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# A Little More in the World: Why Amish Parents Choose to Send Their Children to Public Schools

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**Abstract:** In response to 20th-century industrialization, parents of the Amish tradition established parochial schools, segmenting away from an increasingly secular society. In the 1972 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case, the Supreme Court codified the right of Amish parents to withdraw children from compulsory attendance after eighth grade, and many did withdraw. Yet, nearly a half century later, some Amish parents still send their children to public schools, but only limited research has explored why. This study identifies the factors that contribute to Amish families choosing to attend public schools. The researcher, doubling as the superintendent of a district in Elkhart County, IN, where one K-8 Amish-supported public school is located, conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 Old Order Amish parents randomly selected from this school. Thematic coding revealed that parents consider institutional, instructional, and social factors when deciding to send their children to public school. Amish parents do relinquish control on some issues, including no prayer or religious songs and the presence of modern music, information-communications technology, and exposure to non-Amish influences. However, on balance, the utility of learning skills and dispositions for the future makes pragmatic negotiations with the public education system worthwhile. Ultimately, parents felt that if they instill values consistent with their faith in their children at home, their children will benefit from public education, learning to navigate contemporary society, learning to think for themselves, and, ultimately, selecting to remain in their faith, dually equipped with reason and skill sets for a changing world. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** Amish education; school choice; new localism; parental choice; public schools

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

In his meta-analysis of Amish education, Anderson (2015) contended that few areas of Amish culture and socialization have been studied as much as private schooling. A survey of literature indeed revealed much written about Amish parochial schools (e.g. Hostetler 1972, 1975, 1989; Dewalt 2006; McConnell and Hurst 2006; Johnson-Weiner 2007; Nolt and Meyers 2007; Hurst and McConnell 2010). Education of Amish children in public schools, however, is usually noted briefly as a rarity or is glossed over altogether. Several exceptions exist. Parsons (1983) surveyed Amish education literature for a graduate synthesis to ascertain “factors that influence academic performance of Amish students” (3). Much of Parsons’s annotated bibliography, however, centered on Amish schools and relied on dated sources. Newcomb (1988) noted in *Educating the Amish Child* that a search of educational agencies in six states yielded no evidence of any significant programs serving the Amish. McConnell and Hurst (2006) and Hurst and McConnell (2010) surveyed Amish families in Ohio about their educational choices and reasons for attending public school. Howley and Howley (2007) engaged in a case study of a predominately Amish Title I school in Ohio, and Nye (2013), in a more recent dissertation described an alternative curriculum program for the Amish established by a public community school in Ohio. The dearth of studies beyond these few indicates a research gap in understanding some Amish people’s preference for public education.

## PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In an educational environment dominated by concepts of efficiency and school choice (Cuban 2001) with private and peer public school competition, superintendents and school boards must attend to their communities. In rural districts with high numbers of students from families of the Amish faith, educators can either pursue initiatives or they can find a middle-way between prevailing trends and what the Amish will accept (Hurst and McConnell 2010). Since Amish parents view schools as extended support for the fam-

ily mission of raising godly children, these parents weigh anything superfluous to faithful child rearing against the benefits to their children and the community (Dewalt 2006; Nolt and Meyers 2007). They avoid “too much [they] don’t need” (Hurst and McConnell 2010, 144). The challenge for public school officials is to understand the motivation for Amish parents to enroll their children in public school when an option exists for them to send their children to schools more closely aligned with their belief traditions.

This study can assist policy makers and leaders in better understanding parental educational choices among followers of the Amish faith and may provide very limitedly generalizable data for schools wishing to be more responsive to community needs (Creswell 2006; Stake 1995). Because of this author’s role as an administrator within the milieu under study, this article is easily accessible to the researcher and presents real opportunities to inform practice (Stake 2005).

## Amish Schooling: Public and Parochial Options

American public schools trace their roots to the common schools established within local townships through federal land grants (Bernard and Mondale 2001). Early common schools were marked by varied educational practices and standards, largely dictated by local boards of farmers and laymen, yet also influenced by state planners, legislators, and urban centralizers (Kaestle 2001). Entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public school leaders sought answers to booming attendance, and administrative progressives inspired by business “adopted the model of efficient school governance” (Cuban 2001, 176). A prime component of efficiency was combining smaller local schools into larger institutions. Major contributors to the Amish exodus from public schools was consolidation of one-room school houses (Buchanan 1967; Keim 1975; Nolt 2015) and resistance to modern secular instruction (Peters 2003), which was supported by the Supreme Court decision in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, which removed Amish compulsory attendance into high school. With the Court’s decision, the hybrid rights of parents to direct children’s upbringing and exert the free exercise of religion was established quite particularly for the Amish (Lechliter 2005).

McConnell and Hurst (2006) described the more recent tension between Amish parents' preserving culture while also recognizing the pragmatism of providing their children an education fit for a changing world. While Hurst and McConnell (2010) found few Holmes County, OH-area Amish parents send children to public school solely because they have paid taxes, they also found that 42% of parents sent children to public school for four reasons: in order to learn to manage contact with "English," to gain life skills beyond eighth grade, to alleviate concerns about the quality of Amish school instruction, and to take advantage of the pull from public schools (p. 245). Given how Amish schools pose a threat to funding levels of public schools (Dewalt 2001), McConnell and Hurst (2006) found some Title I elementary schools near Charm, Ohio, offered parent advisory boards, observed "Old Christmas" as a holiday on January 6, and provided German language instruction in a high-quality educational setting Amish parents found "comfortable" (McConnell and Hurst, 2006, 246). Another option is homeschooling. Through interviews, McConnell and Hurst (2006) found 7% of respondents liked homeschooling, and 40 families actually practiced it (p. 247). Additionally, due to cost and low incidence, many Amish families looked to partnerships with public schools to address the needs of special education Amish students (Adams 2015).

### **Tensions between State- and Religious-Based Education**

Amish education research has lacked analysis of the intersection of political and educational theory, so examining these tensions is helpful to this study. Since public education is a common benefit, the concept of utilitarianism (Bentham 1789/1907; Mill 1859/1956) is helpful for framing an investigation into the educational choices of a very private subset of society. Guided by the modern utilitarian precept that humans should do what creates the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens (Miller 2013), one must consider the cost-benefit tradeoff in which Amish families engage as a choice between the education provided for public good and encroachment upon their private rights. Cronin (2004) proposed that while education does benefit the individual and is often regarded as a personal right, education

might be better understood as a collective right, particularly for groups with a "rich and diverse reality" (p. 105).

As pointed out in Bernard and Mondale (2001) and again by Abowitz (2008), the public space for democratic education has been one of struggle for disparate groups as they stake out their respective claims to the democratic ideal. Further under the concept of *parens patriae*, the state assumes to know what is best for children in what Arons (1975) called a "paternalistic tug-of-war" (p. 134). For Amish families such notions of gain and relinquishing parental responsibility are anathema, so their needs from public education stand apart (Erickson 1975; Ingber 1993). MacMullen (2007) highlighted a key source of conflict within this democratic model. The very state of honing the rational mind necessary to address the problems within and to discern who should lead in a liberal democracy creates the conditions under which children could develop the rational autonomy to reject their upbringing. While MacMullen argued good citizens must distinguish among various beliefs, which can only happen through autonomy, an Amish child lost to a different belief system could be considered a potential dire cost of education. Burt (1996) suggested that instead of seeing education as a choice between "one that encourages autonomy and civic competence and one that does not," society would be better framed as "a choice between an education for autonomy and civic responsibility grounded in religious faith against one grounded in secular certainties" (p. 418).

The concept of New Localism from the fields of political science and economics offers further perspective on the tension between public schools as agents of the state and individual religious rights. The premise for New Localism was that if local people were involved in the "hard, rationing choice of politics in the context of a shared sense of citizenship," then they would experience "a more mature and sustainable democracy" (Stoker 2004, 122). Treating students and parents as customers, school choice advocates tout increased efficiency and public satisfaction in ways echoing New Localism (Bernard and Mondale 2001). The needs of Amish families within this study can be interpreted through the utilitarian lens, while the ways in which the school district has met those needs can be gauged against the democratic model of New Localism. Schragger's (2001) dualist

model within New Localism represents a middle ground of affiliations sought between local, parochial needs and larger, communal concerns. Hurst and McConnell (2010) found, “When schools remain small, and community values trump individual agency, Amish parents are often happy to keep children in public schools, because the exposure to non-Amish students and a more varied curriculum occurs in limited doses” (p. 171).

## METHODS

This study addresses the following research questions about Amish use of public schools:

1. Given a history where public education has been less than accommodating and various influences from the public sphere appear at odds with Amish beliefs, what factors contribute to Amish families choosing to attend public schools?
2. What changes have occurred or are occurring within the culture to make the choice to attend public schools viable for Amish families?
3. What areas of public schooling do the Amish resist and in what areas are they open to growth or exploration?

In order to find out how Amish families make meaning around their educational choices, I engaged in a social constructivist investigation “to discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants’ lived experiences, or knowledge” in their “individual and collective experiences” (Hays and Singh 2012, 50). Clifford Geertz’s (1983, 2000, 2012) concept of thick description undergirds the ethnographic study and guides this phenomenological exploration of Amish parents’ concepts of and attitudes toward public education. Particularly useful is Geertz’s (2000) contention that religion is a model *for* as well as a model *of* the life of a believer. Etic concerns regarding education, utility, and polity frame local, emic perspectives from Amish parents (Headland 1990).

### The Setting

Millersburg Elementary–Middle School is located in Clinton Township in southeastern Elkhart County, Indiana. As of May 2018, the school had an enrollment of 448 students, 216 males and 232 females. For the 2017-18 academic year, the school reported 332 language minority students to the Indiana Department of Education in November

2017 out of an official average daily membership (ADM) of 453.14 students. Thus, language minority students comprised 73.3% of the student body. With 303 of those 332 students from Amish families, Amish children comprised 91.3% of the language minority students and two-thirds of all students at the school. Language minority students at Millersburg have increased 1.8 times in the last decade with Amish students comprising nearly all of them (Fairfield Community Schools 2018).

As a result of funding challenges in the district, as part of the need to better serve students with inquiry and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, and as part of the district’s emphasis on preparing high school students for future “12+ Pathways,” the superintendent conducted a series of informational sessions in the spring of 2014 for an Our Community, Our Schools campaign. The campaign advocated for (1) more equitable funding for the district and (2) facility upgrades to accommodate moderate growth while providing needed programs to students. Out of projects totaling \$13.5 million across the district, Millersburg received nearly \$4 million in 2015 to convert from a K-6 elementary school to a K-8 facility. Construction added a family consumer sciences kitchen, a wood shop, an art room, and a science laboratory, in addition to three fifth grade classrooms. Millersburg opened in fall 2016 as a K-8 elementary–middle school.

One aspect of the Our Community, Our Schools campaign involved engagement with Amish families. Both Millersburg Elementary and Benton Elementary, another district school five miles southwest of Millersburg, enrolled large numbers of Amish students. Due to losses of students to Amish schools and the emergence of two new Amish parochial schools within the district boundaries, administrators sought to understand the reasons for losing Amish students and ways to keep them. During the 2013-14 school year, principals at Millersburg and Benton invited families to discuss what they liked about their schools, what they could see improving, and what their vision for the schools would be. A second and third wave of meetings brought additional families into conversation with the superintendent. Issues related to homework, practical learning, technology, and family engagement informed these conversations about a STEM and inquiry focus for Millersburg. Since parents reported that they felt the college and career focus of Fairfield Jr-Sr High School,

**TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEES, GENDERS, AND GRADES OF PARENT-CHILDREN SETS REPRESENTED**

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Duration of Interview</b>	<b>Parents Participating<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Children Represented</b>
1	1:12	AF001	F0 M2
2	1:01	AF002 AM002	M0 M2
3	0:38	AF003 AM003	M6
4	1:05	AF004 AM004	F1 M4
5	0:57	AF005 AM005	F7
6	0:41	AF006 AM006	F4 M6 M7
7	0:48	AF007 AM007	M1 F5 M8
8	0:32	AF008 AM008	F3 F4 F4
9	0:18	AF009 AM009	F0
10	1:00	AF010 AM010	M8
11	0:57	AF011 AM011	M3
12	0:19	AF012	M3
13	0:24	AF013 AM013	M7
14	0:39	AF014 AM014	M2 F4
Total	10:31 (hours:minutes)	14 fathers 12 mothers (n = 26)	10 females 14 males  At least one student from each grade
Not interviewed <sup>b</sup>		AF	F0 M2 F8
Not interviewed <sup>b</sup>		AF AM	F1 M3

<sup>a</sup>Note: AF = Amish father; AM = Amish mother; F = female; M = male; 0 = kindergarten; remaining numbers reflect grade level

<sup>b</sup>Two sets of parents who returned recruitment letters did not respond to two separate invitation letters to take part in interviews.

into which the Amish student fed after sixth grade, did not apply to them, the school board voted to add the middle school at Millersburg in order to be more intentional in teaching skills and practical arts more appropriate to the Amish and to any hands-on learner.

### Study Participants

Participants for this study were solicited from parents within the Elkhart-LaGrange Old Order Amish affiliation whose children attended Millersburg Elementary–Middle School during the second semester of the 2018–19 academic year. Since I was the superintendent of the school

district, I took care to directly address the multiple relationships at work, which “is particularly important with culturally diverse groups” (Hays and Singh 2012, 87). As Savells and Foster (1987) posited from their research with the Amish, it would be “risky (and expensive) if one encountered early rejection in the community” so a “serious researcher must have a good preparatory understanding of Amish traditions and folkways” (p. 29). Because I have been visible in the school community and have been seen as a proponent for Amish children, participants were more likely to complete interviews with me than with a non-affiliated interviewer. Additionally, my role as the researcher in the project allowed for stronger and

more detailed follow-up questions during semi-structured interviews.

To begin the process, I asked the Fairfield Community Schools board of trustees for permission to send letters asking for volunteers to families with children at Millersburg School asking for volunteers. I then sent recruitment letters addressed to 147 sets of Amish parents representing 303 students. Because of my compound role, I implemented steps to provide anonymity to those parents who chose not to participate so they did not feel coerced lest there be ramifications for their children.

All 14 informant sets (i.e. 26 individuals total) who agreed to participate received letters verifying appointments and interview questions for consideration in order to prepare responses. All interviews took place between April 13 and May 22, 2018, in participant homes, per their preference. Table 1 summarizes the participants in each interview, length of each interview, and the range of children they represented. Adkins (2011) advised that Institutional Review Board templates be revised to account for the level of education of Amish subjects lest the researcher unintentionally inflict “literacy violence” (p. 42) on a suspicious or ignorant subject. While my informed consent form contained traditional language, I took time to translate what I was doing into non-academic terms. Aware that recording might be resisted, I sought and received oral permission to record the interviews from all participants; no reluctance or tension was expressed by participants (Fishman 1988; Adkins 2011). Semi-structured interviews focused on eight guiding questions following an established interview protocol (Appendix).

### Analyzing Interviews

Hays and Singh (2012) referred to the process of analytic induction as the “process by which qualitative data analysis moves from exploratory to confirmatory” (p. 307). Utilizing the grounded theory of Corbin and Strauss (2008), I engaged in the following analysis with the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews.

I converted MP3 audio files into Microsoft Word transcripts utilizing Trint cloud-based service version 2.15.10.

I open coded the transcripts to identify patterns and broad categories. Informing these domains at

first were four themes identified by McConnell and Hurst (2006) in their research among parents in Holmes County, Ohio. I did not want my research to merely replicate McConnell and Hurst, and while their themes did surface to varying degrees, the number of interviews resulted in comparisons and subtlety that forced me to develop a broader initial codebook.

Refining codes via constant comparison and recursive reading of transcripts led to emergent relationships among the codes. This axial coding resulted in correlated codes forming categories clustered under institutional, instructional, and social factors (Table 2).

While McConnell and Hurst’s themes formed a helpful framework for considering my emergent themes, various causal relations, ramifications, anomalies, and contradictions resulted in a richer view of this ethnographic phenomenon of Amish parents choosing public schools. In terms of dependability, I employed triangulation across the limited research base, details regarding work the school has done, and findings from semi-structured interviews. The thick description undertaken revealed behaviors and actions, but I also sought to provide context and trace the development of those attitudes (Denzin 1989).

Finally, based on saturation and the prominence of certain responses, I could arrange the codes somewhat hierarchically so that institutional factors appeared to be a second-tier concern to instructional and social contributors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study’s results cover three areas addressing the “what,” “how,” and “why” of Amish schooling (Sinek 2009). The first section summarizes the general view of education as provided by the sample of Amish parents. The second section of analysis will explain to what extent the views of the parents in this study overlap with McConnell and Hurst (2006). Even though interviews offered affirmation for much of what McConnell and Hurst reported, these four factors are not the core “why.” Instead, the four factors and variations within them are the “how”—the means by which parents see their children obtaining the education they hope for their children, the “what.”

The final section of theme analysis moves beyond McConnell and Hurst’s (2006) four factors

**TABLE 2: CODES ASSIGNED TO INTERVIEWS**

Code	Interview Number													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Institutional</b>														
Confidentiality				X		X					X			
Cost				X		X		X	X	X				
Discipline/Safety				X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X
<b>Instructional</b>														
Development of the individual	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Learning English		X		X			X			X		X		X
Presence of hands-on learning	X		X			X	X	X		X			X	
Quality of teachers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
Use of technology	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X		X	X
<b>Social</b>														
Cooperation with community	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X
Engagement of families				X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X
Exposure to different people	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X

Note: Codes were reasons that Amish parents provided during the interviews for choosing to send their children to public schools. An X indicates the code was assigned to at least one statement during that interview.

into what convinces parents in the end to select and stay in public school, the “why” of schooling. McConnell and Hurst generally referred to trust as a motivating influence for Amish families (p. 247); however, as they surveyed various Amish educational options, they did not delve more deeply into contributors to that trust. This is where my ethnography provides insight. What are the back stories and dispositions at play? Why does the relationship with the public school continue to work in this setting? Is it merely a transactional relationship of utility, or is there more happening? Thick description obtained from these interviews allows us to move beyond the what and the how of educating Amish students at public school to contributors of the real why.

**The “What”: Education as Seen by Study Participants**

One of the questions in my interview protocol specifically asked Amish parents what they believed the purpose of education was. I included

this question to better understand the utilitarian perspective as to whether Amish parents viewed education as a means to future economic security and success or as an avenue for the liberal democratic development of the individual (Abowitz 2008; Bessant 2014). Asking this of people that—being from a semi-communal sect—submit themselves to God, I assumed responses would lean toward education for one’s role in society, not as much for economic reasons or for promoting individualism. Responses from these interviewees proved complex.

AF001 represented this complexity well. He stated that education is “about learning to read, write, count, add, subtract. But it’s also about learning to think for yourself and realize that you can have an opinion about things other than being taught that this is the way it is.” When I asked him about the apparent contradiction one might find in an Amish man stating education can help one form his own opinions, he clarified how Amish faith works. He shared how he did not join the church until he was 22; he had had a vehicle and had been



exposed to the wider culture. However, he found “elders, people around [him] that [he] respected seemed very comfortable and at peace with life and the position they were in... That’s something [he] wanted.” He explained, “When somebody decides to join the church and become a member of the church, it’s not forced. It’s encouraged but not forced.” He wanted his children to become Amish “because they want to be Amish, not because Dad says you’ve got to.”

AF005’s first response was to say the role of education was to “be capable through life.” When asked to explain what that meant, his first clarification was that he wanted his sons to have enough knowledge to be able to provide for their future families. Then as he finished, AM005 chimed in that education helps a child “become the person that they are.” AF005 went on to reflect, “We have five different children with five different abilities. And I think it’s necessary to find out if they can excel.” “Or learn to excel,” added AM005. AF013 admitted students can learn to read and write, but “the purpose of education is to stretch your mind and make it want to learn more ... to make your mind hungry for whatever.” Since choice is an element of their faith (Peddle 2000), these parents seemed to support development of independent thinking as well as discrete skills.

In contrast, some Amish parents seemed to push back on the idea that the school’s mission was to develop the individual, but upon clarification they objected to a particular aspect of character development. AM004 stated, “We send [our children] to school for education, not for religion ... Those are two different things.” Later, she said children are sent to school “to prepare them for adult life and teach them how to think and to figure things out and be curious” so that “hopefully it’ll kind of spark something that will help them when they become adults to keep on learning and to think.” AF007 voiced support for hands-on learning because those “opportunities to study and work on things ... will impact their future [since] they’re actually learning things that they can actually use in the workforce.” He quickly added, “But that’s not to say that it’s not important to develop the person too. But I think, we as parents, that needs to be our responsibility first and foremost.” AM007 appreciated that while their son does not fit in easily with other boys, he has formed a valuable mentoring relationship with the school counselor.

They did not mind his learning lessons and forming a friendship with a staff member; they just did not want the school teaching morality or religion as such ethical areas remain under the purview of the home.

AF010 wished that schools would teach some of the hard truths about life though. He asserted education was for “developing a way so you can reason and ... know the process of knowing [*sic*] right from wrong.” Finding this in contrast to other parents who did not want the school to teach morality, I asked AF010 to clarify what he meant by right and wrong. He expressed that he sees “slipping away from society” the ability to have people recognize there are “winners and losers in life.” To him school is “not a public day care like some people think,” but it is about constant development of individuals no matter their skills or intelligence. The Amish parents interviewed in this study fall toward the middle of the continuum between workforce training on one end and pure development of individual talents on the other. Citing academics who cannot relate to everyday people, AF011 wanted his child “to develop a sense of reasoning or [work] with academic numbers” but then also to “live a [*sic*] active social life.” AF014 ultimately felt that education was to prepare students for later life and their years of working “so you’re able to provide for your family and also expand your mind and think outside the box sometimes.” Pressed to ascertain whether he valued career preparation over creativity, AF014 shared, “I feel it’s a mix because you can’t have all of one [creativity] and succeed, and you can’t have all of the other [career training] or you won’t be happy... So you have to have that balance.”

Thus, for these parents the school’s role in developing the individual aspects of their children was not to instill moral, religious education; it was to teach them practical content and work ethic skills for living.

### **The “How”: Themes as Affirmation of McConnell and Hurst**

Given disparate views of the purpose of education provided in these interviews, it is understandable that the reasons for parents to send their children to public school are just as varied. McConnell and Hurst (2006) provided four main factors Amish parents in Ohio identified in send-

ing their children to public school, and due to the overlap with this study's semi-structured interviews, these factors can frame initial analysis of interviewed Millersburg parents. Again, I would contend the four categories present Amish parents' wishes for their children's education, and by looking at these, one can infer some of the deeper motivations as McConnell and Hurst (2006) did. An in-depth analysis of what is behind these factors occurs in the third section.

### *1. DESIRE TO HAVE STUDENTS RELATE TO ENGLISH CHILDREN AND THE WIDER WORLD*

Parents in these semi-structured interviews nearly unanimously desired for their children to be exposed to people outside their community, which was first among the social factors McConnell and Hurst (2006) cited. AM006 stated, "I want my children to learn how to communicate with people other than the Amish, just Amish kids, because there's going to be no way they're going to get through life with just communicating with just our circle." AM003 said it "helps the children know how to interact with adults that aren't Amish" because it is "important that they know how to be respectful of people that aren't Amish." AF005 declared, "I like to see [my children] interact with the English. I think it's a benefit in the future. Just like there's a lot of different people out there, let's talk so they see we don't all have to do the same thing."

AM002 suggested that sending children to public schools in this area is easier because there is not such a difference between the public and private schools. She proffered, "I'd have a hard time to send my kids to a school that's in the city... Westview, Northridge, Fairfield, possibly even Lakeland, they seem like they are like farm kids." While AM002 sees the students as similar, AM010 held that it was important for her children to see students who are less fortunate or less nurtured. Offering that students in need are probably less prevalent in Fairfield than other districts, AM010 stated that she found it "good for [her children] to see that maybe not everybody has [what they need] at home and they can help. Whereas if they go to private school, maybe everybody is more of the same and they would never see somebody disadvantaged." AF012 summed it up this way:

We need to be aware what's going on. I think it's good to know what's happening. We can't just want to have like a tunnel vision and just do what we do and not worry about everybody else. We're still part of the general world.

Many of those who spoke of the need to interact with non-Amish indicated this was an attitude instilled in them by their parents. AM004 reported that both she and her husband attended public schools with AF004 adding that his father "used to say it's important to learn to communicate and interact with non-Amish people" because "it's the real world." AF007 shared being more comfortable with public school because he attended public school, and AM007 attended an Amish school that was taught by an English man.

It is possible the parents interviewed and their parents before them sought interaction with the English out of their acute awareness of the past. AF001 provided a historical perspective that illustrated the Amish long view. "In the local private schools," he commented, "you communicate with people within three, four miles as far with the other kids. I do like that [public school] exposes them to kids 10-15 miles away; it exposes them to a larger group." Then AF001 placed this into the current debate about free speech on college campuses and the status of Amish as a minority sect. To quote at length:

I always thought when colleges began the thinking was that people were supposed to be open-minded going to college. And it seems like less and less that is actually. If [the speaker does not think] the way [the protesters] think, it's racist or it's bigoted, or you know, it seems like if it's not the same way they're thinking, it's thrown out the window or under the bus right away. Which kinda, you know, as a minority, it's ... [extended pause] ... What happens if they decide that about us? Because realistically I mean we believe in the Bible, and what the Bible teaches is not what mainstream thinking is to some degree... You know there's the concern of, you know, Amish being Amish is that we're at this point in time we're looked up to almost, maybe too much, and everything is a pendulum. History repeats itself. So you know will that at some point turn?

And that is one thing that I see as being a possible bent or positive if non-Amish children are exposed to Amish children at the age of growing up. OK, so we're all the same and yet we're

not, but we're still human. If that makes sense? That is one positive, I guess, I could see sending kids to the public school versus if there is no exposure. At that level, you know, all those people are backwards and, you know, ignorant... Maybe we've got our way of living and we call it right, but I also believe we can live alongside other people that are living their life [*sic*] the way that they feel is right.

AF001 echoed Boyer's (2008) criticism that the Amish can be fetishized, but AF001 also recognized that affinity can easily be counterbalanced by scorn or discrimination.

Beyond interaction with non-Amish, parents also felt positive about their children interacting with people outside of their immediate church. AF005 shared that on "in-between Sundays" when there are no services, Amish families of his father's generation would have stayed home or maybe gone to a neighbor's home for lunch. Now, however, these in-between Sundays have become visiting Sundays among churches, and AM005 added, "In this area it doesn't matter where we go, we always have friends because somebody goes to Millersburg [Elementary-Middle School] in our area." AF002 addressed how the ties at Millersburg definitely broaden the children's experience beyond the people in their church radius.

Consistent with their concerns about being separate from the world, Amish parents in these interviews did wonder about exposure to public school children and ideas. AF003 favored the interaction now so that his children learn to navigate the relationships prior to the teen years when he has seen children "just kind of turned loose." AF001 reflected on exposure and striking that balance between the need for exposure to the English world and protecting their children. AF001 pondered, "You could flip-flop the positives and the negatives... Where does the line of less exposure being best or more exposure being best fall?"

One of the criticisms of Millersburg Elementary-Middle School is that because of changing demographics, the school is losing the heterogeneity families seek. In a decade the school has grown from approximately half Amish to two-thirds Amish while growing in enrollment. AM005 indicated she "was kind of sad that there's no English" in Grades 7 and 8. She continued,

I went to Millersburg, too. And the thing is I went there and there was [*sic*] like three other

Amish girls in my grade. I know my parents said they liked it that way. We feel like, well, we're going to have to interact. And right now I think the English feel like I did when I was there when I was small. I felt inferior more to the English people. And now I think it kind of makes me sad because now the Amish are more domineering [*sic*], and the English are just, you know, like the one that I was.

AF010 wondered what would happen if more students came in, particularly Amish as has been the trend. He shared, "If we had more [Amish] students coming in, I would consider sending [my children] to the junior high just for the social side of the interaction with non-Amish. But it's almost a disadvantage... I was hoping to see more of a mixture." AF011 wanted his children to learn to interact with others, but he "guess[es] at Millersburg that is getting less and less," which mirrors his concern "if you have to go to parochial school and all Amish are there, you can kind of get a little bit of not being as open-minded as much."

The claim from AF011 about receptivity raised a recurring theme from parents about a reality of Amish schools that creates discomfort for many families. One aspect of Amish beliefs outlined by Hostetler and Huntington (1992[1971]) is the imposition of community discipline where members hold the other members in check. However, amidst this ethos, some Amish experience a closed or even suffocating mindset. AF006 and AM006 referred to this "drama" at parochial schools as the result of dynamics among four or five sets of siblings from different families. AM002 pointed out the parochial school is such a small group of parents and students who interact constantly, so if there is a set of parents who feel their children do not do anything wrong, "they can make a bunch of trouble." These problems bleed over into the church as well. AF004 admitted, "If you have an Amish school and you have trouble within the school, most of the parents are in that church, so you not only have trouble in school, but among neighbors and within the church." While AF013 felt that "more of a religious-type leaning" at a parochial school was good, "[students] don't get to interact with the general public and just with Amish all the time." He was quick to add that this is a privately held opinion that he does not generally share.

Several of the Amish parents remarked about how cliquish the families who attend Amish school can be. AM003 recalled from her childhood,

I noticed that a lot in our church when I was growing up. We had about two families that didn't go to the public school, and they just all sort of stuck ... you know, just had their own little group all the time. When we had visiting people at our church they were more just sort of by themselves, but us others [*sic*] that went to public [school] interacted more with everybody.

Due to the families living so closely together and being part of the same churches with small peer groups, some children can become ostracized. AF010 illustrated how the proximity of families can lead to some students not being allowed to play with others or their own sub-culture leads them to gang up on a child not from their group. He lamented how the geographical boundaries of church districts lead to this “neighborhood competition” that the public schools undo. AF004 referred to the fact that “if somebody is being picked on at school, they're probably going to be picked on at church because it's the same kids.” One mother even shared how her son was not allowed to play softball at a gathering because he was not as good as his Amish school peers who play almost every day. AF007 applied the proverb “Familiarity breeds contempt” to the lack of respect that comes from families being afraid to “step out of their box.”

AF014 highlighted how an aspect of Amish school leadership can contribute to this mentality as well. From the limited parents who serve on the school board, the leadership roles rotate. A person who serves as the maintenance secretary one year could rotate up to chairman or treasurer—“make the book”—the next. AF014 pointed out,

The maintenance [man] might not make the book, the bookkeeper might not make a good leader, and your leader might not be good at maintenance. They're forcing somebody to do things... There are certain things they could do a little [differently], and I think that could really open up an avenue for less trouble.

In addition to cliquishness, interviewed parents commented how minor concerns take on significance within the confines of the parochial school. AM003 stated that one thing that contrib-

uted to their decision to attend Millersburg was a controversy between “two hens in the nest” over young girls wearing aprons. One matron thought they were a necessary tradition while another woman objected to the added cost and time to make the extra garment. AF005 simply stated, “I have no desire to be in a community dispute about rules and parochial school.”

One interesting anomaly regarding exposure in the interviews surfaced from an Amish mother practicing the “straddling approach” identified by McConnell and Hurst (2006, 251). Since Amish schools do not provide kindergarten, AM009 taught her older daughter for some months prior to sending her to first grade in Amish school. With her second daughter, who had attention issues and was resistant to her teaching, AM009 sent her to Millersburg for kindergarten, but planned to send the child to Amish school for first grade. While many other parents in these interviews commented on the closed nature of Amish schools and the positive opportunity to mingle with a larger, heterogeneous body at the public school, this mother resisted that. She claimed with more students it is harder to get to know peers as “children group up into this small group of friends here and a small group of friends there.” In the Amish school, there is a smaller group of students at or near a certain age, forming a ready-made peer group so there is not the ability to group up, thus “causing less peer pressure.” In addition, AM009 and her husband were committed to Amish community. AM009 simply stated, “We just think that, you know, if we send them to the Amish school, we are Amish. Everyone is Amish. It's just something that we think we just want; we would rather have them there.”

Across several interviews, ambivalence surfaced between the obligation of communal discipline and the desire for parents to defend their right to control the primary social unit in their culture, the family. AF011 captured that duality:

We know that sometimes certain things that happen in a parochial school, if parents and every board member, everybody is in sync, we can handle it in a way. That is maybe not to say they would be more proper in our way of discipline than maybe in a public school... But if they are not in sync and the kids find out about it that can be worse... If the people don't respect each other's space, ... at times it makes it worse. You

know if they don't use the right approach, if you know what I mean... It definitely is somewhat one of the positives of a community like this that we can help each other out and be positive. But if we do it not in a positive way, it can be very damaging.

The exposure to other Amish and non-Amish in the public schools counters the insular society where parents can develop the impression they are under scrutiny in a too-close community.

## 2. *DESIRE TO GAIN LIFE SKILLS*

One consistent thread among parents interviewed by McConnell and Hurst and in this study was their desire to prepare their children for life; however, what type of life was the question at the heart of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* in 1972 (Ball 1975). In the era prior to and contemporary with *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, their separate agrarian existence necessitated a particular set of life skills. Subjects interviewed for this study, however, indicated that times have changed continually since then, so preparation for the future needs to be different.

AF002 noted how population in the region is growing and the impact that has on farmland and Amish communities. Nye (2013) addressed how land scarcity causes dislocation, and AF002 stated something similar: "If you want to be close to your family, it doesn't leave a big area if you try to put 100,000 people in two counties. I mean obviously it is going to be pretty populated." Continuing, he observed,

If people are paying \$20,000 an acre instead of \$4,500, that's another reason farming isn't doable anymore. You know you can't invest a million dollars and expect to pay it off in a lifetime... Could we even say 10% [of Amish are farmers]? I doubt it. Fifty years ago you could farm and buy a place and pay it off and make a good living. That's not possible anymore.

AM009 added that she and her husband know people who had farms and quit because they could not make a living competing with large industrial farms. AF003 posited, "I'm guessing that three-quarters of the people will probably be factory workers at least. Some farmers work in the factory and still get paid from both." Ediger (1985) reported how the make-up of Amish families results in some siblings having no option to farm. AF006

indicated this was the situation in his family. With only one farm and five siblings, one of the other four took over the farm. AF006 posited that most likely a farm is a "previous hand-down" with "probably one in six of every household" owning that farm.

AF014, who owns his own small equipment business and studies the recreational vehicle industry in the county, notes the allure of factories. He commented that people do not choose to do what he does or to farm because it is "so easy" at the manufacturing plants. Compared to non-Amish who may not have the same work ethic, the Amish who labor in factories are "not afraid of hard work." He concluded, "There is no investment. You just go for a job and go home. You're out of there about 1:00-1:30. You get \$75,000 a year, and you know, that's easy for them."

Nolt and Meyers (2007) referenced the centrality of agriculture to the Amish, stating that adaptations to farming equated to changing what it meant to be Amish. Given real estate dynamics and economics in Elkhart County, members of this Amish affiliation across several interviews seemed resigned to abandon agriculture as a way of life beyond what they might do on a small plot of land for their own family. Contrary to the findings of Foster (1984) that Amish workers did not foresee factory work as a sound economic alternative, many of these Amish families noted that readily available manufacturing jobs or private entrepreneurship holds the key to economic well-being.

This changing economic reality over the past 30 years has caused many Amish parents to pursue education for their children that will equip them for that reality. AF006 stated,

I want [my children] to figure out on their own where they're going to be in life because before this they [could be] farmers. Now there's no farm land. So we've got to look for more options.

AF007 confirmed he liked what has been happening at Millersburg "where they have more opportunities to study, to work on things that are hands-on, and that will impact their future. They're learning things that they can actually use in the workforce." Pragmatically, AF002 admitted, "We should [learn English] if we're going to live in America. I mean, it's not like we're the only group of people that has to learn English." AM010 provided a similar view: "If there's somebody

teaching them that can't speak Dutch, they're definitely going to learn English language." AF004 acknowledged that the controlled environment of the school allows for introduction to ideas from broader society. "[Public school lets] our kids get a taste of what's out there, what other people know, and how other kids act before they become an adult and get thrown into the world," he stated. "It kind of gives them that, but they can still come home to Mom and Dad, and we can still express our concerns. It's a general introduction to what happens in the real world."

Because of the need to engage in broader professions, parents felt students must be exposed to a wider range of learning. AM004 admitted that she wished parents who chose to send their children to Amish schools knew "the public school has a more well-rounded education" because she is not sure how much parochial schools teach science and writing. AM013 stated that Millersburg students do indeed experience more of a variety of topics, and AF013 concurred that students "kind of learn what the world is all about, just in a small school." Even though AF013 attended Amish school as a child, he had no interest in sending his children to parochial school. The parents of AF013 enrolled him in public school through sixth grade and transferred him to Amish school for seventh grade. AF013 claimed he "didn't learn anything the last two years [of Amish school]" because of what he learned through Grade 6 at public school. AF003 voiced how impressed he has been with the hands-on and inquiry approach to learning employed at Millersburg, stating, "I realize there's got to be people that know how to operate computers. But it is going so much [that direction] to just do everything on [computers], that we lose our way of making our income." Pressed for more of an explanation, he added, "I'm just biased because I learned from watching somebody do something and doing it [myself]." Admitting that he is a "hands-on kind of guy," AF001 appreciated the learning at Millersburg "geared toward scientific experiments and kinds of hands-on stuff" because "that's going to help it stick." AF006 praised how the students "learn a lot" through technology education in the woodshop area where the teacher runs the middle school classes as a business with students developing, building, and selling projects. The teacher "keeps it interesting" to the point students "don't realize what they're learning

through doing their own projects [and] trying to figure stuff out." AM010 wanted this learning to go further with students using their own money or money from their parents under the guidance of a mentor to develop and market products with all the consequences of using actual capital.

Parents also recognized learning for the real world poses difficulties when children are challenged. AM010 reported that when she attended public school, and with children today, "if a student is really talented, [the teachers] challenge; they keep challenging. They just don't let them slide." AF001 wanted his children to "become confident in themselves, but not overconfident," since the trait of being bold has negative connotations among the Amish. AF003 recognized that the teachers at Millersburg "push the kids," but "[s]ometimes it was almost too much for our kids." For many parents, their students being pushed entailed concepts, particularly math, that were harder or introduced earlier than when they were students. They struggled with homework that competes with chores and family social time. AF012 lamented his son was learning math that he would never use in his life because it was too theoretical and not practical. AM008, whose daughter struggled with math, sought additional help for her daughter. While it did take some time for the intervention team to place her daughter with some assistance, the mother recognized "it's good for [students to have] that challenge, and I know there is extra help available." AF006 shared how the opportunities of the school forced his son to learn to set goals and mature. AF006 pointed out,

I know he had that goal of getting his grades up to be able to play basketball, but then the guitar lessons also came in the way for that. And I was like, you can do it. It pushed him, and he did it; I was impressed.

Many of the parents in these interviews wondered about the balance of learning skills to navigate the non-Amish world versus how that world encroaches into theirs. For these parents, nowhere is this consternation more evident than in the role of technology for learning. Among Amish-Mennonites in South Carolina, Waite and Crockett (1997) found a desire to maintain control over technology and not succumb to it. Amish parents here voiced a similar desire to have computers be a tool, not a master. Like many, AF014 com-

mented that technology was his primary concern, particularly when the junior-senior high school into which Millersburg sixth graders solely used to feed went one-to-one with laptops. When asked about that, AF014 professed,

Probably the main reason for [withdrawing our daughter] was, you know, with the textbooks going away. It wasn't our way of life. That was something very important. Because one thing that is, you know it's Biblical for us, the separation of the world and nothing is new to us more than the Internet. And the way that's getting used right now is probably more of a world thing than anything, but it can be used as a good tool. There's so much that starts off as a good thing. Anything. We take Facebook and all of a sudden we've got security issues. It always starts out good, but it always ends up having something bad with it.

Aware of the role of social media in polarized national political debate, AF001 criticized how there exists no middle ground between right and left ideologies where “you push a couple buttons and your opinion's out there and sometimes looking like a fact. Is it really a fact?” AM008 admitted,

I don't like the dependency on technology, but I like for them to learn it though, too. I mean, we used the computer in school, but naturally those are way outdated. It's way different than it is now. So it's nice for them to still learn a little bit about it.

While many of the parents in this study did not mind exposure to the internet and technology at school, they resist it being brought into the home. AF001 declared, “If it would come to that point where they want to send a computer home, we'd go to an alternative school” AM005 and AF005 admitted that they are an older couple and would not want a computer in their home, but they “could see the benefits of knowing how to run” one and know there are people “that wouldn't care.” AM004 confided, “I am sure you know this is just a lot of Amish parents are not comfortable if their kids have to bring home a laptop... It's a lot of people just scared of technology.” Ignorance is behind this as well, with many people not understanding how the technology works. Namely, many Amish do not understand that the laptop or iPad is not a portal to the internet (and conflicting

ideas) in and of itself. AF004 said, “You've got the older families that know the former technology, and they're really holding back. And then you've got the younger ones that kind of know how it actually works.” AF006 represented that thinking. He stated,

I know the laptop idea has scared a lot [of people] about bringing the laptops home and all, but don't they need Wi-Fi to [make them work when] they bring them home? ... So what harm would it do to take them home [if the home does not have Wi-Fi]? ... And families, even those that have Wi-Fi at home, have it already.

For people who live lives marked by moderation, the perceived threat of technology taking over their lives serves as a legitimate fear. An anecdote from AM004 proved cogent:

I guess for me it's not so much the actual technology, you know, that scares me so much. I mean I'm not totally just freaking out about the Internet in general, but I just think it's scary how people are addicted to like your phones you know. And so for me I just like the hands-on learning, and you know going outside and playing and making things and drawing... You see people sitting in McDonald's, like a dad while the kids are playing, and they're not even watching their kids because they're on their phones. Or at the doctor's office, nobody looks at the magazines. Everyone's on their phone... I've read books where it's like people are losing the ability to talk to one another.

AF011 pegged the problem of lack of moderation to a social cause alluded to by AM004. He stated,

I would like my kids to pull a little bit away from that, you know, and not get too dependent on technology as far as computers and phones and stuff like that. That is probably one thing that is a concern to me, although I do feel 95% of it started right here at home... If guidelines are loose at home, it'll penetrate more in a student's mind. If we can talk about [technology] and they can use it, then we do things in a positive way and the kids have the trust of the parents... Maybe if [students are] exposed in a controlled way at school, then that allows you to be able to teach the lessons at home behind it that need to happen. And then when they do get to an age where they're deciding what they want to do, then they've had good exposure and been led

through it rather than [having it] just get dumped on them, and then they get overwhelmed or they don't know what to do.

With technology, as with many facets of students' lives, Amish parents assume the responsibility for teaching their children what is right and wrong, but as will be discussed in a later section, they question their abilities as much as any parents.

### 3. *DESIRE TO HAVE QUALITY TEACHERS*

McConnell and Hurst's (2006) finding that Amish parents send their children to public school out of concern for the quality of teachers held true in this sample of Amish parents as well. Twelve of the 14 interviews revealed this concern. The shortest interview in this study at 19 minutes with AF012 emphatically focused on teacher quality. When asked if there was any other factor, he responded, "It all comes down to teachers. That's it, and that's it." He referenced at one time that Amish teachers had to pass a high school equivalency test in order to teach, but that is no longer in place,<sup>1</sup> and he stated that he had heard of parents going into Amish schools to teach when another teacher could not be found. AF002 questioned the quality of a person not trained who merely "steps in," contrasting the quality of teachers in Amish schools and public schools. For AF010 it was a matter of "teacher vetting" where schools "sometimes hire the teacher that is available versus the teacher that is qualified." Summing up the issue, AF007 and AM007 engaged in the following exchange:

AF007: I don't like the [teacher] turnover, yeah, the turnover.

AM007: That's, I think, probably one of my concerns too.

AF007: I think they need to pay their teachers more and have more continuity there.

AM007: Sometimes they have young kids coming in and ...

AF007: They're barely out of school themselves. Well, that's probably my main reason for sending them to public school.

Many of the Amish parents attempted to give the Amish teachers credit. AM003 had not heard

of problems with Amish teachers, and she understood that they have teacher workshops in order to learn to teach better. She also referenced how special education teachers are often brought in to work with students, while her husband (AF003) recalled there was a yearly collection at church for the special education teacher. AM003 was one of two women who referenced Wendell Bailey, a non-Amish male who taught at one Amish school for decades and was beloved by many. Regarding the pressures of the job, AM004 sympathized,

You know, I think it's stressful. [The students] don't listen to teachers, and they have like four grades. If they don't live in the neighborhood, they have to live in the school or else, you know, have to find a ride... It is kind of tough. And obviously the women get married, you know, and you just can't have a family and teach at the school; it is too much.

However, many parents simply did not see the current system working. Following the above concession, AM008 stated, "At an Amish school [the potential teachers] get out of school in eighth grade, they're 15 years old, and the next year they're teaching. You won't be able to handle an eight-year-old boy." AF005 indicated that these "fairly young girls ... may be capable" yet finds it "a little bit questionable about how dedicated they are." AM002 also wondered about the abilities of teachers who are not adults themselves, but her concern rested more with English language skills. She shared the following anecdote about her nephew:

[My sister-in-law and her husband] sent their kids to the [Amish] school a couple years, and one of their boys is really smart. He [read] all the books, and his teacher at the time would kind of disagree on how to pronounce words. And [my sister-in-law said] a lot of times he would be right. And to me that's like warning bells. You're the teacher, and your fourth grader knows how to pronounce certain words better than you.

For AF014, his focus was on preparation for vocations lacking by Amish schools. Once asked by an Amish school board member why he sends his children to public school, AF014 replied that the school has a solid technology education program that fully utilizes a shop class. AF014 said when he explained what was happening, "it sort



of got the wheels spinning for him.” AF014 then pushed back at the board member contesting that once the state said Amish had to attend school, Amish schools seemed to only “go to school the minimum amount [*sic*] of days and the minimum requirements that they’re supposed to do.” He then said he asked the state board member,

If we got [the students] there anyway, let’s get them a little bit more education. Let’s get them to think a little bit. We can’t be farmers anymore. Why don’t we all agree there’s better places to work than a factory? So let’s start getting them to think outside the box. What could we do instead of what we are doing and do more of what we’re doing down [at Millersburg]? . . . And he was like ‘Hmmm,’ and I knew I hit a home run with him.

Concerns over teacher quality led to many families making reference to homeschooling, a relatively rare option exercised by Amish families according to McConnell and Hurst (2006). In discussing accountability for Amish schools, AF011 referenced home schooling and how home-schooled students can excel, yet he would resist it because his children would not learn to be responsible to others. AF011 admitted homeschooling would add responsibility to his wife, and AM011 shared that her sister home schools, but she has a 16-year-old who can help out with siblings. Both stated they are pleased with public schools, and they do not hear of many parents who homeschool in the district, while they do hear of it happening in neighboring districts. AF003 stated he was glad for what they have at Millersburg. AM003 conceded she “would make a bad home school [*sic*],” seeing what her sister does with seventh and eighth graders at home and knowing she “probably wouldn’t have had the time to give [her] children the opportunity they had at school.” AF002 and AM002 believed that homeschooling is on the rise as “kind of a trend thing.” AM002’s sister homeschools and has concentrated on the upper grades “because the quality of teaching isn’t so great for the older kids.” AM004 concurred that homeschooling has increased. One of her friends, who lives in the same district referenced by AM002, homeschools because that district is “not doing so much” to accommodate the Amish. AM004 stated that if public school teachers were not allowed to be creative or became too restricted teaching to standardized tests, then that would

be a problem that would make them consider homeschooling. Complimenting his wife as smart enough to homeschool, AF004 summed up, “For us, it wouldn’t be the Amish school or Fairfield. It would be Fairfield or homeschool.”

#### 4. *DESIRE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DRAW OF PUBLIC SCHOOL*

McConnell and Hurst (2006) described how a “push” from the Amish side to engage with public schools exists often as a response to a “pull” from the district (pp. 245-46). Families and students expect certain aspects of public school, but the Amish parents interviewed appreciated various factors that their non-Amish counterparts may take for granted.

Hurst and McConnell (2010) found that Ohio Amish families only slightly factored cost into the calculus of attending public. However, for the families interviewed from Millersburg attendance area, five couples referred to cost as a contributor. AF004 commented how parochial school is “really expensive” and at public school “you don’t have to do all the fundraising.” AF001 noted, “There’s quite a bit of cost in the end to the private school. I’m not exactly sure what it is, but it’s quite a bit of money wrapped up in each child per year.” AM008 admitted, “You know, another practical thing [about public schools] is the cost. Yeah, it’s definitely really expensive to send them to private school or an Amish school.” When pressed for just how expensive it is, none of the families who attended public schools exclusively knew the answer. AF009 and AM009, who were sending a child to Millersburg for kindergarten before enrolling her in Amish school for first grade, shared that their first child in Amish school already costs \$1,200. When the second child joins the first, the rate is not double because standard practice is to provide a multi-child discount. In this case, AF009 thought the increase would be an additional \$800 for the second child.

Even though AF009 and AM009 would not send their child beyond the first year of schooling, they did appreciate their child had bus service and there was a nurse on staff. Many parents valued standard institutional offerings of the public school, most notably transportation. AF014 stated, “We like the idea of transportation to get to school. That’s a plus. Not to worry about your kids

not being safe getting to school.” AM011 enjoyed her years as a student at Millersburg and noted that there was not an Amish school near for her. She said it would have been two miles to get to school, which many kids traveled by bicycle, and she “didn’t feel safe with that.” She is thankful for bus service for her children. AF004 addressed the issue of travel and distance as well: “Our church district is pretty spread out. Some people in our church send their kids to the nearest school... Some have a driver [they pay for hire], or they have kids old enough to drive the buggy.” AF008 liked the “convenience at the end of the driveway ... instead of putting them on a bike and hoping they get to school alright.” He also appreciated the students receive a hot lunch daily, which is not something that happens at an Amish school unless the parents arrange to bring it.

As addressed in the section on learning skills for life, the draw of the public schools with parent engagement around hands-on learning is a benefit to these parents as is the school management of discipline, which stands in contrast to some of the concerns above about Amish school cliquishness. AF001 referenced the invitation parents received to attend the family STEAM night in order to see student work and visit exhibits from the local science center. He also appreciated how when “someone is getting bullied ... you guys handle it... It’s taken care of at school; it doesn’t come home. You know, it’s not a thing that gets dragged on.” AF004 contrasted the “pretty complicated problem” of discipline in an Amish school with Millersburg by saying, “If there is a problem, it’ll get addressed in a very professional perspective. It’s pretty well thought out when it’s approached and that makes sense.” Additionally, AM008 spoke to the fact that Amish schools do not offer field trips, and she felt that these are very valuable for experiential learning. She appreciated that parents could go along as chaperones and the district allows Amish parents who need a way to school in order to go on the field trips to ride a bus to school.

Another draw to the public school is the curiosity to pursue vocational training beyond eighth grade that is slowly emerging. Early on, the preference of radical Protestant groups for education for wisdom (*Logos*) took primacy over technical training in skills (*Techne*) (Littell 1969). Lindholm (1974) stated:

[The Amish] emphasize what has become characterized as the *wisdom* dimension, as contrasted with the *technos*. Wisdom is devoted to character, honesty, humility, and long suffering. They have no interest in landing men on the moon — they seek only to produce good men. (p. 490)

However, this is not the case for many of the Amish in this study 40 years later. To maintain a distinction, the Amish were careful to refer to this post-eighth-grade study as training rather than schooling. This nuance helps avoid the slippery slope of undoing the educational exception of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), yet the necessity for training after eighth grade is still not clear enough for Amish to fully commit. Many readily admitted the need for technical and technology training for employment, but the fact that manufacturing jobs or jobs with Amish entrepreneurs are so readily available means the training is not a current prerequisite for employment. AF002 pointed out how the apprentice model operates very well. He cited that a neighbor boy had started in an RV factory doing entry-level stocking at age 16 and is now making \$2000 a week. He added that his own career in concrete started by learning the trade when “we worked long days and the paycheck wasn’t that big.” While non-Amish forced to attend school may need such pathways, he simply did not see the need for training programs at school for Amish students when “there’s lots of work around right now.” AF004 echoed a similar sentiment, noting that many people with just a high school degree end up with the same jobs Amish are landing, so the Amish realize “without a college degree they’re not going to gain that much more by going to high school. They just start learning by working.”

However, AF007 thought this might be changing. He offered,

We’re somewhat limited with our way of life. But there’s more and more. I mean, the diversity of occupations alone is just great. There’s all sorts of things you can do, and it’s only growing. I mean, it used to be you were a woodworker or a farmer or a factory worker. Those are the main three things... But yeah, I think as these programs, as more of these things [for training] become the norm or people become aware of them, it might make a difference.

Later, AF007 asked, “Why not take some special courses or training? You know, because you set

yourself apart a little better.” When I noted to AF007 that setting oneself apart might strike some people not very familiar with the Amish as a contradiction, he smiled and corrected himself, “Well, that you are giving yourself an edge. Maybe that’s better.” AF007 was keenly aware of the growing need for marketable skills.

AF010, a savvy private businessman, presented his vision for how to accomplish this. He suggested that the district construct on the back of Millersburg School building a facility that “instead of calling it school” would be a “division of this district.” Then, students age 14 to 16 could avoid going to the high school and could come to this building called a “career center or a jumpstart or a career start” center. Teachers there could continue to teach students the practical things the district has been teaching and could serve as a start on something for both the Amish and for the potential “non-Amish that actually drop out and they don’t take school.” It is noteworthy that for a secondary training model AF010 suggested a facility be added to an elementary–middle school as a place they are comfortable rather than use existing programming and facilities at the junior-senior high school.

### The “Why”: Cooperation and Compromise

In their analysis of Amish worldviews, Nolt and Meyers (2007) analogized that Amish interaction with society was a dialogue between the past and the present. In this series of interviews, Amish parents could be seen as engaged in a conversation around the costs of accepting the benefits of public school while also compromising and even tolerating things that run counter to their culture. Ultimately, the reason why they chose public school is because they found utility and comity in the relationship with state schools.

Because public schools are secular spaces, the Amish know they sacrifice the most in terms of religion. AM005 acknowledged that “parochial schools can start their day with prayer and singing,” but she added that Millersburg has a moment of silence during which the child can pray. Four of the parents cited that even though there is no daily Bible study, the district does permit the local ministerial association to conduct off-site Bible instruction as provided in Indiana Legal Code (Compulsory School Attendance, 2005). Parents

lamented that the winter concerts are not full of religious music, but they acknowledged there are spiritual songs intermingled with songs from other traditions. Amish schools are known for their dramas and recitation programs, which stand in contrast to public school music program with, as AM007 criticized, rock songs, raps, and “crazy” dancing that is “not us.” AM005 remarked on this difference and resigned herself, “[The music teacher] is doing what he likes and we have to put up with it because we are going there.” Another parent, AM006, commented that she thought it was “awesome” that her son wanted to learn the guitar from that same teacher. A majority of families reported homework as a bane, competing with chores and family time. AM008 summed up the feelings of many parents:

I’m guessing a lot of the reasons people do choose to send their kids to Amish school is the faith based. I mean, they hear their devotions every morning, and they learn the German songs. And I feel that it’s a good experience, but I feel it’s something that needs to start at home and that we can do at home. To get it in school would be a plus definitely. But I feel that’s more our responsibility at home, for sure, where it needs to start.

These Amish parents responded in ways that reflect a full awareness of the compromises they make.

Cooperation between public school authorities and Amish parents in this setting was marked by deference. It was difficult to discern whether this was merely deference to authority or humility brought on by accommodations the district made. AM008 declared that she “really like[s] the system we have” because she has appreciated the “effort you made for us all up there with the extra classes, adding the German, and the workshop and the sewing and the cooking.” AF004 encouraged the district to keep doing what it is doing because he felt if “we can work together as a community, we’ll have a better community.” AF005 framed the obligation he felt to respond to the invitation to be in the research study:

When you sent this letter out, we know you’re here to respond to us. It would be pretty easy not to do anything. But I thought to myself, you know what, if I send my children to parochial school, we have to be involved. [The public school leaders] want us. They’ve got a meeting

and we got to interact; they've got hot lunch; they've got things that are needed, so somebody is going to have to do it. Someone is going to pick it up like this. I like to participate. What we've got ... [pause] ... We got a great set of teachers. We've been blessed with Millersburg I think, so we [responded].

AM001 said, "I'm not sure we're the best candidates for this interview. My wife actually didn't really want me to reply. But, you know, at the same time if you guys are trying to work with us, I don't see why we shouldn't reciprocate that and try and help you understand." An exchange between AM010 and AF010 captured their desire for recognition in the partnership, yet they did not seek favoritism.

AF010: Disrespectful teachers or administration would really lose my trust. We're different; we have different concerns, and it is what it is.

AM010: But I don't think we should be treated any better ...

AF010: No.

AM010: I don't think so.

AF010: No, not that way. But you know just a recognition that there is [difference].

It was obvious from AF014 that the efforts of the school district contrast sharply with his experiences as a child. When he was in junior high, he was a good basketball player and wanted to play on the junior high team. However, it was understood that "these guys were going to drop out in eighth grade, so let's get 'em through and get 'em out of here." Amish boys were not allowed to play on the junior high team, which "doesn't feel good when you're a kid." Contrast that with his experience as an adult:

This doesn't happen. You don't get a school superintendent sitting in an Amish home. So this is what it takes to get the relationship right. We've never had somebody that cares, OK. I mean it's humbling because we are a sect group that has been a minority for years. I mean we've been persecuted. That has traveled on, so we're used to being quiet and staying away if it's needed, you know. To feel that somebody is accepting you, that's what's really gonna be a plus. And you don't get that. You just don't get that.

Guided by an ethos of community and hard work, the Amish particularly like the fish fry fundraiser the school holds every other year. AF002 admired how when they go to any event at Fairfield Schools, and specifically the fish fry, "everybody works together" and "there's a good feeling with a lot of different people." AF010 saw the fish fry as key to something larger:

I've got to [know] some Millersburg English people, and I see them on the road and do business with them. That's just another positive thing, you know. I think that it helps also pull the community together and that awareness... If everybody stays in his own little corner and one stone flies over here; you know what I'm saying. If we are all in the community and would get to know each other and everybody, still, the big percentage of people want to strive for whatever is good, and if they have some good like that happening and some bad does happen, I get the feeling those guys care as much about their kids like I do... That's a win-win situation.

Much of the success of this community-school partnership rests on the sincerity and integrity of the people involved. AF011 stated,

I think you guys try, and I feel your book is the book. What I mean by that is your communication is openness. You know if we want to come in and talk to you or [the principal] or [the school counselor] or whoever, they're there. It's not that you're a dark organization.

AF010 wished that Amish parents who dismissed public schools "knew that the administration and the teachers are real people with real feelings with real children. They're not just robots."

AF011 offered that because of the faith he and many Amish have in the school regarding discipline, he wanted to know directly what parents needed to do to help with issues of respect among students, particularly at the middle school level. His admonition for school authorities to tell them what Amish parents can do served as an indirect invitation to enter into the sacred family locus. AM006 actually considered Millersburg a "family school." Because it is so comfortable there, she can talk and laugh with the teachers. She even alluded to the fact a teacher new to the school this year taught at a school not that far to the south from the district, but even that teacher has commented to

AM006 that she cannot explain what makes it so special and different.

One parent, however, did raise a concern for the loss of some of that family feel with personal engagement. AM007, who volunteers many hours at school across all her children's classes, indicated there is a shift taking place with newer teachers. She lamented that some of the newer staff have not tried to get to know her, so there are teachers there she does not have a relationship with when she used to have one with all the teachers after many had had her children. Some of the rookies exude confidence and independence and do not seek help from volunteers, with one teacher expressly asking AM007 not to come to her room. While admitting "I know when [my children] go to school [the teachers] take care of them," AF007 voiced frustration that "you have to ask and they don't offer what's happened and you just don't really find out ... what's happening in our kid's life at school."

Ironically, because they take their role as their children's first teachers so seriously, Amish parents question themselves as parents and wonder about the world in which they are bringing up their children. A number of the parents, mainly fathers, commented on the loss of "common sense" in society and how this can be rooted in the world's abandonment of Christian principals. They don't blame the school for this but see the school as a symptom of the secular humanism that tries to teach normative behavior without the moral precepts or authority of a religion (Cheng 1997). AF004 lamented the "general decay in families" but quickly added that condition is not the school's fault. Parents also recognized their conversations with the challenges of the modern world are not easy or smooth. AF002 commented that the Amish recognize their children becoming bolder. AM002 interjected that this may come back to the plentiful money earned in non-agriculture jobs, and her husband responded, "I'd hate to live with less, but I can see where it's, as far as spiritual-wise, it's a drawback to a certain extent because everything is plentiful and easy." They admitted they spoil their children. AF010 and AM010 wondered if the economy took a downturn if Amish families would return to the public schools as they did during the Great Recession in the late 2000s. If they do that, then AF010 noted the parents would not send their children to parochial school, could save

money, and thus preserve their recreational time. AF010 was very concerned for the social condition of fatherlessness. He wondered how young men growing up without a father decide what to do in this world, but he also expressed concern for the fact that fathers distracted by free time, even among the Amish, are not present for their children.<sup>2</sup>

Asked what could endanger the relationship these parents have with Millersburg, responses coalesced around the loss of communication and mutual respect. AF005 said they would reconsider staying in public school if the district lost quality teachers and if they "would see our school corporation not try to, how should I say, serve the community." AM013 reported that she knew of a family in a neighboring county who enrolled a kindergartner in a school there and discovered they would not see a progress report unless they went on the internet. AM013 admitted she did not know if this was actually the case or if the parent was misinformed, but the fact this was not communicated clearly caused the mother to enroll the child in Amish school instead. AM002 reported a similar incident for her sister-in-law at another neighboring district. The in-law removed her children from the district because they felt like the school there was saying "deal with it" as they ignored Amish needs and concerns. AF003 referenced how the relationship would be harmed if the school "completely got away from the Christian way of life" without release time for Bible class or no religious music at programs. AF014 echoed the concerns about becoming more secular, but he added he would hate to see the public school "cracking down and not being able to work with [the Amish]."

## OBSERVATIONS

On a most basic level, interviews with these 26 Amish parents revealed a group of stakeholders who were very pleased with the public school setting in which they have placed their children. Much of this related to the opportunities cited by McConnell and Hurst (2006), and many of the practices highlighted by the pair in their research have been at place in Millersburg Elementary–Middle School and Fairfield Schools for years. The district school calendar has included an extended winter break that runs from a few days before Christmas

to January 7 in order to end after Amish celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany. German was added to the school for Grades 6 through 8. Amish parents are encouraged to volunteer, serve on the parent-teacher organization, and serve as informal advisors to the principal at Millersburg. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) argued that schools can educate to liberate a child from what some may see as the insulated family life into which they were born, or schools can work in concert with the family in order to extend the values taught there. While public schools may disappoint Amish parents because of lack of prayer, sacred song, and religious precepts, the parents interviewed here found the school a place where teachers and administrators cared for their children, respected their children as individuals, and modeled ethics, fairness, and discretion. Parents simply saw this on balance as a successful partnership in which both sides learn to compromise and accommodate.

Beyond the specifics of the school, these interviews provided insight into the ethos of these members of the Amish community and more specifically their views of education. Recurrent in the interviews was an awareness of the diversity of opinions among the Amish and people in general; yet, these parents seem to adhere to a less communal mentality and they tend to consider things from a more rational stance. They realistically considered that their interactions with other Amish and the non-Amish facilitate the ability to test their own beliefs against those who differ. Yet, interview participants shared a confidence that the values and skills taught at public school and clarified at home would serve to strengthen Amish beliefs rather than endanger them. Parents expressed a desire to freely follow their beliefs, a right they deserve as Americans and as a testament to their ancestors. Similarly, other people are allowed the same exercise thereof. They do not expect special treatment, yet they are immensely grateful when someone recognizes and respects their differences.

## CONCLUSION

Many of the interviewed parents' reasons for sending their children to public school appeared conventional and practical, overlapping with what other researchers have found (Fishman 1988; McConnell and Hurst 2006; Howley and Howley 2007; Nye 2013; Anderson 2015). The engagement

and cultural sensitivity Millersburg teachers and administrators have demonstrated have resulted in a community conversation of compromise and cooperation. One of the dominant reasons these Amish parents cite for choosing to consider public schools is the approach the teachers and school administration have taken with Amish families. These parents said they felt officials respected and listened to them, kept their children safe and honored their confidentiality, and provided more than they ever expected a school could for them as Plain People. Consistently, respondents felt that attending public school provided a critical point of contact for their children to socialize with other Amish and non-Amish and hone English language skills. Parents avoided sending their children to parochial schools because of the lesser quality of instruction and to avail their children of inquiry learning across a wider range of subjects than they would experience in an Amish school. Parents reported that they wanted their children to be prepared for their futures, and the breadth of experiences at public school better equip their children for that future.

## Limitations and Challenges

Savells and Foster (1987) reported challenges to their work including language barriers because of the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, difficulty finding Amish informants' homes or arranging interviews, reticence or aloofness of participants, and identifying an appropriate sample. My experiences for this study were quite different. Communication with Amish parents for these interviews was not difficult. Ideally, I would have been able to conduct the interviews in their first language, Pennsylvania Dutch, but I cannot speak the dialect. Because these parents do engage with non-Amish in the Goshen, IN, area for business and work, their English skills were excellent, other than an occasional lack of vocabulary for what they wanted to say. They felt an obligation to share their views and help round out perceptions non-Amish people have of their culture. Still, because these parents were so accommodating and saw the value of participating in this ethnography, the findings from this study must truly be considered a snapshot of this particular locale at this particular time.

While transferability from this research setting to another setting would be extremely nar-

row due to the unique milieu in this ethnography (Krefting 1991), school officials undertaking a process of improvement or wishing to better engage their constituencies could find it helpful to employ a similar process of reflective information gathering, sincere listening tours, careful study, and continuous respectful conversation in order to ascertain true needs and real direction.

Additionally, the findings remained complicated because of the dual role of the researcher. The very relationship that opens the possibility to investigate attitudes and dispositions among these parents could also hamper honesty if the truth might be seen as jeopardizing that relationship. Another possibility was that families shared only positive perceptions in order to preserve what was being done for their children in the public school. Research conversations with these parents all appeared honest and sincere and I received responses that prompted additional questioning for thick description. However, there were occasions where the participants seemed to be holding back. Hoping to avoid conflict (Ediger 1985), study participants may have simply not answered my queries fully rather than providing any negative feedback and upset a perceived authority. I made clear in the interview protocol that I was seeking honest answers and there would be no repercussions or favoritism toward their children for any response given by parents. Given the mores of the Amish, such openness even with an educational leader they know was difficult to always decipher. The interviews were riddled with deference and attempts to tamp down perceived criticisms. Many times the interjecting clause “don’t get me wrong” preceded or followed statements of opinion, and many similar qualifiers were offered.

Interviews did reveal negative aspects of public schooling for the Amish. They were honest about secularism, bullying, concerns over the lack of diversity in the middle school, and some loss in communication with teachers that used to exist. Families sharing these hard truths led me to believe moments of deference were more a function of the Amish avoidance of conflict in general than specifically trying to impress me as researcher.

### Future Research

Prospects for future research could address the continuing changes that Amish experience. A

comparative study could demonstrate the extent to which public schools and Amish parochial schools prepare students for the world. Public school leaders could benefit from such a study in order to know the gaps to fill; private school educators would have evidence to support making changes that they are beginning to note anecdotally. Complementary research could further compare how Amish parents who do not send their children to public school view the choices of their Amish peer parents who do. Another potential line of study would be to ask families why they no longer send their children to public schools if they once did. Such a study could flesh out how strong that external pressure is to withdraw from the public school or whether there were things about the public school program they could not accept. A final research area would compare the in-depth results of this ethnography to a similar ethnography from another geographical area and Amish church affiliation. For example, participants in this study self-identified as more liberal than most Amish, so an understanding of more conservative families could provide balance.

### Implications

To mark the centennial of the American Council on Education (ACE) in March 2018, ACE president and former Undersecretary of Education Ted Mitchell (2018) penned,

We must recommit ourselves to the idea that K-16 education is a public as well as a private good. This was a common understanding among the founders of the republic and it is ripe for a revival. Second, we must recommit ourselves to the task set out by Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, who said that “democracy must be learned in each generation. It has to be taught.” Finally, we must recommit ourselves to the idea that democracy demands we engage with diverse others in ways that create ways for “associated living.” (p. 92)

The issues that steer Amish parents in rural Elkhart County, IN, to send their students to public schools overlap with Mitchell’s clarion call. The parents in this study valued education as a private good for their children to be successful in their future lives,

but they also appreciated that the public school's varied curriculum forced their children to learn. They respected and appreciated the public school officials as agents of the state who actually listened to them and acted with integrity toward them as a model for democracy. They sought exposure for their children to other future citizens who were not like them in order to head-off prejudice and build understanding community. The significance of this study lies in the words of the informants which provided evidence to educators of the power of promoting community, of listening to school stakeholders, and of being responsive to those whose voices may be limited. Strike's (1991) reference to Aristotelian communitarianism seemed apropos to this setting as he argued the school as an arm of the polis<sup>3</sup> should be "devoted to the realization of a collectively held conception of human flourishing" rooted in association and shared values (p. 424).

Rather than viewing the issues facing the Amish as uniquely parochial concerns for that community, we need to see their challenges as impacting wider society. The problems Amish schools face with hiring and maintaining quality teachers mirror those in the public sphere. Children in any educational setting who are not taught by capable teachers develop neither the critical thinking nor problem-solving proficiencies democratic society requires. Knowing that Amish teachers will not undertake traditional teacher preparation, could there not be a pathway through high school for such young people? Keeping with the spirit of Indiana Amish State School Board's *Regulations and Guidelines for Amish Parochial Schools of Indiana* (2016), that a teacher possess "a knowledge of subject matter" and be "a learned individual with a desire to keep on learning" (p. 6), a modified course of study would provide additional years of academics, would hone English language skills, would allow time for maturity, and would offer basic job-embedded learning in classroom management and pedagogy. This mini-pathway would not result in a high school diploma but instead would focus on specific training for potential educators within Amish schools.

Within a broader context, this ethnography points to the success of public schools employing a variation of New Localism. Stoker (2004) proposed that democratic systems have a strong local dimension and provide a variety of avenues

for engagement. In this ethnography, Amish families spoke to the respect they share with the school administration and how the school represents not just students of particular church affiliations but also represents the larger community. In microcosm, the school teaches students global principals of tolerance, engagement, and thinking for oneself. This is where Schragger's (2001) three concepts from New Localism help elucidate the choices these Amish parents made. Between a purely contractarian view of society rooted in agreements and a deep society rooted in culture and ethos, Schragger's middle dualist community is publicly negotiated space where the individual takes part in collective decision making as an active citizen rather than a mere party to a contract. Dualism's balance between a functionalist, deep society and the independent contractarian reflects the interplay Geertz (2000) saw in a culture with "symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Inherited deep conceptions grow from the *Ordnung* and their collective past, while most non-Amish conceive of America as a liberal state serving individual freedoms. Given the fact that a liberal democratic state can aim to be contractarian and Schragger identified the Amish as deep communitarian, implementing a middle-way dualist approach can assist with bridging the two worlds. Pratchett (2004) suggested that citizens can view local autonomy as *freedom from* the central authority (as Schragger's deep communities would), as *freedom to* accomplish certain objectives (as Schragger's contractarians would), or as a dualist *reflection of local identity*, that is, "the ability of communities to reflect their own sense of place and meaning" (p. 363).

In conclusion, the attitudes and dispositions of Amish families who send their children to public school reflect a careful balance of standing apart from the world while carefully stepping back across that line. As many families indicated, they cannot be totally separate from the world around them, whether this is out of economic necessity, Christian altruism, concern for community, or any combination thereof. They want their children to have opportunities, and they know that an education at their local public school can be a model of fairness, collaboration, and discretion. Readily these parents admit they make compromises in



choosing a public school. However, the conversation in which these parents engage with the public schools is to find the place where their children will be happiest. Sen (2009) argued that humans can look upon their opportunities for living and find a range of determinants to value about life. Instead of merely looking at earning power or preparation for a career, he argued that we look at the *capability* of life, its capacity for a breadth of factors that bring meaning, justice, and purpose to our lives. These Amish parents take that view and embrace the responsibility for their children seriously, fully aware it is their job to stand firm at home in their faith and support their children as they venture out into the sphere of public school.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Under Standard V: Qualifications and Duties of Teachers in *Regulations and Guidelines for Amish Parochial Schools of Indiana*, the State of Indiana declares, "The teacher should be a learned individual with a desire to keep on learning. A teacher should be willing to undergo a testing regimen whenever this is required. A passing score on a GED, a passing score on a SAT, or a score of 10.0 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills is satisfactory." The regulations contain no "shall" provision, leaving the issue of testing to local control.

<sup>2</sup> AF007 and AM007 both stated that they want to instill in their children a respect so that the period Rumsprunga won't "start any sooner than that age" or will not occur at all because "it doesn't have to be that way." The fall 2016 meeting Amish teachers in Northern Indiana attended to initiate the school year featured Amish ministers and bishops speaking to the teachers and school board members present about a variety of topics. If not for the fact that they were conducted in Pennsylvania Dutch, lectures on overly busy schedules (Mast 2016), respect for authority (Yoder 2016), and trust between parents and teachers (Miller 2016) from the day-long program could have just as easily been presented to non-Amish families.

<sup>3</sup> That is, a society holding a sense of community, similar to the ancient Greek city-state ideal.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: Amish Families and Their Choice of Public Schools

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewer: Steve Thalheimer

Interviewee(s):

Demographics of interviewee(s)

Gender:

Number of children attending school:

Grade level(s) and gender of child(ren):

Consent form signed? YES NO

Approximate length of interview: 60-75 minutes

### Notes to interviewee

#### Introductory Protocol

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview to assist me with my dissertation. Before we begin, you are asked to sign a consent form for Indiana State University. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, and (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour and fifteen minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete the line of questioning. I also may not use all the questions I have prepared if we are having conversation about other important points*

#### Introduction

*You have been selected to speak with me today because I am interested in your opinions and experiences as an Amish family that chooses to send your children to public school. I provided you a copy of potential questions before our meeting so you could think about your answers.*

### Research Questions

1. *What factors (academic and social) about Millersburg Elementary-Middle School influence you to send your children there?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

2. *What are the positives and negatives about sending your child to a public school that you weighed in making this decision?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

3. *What are the positives and negatives about sending your child to an Amish school that you considered when making this decision?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

4. *What do you feel is the purpose of education?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

5. *What things could the public school do to lose your trust?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

6. *What things could the public school do a better job of?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

7. *Where do you see the future of Amish students and public schools moving? Will there be more students attending public schools, fewer attending public schools, or will it remain about the same? Explain.*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

8. *What do you wish Amish families who do not choose public schools or who have a negative view of public schools knew?*

Response from Interviewee

Reflection by Interviewer

### Closure

*Thank you for taking part in this interview; your participation is very much appreciated. Do note that what was discussed here is confidential and*

*will not be shared with your name connected to your responses. If necessary, do I have permission to follow-up? YES NO*

*Thank you for your time.*