samantha, and Aaron) discussed their views on housing and organizing for equitable housing. These participants who had close ties to the teacher's union were more likely to voice their opinions against unaffordable housing as something that is a detriment to school communities. Samantha did not describe involvement in the union beyond membership, but she had previously worked for an affordable housing non-profit in San Francisco before getting her teaching credential, which she said contributed to her knowledge of housing policy.

Carly described her experience growing up without access to parental financial support and struggling to afford housing, which she said set her apart from other White staff at her school. After working in the district for over 20 years, she described finally affording a home purchased with her husband and her husband's mother. While Carly was White, she described sharing the experience of housing insecurity with staff of color. The shared experience of housing insecurity is a generative origin point for organizing that moves beyond basic racial identity politics that can work to separate people more than it joins them (Táíwò, 2020). This experience of struggling to afford housing also led to Carly's clearer understanding of students' housing struggles. While other teachers spoke about this in vague terms, Carly specifically identified ways rising housing costs had influenced Franklin where she used to teach. Her class identity, then, offers a potential jumping-off point for solidarity with students.

Union members Luis, Aaron, and Mike described supporting social housing. The teacher's union explicitly endorsed I-135, which created a social housing developer in Seattle. Mike also organized with House Our Neighbors, the advocacy organization that authored I-135 and did the signature-collecting to get it on the 2023 ballot. Of all the participants, only Mike had heard of the Comprehensive Plan before I raised the topic and knew how it would impact zoning and housing. While this points to the general lack of engagement the city achieved surrounding the Plan with the general public, it also demonstrates how those organizing for affordable housing were more in tune with city zoning policy. Expanding the connections between education organizing and housing organizing, as the teacher's union already does, could allow for understanding of (often obtuse) zoning policy changes that directly impact housing affordability and school-communities.

Aaron envisioned a possible result of the teacher's union organizing for affordable housing. This dreaming points to alternative placemaking beyond the current housing crisis. He explained that the union could help new teachers afford housing through something such as housing subsidies "so [they] can live in Seattle in the community [they] work to better serve the students. For the city of Seattle, as far as their bottom line goes, just imagine how much more money put into your state taxes, sales taxes, all the local businesses now…because those are my students, businesses, and I would really love to help them before I couldn't because I live an hour away." He imagines a more complete community, with teachers living near schools and therefore being more enmeshed in their school community.

**Conclusion**

The practices laid out in this chapter are mostly informal, in the sense that they lie outside of the realm of official policymaking. However, attention to these informal practices demonstrate possibilities for future avenues of collaboration and organizing to continue to resist school-community gentrification. Importantly, this chapter highlights that these practices happen at all, especially in a city whose administration, as noted in the first findings chapter, is often dismissive of the seriousness of the threat of displacement to people of color and low- and middle-income people. People of color in Seattle mount serious challenges to the fragmentation of their communities amidst gentrification. They do so with their investment–time, money, memory-keeping–in school-communities.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand how policy and people's actions have shaped school-communities in gentrifying Seattle neighborhoods. Using Seattle as a case of school gentrification in a multiracial city, I investigated how policy and people's everyday actions have shaped school-communities across the city, and particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods with majority people of color. I examined the intersection of the Comprehensive Plan and Seattle Public Schools' policies related to housing and land use, which has little overt policy connection. This study generated data and analysis at the intersection of the city's land use and housing policies and schools, examining connections and divergences between the ideas and experiences of people concerned with equitable schools (parents, school staff, and alumni) and city and school district policies. Additionally, the school district faces a $150 million deficit. This study investigated these dual, linked phenomena—the school district's policies regarding housing amidst a budget crisis and the city's rezoning process—as potential sites of placemaking.

I built on research that sees schools as important collaborators in addressing broader social problems (Anyon, 2014; Green et al., 2022; Warren, 2005). This is particularly important given the metropolitan demographics are changing quickly. The racial capitalism and spatial dialectic lenses of this study highlight the material and spatial consequences of changing metropolitan educational landscapes, and the way people react to and move beyond these consequences. Most research on school gentrification focuses on families or principals, rarely considering them together (Roda, 2020; Green et al., 2022). Moreover, while Roda and Green and colleagues' research contextualized school gentrification as a problem dependent on larger economic and racial factors, they did not investigate education and housing policy together. The aim of understanding these policy areas together is to break down the existing policy silos in

housing and education via research. I considered the placemaking of policy and people, adding to research on placemaking in schools by considering a variety of school-community members and a housing policy.

Enrollment decline and changing metropolitan demographics are some of the most pressing issues for urban and suburban school districts today. This study provides evidence that the experience of gentrification, displacement, and enrollment decline rely on historical, racialized, and classed projects. First, I review these main conclusions, including the ways policy does and does not address the intersection of housing and education in Seattle, and how people make place amidst this context. These findings confirm that gentrification impacts school-communities, and that school-communities (particularly those with majority students of color) find their schools important anchors, and act accordingly to uphold these central features of their community. This study extends analyses of gentrification and schools by considering schools within their historical, political, and economic contexts. I conclude with related implications for school-communities, school districts, city planners, and community organizers.

**The limits of progressive policymaking**

This study found that the city planning office, OPCD, and the school district missed opportunities to collaborate effectively. Despite efforts to engage people throughout the policy process, the city and school district struggled to use this feedback to impact policies. Additionally, decades of exclusionary land use policy has exacerbated Seattle's housing crisis, which I argue has contributed to the school budget deficit crisis. In response to the first main research question, "*How has Seattle's housing and land use policy influenced schools and their political and economic contexts?*," I argue through the lens of racial capitalism, this crisis of capital demonstrates how the pursuit of wealth and capital via land use policy (i.e., single-family

zoning) has contributed to failure in public systems like education. Families struggle to afford living in the city. The conditions of capital can no longer sustain themselves, leading to crisis. The lack of affordable family-sized housing is not an unrecognized policy problem. But the political will to address this problem, despite Seattle being a progressive city, is lacking, as seen in the gap between the results of the Comprehensive Plan community engagement and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. This lack of imagination, vision, and will to try new solutions contributed to the school enrollment crisis.

Public systems often, and rightly, receive criticism for their inability to deliver public services. This case provides an example of how progressive policies fall short of their intentions. This case shows that this falling short occurs because of a lack of coordination between public agencies facing budget and political constraints. While holding public agencies accountable for their failures is critical, understanding the root cause of these failures is even more important. In this case, for instance, while OPCD and SPS could have partnered more closely on housing and education policy connections, this partnership likely could not undo decades of underinvestment in school-communities that are now gentrifying. Understanding root causes—like long-standing exclusionary, racialized zoning regulations—can focus activism and intervention–efforts that usually have too little resources–on the heart of the problem. Gilmore (2011) claims that "policy is the new theory" because "policy is to politics what method is to research. It's a script for enlivening some future possibility – an experiment" (p. 260). In this section I outline how the attempts at progressive policymaking succeed and fall short to "enliven some future possibility."

***Abstraction in school-community policymaking***

The policymaking process abstracts the linked housing crisis and school budget deficit crisis. The bureaucratic divisions between city planning and the school district "displace

differences" into "hierarchies," as Gilmore (2002) typifies abstraction, across these two organizations. Rather than understanding declining school enrollment in a city with unavailable family-sized housing, the two organizations divide this problem into their respective bureaucratic areas. To some extent, the point of policymaking entities is to make the process more efficient and feasible. However, in this case, the division of responsibility over creating school-communities where families can afford to live creates a policy vacuum. The ability to create effective policy that could address the lack of affordable family-sized housing, therefore keeping school enrollment more stable, is not possible within this policy silo.

This work builds on Latham-Sikes and Green's (2021) contribution to the *Poverty & Race Research Action Council* where they suggest city planners and school districts work together across metropolitan areas to intervene in gentrifying neighborhoods. Similarly, Holme & Finnigan (2018) call for metropolitan policymakers to work together across agencies to create equitable school districts. This study extends this research by providing empirical evidence of the stops and starts of potential district-city collaborations. Moreover, it provides specific examples of the ways land use policy gets watered down throughout the policy process in a manner that ultimately impacts schools, even if schools are largely excluded from the process. Future research could investigate lang use policies across other geographic areas to understand the ways different histories and local politics impact the possibility of creating just school-communities.

***Abandonment in the age of community engagement***

By analyzing data from two community engagement processes–the Comprehensive Plan feedback sessions and the school district Well-Resourced Schools meetings–I argue that these community-engaged processes neglected community feedback by not addressing historical harms, and, in the case of city planners, not including community feedback into final policies.

Perhaps one of the most glaring absences in the city and school district's negotiation of housing policy was the lack of land back or reparative policy towards Indigenous tribes. While the Comprehensive Plan mentioned Indigenous history in several policy documents, this did not come up in the actual drafting of policy solutions. In the case of the school district, the efforts to partner with city planners rarely included any mention of history, suggesting that the historical links between land use and schools often went forgotten or unnoticed.

At the same time, these public engagement processes allowed for participants to bring up their personal connections to policy, and their understanding of history. I argue that the connection between present-day racial inequities in schools and past policies has the potential to act as a "narrowing" (Gilmore, 2002) between policy and resistance. OPCD and public engagement and this study's participants often agree on the history of racist policy but diverge on what to do about it or how it is significant today in school-communities. This understanding of the "archive" of place could be a fruitful ground for further exploration–how can policymaking entities take seriously the disparate, personal histories of people of color? Scholars studying school-community engagement suggest the creation of structures to cede decision-making power to communities (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014) as a potential way to address this gap between community engagement and action. Throughout both community engagement processes, I often overheard participants express curiosity and frustration about how their responses would be used by policymakers. I never heard a clear answer from city planners or the school district. One interpretation is that this community engagement work is performative and for the sake of the policymaking entity to legitimize their own ideas. Another is that community engagement work is complicated, and often not something policymaking experts are trained in doing or using in tandem with their own analytical frameworks. The findings from this study

suggest that progressive policymaking can be made more effective is to put forth organizational changes that incorporate community feedback in systematic ways that pay attention to race and class, rather than to simply collect and report back. Examples could include funded community councils, putting community members in positions of power in organizations more generally, or providing clear checks and balances between engagement and the final product.

## Maintaining school-communities

In response to the second research question, "*Do people such as parents, teachers, or school leaders connected to schools in gentrifying neighborhoods engage in placemaking and surface racialized ideas about space? If so, how?,"* I explain how communities see schools as central in their understanding and experience of displacement, and that this is racialized. I note where this work expands on the vital contributions of Lipman (2011) and Anyon (2014) in understanding schools as anchors in their communities. I also highlight how this study builds on research that considers the impact of gentrification (i.e., Green et al., 2022; Pearman, 2020; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Roda, 2020). In response to the third research question, "*How does race and class shape people's placemaking in gentrifying school-communities?*," this study adds to the current scholarship by taking into account the everyday activities of school-communities (rather than policies only) and considering these school-communities more broadly (not just school leaders). Finally, I note where the focus on housing policy in addition to education policy demonstrates the imbrication of these two domains, and what this means for schools.

### *Schools as community anchors*

I found through analysis of Neighborhood Council plans and interviews with the 17 study participants that people see schools as community anchors, and that people of color (as represented in the Neighborhood Council plans and with eight participants of color) are more

likely to mention schools as central to their communities. Given OPCD's stated policy focus on building housing near community anchors, this focus on proximity to schools shows a potential opportunity for designing neighborhoods with schools as central components. Lipman (2011) and Anyon (2014) note that schools are community anchors in communities of color. I build on this work by providing additional empirical evidence that this is racialized, and that this applies to a city with a smaller population of people of color (Lipman focuses on Chicago). In cities where gentrification has significantly impacted the population of people of color, schools are vital resources and central community features. Access to schools for people of color is a housing issue–not just a schools issue. The idea that living near school creates community, and that this is necessarily related to zoning and housing policy, adds to the argument that housing and schools are mutually constitutive: access to affordable housing in school neighborhoods can create more closely knit school-communities.

The composition of the neighborhood itself also impacted schools as community centers. I found collective participation in public spaces near the schools impacted the school-community. I also found teachers living near the school also enhanced the school-community, as identified by both school staff and parents I interviewed. In this sense, community-building outside of school and beyond the school walls contributes to the school's community fabric. This study adds to the research that gentrification fragments school-communities (Cucchiara, 2013). It does so by highlighting what brings people to their school-communities–parent networks, cultural resources, social life with Black people–and staves off this fragmentation. Further research could examine the way housing affordability impacts teachers' longevity at a school and their relationships with students, particularly as this relates to teachers of color.

Research has found that schools as community anchors can counteract narratives of failing schools or under-resourced schools by recasting schools as important community centers, even if the system does not provide them with adequate resources (Ewing, 2018; Green, 2015). This study adds to this research by providing evidence of how this can happen in gentrifying urban contexts through attention to history, race, and class, and prioritizing the experiences of people embedded within school-communities. Particularly as districts face enrollment decline and the discussion of school closures once again has entered the public discourse (including in Seattle), the idea that schools are more than their test scores is prescient. Schools with long histories of serving students of color, proximity to cultural resources, and strong parent and community networks are invaluable.

**Stability as key motivator**

This study demonstrated that, in this case, housing affordability and displacement were detriments to school communities. In this sense, housing affordability and school-community building go hand in hand, despite, as noted in chapter four, this connection elides most official policymaking. Relatedly, people of color in this study consistently noted that home ownership was a goal, particularly due to rising rental costs, and gentrification in general. Owning a home offered a respite from the whims of the rental market. In other words, owning a home gave a sense of stability–both physically in terms of place and financially. However, people who advocate for more upzoning and related progressive policies often see the desire to own a home as adhering to the values of a predatory real estate market. How can planners and school districts make decisions that do not flatten history and see people's unique historical sacrifices (Brand, 2015)? People's historical access to housing has been shaped by race and proximity to Whiteness. Therefore, while the desire to own property is associated with the White spatial

imaginary (Lipsitz, 2011), this desire varies due to its widely varying historical roots across racial groups. People of color have had severely restricted access to property and generational wealth, meaning that their present-day desire to own a home (as evidence in this study's findings) is complicated by personal and systemic histories of racism. The understanding that policy could address people's unique histories (i.e., as in reparations) could lead to policy that more adequately addresses people of color's desire for stability. Like the state's program to assist students who are unhoused, education policy could specifically work to stabilize families of color, working class, and low-income families.

**Possibilities under austerity of racial capitalism**

One participant at an SPS "Well-Resourced Schools" meeting brought up a limitation of the school-community framework. They asked, "Why are we discussing what to do with limited funds we have been allocated when we SHOULD be discussing ways to increase funding allocation by the state and feds? Couldn't we have this organized activity to solve the underlying funding?" In other words, how can school-communities address broader economic forces that constrain them? Speaking to the barriers of moving from small changes to system changes, much of the results of the community engagement in the Comprehensive Plan did not show up in the final plan city planners drafted. While this gap exists for several reasons, one likely reason is that much of the community feedback addresses things that are outside of the scope of the Plan itself. Planners at public meetings often noted that the "plan can't address everything." While these comments across the school district and city planning engagement point to some of the practical constraints of policymaking, they also point to the constraints of austerity mindsets under racial capitalism. As public funding grows smaller and financialization and privatization increases, the

scope of public agencies shrinks. Or rather, the possibilities of what can be done with an ever-shrinking budget and ever-widening social problems become circumscribed.

Gilmore (2011) provides some guidance to responding to these big, structural problems in her aptly named talk, "What is to be done?" She references abolition, and the Black radical tradition that informs the Black spatial imaginary employed in this study. In response the linked crises of capital and the shrinking of the public sphere, she says,

> The abolition of speak of somehow, perhaps magically (meaning we don't yet know how, which is what magic is, what we don't know how to explain yet)—resists division from class struggle…Abolition is totality and it is ontological. It is the context and content of struggle…but it is not struggle's *form*. *To have form*, we have to organize.

This study does not claim to have the answer to redress austerity politics, budget deficits, and crises of capital. However, it does highlight places of inconsistency that can "narrow the distance," as Gilmore claims, between people and the changes to their material conditions that they seek. I attempt to highlight some of the possibilities for organizing in the final implications section, while recognizing that this list is incomplete. One way to look at the participant's question about the state's limited funds is that the meeting itself was a gateway towards asking big questions about abolishing systems–like school funding–that keep inequitable material relations in place.

**Implications**

This study has implications for school-communities, school districts, city planners, and community organizers. Most major metropolitan areas face school enrollment decline and many also face housing crises. These implications, while specific to Seattle's political and economic context, could therefore be relevant to other school-communities facing similar or interrelated challenges. I provide several practical, policy-based suggestions, while also acknowledging that

policy is a limited tool for addressing racial and class disparities. I point to additional areas of research that could further this work.

***Community organizing***

For community organizers and school-communities, this study provides a jumping off point for imaginative new ways for organizing for spatial justice. Due to the failures of the progressive state to adequately pursue spatial justice in school-communities, we must understand what interventions are available to people organizing for just schools and neighborhoods given the complex dynamics of changing metropolitan areas. The path to repair is clearer when specific, local problems are laid out like everyday people see and experience them. The intersection of education and housing provides an area ripe for new movements and activism. Like the charter school movement found cross-sectional appeal across Republicans and parents of color, progressives can build solidarity across racial and class lines with those who are concerned with gentrification, housing, and access to schools. For instance, the desire to create stability through home ownership appeals to a broad base of people. How could this issue be mobilized at the school level? How could principals and teachers support their students and families through advocacy for affordable housing? The fact that only a few interview participants had ever heard of the Comprehensive Plan points to the opaqueness of land use policy to the average citizen, despite its impact on affordability. Families and students could collaborate with the teacher's union, the MLK Labor Council, and other community groups to familiarize themselves with the struggle for affordable housing and organize together. Some of this work could happen through the use of schools as community spaces–something already happening in communities. How could schools create places for organizing and bring groups together to address shared issues?

While we push for more affordable housing to be built, more just land use policies, and reparative response to people of color, community organizers can also push for economic relief elsewhere. I refer to Yamahtta-Taylor's (2019) work where she chronicles the predatory housing market of the 1970s and 80s which targeted Black people. She claims at the conclusion that the housing market in the U.S. will not meaningfully change in our lifetimes towards a more just and equitable system, at least enough to significantly impact the lives of Black people. She suggests, therefore, that we advocate for social safety net improvements that can make owning a home less necessary for economic survival. In this vein, we may not see affordable housing developed en masse in the near (or distant) future. Schools, given that they are central to community life, could become hubs of activism for better access to health care, an increased minimum wage, and other quality-of-life improvements that could make Seattle a more affordable place to live. For instance, community organizers—school-community members like leaders, staff, caretakers, and youth—could organize school communities for social change outside of school walls.

Similarly, community organizers can rally around the need for increased school funding from the state. Seattle, the largest district in the state, does not receive sufficient funds to meet the needs of its students. The budget deficit exposed these holes in the state funding formula. While making Seattle a more affordable place to live is one way to boost enrollment by keeping families in Seattle, getting more funding is another way to maintain the viability of neighborhood public schools. As Pulido (1996) argues, "diverse groups cannot engage in collective action unless they recognize some commonalities and develop at least a partial collective identity" (p. 172). Participants did not describe multiracial coalitions specifically. School funding and the lack of affordable housing are issues that cross-racial groups could rally around to build broad, diverse coalitions.

***Policy recommendations***

While I finished writing this dissertation, the Seattle school district announced they were planning to close 21 elementary and K-8 schools (roughly 25% of all public schools) during the 2025-2026 school year to address the school budget deficit. This study has implications for moving forward in an era of declining enrollment in Seattle and across almost every major metropolitan area in the U.S. These following policy recommendations span city planning departments, school districts, and city governments to break down the silos identified in this study.

*Establish accountability and evaluation procedures for anti-displacement policies which include school-community members*. Both the city and the school district conducted community-engagement, with the city funding community-based organizations to do extended outreach. This community engagement created opportunities for increased awareness of and participation in these respective public processes. However, the ultimate policy decisions that came out of these public processes—the watered-down Comprehensive Plan and the school closures—did not clearly reflect the results of community engagement. For instance, the Urban Village zoning plan, which the city has collected direct feedback on calling out its racism, still exists as a cornerstone of the Comprehensive Plan. When policymakers are tasked with using community feedback to craft policy, they go behind closed doors and come up with a product. Community members are left confused as to how this product reflects their say. To hold policymakers and elected officials accountable, councils of community members that are continuously involved in the policymaking and implementation process should be funded and given official power to evaluate policymakers and officials. "Community engagement with teeth," as I see it, would move community feedback from its more performative role to one with actual decision-making

power in the policymaking process. Concerning anti-displacement policy, these councils could include school-community members who have a vested interest in protecting schools as community anchors.

*Build organizational partnerships across city departments with equity-based goals.* The school district, city planners, and the Office of Housing should collaborate to set progressive policy goals for school enrollment using an equity-based framework. This collaboration should involve community participation from school-communities, which in turn can hold departments accountable for meeting these goals. Departments can start by transparently sharing data and methodologies for calculating student enrollment and housing growth. They can use this data sharing to do research similar to this study to understand how zoning and housing policy has shaped school enrollment in racialized ways. Beyond this data sharing, the departments can set goals together to ensure that housing and land use policy complements school district policies. For instance, goals for family-sized units, rather than units alone, could be included in the Comprehensive Plan where it is currently absent.

*Include mitigating the impact of gentrification on schools in city planning and school district goals.* Related to building organizational partnerships, these departments should include explicit goals related to the impacts of gentrification and displacement on schools. School-community members have made it clear that displacement impacts their school communities in harmful ways. City government is responsible for responding to these experiences, particularly given both the city and school district's explicit racial equity goals. To start, these policy goals could include siting affordable, family-sized housing near schools, providing property tax relief, mortgage assistance, or rent assistance to families with children in schools, or prioritizing families in community preference housing policies.

*Abolish the school funding formula and school-based PTA funding.* The Washington school funding formula does not adequately fund schools. The school budget deficit (while the result of several policy problems) is evidence of this inadequate funding. School staff repeatedly spoke to the feeling of not having enough resources, particularly if they taught in a gentrifying neighborhood. This search for scarce resources can lead to principals recruiting students and marketing their school (Green et al., 2022), which can hasten gentrification. Additionally, the state legislature must pass taxes (ideally, an income tax) that can adequately capture the immense private wealth in the region for public use and increase Washington's overall effort towards school funding. Relatedly, Seattle should abolish PTA school-based funding and centralize all private contributions to schools. As evidenced by school-community members in this study, PTA funding creates more inequity across schools and the sense that some schools, based on neighborhood wealth, can accrue additional resources. Centrally disbursing PTA funds would allow all schools to benefit from these contributions.

In a city undergoing rapid gentrification, a focus on building up schools' community anchor potential could create stronger community ties that can work against the cultural fragmentation which accompanies gentrification. Whether the school closure plan receives School Board approval, Seattle has the opportunity to reimagine the neighborhood school in partnership with school-communities. How can the school district support the placemaking of students, families, and communities described in this study—the preservation of neighborhoods and schools of color, the creation of strong parent networks? This study demonstrates that people of color who participated in public engagement via Neighborhood Councils and interview participants of colors were more likely to identify schools as community anchors and actively shape them as such. The narrative of school choice and marketization, however, often privileges

the voices of White families (Nickson, 2021). The school district has the opportunity to leverage the knowledge and experiences of families of color, who remain committed and invested in their public schools amid struggle.

When thinking about Seattle Public Schools' goal of creating racially equitable schools, the fact that families of color are being displaced from the city directly challenges this goal. However, the district does not have a systematic way to approach or address housing affordability as it relates to schools. Breaking down the organizational silos between the school district, the city planners' office, and the various other agencies that deal with housing has the potential for implications for students and families in Seattle Public Schools.

Further research could expand on several topics, including community engagement in local politics, land use and education policy intersections, and racial capitalism in education research. I imagine this research could be valuable to scholarship broadly, but also for people working on these issues in the field. Researchers could continue to parse the idea of "community engagement" in the policy process. This study demonstrates that by keeping the material conditions of people always in focus (in this case, through a racial capitalism lens) the impact of community engagement can be more easily ascertained. As identity politics and the desire for representation continue to make headway in public policy and private corporations, research can incisively locate where this desire for engagement and racial representation actually changes the material conditions of oppressed people. Given the rightward movement of politics, including in education where local School Boards face challenges to race-conscious policies, anything more progressive can seem like a "win." To actually change people's economic conditions, however, we must envision a future beyond what is "left"—both politically and figuratively–after regressive, right-leaning policy. Continuing to challenge policy processes to be more equitable

and responsive through rigorous research is one avenue to keeping liberation at the forefront of policy research.

Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2014 *Atlantic* article "The Case for Reparations" and Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law* (2017) made redlining (and reparations) household terms. The George Floyd protests, and a subsequent *New York Times* article interviewing Ruth Wilson Gilmore made abolition a widespread word, particularly in the context of prisons and the police. Land use and zoning has yet to have its moment. However, researchers, following the experiences of people of color, had been documenting and asking questions about redlining, reparations, and abolition long before these terms gained widespread popularity. That is to say, perhaps the "spatial turn" in education research points to the potential for a broader turn down the road in popular understanding about the importance of spatial politics. Continuing to frame educational research as a spatial issue, with spatial consequences, in research can bolster the idea that, as Jean Anyon (2014) claimed, housing policy is education policy.

Further research on land use, housing, and education could consider what happens to schools when neighborhoods are upzoned–policies that have gained traction across the U.S. in cities like Minneapolis and states like Montana. It could also consider how right-to-return policies that grant access to housing to displaced families impacts school-communities. Large-scale quantitative research could also examine, similar to Pearman (2020), how schools change as neighborhoods gentrify.

Finally, education research can ask new questions about spatial justice using racial capitalism as a lens. This racial capitalism lens provides a historical material way to examine the political and economic contexts of schools, joining race and class for a more complete analysis. This lens is particularly helpful when examining schools within larger systems. As the U.S.

becomes more racially diverse and metropolitan areas change, the ability to consider race and class in tandem focuses analysis on linked systems of oppression, and paths to liberation, that impact school-communities.

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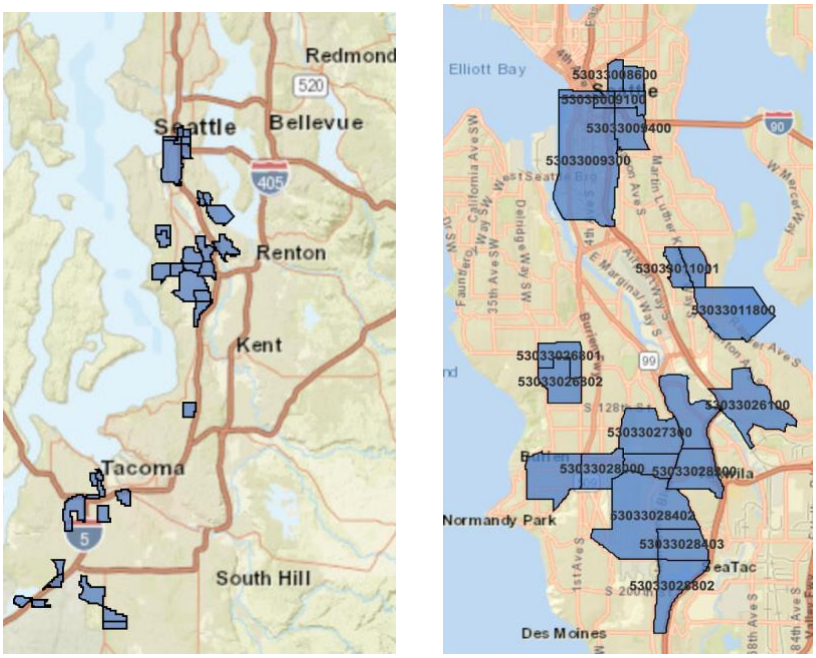
# Appendices

## Appendix A: Opportunity zones maps




## Appendix B. Interview protocol

The purpose of this study is to understand gentrification and displacement affect Seattle schools and how the Comprehensive Plan relates to this.

**I will identify Seattle as the site of the study in the final publication and presentations.** I will *not* identify the specific school you work at or are connected to, but I will ask you if I can identify its general geographic area (i.e., North or South Seattle).

Can I record the interview so I can focus on what you're saying rather than taking notes?

You can tell me to stop the recorder or stop the interview at any time. You can also always pause to ask me a question or clarifying question.

### Introductory questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about you and your family?

2. Where do you live?

3. How long have you lived there?

4. What school does your child/children attend? How far is it from your home?

5. Are you a member of the PTA?

6. Are you a member of other community groups in your neighborhood? [**if no to both, skip community group section]**

7. Where did you grow up?

8. How do you racially identify?

**Perspectives on neighborhood and schools**

9. Are you satisfied with your school?

10. What do you think makes a school a *good* school?

11. Do you think the quality of Seattle schools varies geographically?
    a. If so, how?
    b. *Probe:* Do the racial demographics of the school your child(ren) attend impact the quality?

12. How would you describe your school's neighborhood to someone who hadn't been there?
    a. *Probe:* What are your favorite parts of the neighborhood?

13. Does your school play an important role in its neighborhood?

14. Do families spend any time in/near the school building outside of school hours?
    a. Do you spend time there?

15. What makes your school a community?/Give community vibe?

16. What are the barriers to making your school a community?

17. How do you think schools in Seattle compare to those in the suburbs?

**Perspectives on metropolitan Seattle and zoning**

18. Have you thought about residential zoning?
    a. How do you feel about it?
    b. How do you think race plays into the zoning plan?
    c. How do you think class plays into the zoning plan

19. How do you feel about living in Seattle?

20. Do you think Seattle is changing?
    a. *Probe:* Is Seattle changing in terms of race?
    b. Is Seattle changing in terms of social class?
    c. **[if yes]** Do you think housing plays a role in Seattle changing?

21. Do you think your child's school is changing?

22. Are you concerned about housing affordability?
    a. *Probe:* Are you concerned about living near the school you currently are zoned for?

23. How does gentrification impact your school, if at all?

    a. *Probe: What are the impacts? Are the positive or negative? A mix?*

24. Do you see schools as playing a role in Seattle changing more generally?

25. Do you know any students who have moved out of Seattle? Why did they move?

26. Are you thinking about moving out of Seattle?
    a. Why would you decide to move?
    b. Why would you decide to stay?

27. Is there anything else I haven't asked about regarding gentrification or schools that you'd like to share?

**FOR SCHOOL STAFF**

**School/teacher**

Has your school changed at all since you started working there? How so?

Does your union or school administration discuss housing costs? (IF YES, ASK QUESTIONS BELOW)

**School leadership**

1. What strategies do you think are effective in influencing policymakers about gentrification, if any?

2. What are the barriers to influencing policymakers as a school leader, if any?

3. What do you wish policymakers knew in regard to gentrification and schools?
    5a. What do you wish they did differently?

## Appendix C: OPCD focus group questions

QUESTION 1

**Thinking about your neighborhood, what kinds of new housing are needed near where you live?**

As you think about this question, you may want to consider:

- What types of housing did you need when you first moved to this area?
- What types of housing might you want later in your life?
- What do other people you know need?

QUESTION 2

**Where would you like to see more housing?**

As you think about this question, you may want to consider:

- Where is the best place in your neighborhood and across the city to add new homes?
- Would it make sense to locate new homes near specific amenities like transit, shops, or parks?

**Appendix E.** Role of history in conceptions of Seattle policy

| | **Role of history** | **Example** |
|---|---|---|
| **OPCD** | Created inequities that exist today and must be addressed by policy. | "The effects of this history remain visible today through persistent segregation and disparities. Current land use regulations reinforce these outcomes by limiting the availability of lower-cost housing choices in many neighborhoods." |
| **SPS** | None. SPS documents do not explicitly refer to historical impacts of policy. | N/A |
| **Community feedback to OPCD** | Represent ways the city still does not create equity. | "Urban villages were built on a history of redlining and [the city] still chose to direct most |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | growth to these areas, thus accelerating economic pressures on existing communities.” |
| **Interview participants** | Demonstrate the pernicious root of current policies that might otherwise seem sufficient. | “It was the start of weeding the weeds. The plan incorporated the makeup of the neighborhood schools. Technically speaking, neighborhood schools are a good plan. It's a good idea. But it was not necessarily done for the community that was there, it was done for a community we're trying to bring in.” |

QUESTION 1

**What do you love most about your neighborhood?**

Things to consider:

- ➜ What amenities, goods, or services do you enjoy within a 10-minute walk of where you live?
- ➜ What cultural experiences and businesses in your neighborhood are most important to you?

QUESTION 2

**What's missing from your neighborhood?**

Things to consider:

- ➜ What other businesses, services, or amenities would you like to see that don't exist today?
- ➜ Are there essential daily needs that you can't find within a 10-minute walk of your home?

## Appendix D. SPS focus group questions

3 topics:

1. School buildings and learning spaces
2. Support services and resources
3. Academic and extracurricular programs

Prompts for each topic: "What do you love about your child's [insert topic]?"