

THE RECEPTIVENESS OF THE AMISH COMMUNITY TO A COMMUNITY  
SCHOOL DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR AMISH CULTURE AND NEEDS

by

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THE AMISH AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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The Receptiveness of the Amish Community to a Community School Designed  
Specifically for Amish Culture and Needs

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the mid-twentieth century public school consolidations, private Amish schools were formed within many public school boundaries. In the early 1990s, federal and state charter policies allowed unique formations of new community schools. This research explored the viewpoints of Amish parents and leaders regarding the possibilities of the formation of an Amish focused community school.

This qualitative study involved Amish participants residing within one public school system's boundaries as well as within one Amish settlement. Focus group research was employed to garner descriptive data concerning the participants' viewpoints on receptiveness to a public funded community school tailored to meet Amish needs. Four focus groups consisted of Amish leaders, Amish parents who send their children to public school, and Amish parents who send their children to a private Amish school. Participants were interviewed through focus group formats.

The results of this research included descriptive data concerning viewpoints of Amish participants' attitudes, concerns, and receptiveness to a public funded community school. The participants outlined projected Amish concerns, advantages, and disadvantages of a school formed for such a purpose.

This analysis suggested that culturally appropriate education of the community school format is needed within Amish communities. While this study revealed that Amish participants were receptive to new educational ideas, it also uncovered elevated concerns toward any government regulations. Finally, descriptive data indicated that Amish leaders are the acting agents who have the authority to implement changes in educational formats.

**DEDICATION**

This dissertation study is dedicated to my family, who faithfully supported me through this endeavor. To my lovely wife, Leah who never once complained about family time lost to the graduate process. To my four loving children, Joe, Dexter, Logan, and Brady, who may have sacrificed and always gave me unconditional love and support.

In addition, I would like to dedicate this study to both my late father William Robert Nye, from whom I learned my work ethic and my late uncle William H. White, who taught me how to have fun in life. Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my younger brother, Charles Edward Nye. You were taken from us way too early in life. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about you. I miss you!

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE PROBLEM**

The Amish are a religious sect that migrated to the United States in the early 1700s because of America's religious tolerance and policy. Today, Amish settlements are found in rural communities of 24 American states. In many rural school districts throughout the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois there are Amish settlements with rapidly expanding populations. Ohio is home to two of the largest of these settlements (Kraybill, 2001).

The groups of Amish that reside within public school districts in these settlements create unique educational and political situations. In rural districts with large numbers of Amish residents, Superintendents often contend with a high percentage of school aged children being educated in private Amish schools. On the other hand, some rural public schools end up educating a small portion of the Amish populous which require more services. The majority of the Amish community desires minimal government influence on the education of their children. The result of limited Amish enrollment in public schools leads to a missed fiscal opportunity that many rural public school leaders feel unnecessarily limit their school budgets. In some Ohio rural communities, the population of Amish school age children surpasses the population of other non-Amish school age children.

Amish parents have a great desire to be involved with the schools of their children. It is reasoned that Amish parents would be more supportive of school levies if their children attended the public schools. Additionally, school districts' revenue would be increased because in states such as Ohio, public school districts receive most of their funding from the state based on enrollment. Public school state revenue could substantially increase with the enrollment of Amish school aged children in their district.

Amish culture is focused on the desire to remain "plain" and live off of the land, separate from the rest of the modern world. The Amish live a rural life in which agriculture is one of the predominant occupations. This is one of the major reasons the Amish desire to settle in rural communities. Amish leaders believe that a major threat to the preservation of their culture is the loss of their children to a modern society which devalues their religious beliefs. It is not uncommon for Amish children to leave the Church during young adulthood. This usually leads to excommunication from the church and being "shunned" by the Amish community (Kraybill, 2001).

According to Siegel (1970), the Amish engage in defensive tactics to avoid this unwanted situation and to preserve their cultural heritage. These strategies include (a) decisive leadership that makes timely decisions to avoid threat, (b) comprehensive socialization that creates loyalty within their group, (c) controlled interaction with outsiders, (d) social sanctions to keep members compliant with group norms, and (e) symbolism of core values that call for loyalty (Siegel, 1970). During school consolidations in the 1970s, Amish parent groups developed private Amish schools for their children to protect their beliefs and preserve their culture.

While the Amish resist many aspects of modernization, they have selectively integrated some features of modern life. Reluctantly, they struck compromises between their beliefs and the conveniences of advanced technologies in order to preserve their culture. Two examples of these concessions include transportation with automobiles and the use of business cell phones. On the issue of education, they have adamantly refused to concede to modern ways in most areas. For example, many Amish send their children to public schools but will not allow them to proceed beyond the eighth grade.

There is a need for public educators to study new ideas for Amish education. Although vast amount information on Amish history and culture is available to researchers, there is a limited amount of information available on the compromises the Amish make to preserve their heritage. To date, Donald Kraybill is considered the authoritative source on the Amish and the accommodations made within their culture. It is the hope of this researcher that this study will add to the breadth and understanding of the rationales used to create modifications within the Amish educational system to preserve their way of life as technology moves forward. Understanding Amish views and current desires will shed light on how to possibly propose community schools geared towards Amish needs in the future.

### **Background and History**

Relevant to this study is the history of the Amish because it provides a background of their lifestyle and beliefs. Jacob Amman (1664–1720) founded the Amish movement in Europe. He started a reform group within the Mennonite movement in an attempt to restore some of the early practices of Mennonites. The Amish name derives from the surname of Jacob Amman. The beliefs and practices of the Amish were based

on the writings of the founder of the Mennonite faith, Menno Simons (1496–1561). The Amish who split from the Mennonites generally lived in Switzerland and in the southern Rhine River region of Germany. They separated in the seventeenth century because they perceived a lack of discipline among the Mennonites (Robinson, 2005).

Amish groups started to migrate to the United States in the early eighteenth century. They initially settled in Pennsylvania; later waves of immigrants established communities in New York, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Ontario, Canada. Today the greatest concentrations of Amish are in three states. Population groups in descending order are (a) Holmes County in Northeast Ohio, (b) Elkhart County in Northeast Indiana, (c) Lancaster County in South Central Pennsylvania, and (d) Geauga County in Northeast Ohio (Robinson, 2005). The epicenters of the large settlements found in these communities are within the boundaries of rural public schools.

The strong beliefs and faith of the Amish attempt to preserve the elements of European rural culture. Amish try to avoid many features of modern society and choose to “live plain.” Living plain requires practices that isolate Amish from mainstream American culture. Many modern conveniences and technologies used today are disapproved for Amish life. It is frowned upon to use electricity, automobiles, appliances, and many other items they consider to be vain in lifestyle (Robinson, 2005).

Almost all members of Amish communities are born and raised into the faith. Very few Amish are converts. The four basic Amish orders are (a) Old Order, (b) New Order, (c) Andy Weaver, and (d) Swartzentruber (Robinson, 2005). The largest population is Old Order Amish and is found throughout Northeast Ohio. Within each Order there is a set of written rules that dictate how Amish community members should

live life. These rules are known as the *Ordnung* (Hostetler, 1993). It is by these rules that each specific Order directs its lifestyle. These rules have to do with dress, hair length, facial hair, buggy styles, and any other aspects of life that have a perceived effect on humility and the ability to remain plain.

The philosophy of Amish culture is embedded in the German word *Gelassenheit*. Kraybill (2001) offered the following explanation:

When translated, *Gelassenheit* means submitting or yielding to a higher authority. Although it is rarely used as a common term in speech, it is a resignation to God's will, yielding to God and to others, self-denial, and having a calm spirit. (p. 29).

There are many terms in the English language that capture this meaning: humility, obedience, submission, and simplicity. *Gelassenheit* is a cultural disposition deeply embedded into the Amish soul that governs their behaviors (Kraybill, 2001). Amish religious doctrine is focused around the two basic principles of obedience to the Church's teachings and separation from the world (Kraybill, 2001). The Amish believe that the surrounding culture imposes a threat to the survival of their way of life.

When the Amish join the Church as young adults, they become accountable to the rules of the order. While growing up within the faith, the young adults go through a period called *Rumspringa*, a period of running around (Hostetler, 1993). This is a time for the young to experience life beyond the rules of the order before they commit to the Church as adults.

After joining the Church, most Amish couples settle down and start what usually becomes a large family. It is not uncommon for Amish families to have more than 12 children. Since most Amish are rarely from outside communities, many Amish groups

have a limited gene pool and are experiencing several inherited disorders (Hostetler, 1993).

According to the Mennonites and Amish, education can be a useful and helpful experience for the young and prepare them for future success. The Amish value education if it teaches about farming, animal care, carpentry, masonry, and other skills conducive to their lifestyle in agriculture and the trades. They show less value for science, technology, and the arts within their curricula. An eighth grade education is considered adequate preparation for Amish life and is generally the accepted length of time for schooling within their culture (Kraybill, 2001).

Amish value education up to a certain level but tend not to pursue specialized education they feel they do not need. They desire to have their children learn basic skills and, on the whole, did not resist public education until 1895 when the enforcement of compulsory attendance laws began. During the following three decades, Amish parents violated attendance policies only for agrarian reasons which led to minor dispositions from public school officials. In 1925, the Pennsylvania state legislature lengthened the school year and increased the enforcement of school attendance. The Amish were resistant to state action that led to widespread school consolidations and the creation of large schools. They believed that modernity would pull schools away from local control, infringe upon their religious beliefs, and diminish their cultural heritage (Kraybill, 2001).

In 1937, the Amish responded to the consolidation of public schools by organizing a layman committee to address Amish schooling desires. After formal meetings they developed a philosophy of what they felt was best for Amish educational needs. One of the goals of this new philosophy was to promote having Amish children

excused from public school after the eighth grade. Amish leaders felt that an eighth grade education was enough for their children to prepare them for the Amish life style. This eventually led to the organization of local Amish schools and Amish school boards. In 1957, the school committee eventually evolved into a statewide organization known as the "Old Order Book Society." This committee's original role was to review and decide what books were appropriate for Amish students. Later roles of the society were to maintain relationships with public school state officials and provide guidelines for the administration of the Amish one-room schools (Kraybill & Huntington 1994).

Prior to 1972, Amish students attended public schools, were under state supervision, and had to adhere to mandatory compulsory attendance laws. This all changed when Jonas Yoder challenged the state of Wisconsin and took the challenge all the way to the United States Supreme Court (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1972). Although the Amish are taught to "turn the other cheek" and do not normally utilize the court system, three different families were represented in court by Yoder, who was the father of one of the students represented in the suit. Yoder argued that the State was forcing young Amish students to attend school and to dress for physical education class in a manner that took away from their plain beliefs. In addition to being asked to dress contrary to their beliefs, the Amish found the whole public school setting to be obtrusive to their favored religious life style and in violation of their first amendment rights. In addition, many Amish parents were later fined five dollars for refusing to send their children, ages 14 and 15, to high school. Lower Wisconsin courts upheld this ruling. Conversely, the Wisconsin Supreme Court overturned the lower court decisions. Furthermore, the United States Supreme Court affirmed the most recent decision finding that the benefits of the



universal education do not justify a violation of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment (Krabill, 2003). They also offered arguments that Amish parents could teach vocational skills such as agriculture and the trades to their children of post-elementary school age. In the end, the United States Supreme Court upheld their rights and voted 7–0 in favor of the Amish (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1972).

One Justice, William O. Douglas, partially dissented because he was opposed to the parents' role in limiting the education of their children by failing to go beyond the grade school level. Justice Douglas felt that the State had the right to protect the children's interest in more education. He felt that each child should decide if he/she wanted go beyond the eighth grade and pursue higher-level careers (*Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 1972).

The Supreme Court's decision created a lasting legacy in educational practice. Since *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972), all states must grant Old Order Amish the right to establish their own schools (should they choose) or to withdraw from public institutions after completing eighth grade. In some communities, Amish parents have continued to send their children to public elementary schools. However, in those same communities, the majority of those parents send their children to public kindergarten and then to Amish schools for the rest of their education (Kraybill, 2001). The reason for high kindergarten attendance is that Amish schools have no organized kindergarten within their system.

Teachers in Amish schools are usually graduates from their schools and have no advanced training in the field of education. Many of their teachers are young women who are between the ages of 16 and 23. When a teacher marries, that is usually the end

of her teaching career. In some cases when Amish School Boards cannot find a teacher, they will employ either a local mother or on rare occasions a local man.

Throughout the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, the rural one-room Amish school house is becoming more common. In the span of 50 years from 1950 to 2000, the number of Amish school houses increased from 4 to 237 in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (Dewalt, 2001). In 1992, the states with Amish communities averaged a growth rate of 16 new Amish schools a year (Kraybill, 1993).

To gain voter support rural public schools will often support the opening of an Amish school within their boundaries. The Amish may receive used books, furniture, and desks from the public rural schools. Often, the public schools willingly donate needed items to maintain a positive relationship with the Amish community. In some cases, rural public schools sell these items to the Amish schools at a discounted price.

Today, Amish schools are similar to the historic one- or two-room school houses of the past. The Amish are, in fact, preserving a part of rural America and a piece of America's rural educational history. Consolidation and the design of modern school systems are changing the structure of how future schools are built. New schools today are located in populous areas and the small communities are left without a local school. The Amish communities and their small local schools help keep the rural character of such small agricultural towns (Beeson & Strange, 2000).

Prior to the 1972 U. S. Supreme Court decision, Amish communities battled states over vocational training and chose to withdraw their students from school at the age of 14 and then apply for work permits (Kraybill, 2001). Since winning that decision in 1972, the Amish educate their children either in an Amish school setting or a public school

setting until the eighth grade, after which they provide vocational education at home.

Prior to the 1970s, some Amish parents wanted to send their children to public elementary schools to give them more opportunities to interact with outsiders. However, the interest of these parents in public education quickly waned upon the arrival of sex education, in-school television, and the teaching of evolution (Kraybill, 2001). Today, with few exceptions, Amish children attend either a one or two room school staffed by Amish teachers. Within those walls, the values of obedience, tradition, and humility eclipse science, competition, and diversity. Whereas public high school students write essays and prepare for continued education to learn how to think critically, the Amish students prepare to become apprentices for farming, crafts, and the trades (Kraybill, 2001).

The Amish are often portrayed as socially primitive people who have withdrawn from the modern world. Their simple lifestyle of reading by lantern, riding buggies, and shunning high school during the teen years is not perceived to be modern. However, if you enter an Amish shop you may find the most modern air and hydraulic tools, sophisticated equipment, and many modern technologies that fall within the scope of their written rule. This also relates to educational practices. They use textbooks and equipment that were discarded by the public schools, teach a curriculum similar to public schools, and fulfill the requirements of special needs children as do public schools (Kraybill, 2001).

Since the Amish pay property taxes, they help fund public schools and there is an unmet need to gather information that might lead to additional educational services for the Amish schools from public funds. It is clear that Amish parents do not prefer their

children to be educated in the public schools. However, data on Amish perceptions, opinions, and attitudes toward the acceptance of public educators in an Amish setting might be of great value. Attempts to reunite the public system and private Amish schools have not been adequately explored.

### **Problem Statement**

Many states have seen a rapid migration of Amish people into rural communities. The counties that have a higher percentage of Amish residents are running out of available farm land. Future generations of Amish settle into adjacent counties for the lower cost of living and available farm land. Less populated, adjacent counties are more desirable to the Amish because their land is taxed at a lower rate. The movement has been so rapid that some public school systems have more school-aged Amish children within their boundaries than their current enrollment. This leads to communities with many Amish taxpayers who do not fully endorse public education

Even though land is more available in bordering counties, more and more of the Amish workforce is becoming less agrarian. Each year young Amish adults select other occupations such as manufacturing and trades. Some local schools are located in portions of counties that are directly adjacent to counties with large, established Amish settlements. The movement and population growth of the Amish into bordering counties have led to the development of multiple Amish schools within the borders of many rural school districts.

Amish schools exist to preserve Amish culture, religious beliefs, and first amendment rights. The number of children that attend these schools is significant and problematic for local school systems. Since school funding in Ohio is determined by

public vote, there is a need to foster some type of relationship between the Amish community and the public schools in order to build united support for the local public schools.

In Ohio, schools are locally funded by vote and there is limited evidence of public schools negotiating with Amish leaders to include them in their educational systems. Amish culture includes the desire for the Amish community to be educated in a “plain,” one-room school house setting. There is a paucity of information available regarding local school leaders and Amish leaders trying to compromise to create an educational setting that Amish leaders would endorse. Multiple studies by Dewalt (2006), Ediger (2005), Hostetler (1992), and Johnson-Weiner (2007) were done on the operation and curricula of Amish schools but no actual studies suggest any inquiry of Amish school houses converting over to a community school format.

In 2012, one community school in central Ohio was developed to retain Amish students who were currently enrolled in public school prior to a school consolidation. Parents of the students being educated by this public school threatened to put their children in a local Amish school due to consolidation and the increased distance from their homes. After a community school was instituted and located close to the Amish populous, they successfully retained over 30 Amish students in the 2012-2013 school year.

With the reduction of rural work opportunities and the need for the Amish community to adapt to the modern workforce, Amish leaders are becoming more flexible with written sect rule, particularly when it comes to job opportunities or the work force. As the modern work force is required to be more skilled and familiar with modern

technologies, there is thought that Amish leaders would explore new educational options (McConnell & Hurst, 1987).

It is proposed that an educational setting that would benefit both the Amish community and the public schools would be a symbiotic relationship. Discussions should take place on the need for Amish students to be competitive in today's workforce and be educated in a style that would respect their religious beliefs. Relationships fostered between Amish parents and public school administrators could lead to public transport of Amish students and the creation of a school setting that meets Amish educational and cultural concerns. Educational settings could be funded by the local school system to create an atmosphere apart from the "secular vanity" of the normal public school. This study will be the documentation of such discussions between a local Superintendent and Amish leaders and parents. Discussions will center on the topics of curriculum, administration, and educational setting in an attempt to create an Amish Community School and to create a mutually beneficial relationship with the public schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study obtained data concerning the attitudes, beliefs, and relationships between the Amish and the public schools of a school district located in northeast Ohio that has a large number of Amish residents. A focus specific to this study was to identify opinions and interests from parents as well as Amish leaders who have substantial influence with the Amish families who reside within school district boundaries. Another major focus of the study was to examine the willingness of Amish parents and Amish leaders to engage with public education, particularly in the context of community

schools. It was pertinent to gather outcomes from this study to help design a plan to build better relationships between the Amish community and the local public schools.

### **Significance of the Study**

The aim of this study was to design plans and improve the current relationships with the Amish community that exist within the public school district borders and explore options in which public schools would educate or provide support services for the Amish children of their community. Strengthening the Amish support of Ohio's rural public schools, as well as enrolling Amish students, is important to the financial success of the public school system in those areas. With data from this study, the possibility of bringing a publicly funded teaching system to the Amish classroom, as well as public transportation to the Amish setting, will be explored.

Lately, there have been issues within the Amish community that have some bearing on the public schools. One School Superintendent in Geauga County, Ohio, attempted to eliminate the practice of providing used text books and furniture to Amish schools to influence Amish parents to vote in favor of a school operating levy. This led to organization against the public schools throughout the Amish church system in Geauga County. The Amish usually are a neutral factor in school operating issues, but as the economy wanes and the Amish population grows there has been increased voting attendance for tax initiatives.

The Amish have some interest in what public schools have to offer. They take advantage of the kindergarten programs, special education programs, and use the facilities when possible. One of the hardships the Amish have is transportation. In order for the culture to remain vibrant, the Amish must compete and use modern transportation.

Since they decline to drive modern vehicles, they must pay for transportation to and from work and for some of their students to be carried to their local school houses. Some Amish leaders have expressed interest in public school transportation to their private school houses.

Public schools do not receive state funding for Amish children and therefore do not transport Amish children. Amish leaders may argue that they pay local property tax and that the schools should transport those children. Ohio law dictates that schools must transport any children to accredited schools within a 30-minute drive from the public school. To the Amish community's disadvantage, the Amish schools are not accredited, and therefore, there is no legal requirement to transport those students.

Many Amish students either walk to school or ride pony carts when weather is conducive. Occasionally one of the older students will drive a buggy and pick up other students on the way to school. Teen usage of horse drawn transportation is a major safety concern to the Amish. In poor conditions and when the traveling distance is too great, the Amish pay for transportation service. This is a financial hardship on them due to their low average income compared to the rest of the community and the high cost of transportation services offered by private vendors.

The Amish have a well developed and organized school structure. They have a Superintendent of schools who oversees local school boards for each school. Often the local school district is very similar geographically to their local church district. The Amish School Board's role is somewhat different from the public School Board's role. In public schools, the Board of Education hires the Superintendent and approves policy, purchases, and the hiring of personnel. In the Amish community, the local School



Board's role is to organize fundraisers for the school and delegate the duty to keep the school operational. The Superintendent oversees the school houses and is responsible for teachers and curriculum. It is not uncommon to see an Amish Superintendent given the responsibility to oversee school houses located within multiple public school boundaries. It is the Amish Superintendent's responsibility to appoint at least one teacher to each school, and most of the teachers are self-trained.

The Amish school day has many similarities to the school day of many public schools. While they start the day with a Scripture reading and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, religion is not formally taught in the school. The curriculum usually includes reading, arithmetic, spelling, grammar, penmanship, history, and some geography. Science, art, and sex education are usually not taught. Interestingly, it is taboo for Amish students to speak their native language during school hours. There is one exception. Speaking Amish on Fridays is a positive reinforcement for good behavior. Religion and their native language are taught at home and in church.

Local Superintendents of Northern Ohio school districts have concerns regarding the rapid migration of Amish people into their communities. Many work hard on developing quality community relations with their Amish parents. A desire to foster a better working and collaborative relationship was the foundation of this research project. Since there are some Amish children attending public schools and some Amish communities that enjoy some of the services the public schools provide, the exploration of opportunities to further incorporate Amish students into the public funded community educational setting was warranted.

This research was designed to explore the desires of Amish leaders to further their relationship with the public schools. It was understood that Amish leaders still have strong beliefs and desires to remain plain. However, it was felt that some areas could be studied that would serve the Amish students while being sensitive to their religious values. If a relationship could be built where the Amish communities seek services from public schools, then their voter support could be extremely advantageous to a local public School Board.

This study was conducted within a rural public school boundary that hosted nine private Amish schools. Each Amish school educates approximately 40 to 50 elementary children from the first through eighth grades. The local public school accommodates 91 Amish students whose parents' chose a free public education.

Noteworthy at this point was that the researcher has public school interests and is an acting public school Superintendent. Exploration of whether rural public schools can benefit financially and/or socially from greater Amish participation was a major emphasis of this study. The researcher has an established, positive rapport with the local Amish community and was exploring new avenues to strengthen relationships between the Amish and public schools.

### **Theoretical Framework/Methodology**

The theoretical framework of this focus group study fell within the scope of an ethnographic study. Ethnography refers to both the research process and the product of that effort—the written ethnographic account (Jaeger, 1988). This was a study with no predicted outcome.

The results were analyzed from the inquiries into the social behavior of Amish people. This study was an attempt to document and analyze what Amish parents (a) actually do, (b) what they say they do, (c) what they say they should do, and (d) the meanings they assign to a proposed community school (Jaeger, 1988). Through ethnography, the researcher aimed to acquire a methodological set of tools designed to lead to further studies of social situations.

The ideal tool for this ethnographic study was the focus group. Focus groups are a discussion-based, group interview that produces a particular type of qualitative data. It involves the use of multiple respondents to generate data and is focused on a specific stimulus in a relatively staged setting by a moderator (Millward, 2001). From a social psychological perspective, a focus group is an exercise in group dynamics in the conduct of the group. The interpretation of results obtained must be understood within the context of group interaction (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Through mutual engagements in which the researcher and Amish focus groups will converse, data will be produced for investigation (Hatch, 2002). The set of topics the study explored constituted the substantive frame of the study (Weiss, 1994). This process used focus groups with Amish parents and observations of their interactions in an effort to analyze the Amish participants and make sense of their world.

This qualitative method used a descriptive emphasis on facts and acts. Unlike other forms of qualitative research, ethnography was oriented toward the description and interpretation of cultural behaviors. The results were gathered through the use of cultural processes and behavior patterns; the behaviors were interpreted and portrayed (Schram, 2006).

The basic assumptions utilized by the ethnographer were:

- human behavior and the way people construct and make sense of their lives are highly variable and locally specific;
- social behavior and interactions vary on what should, does or might occur;
- it is possible to discern patterns of social behavior by experiencing and inquiring;
- before you can offer interpretations of people's actions and behaviors, you must uncover what they actually do and the reasons they give for doing it;
- interpretations you construct of people's lives is built upon the points of understanding and misunderstanding that occur between you and them; and
- ethnography cannot provide an exhaustive, absolute description of anything (Schram, 2006, p. 95).

While these approaches demand accountability to the data, the model allows research questions to reflect an understanding of the process or change over time (Schram, 2006).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A limitation in this focus group study was that narrative analysis does not always provide results that can be easily categorized. Although critical and reflective analysis was utilized through this study, the potential for bias was present. The researcher can reap political gain from outcomes of the study; however, the rural public and Amish schools can benefit from any results from this study. Both the studied focus groups as well as the public school system gained knowledge that will set a framework for future community relations. A second limitation of this study was the relatively small number

of participants in the focus groups. This study sought to involve interviewees who had the power to make educational decisions, and with a small community group such as the Amish, the viable candidates to study were limited. Third, although this study was designed to collect data in relation to finance; both the interviewer and interviewees can achieve outcomes that can lead to financial gain for their schools.

The delimitations of this study are of two-fold. First, the studied community groups are all located within the boundaries of the same rural public school district. Second, the group studied is only one parochial subgroup within the community. There were no other parochial groups involved in this study and knowledge of other parochial subgroups within the public school boundaries is limited.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms are critical to the understanding of this research study. The key terms presented in this section are defined within the context of their use and are intended to provide clarity of the research presented.

- **Community school.** This is a public, non-profit, non-sectarian school that is operated independently of any school district, and is under contract with a state authorized sponsoring educational entity (We, n.d.).
- **Charter.** A state approved document that gives authority for a community school to operate (Fisler, 2003).
- **Amish-Mennonites.** This is a group that split from the traditional Old Order Amish. They meet and worship in a church building. They are also known as “Meetinghouse Amish” (Krabill, 2001).

- **Andy Weaver.** A group of Old Order Amish who are known for their strict observance of Old Order Amish Traditions (Robinson, 2005).
- **Beachy.** This is a group that split from the traditional Old Order Amish. They have an aversion to “shunning.” They tolerate technologies such as telephones, cars, electricity, and tractors (Krabill, 2001).
- **Gelassenheit.** This is an old German term that means submitting and yielding to a higher authority. Although it is rarely used as a common term in speech, it is a resignation to God’s will, yielding to God and to others. As practiced in the Amish culture it includes self-denial and having a calm spirit (Kraybill, 2001).
- **New Order Amish.** A group, in recent years, that split from the traditional Old Order Amish. They are slightly less conservative than the traditional Old Order Amish (Robinson, 2005).
- **Old Order Amish.** The traditional Amish group also known as House Amish because they continue to worship in their homes (Kraybill, 2001).
- **Ordnung.** This is the written rules of the church that guide Amish behavior (Hostettler, 1993).
- **Plain.** A term used by the Amish that means down to earth, the avoidance of modern technologies, staying away from the outside world, and the practicing of humility (Kraybill, 2001).
- **Rumspringa.** This is a period of time where young Amish adults experience life outside of their faith. This occurs prior to taking steps to join the Church (Hostettler, 1993).

- **Shunning.** Practiced by Old Order Amish and commences upon order from Amish leaders. Shunning results in a dissociation of a former member who freely left the Church or results in a dissociation of a member who unforgivably sins and is asked to leave the Church (Hostetler, 1993).
- **Swartzentruber.** This is a group of Old Order Amish. They are considered to be the most conservative. They practice strict observance to Old Order Amish traditions (Robinson, 2005).
- **Vain.** This is a term used by the Amish. It is associated with modern life, the use of technologies, and the bringing of attention to oneself (Kraybill, 2001).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Amish are a religious sect that migrated to the United States in the early 1700s because of America's religious tolerance and policy. Today, Amish settlements are found in rural communities of 24 American states. In many rural school districts throughout the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois there are Amish settlements with rapidly expanding populations. Ohio is home to two of the largest of these settlements (Kraybill, 2001).

Amish students attend school from the first grade through the eighth grade and then they are withdrawn from school to work along side their parents in a vocational-like setting. In Ohio, especially in rural local school districts, many Amish parents send their children to kindergarten in public school districts to prepare them for their journey through private Amish schools. In a few cases, some Amish children attend public school through the eighth grade and then are withdrawn by their parents.

#### **Differences between Amish and Public Schools**

School subjects within the Amish curriculum are very similar to those taught in the public school system (Dewalt, 2006). The subjects taught are arithmetic, reading, spelling, phonics, history, and limited science and art (Dewalt, 2006). Since the subject matter of the public school curriculum is similar to Amish subject matter, Amish parents endorse public kindergarten.



Although the subject matter is similar when comparing public and Amish schools, there are major differences in the philosophy of education (Ediger, 2005). In some of the early Amish schools, young children used the Rod and Staff Reading Series. This series used biblical stories from the Old Testament that taught lessons conducive to their lifestyle. Students would draw and color artwork that was Bible related and this counted as their art requirement. This learning approach was used to cover the subject matter within each curriculum area and it taught Amish values such as humility and the understanding God's will (Ediger, 2005). A good deal of the early curriculum was also taught using the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson because his writing harmonized well with the Old Order Amish thinking. Many of Emerson's works focused on Amish values such as self-reliance, trust, humility, the acceptance of divine providence, and God's will.

In the early part of the twentieth century, critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving were not emphasized as strongly as arithmetic with its utilitarian functions in an Amish society (Hostettler, 1980). As the twentieth century evolved, the religious influence waned in the one-room school house setting and Amish leaders encouraged religious values to be taught at home or in church meetings (Krabill, 2001). Currently, the mechanics of written work receive full attention. Punctuation, proper paragraph formation, and proper quotation marks are emphasized. Letter writing is also stressed due to its practicality and value to the Amish society (Ediger, 1986). Design and engineering are taboo because of their association with discovery. Exploratory or inventive sciences are perceived as vain and likely to draw attention to oneself. However, practical science is often used to educate about soil erosion, weather,

horticulture, animal husbandry, and fertilization. These types of science lessons are very common and aid with the Amish way of life (Ediger, 2003).

Today, the Amish school house uses a model of teaching subjects similar to the public school system. Students are required to write in English and speak only English, with the exception of a reward system that allows them to speak Amish during part of the last day of the week. The Amish philosophy is to expose their children to English due to the environment and work force in which they live but still educate them in a setting that is “plain” with the focus on humility and God’s will (Hostetler & Huntington, 1992).

Features of Amish schools have been described in the literature (Hostetler & Huntington 1992; Huntington, 1994; Harroff, 2004). These schools include a small-sized school house with a curtain that has the ability to divide the room into two sections where the lower and upper grades are housed. A streamlined and pragmatic curriculum focuses on a pedagogical approach that emphasizes rote learning, drilling facts, and seatwork. Subject matter is similar to public schools with the exception that at the end of each day those students in the fourth through eighth grades receive German instruction. Except for a morning prayer and a biblical reading, the curriculum is formal and English-based and does not include religion. There is a strong emphasis on practical applications of schoolwork, physical labor, and a widespread rejection of the idea of homework (Hurst & McConnell, 2003).

### **Today’s Amish School Culture**

Other features of the Amish school setting are worth mentioning because they give an indication of the culture of the school. First, it is important to note the emphasis of formal structure and patriarchal authority (Harroff, 2004). The operation of Amish

schools is heavily male gendered. The school house facility is cared for and operated by a group of all-male school board members. These school board groups usually consist of three to five fathers of the attending students and they meet on a monthly basis. The teaching is a feminized and a temporary occupation.

Teachers are usually unmarried women with an eighth grade education (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). Male and female students are expected to learn the same curriculum and participate in athletic activities during break time. Multiple teachers interviewed by researchers were adamant that the academic and extracurricular expectations are equal for both boys and girls (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). Today's Amish schools have many similarities to the public schools pertaining to curriculum, and it appears that in spite of some obvious gender division in the hierarchy, the schools strive for a gender equal curriculum (Hurst & McConnell, 2006).

Amish teachers also take great interest in the socialization of the children and the intensity of how they tend to social needs. Much thought is put into disciplinary strategies and dealing with behaviors that indicate nonparticipation or lack of obedience to authority (Kraybill, 2001; Hostetler, 1992). Corporal punishment is rarely used. Instead, Amish teachers will use punishments such as an extra writing assignment or the removal of privileges (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). These strategies appear to be similar to the tactics used in public school settings.

Finally, one of the most interesting facts about Amish-organized schools is that parent groups rather than church districts run them. While the development of the Amish schools was based on the argument of religious freedoms, a lack of religion within the school system appears to be evident. In Ohio and Pennsylvania, many Amish schools

have students in attendance from multiple church districts (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). Amish church districts are not always completely segregated, and it is not economical to build a school for each church district. Church affiliation has far more impact for individual behavior within Amish communities than their schools. This can lead to the argument that these small schools are formed for reasons of culture over religious belief.

### **Historical Relationships between Amish and Public Schools**

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the majority of Amish children attended school in the one-room, public school setting. As the United States became more developed, alternative school settings were established which eventually led to the consolidation of rural schools. In many rural communities, the strict enforcement of state laws required students to attend school until the age of 16. These actions were the impetus for the establishment of Amish schools to meet Amish needs (Meyers, 2003).

Until the 1900s, Amish parents had major involvement in and control of the schools in which their children attended. The first recorded school conflict between Amish and the State occurred in 1914 in Geauga County, Ohio. Three Amish fathers were fined when they refused to send their children to high school. These students had completed the eighth grade and were under the age of 16. A few years later, the tension became worse with the passage of the Bing Act by the Ohio General Assembly in 1921. This law compelled children to attend school until the age of 18 with the provision of work permits issued after the age of 16. This created unhappy Amish parents who were of the mindset that their children were in school too many years and an eighth grade education was adequate for their culture (Meyers, 2003).

At this time in history, Amish parents considered the subjects of art, science, history, geography, and hygiene unnecessary. They protested by telling their children to not to study these subjects and in a few cases got charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor. This behavior occurred in several states in one form or another (Meyers, 2003). Difficulties in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, began in 1937, when officials of the East Lampeter school district decided to replace 10 one-room school houses with one consolidated school located a considerable distance from Amish home sites. This led to a widespread dissatisfaction among Amish parents due to the loss of local involvement (Kraybill, 1989).

There were several other conflicts that occurred between the Amish and the State on a national level and many of them occurred within the boundaries of Ohio. In the 1950s, the case of *State v. Hershberger* (1990) drew national attention when the local sheriff tried to remove Amish children from their home for truancy. The charges stemmed from non-attendance at high school. The Amish parents were ordered to bring their sons to a hearing. When the parents attended the hearing without their sons, they refused to pay the fine for non-compliance of delivery of their children. Consequently, they were arrested and later released because the judge felt the parents did not know the whereabouts of their children. Thus, the issues of this case did not come to light because it never was fully tested (Meyers, 2003).

As history passed, other battles between the Amish and the State occurred in different states. The states that experienced conflicts between the Amish and state officials were Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. In 1972, a landmark case was taken all the way to the United States Supreme Court when

Jonas Yoder successfully challenged the State of Wisconsin's requirement of compulsory high school attendance (Meyers, 2003). The groundbreaking ruling of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) paved the way for cultural self-determination through control of education and has become crucial for cultural and social continuity within the Amish community (Hurst, 2006).

The relationship between the Amish and public education officials mellowed after the Supreme Court ruling in 1972 (Kraybill, 2001). Legislators created regulations with Amish leaders in which mutual expectations were agreed upon. For example, local building codes in the mid-1970s required coal stoves to be located in basements. During this time, many of the Amish schools were heated on the same floor as a one-room school house. The building of basements for the sole purpose of heating became too costly for the Amish community. After several discussions, state officials began to overlook the furnace requirements. In addition to fire safety, many other issues were quietly solved behind the scenes with state officials. Some of these included (a) water testing, (b) teacher certification, (c) attendance reports, (d) immunization, (e) Worker's Compensation, and (f) unemployment benefits (Kraybill, 2001).

In the mid-1980s, new state regulations in Pennsylvania and Ohio called for state certification of schools. According to Amish leaders, state officials agreed to honor past informal agreements as long as the Amish agreed not to protest or obstruct the pending legislation. The Amish then designed their own standards for education and printed their own certification form. After fully accepting the Supreme Court ruling, Old Order Amish leaders had great respect for the legal system. They won battles of location, size, control, curriculum, and compulsory age issues but had to accede to the 180-day school

year. Their agricultural lifestyles created a need for students to end school early to participate in spring planting (Kraybill, 2001). Today, a typical Amish school will have shortened breaks with minimal holiday vacations to get students out early for spring planting. Even though a growing population of today's Amish workforce does not directly work in agriculture-related jobs, Amish culture still revolves around a spring planting calendar.

### **Modern Relationships with Amish and Public Education Systems**

Many public schools in Pennsylvania and Ohio have fostered special relationships with the Amish community for political reasons. Schools donate their used books, desks, and other furniture to Amish schools to help create political support within their district. Usually these items are donated when the public school has exhausted the need for them (Kraybill, 2001).

Since Ohio public schools rely on local voters for portions of their revenue, they actively engage with the Amish living within their school districts. Public schools allow Amish community groups to use their facilities for Amish organized basketball games, volleyball tournaments, and baseball games. Amish schools encourage athletic games as part of the curriculum and the love of competitive sports in the Amish community is strong. It is not uncommon for Amish groups to attend a public high school athletic event or have Amish groups organize athletic events among themselves at the public school facilities. Public schools commonly allow and encourage their Amish community members to utilize the public school facilities. This builds a relationship between the Amish and the local schools.

In Ohio, Amish community members tend to vote in low numbers and rarely get involved when school issues are placed on the ballot. Electoral outcomes indicate low opposition among the Amish community when it comes to school issues. The Amish are of the opinion that public school issues are no concern to their lifestyles and, therefore, they fail to take any political interest in public school issues.

In the modern era, Amish communities have accepted some aspects of modern society. Under pressure to keep competitive with modern economies and markets, the Amish leaders have made concessions to ensure the survival of their communities. These concessions are mostly related to updated technologies. However, there are limited reports of Amish concessions with education in recent years.

#### **Amish Schools Grounded in the Past but Adapting for the Future**

In Holmes County, Ohio, the 2007 elected public school board members observed that there was often tension between younger Amish parents who wanted to send their children to public schools and older members of the community. Younger parents were desirous that their children acquire the education they would need to work in an increasing industrial environment (Johnson-Wiener, 2007). Since over half of the working Amish in Holmes County no longer have agriculture-related jobs, there is great concern among the younger Amish parents to ready their children for a more modern working society.

Some Old Order schools in Holmes County, Ohio, ensure Amish parents that education remains as it was before school consolidation. These schools tend to serve the Old Order Amish, yet diversity leads some Amish parents to decide to send their children to today's Amish schools. Many Old Order Amish regret that public schools have not



maintained their smallness and usefulness to the Amish (Johnson-Wiener, 2007).

Although the Amish want to maintain their ways in life, many do not like the fact that they are cut off from their non-Amish neighbors.

In the Holmes County area, many Old Order families have chosen not to take their children out of the public schools. In fact, recent Amish directories suggest that over a third of the Old Order parents continue to send their children to public schools. Some of these public schools are predominantly Amish (Johnson-Wiener, 2007). Over one-half of the students in the East Holmes School District are Amish and the district has maintained a number of smaller Amish elementary schools. The Amish often attend school there through the eighth grade then withdraw for cultural reasons.

Since many Ohio Amish students receive an education similar to their non-Amish peers, the public schools are starting to have some influence on private Amish schools (Johnson-Wiener, 2007). In the Holmes County area, the Old Order Amish private schools are mainstreamed in an indirect way. These schools do not focus on being different from the public schools. Their aim is to provide a basic education similar to that which is offered in the public school and reflect the lifestyle that supports Old Order values (Johnson-Wiener, 2007).

The educational settings and relationships between the public schools and Old Order Amish have many variations within the Holmes County, Ohio area. In East Holmes County schools, there are many Amish students enrolled in the public schools, whereas in other parts of Ohio the local Amish communities support their private schools. Some Amish parents desire a school setting that accommodates their culture rather than a school with a unique curriculum. It is commonly understood that today's Amish

curriculum is similar to public schools with the exception of the teaching of German (Dewalt, 2006; Kraybill, 2001; Johnson-Wiener, 2007).

### **Modern Societal Pressure on Amish School Culture**

To outsiders, the one-room school house setting, the horse and buggy, and the style of dress are the most visible signs of the Amish rejecting modernity. Though farming is the preferred occupation for the Amish, high birthrates coupled with the limited availability of property, rising property prices, and technological changes in the larger society have made the non-mechanized farming model increasingly problematic (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). Modernization encroaches upon the Amish. Highways, shopping malls, rural established businesses, and new house building for non-Amish make separation from the world increasingly difficult (Marlow, 2005).

While the Amish continue to fight progress and resist modern technologies, they have also been willing to negotiate with the current society. According to Kraybill (2001), “they seek to find a balance between strict isolation and wholesale accommodation to the larger society and have struck many compromises that blend aspects of both cultures.” When the Amish negotiate issues that concern their values, beliefs, and ideals it is considered cultural bargaining. When they are willing to negotiate patterns of social organization, the exchange is considered structural bargaining (Kraybill, 2001). Some examples of bargaining concessions are (a) using regular and cellular phones outside of the home, (b) riding in automobiles without owning them, and (c) using rollerblades or bicycles for local transport. This negotiating metaphor implies a dynamic process of give-and-take within Amish society and between the Amish and the rest of the society.

One of the major reasons Amish leaders negotiate is because of what happens when they fail to negotiate. Throughout history, there were several instances where Amish leaders failed to negotiate and that resulted in some leaving the Amish way of life. Expulsion of detractors is a strategy by leaders to preserve the Amish culture. However, by groups leaving the Old Order Amish, the formation of groups such as the Amish-Mennonites, Beachy Amish, and New Order Amish were possible. Amish leaders give huge considerations before expelling (i.e., shunning) a group that makes modern adaptations. The expulsion is heavily weighed against making concessions for that group in order to preserve members of the Amish culture (Kraybill, 2001).

In the three decades since *Wisconsin V. Yoder*, (1972) there have been dramatic transformations in the economic livelihood of Amish communities. Although farming remained the preferred way of life for most Amish communities through the 1970s, high birthrates coupled with shrinking availability of land, rising property prices, and new technology in today's society have made non-mechanized farming increasingly problematic (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). As a result, economic alternatives such as micro-enterprises, mobile work crews, and factory employment have become common to the Amish workforce (Kraybill & Nolt, 2004). For most Amish farmers, the success rate has been above average and the success rate for Amish enterprises is far above the national average due to their creativity, on-the-job learning, and savvy.

Amish adults see the need for new skills and training but want to avoid becoming too formally educated. Amish philosophy and beliefs dictate that someone who is over-educated appears to be vain in God's eyes. One way the Amish navigate around this learned religious philosophy is to selectively educate students. There are many cases

where they take specific courses to learn a trade or pursue a graduate equivalent exam in order to achieve certification in a specific trade (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). This constitutes an educational response to the social, economic, and cultural pressures of current years.

However, increasing entanglement with the market economy has also created (a) greater socioeconomic differentiation (including the rise of Amish millionaires); (b) extensive leisure time and purchasing power; (c) the growing employment of women; and (d) the need for specialized knowledge about information technology, insurance, legal codes, and other matters of the English world (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). These changes strike at the center of Amish culture and raise questions about the importance of changing the format of Amish education. There have been several opinions in the Amish community of how Amish leaders should attempt to adjust education to meet the need for the modern work force. Amish leaders fought hard to control their children's schooling only to find out that as the work force evolves, the need for educational change will eventually need to be explored.

Safety has great value in the Amish community and also creates pressure to co-mingle with the public sector for educational programs. In the Geauga County region, the Amish population has overcome cultural differences and is working to improve fire safety training programs for the residents. Over a span of several years, public health workers in the Amish community noticed an overwhelming number of Amish families visiting local health clinics complaining of symptoms related to carbon monoxide poisoning. During the same time, there were several outbreaks of Amish house and chimney fires which were mainly due to the common method of home heating by burning

firewood and the misuse of kerosene heaters, lanterns, and stoves because of the prohibited use of electricity (Panasevich, 2004).

Amish leaders and Geauga fire officials teamed up to create fire safety training programs and brought them directly to the local Amish schools. A federal grant funded a program to bring education to the Amish schools in which carbon monoxide poisoning prevention, hazardous material storage, and fire safety were parts of the curriculum. Local fire departments visited over 50 of the local Amish schools for training programs and additional programs will focus on pedestrian and buggy safety (Panasevich, 2004). This gives an indication of some of the Amish leaders' flexibility and willingness to compromise their educational format. The areas of safety are some of the easiest formats to negotiate due to concerns by Amish leaders for public safety.

There is a developing need for Amish children to receive curriculum outside of the normal Amish culture. Although many public educators and safety officials feel the need for a developed Amish education system, the Amish situation is rarely mentioned in the growing sociological and anthropological debate over schooling, culture, and modernity (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). Defenders of the Amish school house setting argue that modern curriculum delivered in mass hegemonic forms will threaten the local control of schooling that keep Amish children close to their culture. On the other hand, advocates of a more modern curriculum respect Amish lifestyle but argue that Amish children will need a limited but advanced curriculum to enable them to survive in a modern work force.

Unanswered in the literature are key questions about how the shift away from agricultural careers and the growing of socioeconomic differentiation in Amish

communities impact Amish schooling and their needs (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). The Amish have worked to minimize their contact with the non-Amish to keep their community intact and integrated. This cultural cohesion and insulation from mainstream society is a major factor behind the relative success in resisting mainstream education compared to other religious groups (Dewalt, 2006). However, the macroeconomic, technological, and legal changes that are evident in today's environments impinge on Amish communities and their ability to maintain isolation from the outside world. This infiltration results in the creation of ties between Amish and many non-Amish, resulting in a bridge between the two groups (Hurst & McConnell, 2006).

With evidence of multiple concessions to technology in the Amish workforce, it is timely to investigate how willing the Amish are to negotiate modern day curriculum as well as school setting. Increasing numbers of weak ties and consequent infiltration of new elements introduced within their community encourage the development of a variety of educational responses (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). School settings that did not permit any type of modern convenience now are equipped with indoor plumbing and heating systems that have some degree of mechanization.

### **Amish and Community Schools**

The concept of community schools did not arrive in Ohio until the late twentieth century. The option of Amish groups using community school formats has not been explored. In order to explore this option, a review of community school history is relevant to this research topic.

### **Impetus for Community Schools**

In the early 1980s, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published an alarming report called, *A Nation at Risk* (1983). This report opened the door for “competition” within schools. This new idea was driven by popular business models which thrived on competition in quality and costs. It was recognized that several school systems throughout the country were failing to graduate students with the needed skills to compete in the workforce. An outcry by community members residing in failing school districts and industrialists who were looking for an educated work force spurred the beginning of the so called “charter movement.” These groups evolved to include civil rights activists, free market economists, career public-school educators, and voucher proponents with varied aspirations for the movement and feelings toward the traditional system (Noller, 2010).

A National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) study found that the nation’s charter laws cite at least 18 different goals that include (a) spurring competition, (b) increasing professional opportunities for teachers, and (c) encouraging greater use of technology (Smarick, 2008). Today, there are multiple venues that focus on community schools. These include advocates, special interest groups, and coalition groups’ that campaign for new policy or policy amendments on a continuous basis.

In the early 1990s, several influential members of the business sector developed a strong campaign for alternative education. Many public, inner city schools were failing and elected officials received pressure by local businessmen to create an alternate educational setting which would properly prepare the student for the current workforce. Many parent groups followed their campaign and strongly advocated for school choice.

### **The Evolution of Community Schools**

During 1995, reform movements were initiated in various sectors of the public education system. One school format that evolved during this time was the community school format. As early as 1955, Milton Friedman, an economist at the University of Chicago, endorsed the need for school choice, citing the dangers of a monopolistic public school platform (We, n.d.). Milton and Rose Friedman are considered the couple who pioneered school choice in America. They are the founders of The Foundation for Educational Choice in 1996. They and many others in the business sector believed that when schools are forced to compete to keep their children, they will perform best.

Community schools are primary or secondary schools that receive public money but are not subject to some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools. The rules and regulations are relaxed in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each school's charter. In the early 1990s, community schools began to open and many American children attended by choice and often received assistance through donated funds.

While community schools provide an alternative to other public schools, they are part of the public education system and are not allowed to charge tuition. When enrollment in a community school is oversubscribed, admission is frequently allocated by lottery-based admissions (Charter, n.d.). Community schools established in urban areas have waiting lists for admission. Many community schools focus on providing a curriculum that specializes in a certain field (e.g., arts, mathematics). Another concept of community school formats is to provide a better and more efficient general education than nearby public schools.



### **Ohio's Community Entrepreneurs**

One leader of the community movement is David Brennen, who was one of the first to develop alternatives for students and parents who perceived a need for new educational options (Education, n.d.). He is described by some as “one of the early pioneers who led movements in a march toward community schools that led to countless innovations and opened America's mind to the idea that there is more than one way to teach our children” (Education, n.d.). Additionally, Brennan opened America's first diploma schools for high school dropouts, now known as Life Skills Centers.

David Brennan has created and served public, private, sectarian, non-sectarian, voucher, and community schools. His movement has worked through several states and has helped develop private and public scholarship funds. In Ohio, he created many programs and schools for needy children in urban school districts. In many minds, he is an entrepreneur who formed various alternate school venues for financial gain. He is the Chief Executive Officer of the White Hat organization which he founded in 1998. In 2003, this organization was a major force behind amendment modifications to existing legislation and it contributed campaign funds to those Republicans with new charter policy as a target (Marshall, 2011).

### **Community Opposition**

The National Education Association (NEA), the Ohio Education Association (OEA), and public school officials have voiced objections to community schools. The fact that the community policy streams focus upon policy change creates opposition in various groups that support the public school format. This specifically happens when the interest rests with the political contexts, problems, and preconditions that facilitate

community school policy formulation and not the structural reforms, school level innovations, and student outcomes associated with the public school policy (Lubienski, 2004).

Opponents of introducing a profit-making model in the main system of education question the real motive in policy making. Many of the community models contract with for-profit agencies and give community boards the power to delegate and make financial decisions. This system would undermine the process of public accountability that is currently in place. Many opponents feel that this autonomy will lead to financial motives for big business and stray away from educational goals.

Over the last 10 years, the majority of opposing opinion comes in the form of general opposition rather than to a proposed alternate policy. Many advocate groups of the public sector feel that taking public money and funneling it into a private model for profit is unconstitutional. On several occasions, members of the Ohio legislature have been asked how such a policy can allow public tax dollars put toward schools to be used for the financial gains of business entrepreneurs.

### **Community School Advocates**

There are several groups that advocate for community schools on both the national and state level. On the national level, one such group is the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). An example of a state interest group is the Ohio Alliance for Public Charter Schools (OAPCS). Most policy changes emerge when three streams (i.e., problem, policy, political) come together to create a “window of opportunity.” Changes in national and state leadership, a fiscal crisis, or a massive program failure help trigger an opportunity.

When urban schools fall into academic watch, are in a financial crisis, and new management has been put in place, an opportunity is created that allows a movement toward policy change. This requires political leadership or a policy entrepreneur. The policy entrepreneur manages the policy network by anchoring the new agenda to a well-defined set of problems and solutions (Kingdon, 1995).

This situation is currently occurring in Ohio. We have (a) several failing schools, (b) parents pressing for change, (c) parents being coaxed by entrepreneurs, (d) the worst financial crisis in over 10 years, and (e) a new governor. This scenario has resulted in several pieces of policy being changed or created to promote further expansion of alternate schools.

The NEA and the OEA oppose the structure of community schools more than their educational philosophy. The NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) both maintain that community schools should be required to secure approval from school districts (Vergari, 2007). Steve Saland, the 2006 republican chair of the New York State Senate Education Committee, stated, “We do not have a problem with the concept of community schools but have issues with how they are funded. Most community school formats are focused around educating students with limited resources including non-unionized labor” (Vergari, 2007, p 17).

### **Federal Pressure**

Community schools and alternate school formats are complex with many advocates and proponents on all sides. The policy battle between the creation of a true alternative school and the community school format that is advantageous to the school

entrepreneur is ongoing. The parties that will set agendas for new and modified policy formation will most likely battle for years to come.

In response to political pressure to implement school choice, the federal government created policy to provide community school start up funding if states created policy to allow community school formation (Elmore, 1987). Community schools are an example of how the federal government coordinates with the efforts of individual states to promote inducements to new policy. In the early 1990s, the federal government allowed for the development and operation of publicly funded community schools. Minnesota was the first state to take advantage of the new funding policy.

In June 1991, Minnesota enacted the First Charter School Law in the United States (Vergari, 2007). In May 2009, the Minnesota Legislature enacted a comprehensive "second generation" community school law that focused on strengthening accountability and innovation. Minnesota's 2009 law was rated by community school advocates as the nation's best community school law (Fisher, 2003).

Since 1995, the federal community school program has been administering grants for the start up of community schools. These federal inducement policies have allocated over 6 million dollars in start up grants. Over 217 million dollars in grants have been allocated to start up schools in the United States (Vergari, 2007).

### **Federal and State Policy Adoption and Content Analysis**

The traditional education system has long enjoyed monopoly control of K-12 public education. The members of this traditional group include teacher unions, school board associations, state education departments, colleges that prepare educators, and other interest groups. During the past two decades there have been many attempts to

discredit this format. These attempts have led to a series of challenges to the policies currently in place. These new ideas include making policy changes to introduce market-based education models. The players in this initiative include groups from the business community, private foundations for school choice, think tanks, and education reformists.

Both political parties have advocated for their causes and defined their problems. This led to a series of attempts to solve the problem with new policies. At the nexus of politics and policy development is the persistent conflict over where the problems come from and what kinds of solutions should be attempted (Vergari, 2007).

The community school concept was supported by several coalitions that cross both the Democratic and Republican lines. In 2001, the George W. Bush administration announced an education reform package that included privatization, competition, and school choice. Most of the agendas linked to those policies were focused on schools that were located in the inner city where there was pressure to fix failing schools. After the George W. Bush administration, many of the states adopted additional Community School Policies with Ohio adopting additional policies as well (Vergari, 2007).

The community format, like any other type of format, will struggle from the liability of newness. The founding of a new type of organization will experience an array of daunting trials and constraints facing all new organizations (Loveless & Jasin, 1998). The odds of a new organization are enhanced when there is a reliable flow of resources. Many community schools are given start-up funds and operating funds, but in order to have sustainability, they must annually create additional revenue streams (Loveless & Jasin, 1998).

### **Community School Theory**

The community school format represents a different way of organizing schools into school systems. They are created with the concepts that decentralized management is superior and that the successful institutions will be the best-managed systems. The community school format and policy stems from a compromise between voucher advocates and public school defenders. With the community school format, school choice advocates can be pacified with the market-based approach of education while still giving the democratic educational process its ability to thrive (Loveless & Jasin, 1998).

One of the major advantages of the community school format is the funding that may be supported by the Amish community. Although a few Amish students attend public schools, the vast majority of them attend private Amish-run schools. Rural public schools would lose some funding for any student who would leave public enrollment to attend a proposed school with an Amish community school format. One would speculate that many other Amish students may attend the new school in which funding would become available for them due to the community school being state sponsored. Currently, Amish children who attend their private schools have no recognized state funds. In a community school format, Amish parents and leaders who pay property taxes will get their children educated by popular school tax programs.

Another advantage to the community school concept is the autonomy of the school and the flexibility that can be created to develop a specific curriculum for Amish students. Community schools are approved with the concept to have accountability for special education laws, as well as to prioritize the core concepts of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Nevertheless, very few state

community school laws reference special education accountability and requirements (Rhim, 2007). This is another area where the community school concept would have the ability to avoid unfunded mandates and have the flexibility to operate.

This type of school format would be proposed to Amish leaders with the requirement to create an Amish member school board. This Amish School Board would be created to help decide school policy and help design curriculum. This would be crucial for the buy-in by Amish parents and leaders. One of the major factors that led to Amish groups protesting public schools is the lack of parent control and involvement (Kraybill, 2001).

### **Evolution of Ohio Community School Law**

Most of Ohio Community School Legislation is proposed in the General Assembly Budget Bill. These policies are proposed by the governor in place and debated by both members of the House and the Senate until a final version of the Bill is signed into policy. The following section will give an overview of Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3314 adoptions and revisions proposed by various budgets, after which discussion will follow on the key influential players who were involved in the process.

In the 122<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, 1997-1998 (Governor Voinovich), the enactment of House Bill 215 allowed a pilot community school program to be established in Lucas County. The Lucas County Education Service Center (ESC) and the University of Toledo were authorized as the Community School Sponsors. The bill allowed for the creation of start-up schools and community schools. S.B. 55 and H.B. 770 later led to the expansion of the community schools for statewide community schools sponsored by a public entity (Since, n.d.).

In the 123<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, 1999-2000 (Governor Taft), House Bill 282 allowed for the expansion of start-up schools to the 21 largest urban school districts. If a school fell under academic emergency, Lucas County ESC and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) were appointed the sponsor to start up new community schools in any of the eligible districts. This policy required the school system to develop policy to decide whether they would take their own student or students from adjacent districts. This legislation also required regular school districts to transport children within their own district to community schools.

In the 124<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2001-2002 (Governor Taft), H.B. 94 addressed the issues of facilities for start-up schools. This policy required that public schools first offer any property that they would sell to available to community schools. Shortcomings of the original policy were addressed. Health and safety regulations were enacted and sponsors were given authority to terminate the charter of a community school for defined reasons.

Later, there were policy alterations in H.B. 364, which changed the role of ODE, and within two years, community schools could seek new sponsors. In addition, the sponsorship eligibility was defined for start up-schools. Public schools, Educational Service Centers, Universities, or 503(c) organizations were legalized to sponsor community schools. These schools had to be approved by ODE and further guidelines were developed for e-schools. Face-to-face visits by teachers were required on some scale for e-schools (Since, n.d.).

In the 125<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2003-2004 (Governor Taft), H.B. 95 became effective and allowed ESCs to sponsor community schools in any challenged school



district not limited to their jurisdiction. The mechanisms of state aid were detailed in this legislation. State parity aid that would flow to a student's resident school system would now follow him/her to their community school. Additional policy revisions included a mandated withdrawal from a community school for a student who missed 105 consecutive hours of learning opportunities without legitimate excuse. In 2003, H.B. 3 redefined the title "challenged school districts" to include schools in academic watch or academic emergency and the "Ohio Urban eight" (i.e., Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown).

In the 126<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2005-2006 (Governor Taft), H.B. 66 further defined ORC 3314, the policy of community schools. Many advocates and opposition pushed politicians for accountability. There were numerous revisions and new proposed legislation to operate community schools. Other legislative measures, including H.B. 530 and H.B. 79 further defined the scope of community schools beyond H.B. 66. The following H.B. 66 policy and further revisions are outlined below:

- **Accountability for community schools.** The policy was expanded to require community schools to report plans for special education and related services. Internet-based schools were required to submit plans that allowed their schools to service children of special needs. In addition, there were expectations in achievement and the requirement for administering assessments. Internet schools were required to test in specific locations. Students who did not participate in mandated testing would lose their funding for their community school (Since, n.d.).

- **Community school growth.** A lottery was required to determine the order in which schools would be able to open. Schools eligible for the lottery were those that intended to open in the 2005-2006 school year. A moratorium was enacted on Internet-based community schools until further policy was developed.
- **Operator provision.** Under this policy revision, an operator was defined as an organization that manages the daily operations of a community school pursuant to a contract with a governing authority. It allowed a governing authority in partnership with an operator that had previous academic success to start up additional community schools. Operators were legalized to open new start-ups providing they were academically successful on the most recent report card.
- **Sponsorship limits.** This legislation also limited the amount of sponsorship to 50 schools and for sponsors who had sponsorships beyond 50, limits of 75 were enacted. Any sponsor who shut down a school for any reason was not allowed to start-up another school if the person or group was sponsoring 50 or more community schools.
- **Exclusion of certain students from community school enrollment count.** A provision was added to exclude funding to a community school if that student had already graduated from a nonpublic high school (Since, n.d.).

- **Early graduation.** It also permitted a student who had completed graduation requirements to leave school. These students would still be allowed full state funding for the remaining of that year.
- **Federal school foods program.** This revision required community schools, with the exception of e-schools, to provide school breakfast and lunch programs pursuant to the National School Lunch Act. The bill also required community schools to offer federal food-service programs during summer intervention services. If the community school could not provide food service due to financial reasons, then they were required to notify all parents and apply for state and federal funds under division (B) of ORC 3313.831 and comply with state standards.
- **Conflict of interest.** H.B. 530 further specified that a community schools' governing authority members cannot be employed by the community school or have an interest in any contract awarded by the governing board of said school.
- **Deadline for signing a community school contract.** H.B. 530 clarified time difference between adopting and executing contracts. Beginning September 29, 2005, adoption of a contract shall occur no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, and signing of a contract no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of May prior to the year in which the school will open.
- **Qualifications of sponsors, including a prohibition on a community school sponsoring another community school.** This legislation was included in H.B. 530 to revise the eligibility of entities seeking to start up

a community school. They must apply and be approved by the Ohio Department of Education. To be approved, the entity had to have \$500,000 committed to an education mission and show fiscal responsibility (Since, n.d.).

- **Disposal of real property.** The policy also proposed that a school district's board of education must offer any real property that is usable for any classroom or school activities to governing authorities if the school board did not use that real property for education purposes for a full year. It had to offer any real property at appraised value to governing authorities, and if the local school board wanted to retain the property, they had to submit a three-year proposal for the property in a formal resolution.
- **Reduction in number of schools for approved sponsors.** The legislation approved community school sponsors to have a cap or limit in their sponsorship agreement. H.B. 79 further defined a date of March 2007 that sponsors will have caps reduced by one for every school that permanently closes.
- **Restrictions of start-up community school governing authorities.** An individual was limited to service on two start-up community school governing authorities at the same time with a maximum payment of \$125 per meeting. If a member was on two governing authorities and had meetings at the same time, the maximum compensation would be \$125 for

that date. Governing authorities could not be employees of the community school unless they removed themselves from the governing authority.

- **Operator provision.** H.B. 79 further defined the ability for a governing authority to use and replicate a successfully rated community school's agreement. This was even further defined in H.B. 276 which defined an individual who, acting under contract with the governing authority, was responsible for the success of the school.
- **Rights of a community school operator.** If a community school authority intends to end a contract with a community school operator, the authority must notify the operator of such intent. The operator has the right to appeal the governing authority decision, and if the community school is less than 12 months of age, the appeal will be forwarded to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) for further review and final decision. If the ODE favors the operator, then the sponsor is required to remove the governing authority.
- **Value-added and school closures due to poor academic performance.** H.B. 79 further required that the State Board adopt a performance measuring system to determine academic growth. Valued-added performance measure will be used to determine which community schools will be required to permanently close. In addition, the governing authority of a school closed for poor performance under the new performance measures will not be allowed to enter into a contract with any other sponsor (Since, n.d.).

- **Changes to terms of community school contracts.** H.B. 79 further required community schools to have employee and student records, adoption of school safety plans, professional conduct and reporting conduct unbecoming to the teacher profession and display of the United States and Ohio mottoes.

In the 127<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, 2007-2008 (Governor Strickland), H.B. 119 contributed to the further development of Ohio community schools through more adopted policy. As a result of these new revisions, a number of new features were incorporated in Ohio charter law (ORC 3314). The growth of community schools was increasing and both advocates and protesters of the concepts lobbied for more revisions.

- **Operator provision and the opening of new community schools.** The moratorium on opening of new schools in 2005 was lifted by this legislation. New start-up schools may open if the school's governing authority contracts with an operator that has performed higher than academic watch.
- **Community school sponsor approval.** Any entity that wishes to sponsor an Ohio school and operates a school out of state were required to show evidence of operating schools out of state that are at academic watch or better.
- **Community school sponsor territory.** Education service centers may sponsor schools within their territory and adjacent territories. If they have sponsored a successful community school beyond the scope of an adjacent territory, then they are allowed to continue, providing they are successful.

- **Community school payments and transportation.** This legislation allowed ODE to more fairly allocate funding for students who attended multiple education providers during one year. It also allowed community schools to provide their own transportation services.
- **Sponsor assurances and community schools audits.** The new legislation required a series of new pre-opening requirements. One such requirement would be a detailed plan of special education and related services. It also required ODE to declare community schools unauditible if the community school didn't succumb to audit, and they will not be allowed to enter into any further contracts.
- **Others.** This legislation further defined policy associated with Distribution of Assets, operation from residential facilities, building performance ratings, miscellaneous charges, conversion schools, locations, pooling agreements, demolition, drop-out recovery, and e-school guidelines.

In the 129<sup>th</sup> General Assembly 2011-2012 (Governor Kasich), H.B. 153, further adjustments to community school policy were adopted. New policy (a) allowed community schools that do not have a sponsor to apply to the ODE for approval to operate, (b) removed the ability of schools to seek direct authorization from the Ohio Department of Education, and (c) strengthened the department's oversight of current and future community school sponsors, (d) guaranteed school governing boards as independent with control over the operators they hire, and (e) strengthened ethics and transparency rules. This bill eliminated the provision that allowed for-profit entities to

become governing bodies. There would be greater funding equity and access to facilities for community schools and promoting the replication of high-performing community schools (129<sup>th</sup>, n.d.).

Some policy adjustments were incorporated into this budget bill as well. They are:

- Removing the provision prohibiting the selling of services to a community school by a sponsor.
- Reinstating the moratorium on new e-schools until 2013, then allowing up to five new schools each year thereafter.
- Adding the Jon Peterson Special Education Scholarship (Voucher) Program.

In addition, enrollment for the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program was reopened, increasing the number of scholarships to 30,000. The budget requires the ODE to hold a second application period for students who might be eligible for an award for the 2011-2012 school year. The enrollment period was to close August 15. The budget bill eliminated the need for a lottery to select among some new applicants. The scholarships may be used to attend private schools that meet requirements for program participation. Under law, Ed Choice eligibility was limited to students attending (or, in the cases of new kindergarteners and community school students, assigned to attend) low-performing public school buildings. Other developments were a provision directing ODE to develop a plan for allowing students over the age of 22 to attend district and community dropout/recovery programs tuition-free. This must be accompanied by



establishing provision that would allow community schools without sponsors to apply to ODE for approval to operate (OSBA, 2011).

### **Summary**

It is apparent that the educational needs of the Amish are different from those in the earlier part of the twentieth century. The Amish school setting has evolved in modernity throughout the last 80 years as well. History indicates that Amish communities were tolerant to the public systems when the educational setting was similar to the one-room school setting. One of the major factors that drove Amish leaders to desire their own schools was when the public systems started to consolidate the small school settings (Huntington, 1994).

When schools remain small and structure trumps individual agency in influence, Amish parents are often happy to keep their children in public school because the exposure to non-Amish teachers and a more varied curriculum is limited (Hurst & McConnell, 2006). During the beginning of the century, many rural Ohio schools saw reduced Amish attendance after the consolidations of older buildings were placed into newer buildings through Ohio School Facility projects. The new schools were centrally located within the district settings and resulted in further distances from the nucleus of the Amish communities. Amish students who still attend public do so to attend kindergarten or are students who are located close to the new complex.

The second major reason that Amish created their own schools is the perpetuation of the Amish way of life and values. Although religion is minimally taught, the Amish school setting is a way to isolate Amish children from modern societies which, in turn, preserves their culture (Cowles, 2005). Amish parents value education until the eighth

grade and endorse a similar curriculum of public schools but wish to minimize exposure to modern English culture.

Exploration of the idea to bring a public sponsored school back to the small community setting needs to be explored. If a public school can develop a setting that is similar to a small community setting, as well as minimize exposure to technology and the modern culture, the response of Amish leaders may be positive. Rural public schools in Ohio are in most part funded through enrollment counts. Working with Amish parents to persuade Amish leaders to allow their children to be taught by some mechanism of public funding would be of great financial benefit to Amish communities and the local public school. It can be projected that political support would be realized by the rural public schools by entering in a symbiotic educational relationship with the local Amish community.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

There are many reasons why rural school districts choose to foster relationships with the Amish living within their district boundaries. Regardless of the reasons, if the process of creating relationships between public and Amish communities is not implemented using a structured and purposeful method, the benefits will be minimized. The purpose of this study was to develop framework and design methodology to foster educational relationships with Amish community groups located within the boundaries of rural public schools.

To develop the conceptual framework, data collection and analysis addressed the following research questions:

- What are modern attitudes of Amish communities and Amish leaders towards working with the public school system in creating an Amish Community School?
- How willing are Amish groups to negotiate some of their cultural boundaries to reap benefits from the public funded Community School format?
- What are the major obstacles that prevent a modified public curriculum to be used as today's Amish curriculum?
- Who within the Amish communities have the authority to negotiate curricular and educational issues with public officials?

These questions served as the basic ethnographic assumptions for a focus group study and provided the depth necessary for developing a framework for public schools to utilize when negotiating or engaging with Amish cultures on today's educational issues.

The sections of this chapter describe the theoretical perspective and methodology of this study. Included are (a) justification of focus group methodology, (b) research methods and design, (c) participant and focus group samples, (d) data collection, (e) ethical assurances, and (f) summary.

### **Justification of Focus Group Methodology**

Focus groups as a qualitative interview strategy have been used in sociological studies for many years (Hatch, 2002). They have been widely utilized in marketing research since the late 1960s and by the food marketing industry up to 10 years earlier. Most research practitioners agree that the technique was used regularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s and has since gained in popularity (Greenbaum, 1998, p. 167).

The initial use of focus group interviews delved into the experiences and perspectives of people in a specific social setting. Focus group interview styles used in current research have both gained in creditability and developed into a legitimate methodology that is readily accepted today as scholarly research. Today, focus group studies foster interaction between participants during the interview. The interactions in focus groups provide a clear view of how others within the group think and talk. This is a powerful tool to expose researchers to the reality of the specific opinions, views, and values of their clients (Morgan, 1993). Researchers use focus group interviews to collect information about issues that are of great value to their research needs. As a primary research technique, the focus group method is used as a forum in which to explore

people's opinions, attitudes, beliefs, values, discourses, and understanding of things as valid in their own right (Brewerton & Millward, 2001)

Due to the culture of Amish groups, a focus group interview was one of the few tools that could be used to gather data that is rich in opinions and values embedded deep within their community groups and cultural beliefs. Since many Amish parents have an eighth grade education, oral response was thought to be more practical than a written response. Focus groups are sets of individuals with similar characteristics or shared experiences who sit down with a moderator (Hatch, 2002). This methodology produced explicit group interaction and provided data and insights that would not have been available without the interaction found in a group setting.

Group interaction among Amish parents and Amish leaders provided data rich information pertinent to the views on education currently embedded within their culture. The focus groups were created in order to have a degree of co-operation and commitment generated among respondents. Many focus groups are videotaped and/or recorded to collect data. In respect to Amish values, this study only used audio recording.

In most research settings focus groups are set up around a focal stimulus. In social science, the stimulus might be a behavioral scenario, a concrete event, or even a concept (Millward, 2001). In this study, the focal stimulus was the newly introduced concept of a proposed Amish community school. This focus group study attempted to illuminate the decisions made, the reason for them being made, how they were planned, and with what result (Schram, 2006). The goal of this research study was to get a clear understanding of the Amish communities' position concerning a potential community school developed to fulfill their cultural needs.

### **Advantages of Focus Groups**

One of the major advantages of focus groups is that they have a great capacity to produce “concentrated data on precisely the topic of interest” (Morgan, 1997, p. 13).

Focus groups are so named because they are designed to focus on a particular topic with the ability to generate significant data in a relatively short period of time compared to observations and individual interviews (Hatch, 2002). In addition, focus groups provide rich insight about existing conditions and current views about modern situations at hand.

A focus group study allows the researcher to develop the questions that will be asked by the moderator who has personal familiarity with the participants. The skills of the moderator are fundamental to the effective running of the focus group. In a social science context, it is preferable for the moderator to be someone directly involved in the project. The moderator should be sensitive to the research issues and the need for methodological rigor even if their group management skills are not especially polished (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The issue is whether the moderator is able to obtain useful information while handling the group with sensitivity and empathy (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Focus group questions are designed to generate interaction and communication among the participants. The moderator can probe the participants for greater depth in their individual responses. Focus groups allow respondents to react to and build upon the responses given by other members of the group. This format gives a synergistic effect of the group setting, which has the ability to produce data or ideas that might not be uncovered by other means of interviewing (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990, p. 16).

Additionally, focus groups give the participants a say in what direction the interview will go and which way the discussions generate new data (Hatch, 2002). Finally, the researcher can obtain insights and clarification of the research data through the review of audiotapes and moderator notes.

### **Disadvantages of Focus Groups**

Unfortunately, no research design is without limitations. Often for the sake of efficiency, the focus group moderator may take too much control of the discussion (Hatch, 2002, p. 132). The more control the researcher has, the less natural the conversations will be (Morgan, 1997). Studies implemented outside of the natural setting may not represent how such interaction might have taken place within it (Hatch, 2002). Some participants will feel comfortable speaking up in a group and others will be reluctant to be candid within the group setting. This may lead to some bias in the findings leaning towards the views of the more aggressive participants.

Two additional criticisms of focus groups are (a) that yielded data is not “hard” data and (b) that group members may not be representative of the whole population (Shamdasani & Stewart, 1990). Many researchers believe quantitative data is more concrete for the analysis process. The majority of material collected in this study yielded qualitative data.

Another disadvantage among critics is the sample size of focus group studies. Focus group research is often criticized due to the small sample size and the fact that many studies do not select participants using probability or random methods (Fern, 2001). In addition, members that volunteer for focus group study may not be a true

representative of the sample being sought due to their willingness to participate in the study.

### **Research Method and Design**

Creswell (2007) discussed the elements of research and developed a set of central questions that researchers should consider before conducting a research study.

Creswell's three questions are the following:

- What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher (including a theoretical perspective)?
- What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures?
- What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?

When answering these questions, the researcher must evaluate which methodology, strategy, or action plan links methods to outcomes. Establishing a theoretical perspective for conducting research informs the methodology and guides both the research theory and the method for data collection and analysis. Conducting research by matching perspective and methodology provides the research rigor that will provide credibility to this research study (Walsh, 2009).

The focus groups consisted of 6 to 8 parent members of Amish school age students within the Amish community containing both sexes. One of the focus groups consisted of 3 to 4 Amish leaders who were in a position to make educational decisions on behalf of their cultural community. The focus group format consisted of an introductory explanation of the community school concept followed by a series of several questions as follows:



- Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why or why not?
- What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?
- What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today's economy and workforce?
- What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?
- What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?
- What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?
- Currently, there is a community school near Holmes County that serves mostly Amish Children. Can you tell me what you know about the experiences of the children, their families, and their communities with this school?
- What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?
- What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?

- What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?
- What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?
- Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?
- Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.
- Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?

This study was designed to take an ethnographic look at a focal stimulus (e.g., proposed Amish charter school) by using the focus group methodology. The group process can be understood on two different levels. These levels are (a) intrapersonal, which includes the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and values of the individual and (b) intragroup, which includes how people communicate and interact with each other within the group. The group dynamic is integral to the process and the needed moderator skills are different than those for basic interviewing (Brewerton & Millward, 2001).

Focus groups have become a common ways to do qualitative inquiry. Intrinsic studies refer to the idea that the study itself is of interest and that the researcher is focused on finding out what can be learned about that particular case. During implementation of

this study, the major goal was to learn what can be found out during the negotiation between public schools, Amish parents, and Amish school leaders. The value of this study lies in facilitating an appreciation of the uniqueness, complexity, and context of individual events (Schram, 2006).

This study examined the process of persuasion and the negotiation of educational issues with rural public school officials and their Amish communities. It is through the interpretation of Amish and public school officials' interactions and decision outcomes that a conceptual framework was developed for future Amish community interactions.

### **Participants and Focus Group Samples**

Participants for this qualitative study were representative of Amish community members who have ownership of their Amish education system as well as the decision makers of Amish educational policy. Data collection for this study included interviews with 4 to 5 focus groups; each focus group contained a key educational decision maker. Critical to the reliability of the data was the depth of information gained through focus group and interview participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). In order to provide depth, the focus groups consisted of the following:

- Four groups of 4 to 5 participants with at least one Amish School Board Member from their local parochial school. Each Amish School Board member is elected by Amish patriarchs within the Amish School districts (Kraybill, 2001). Focus groups consisted of 4 to 5 male and female participants discussing themes relevant to this research study and were facilitated by the researcher (Morgan, 1998).

- One group consisted of at least 2 participants were Amish men labeled as the area Superintendents of Schools. These men are appointed by the Elders of the local settlement to create policy on curriculum.
- One group consisted of at least 2 Amish Elders of the local settlement. These men were some of the oldest Bishops of the many local church districts and have final say in religious doctrine and Ordnung within the Amish community.

According to many social scientists, there are occasions when the existence of a shared, group view point can be advantageous to reaching research objectives (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). Accordingly, this researcher selected focus group members that (a) exhibited similar characteristics with similar experiences to the Amish school setting and (b) were from volunteer participants found within the physical boundaries of four to five specific Amish parochial schools. Upon acceptance of participation, the researcher along with the moderator transported Amish participants to a local Amish school building or a public library to conduct focus group discussion. Having transportation to and from the focus group discussions aided the process of gathering focus group participants due to Amish travel limitations.

### **Materials/Instruments**

The method of observation used in this study was the focus group format. Focus groups are a special mode of observation in which the researcher will not be a passive observer. Instead, the researcher assumed the role of the facilitator within the focus group to study the situation and participate in the events being studied (Yin, 2006). The researcher was the Superintendent of the rural local school system. This method was

avored because focus groups have been successfully used in multiple studies of different cultural or social groups (Yin, 2006).

A neutral focus group moderator asked all the questions. The group moderator had a basic understanding and experience with the Amish culture. The researcher assisted the moderator when needed, audio taped the meetings, and recorded field notes. The researcher observed while a neutral moderator conducted the focus groups and interviews. This kept in mind the differences of roles between what is referred to as an insider and outsider positioning (Yin, 2009). The audio taped sessions were transcribed, verified, and coded for words and concepts.

The researcher in this study, recognizing his relationship with participants and participation in the communities groups in past years, continually used critical reflection to maintain objectivity. The questions that focus on a specific issue were brief and clear enough so that all participants interpreted the questions in the same way. A pilot test of the questions was conducted. Six questions needed to be modified to a lower reading level with simpler terminology in order to assure full comprehension. The use of open-ended questions in this study provided responses that include rich descriptions and perceptions (Yin, 2009).

### **Data Collection**

It is very important that every study project strive to develop a formal and accurate presentable database so that other investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written case study reports (Yin, 2009). A focus group study database was developed by using audio tapes, field notes, and narratives. Study notes were taken by the researcher to collect interview condition, observations, and document

analysis. They are stored in a manner that anyone, including outside parties, can efficiently retrieve them at some later date. Confidentiality of participants was maintained.

Focus group study documents were collected during the course of the study when deemed relevant to the study. Such annotations facilitated storage and retrieval, so that investigators can inspect or share the database.

Tabular materials were limited in this study but may be used to collect data during some focus group discussion. This process would be a secondary process (i.e., back up) for recorded focus group discussions. Due to the Amish culture, the study participants were willing to respond to certain questions in a group format that deeply explored their culture. Amish culture often reflects humility and it is thought by several researchers that some areas of questioning will be more likely answered with a nonverbal response (Kraybill, 2001). The researcher watched for this behavior and made appropriate notations.

The majority of the database for this focus group study consists of narratives. This study used several open-ended questions concerning matters on Amish communities creating educational relationships with the public schools to possibly form community schools. Each answer represents an attempt to integrate the available evidence and to converge upon the facts that of the matter or their interpretation (Yin, 2009). The main purpose of the open-ended answer was to document the connection between specific pieces of evidence and various issues. All of the are considered part of the focus group database.

### **Processing and Data Analysis**

Common trends and themes were collected to produce needed analytic results. They were useful and helpful in looking for data that linked to the original problem statement. The researcher presented each group's preliminary findings back to a peer chosen representative within each focus group. This acted as a validation of formulated data and aided in the minimization of any possible bias by the researcher. This process allowed the researcher to look for meaningful patterns within the data.

The researcher used various strategies to summarize the data (Yin, 2009). These strategies included (a) putting information into different arrays; (b) making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories; (c) creating data displays, flow charts, or graphics; (d) tabulating frequencies of data; (e) examining the complexity of such tabulations and their relationships by calculating second-order numerals such as means and variances; and (f) putting information in chronological order or using a temporal scheme (Yin, 2009).

The second method of data analysis was explanation building. This procedure is mainly relevant to explanatory focus group studies. The major goal was to analyze the study data by building an explanation about some of the founded outcomes. A second goal was not only to conclude the study but to develop ideas for further study or negotiations within the Amish culture.

### **Ethical Assurances**

The research in this study included human participants. Consequently, it was necessary to seek approval from Youngstown State University (see Appendix A). Once approval was obtained, letters of consent were presented to participants in this study (see

Appendix B). The researcher in this study complied with the National Research Act, the National Institutes of Health, and the Belmont Report. The names of the parochial schools, the school district, and the participants will remain private. All identifying information was changed to protect the privacy of the children, the adults, and the identity of the school.

Since the researcher in this study was the Superintendent of a rural public school, it will be made clear to all participants that participation is optional. There was no coercion to participate in this study. Those participating were asked to refrain from sharing responses until the interviewing was over for all stakeholder groups. Participants did not suffer any repercussions for any responses or comments that were unfavorable toward the public institution or the actual study. After the data was collected, processed, and analyzed, the researcher examined the data for risks and benefits to all parties involved. If results of the study risked harm to a participant, the Amish school district, or the public school district, the information was eliminated from the study. One example of such deletion is the use of proper names.

### **Summary**

The populations within the Amish community that have authority to implement educational reform are minimal. This study was developed to collect key data within the decision making process when confronted by a public school administrator. As time evolved, the research portrayed whether the leaders within today's Amish communities are susceptible to negotiations. The majority of Amish negotiations with public schools revolve around the survival of their culture, and if Amish leaders weaken in one standard



it is with the intent to strengthen another standard or foster cultural vitality (Kraybill, 2003).

Data from this focus group study provided an indication of the willingness of an Amish community within a public rural school setting to negotiate new school settings. The findings of this study will be the foundation of future studies that are targeted around fostering the relationships between Amish schools, their communities, and rural public schools.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

There was a need to explore the views of both Amish community members and leaders of a proposed Amish community school concept. In addition, community school formats were examined to Amish groups in order to discover what opinions and viewpoints their communities have towards such a proposal. Specifically, this research sought to introduce the community school format to Amish group participants and to gather opinions of the proposed community school concept from them. In an effort to obtain this data, the researcher used focus group research. Four focus group discussions were conducted to achieve these initiatives. The research focus group sessions included:

- An in depth explanation of how the law has changed in regard to the formations of community schools.
- Additional information of how community schools are started and structured in order to operate as a state sponsored entity.
- A series of questions aimed to gather opinions and attitudes of the various operating concepts, government policies and structuring of a community school aimed to fulfill Amish community needs.

Each of the four focus groups had unique demographics that need to be understood in order to gain complete comprehension of various viewpoints within each specific group. The general age of the Amish parents and whether their children went

to public schools or private Amish schools played a role in the responses given by focus group members. The fact that some participants have the authority to make educational decisions for the group while others are not empowered created a variation in participants willing to formulate strong opinions. Anonymity of all participants was protected by the use of name tags that identified each member by their sex and numerical order of their seating location (e.g., Male 1, Male 2, Female 1, Female 2). Any conversation that had potential to reveal the geographic location of the school or community was deleted from any transcripts. The focus groups were audio taped. Upon completion of each focus group session, the participant responses were transcribed. The researcher guarded against interruptions that would in any way alter the meaning of any of the participants' answers. (See Appendices C, D, E, and F for the complete transcript of each focus group discussion.)

### **Demographic Data for Focus Group 1**

This focus group was conducted on August 2, 2012, with three male and two female Amish parents who ranged in age between 24 to 40 years. This group had the common characteristic of sending their children to private Amish schools. The parents in this focus group represented 17 Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the eighth grade.

### **Results for Focus Group 1**

Question 1 allowed participants to share their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum taught in the private Amish school setting and what would be used in the proposed community school. In addition, Amish parents were given an opportunity to express the importance of Amish curriculum in relation to career readiness. It is worth

noting that all of the participating parents stated that Math, English, Spelling, Writing, History, and Religion were of importance to them in any school setting. Some participants expressed the importance of education to their values and beliefs.

**Moderator:** “Why do you want them to know those things?”

**Female 2:** “To help them later in life.”

**Male 2:** “So they can make a living later in life.”

**Male 3:** “To communicate with other people.”

**Male 3:** “Important thing is to learn.”

Question 2 gave the group members an opportunity to express their opinion on preferred course work and technology and the need for future technology in the students’ classroom. Coursework that was important to the group was common to the public school with the addition of Religion and German on specific days of the week.

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

**Female 1:** “English but we do not want technology. We think you need to learn to do math by hand. You won’t have a computer when you build a house or barn.”

**Male 1:** “Spelling and Religion.”

**Female 2:** “German, one day a week.”

Question 3 gave the parents an opportunity to voice their views on education as it applies to the readiness of their children for the modern workforce. Most of the participants stated that the major focus on school was to prepare the student for a modern work force. Male 2 commented more extensively.

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, I think that education is needed to help our children prepare to do jobs in the future. Some require thinking such as math skills. Writing skills are needed to be successful in the population today.”

Question 4 asked the participants who they thought would be the ideal operator of a community school tailored for Amish students. Two of the participants advocated for the Elders of the church to manage the proposed community school. The participants stated that on the local level a Board is elected and put into place to operate the private schools. They revealed that this type of format would be preferred in a new community school if implemented.

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “Elders.”

**Male 3:** “Elders is probably the main person.”

**Moderator:** “Anyone else have any thoughts about who should be the operator? Do you have a board that’s local now?”

**Female 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “Who’s involved in the board?”

**Male 3:** “Like an Elder would be the Superintendent. He would get information from the other Elders to help run the school system.”

**Moderator:** “How does the board work?”

**Male 2:** “They get voted in from the community.”

Question 5 asked the participants to give personal opinions of what obstacles might hinder or prevent the formation of a proposed Amish community school.

Government involvement and technology seemed to receive the greatest opposition.

Placement of a certified teacher in the Amish classroom gave some parents reservations due to the government being linked to the teacher.

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 2:** “One thing is that they would have an English teacher and probably would have to have computers. The Elders would not allow computers.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think if there were computers it would be a problem?”

**Male 2:** “Right, I think so.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that and you want to keep it as independent as possible as far as having the public involved.”

**Male 3:** “There would be a problem if the children were taught the same way in the Amish school as they are taught in the English School.”

**Moderator:** “Anything like government involvement?”

**Female 2:** “The Elders and Superintendents do not like government involvement especially if it is Federal.”

Question 6 gave the Amish parents an opportunity to give their viewpoints on bus safety and public busing in general. One parent indicated that public busing was safer

than Amish transportation. Multiple parents voiced some mixed concerns about public school children being bused with their Amish children.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 2:** “I feel it is safer with a bus.”

**Moderator:** “Does anyone else have an opinion on a school bus picking them up versus them walking to school?”

**Male 3:** “I think it would be a good idea.”

**Moderator:** “What about who would be on the bus; any opinion on that?”

**Female 2:** “Would they would have to be picked up with non-Amish children?”

**Moderator:** “Does that bother you if they were picked up with non-Amish children?”

**Female 2:** “The order on the bus would bother me.”

**Male 2:** “The order wouldn’t bother me about that.”

Question 7 provided the participants with an opportunity to gain knowledge on an existing Amish community school located in a nearby settlement. All of the focal group members were unaware of the school’s existence.

Question 8 was designed to gather the views of Amish parents about a school funded by state and local tax dollars. While all of the parents felt that the tuition would be a burden, it was something they would be willing to pay in order to keep the Amish structure of their schools.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Female 2:** “Tuition isn’t all that much really.”

**Male 2:** “The tuition isn’t a big problem. It is high to an extent but I think it is worth it.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that. It’s worth paying tuition versus giving up some of the other stuff that you would have to give up if it was funded by the state.”

**Moderator:** “What do you think they would have to give up?”

**Male 1:** “You would have to be more involved as far as educated or rules. We would have to give up our Amish teachers. Teachers would have to have a degree.”

**Female 1:** “I feel the same way.”

Question 9 asked the Amish parents give their opinions on the formation of a community school using old public school buildings instead of the private Amish school setting. The parents were concerned about public school students wanting to attend a community school in an unused public school building. In addition, all of the participants had concerns with the large number of students in the classrooms. One participant stated that the large size classrooms are problematic with both the educational process and the building capacity.



**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?”

**Male 2:** “I really wouldn’t but how would you keep other people out?”

**Moderator:** “So you would have a problem.”

**Male 2:** “Right, if it headed that way they couldn’t say that this guy couldn’t come to school because he’s not Amish.”

**Moderator:** “So you want to make sure that it would be all Amish.”

**Male 2:** “Right.”

**Male 3:** “It might not be good if there’s too many kids in one school.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that too, if you have too many kids in one school.”

**Female 1:** “Too many kids and too many parents sometimes causes problems.”

**Moderator:** “Populous might be too much. In your opinion, would you rather have smaller units in school? That kind of where the 60 rule comes from other than the building code.”

**Male 2:** “Yes, it wouldn’t work too much. I don’t think it is a good idea to have a school like our school with a 100 kids. It would be too much.”

Question 10 gave the participants an opportunity to list the disadvantages they felt an Amish community school would produce. The use of modern technology and the fear of religion not being taught in their school were the major issues viewed as disadvantages.

**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Female 2:** “For me one thing would be that they would have to use modern technology. I would not want my children using that.”

**Male 2:** “And religion is another thing that’s not being taught in public schools.”

**Female 1:** “And the discipline.”

**Female 2:** “And they took the prayer out of the public schools quite a while ago, right?”

Question 11 gave the Amish parents an opportunity to give their views on the advantages an Amish community school may bring to Amish families. The key advantage that all participants indicated was the reduced financial burden. Second to operational costs was that community schools would have safe transportation.

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 3:** “Money.”

**Moderator:** “Is there any other advantages you would see? What about transportation, anything with transportation?”

**Male 1:** “Just like now, we have to transport our children. There again it would be money.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think school buses are safer than vans?”

**Male 2:** “I think the bigger the bus would be safer than a van. You would have a lot more kids on a bus than in a van.”

**Moderator:** “So you don’t like the larger volume of kids in one vehicle.”

**Male 2:** “Right.”

Question 12 gave the group members the opportunity to state their opinions on state mandated testing within a community school format. There was a mixed opinion on state testing. One participant thought testing was good because it sought to see if the children were being appropriately taught while others thought it brought too much government control.

**Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t really care for it.”

**Moderator:** “You would not want your kids take the state tests.”

**Male 2:** “I don’t think it is anything we want.”

**Male 3:** “I feel the same way. I wouldn’t want them taking the state tests.”

**Moderator:** “You wouldn’t want them taking the state tests.”

**Male 3:** “Probably not.”

**Moderator:** “Is there anyone here interested in seeing how their kids did in Math compared to other kids?”

**Female 2:** “They have tests at the end of each chapter in their book. They have a test on what they learned and those grades go on their report card.”

**Female 2:** “They have tests at the end of each chapter in their book. They have a test on what they learned and those grades go on their report card.”

Question 13 gave the participants the opportunity to disclose how involved they would be in their children’s school and with their staff. All of the participants in Focus Group 1 had children that were attending a private Amish school. The majority of parent involvement stemmed from student academic assistance to helping with the buildings and grounds.

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Female 2:** “Have our children prepared for their lessons and help them study.”

**Male 1:** “Help them study and help them with their homework.”

**Male 3:** “Stays the same.”

**Moderator:** “What about fundraisers? Would you help the facilities? What would you do there?”

**Male 2:** “We have fundraisers.”

**Moderator:** “What are the fundraisers for?”

**Male 2:** “They help with the costs.”

**Moderator:** “Specific costs. What costs?”

**Male 1:** “Any costs. For the teacher and for the tuition for the kids.”

**Moderator:** “Anything like materials, too?”

**Female 1:** “Their school supplies.”

**Moderator:** “What about their food? How do they do food?”

**Male 1:** “They pack their lunches.”

**Male 2:** “Pack.”

**Female 2:** “Pack.”

**Moderator:** “Does anyone get together and cook lunch for them?”

**Female 1:** “Twice a year.”

**Moderator:** “Do they have a picnic or something?”

**Female 1:** “Take hot lunches to school twice a year.”

**Moderator:** “When are those?”

**Female 1:** “Usually November and February.”

Question 14 asked the participants to indicate who would have the authority to create an Amish community school. All participants indicated that the Elders of the settlement would have to approve an Amish community school. One participant indicated that the Amish Superintendent would have some say but still would need support from the Elders of the settlement. One participant described the Elders to be the 10 oldest Bishops in the settlement.

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Male 2:** “The Amish Superintendent, but they would still have to go to the Elders and Bishops.”

**Male 1:** “The Elders and Bishops.”

**Moderator:** “Is there a specific Elders and Bishops you have to go to? Are they in one big area settlement?”

**Male 2:** “It would be the Elders and Bishops from the settlement.”

**Moderator:** “Is there certain ones that are Elders? Is there a list of them?”

**Male 3:** “Actually my wife’s dad would be one of them.”

**Moderator:** “So her dad was a Bishop for a long time. Do the Elders act like Bishops? In other words, are the Elders acting Bishops?”

**Female 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “And they are the ones who basically make the call.”

**Female 2:** “The whole community has to agree to it.”

**Moderator:** “Would they have more pull over the Amish Superintendent?”

**Male 1:** “They would rule over the Amish Superintendent.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

### **Demographic Data for Focus Group 2**

The second focus group was conducted on August 7, 2012, with two male and two female Amish parents who ranged in age from 23 to 42 years. This group had an equal mixture of parents who sent their children to the public school and who sent their children to the private Amish school. The parents in this focus group represented 9 Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the eighth grade.

### **Results for Focus Group 2**

Question 1 allowed participants to share their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum taught in the private Amish school setting and what would be used in the proposed community school. In addition, Amish parents were given an opportunity to

express the importance of Amish curriculum in relation to career readiness. Similar to Group 1 respondents, the Amish parents had no issues with the curriculum taught to public school students. However, they did express the need for the teaching of German.

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Male 1:** “I think those are good subjects. The only thing I would like to see taught would be the German language.”

**Female 2:** “German needs to be taught to keep the students up on the language.”

Question 2 was designed to give the group an opportunity to voice their opinion about the need of technology within the curriculum. Although computers were not mentioned, parents stated that any technological aide was improper for their students. Parents felt students should use their own resources for calculations.

**Moderator:** What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?

**Male 2:** “I don’t think they need any of those technologies.”

**Male 1:** “I would rather not have any technologies either.”

**Female 1:** “They add with their paper and pencils.”

Question 3 gave the participants an opportunity to voice their opinion on the purpose of education as it applies to preparing their children for the future workforce. Two participants voiced that the purpose of education is to help students for the future.

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 1:** “I think it helps them to be self sufficient.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think they should have skills and technology to prepare them for a career (such as to be a carpenter)?”

**Female 1:** “Yes, they learned that in eighth grade.”

**Female 2:** “It helps our children be ready to work as adults. They need to know math and reading to run a business.”

Question 4 gave the second focus group a chance to voice their opinions on whom they felt would be a proper operator if a community school were to serve the Amish community. Answers ranged from a board of elected officials to Elders of the church.

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Female 2:** “Usually a board governed by the parents.”

**Moderator:** “Is that how you do it now in your Amish schools?”

**Male 1:** “I would feel most comfortable that way.”

**Moderator:** “What about an Amish Superintendent or the Elders? Do you think they should have some say? Who runs your board?”

**Male 1:** “It’s all voted in by the parents. The parents of the children in that district have a right to vote to elect the board. It’s by a majority vote.”

**Moderator:** “Does that person make all the decisions?”



**Male 1:** “It’s the board. It’s either 3 to 5 people to keep it uneven.”

**Moderator:** “What does that board do? Do they hire the teacher and run the facility?”

**Male 1:** “Yes, hire a teacher, maintenance, janitor work.”

Question 5 asked for possible obstacles that would prevent the formation of an Amish community school. The two major concerns were constriction of religion and the total population of the school.

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 1:** “Well, it depends on how big it would get, how many pupils, and if they have any say so or that.”

**Moderator:** “I believe you are right. That’s a concern you don’t want to get too big.”

**Male 1:** “Another concern might be electricity or how much say they would have as far as religion.”

Question 6 gave the opportunity for the focus group members to state their views on busing. Safety and distance from school seem to be the two greater areas of concern.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 2:** “I think it would be alright except we don’t have spring breaks and days off like public schools.”

**Moderator:** “You may have a different calendar.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “How many total days do they go to school?”

**Male 1:** “160.”

**Moderator:** “I think we have 178. Your summer is way longer because you don’t have Christmas break. Are you against busing or would you rather have the kids walk to school?”

**Male 1:** “Now in our district they can all walk. But, where it would be farther, I think it would be something that could be considered.”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t be against it.”

**Female 1:** “Busing would be good.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think it is safer than walking?”

**Female 1:** “Yes, I think it is safer.”

Question 7 provided the participants with an opportunity to gain knowledge on an existing Amish community school located in a nearby settlement. None of the focus group members had any knowledge of the existence of an existing Amish community school. The participants in this focus group were exposed to the community school concept for the first time when they heard the explanation of a community school.

Question 8 was designed to gather the views of Amish parents about a school funded by state and local tax dollars. The participants had mixed opinions and three group members were receptive to the idea but voiced a negative attitude when it came to receiving any type of aid.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Male 1:** “I wouldn’t have any problem with it if it were tax dollars that we paid. I do have a problem with government aid, as long as it was tax dollars.”

**Female 1:** “I agree.”

**Female 2:** “I agree.”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t have a problem with it but I think I would rather stay like it is.”

Question 9 asked the Amish parents to give their opinions on the formation of a community school using old public school buildings instead of the private Amish school setting. Three participants voiced viewpoints that related to the financial advantages of such a school scenario.

**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school?”

**Male 2:** “It would cost less to operate.”

**Female 1:** “It would be safer riding the bus to and from school although I don’t know if I would like Amish students riding the bus with the regular kids.”

**Male 1:** “If many of the things could be paid for then it would take much of the pressure for Amish families to pay tuition. Although, paying tuition would be better than having federal government control.”

Question 10 gave group members a chance to project any foreseen disadvantages that would possibly arise with the formation of an Amish community school.

**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 1:** “One thing about paying tuition it gives you a sense of belonging or helping. It makes you responsible for the school. It could be lost if it was free.”

**Moderator:** “You like the ownership or closeness.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What about distance to schools. You like to keep it close to home? Why?”

**Male 1:** “I think it is nice.”

**Moderator:** “A community school would have to have a regular classroom teacher and some Amish teachers as well.” Would that be a disadvantage to everybody?”

**Male 1:** I think it would be a little hard for the Amish to accept until they get used to it. I think at first people would be cautious about it.”

Question 11 asked the participants to give their opinions of the predicted advantages of an Amish Community school. All responses included the common element of reduced costs to educate their children.

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 1:** “If they had to go far as far as the bus would travel normally there would be less time and taxi expense. No tuition would definitely be an advantage.”

**Female 2:** “It would be an advantage not to have to pay tuition.”

**Moderator:** “Is your tax included in your tuition?”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “How is that organized?”

**Male 1:** “Usually you figure all expenses for the year and divide by the number of parents and pay that monthly.”

Question 12 asked about mandated state testing. There were three parents who were receptive to the state requirement. All of the participants had a positive reception to the idea of formative assessment to benchmark progress.

**Question 12:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Female 2:** “I think it is a good idea.”

**Female 1:** “I agree.”

**Moderator:** “Why do you think it is a good idea?”

**Female 1:** “It gives them a challenge and a goal.”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be nice to make sure we are on track with the rest of the state.”

**Moderator:** “Do they have some kind of tests in Amish school?”

**Male 1:** “They do test them but I don’t think it is the same test for every school until they are in eighth grade then they have a year-end test.”

**Moderator:** “What happens if they don’t pass that test?”

**Female 2:** “I don’t know.”

**Male 1:** “I can’t say truthfully that I know of anybody that never did.”

Question 13 gave the participants an opportunity to disclose the level of parental involvement they felt was appropriate in Amish schools or a proposed Amish community school.

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Female 2:** “We usually have hot lunches.”

**Moderator:** “How often is that done?”

**Female 2:** “Twice a year, three times, maybe.”

**Moderator:** “What else do the parents do?”

**Male 1:** “They clean the schools. They bring in firewood. They fix things. They pay tuition.”

Question 14 asked the participants who they thought should have the authority to form an Amish community school. The participants indicated that either an Amish Superintendent or Elders of the church should make decisions.

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Female 2:** “We would probably ask the Elders.”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be a local decision but the Elders and the Superintendent would advise us.”

**Female 1:** “I say the same thing.”

### **Demographic Data for Focus Group 3**

The third focus group was conducted on August 18, 2012, with two male and two female Amish parents. The parents ranged in age from 23 to 36 years and had the common characteristic of sending their children to the local public school. These focus group members represented 7 total Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the fifth grade.

### **Results for Focus Group 3**

Question 1 asked participants to describe what type of curriculum they felt would be proper for Amish students. Group members showed some knowledge of what Amish schools used as coursework even though none of their children attended an Amish school to this point.

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Female 1:** “Science.”

**Male 2:** “The family of science is something that we don’t do now.”

**Moderator:** “You don’t do science?”

**Female 1:** “No.”

**Moderator:** “What about German?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What other courses would you teach in Amish school?”

**Female 1:** “Spelling.”

**Female 2:** “Handwriting.”

**Female 1:** “Vocabulary.”

Question 2 gave focus group members the opportunity to give their opinion on the course work and technologies that they feel would be appropriate in a school for their children. Some questioned the course content but felt that technologies should not be present.

**Moderator:** “What other courses would you teach in Amish school?”

**Female 2:** “I have no idea.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think they should have any technologies at all?”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be best not to.”

**Moderator:** “Do they use calculators?”

**Female 2:** “No, it’s all brain.”

**Moderator:** “Does that encourage them to be able to do that without any help?”

**Female 2:** “Yes, especially when they become carpenters. They will not have a calculator in front of them when they are trying to do all the things that they need on the job.”



Question 3 gave the group members an opportunity voice their opinions on the purpose of education. While there was a consensus among the participants that education is needed to prepare for the workforce, they also felt that technology was not needed.

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 2:** “No, I think they shouldn’t have to learn computers but that’s a lot of it education is all about.”

**Male 1:** “Yes that is why we send our kids to school. They need to be prepared to read and write in order to do work or business.”

**Female 2:** “Absolutely.”

Question 4 asked the focus group members their opinion on the proper operator for a proposed Amish community school. Participants felt that parents overseen by Elders would be the best organizational structure. They did recognize the fact that parental involvement was already accountable to an Amish Superintendent.

**Moderator:** What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “I would say a little older guy; somebody with experience with raising kids.”

**Female 2:** “Definitely an Elder.”

**Moderator:** “How are your schools governed now?”

**Male 2:** “The board president runs the school and helps with all the fund raisers, taxi service and teacher.”

**Male 1:** “The president is elected by the parents and we all take turns being president by voting each year. Sometime the president is in charge for more than one year.”

**Male 2:** “And if they can’t handle that, the Superintendent takes over.”

**Moderator:** “The Superintendent will take over if they can’t handle that.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Female 2:** “Yes, he will step in.”

**Moderator:** “Do you feel that a board of Amish would run your school?”

**Male 1:** Yes

**Female 2:** “Definitely, one takes board and community works together.”

Question 5 gave the participants an opportunity to identify any obstacles that would prevent the formation of an Amish community school. They noted technology and government involvement when it came to funding.

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 2:** “I think if there is a possibility of computers being in there. I think that’s a good possibility of stopping it.”

**Female 2:** “I would have to say government funding because a lot of the Elders don’t want anything to do with government funding. I think that would be a big issue.”

**Moderator:** “Any kind of government funding or certain areas?”

**Male 1:** “I’m not sure about that.”

**Male 1:** “I’m not sure if they have certain things they go by or not. What can go and what can’t go for funding?”

**Male 1:** “And as far as religion maybe. I don’t know if that would affect it or not.”

**Female 2:** “Yes. Would they be able to do the Bible reading and the morning prayer; everything that they do in Amish school? Keep the religion in it?”

**Moderator:** “So you would want religion in the schools.”

**Female 2:** “Absolutely.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

Question 6 asked participants to give their opinions on the public busing of Amish students to either an Amish community school or the local public school. Participants felt that since they pay taxes busing would be safer and acceptable.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 1:** “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it other than if we are paying taxes as long as it doesn’t I mean we got enough bad names already. Is that going to give us more of a bad name being we don’t pay some of the stuff that you do?”

**Moderator:** “You pay taxes?”

**Female 2:** “We pay land taxes, state taxes, and school taxes.”

**Moderator:** “Are you opposed to kids riding on the bus?”

**Female 2:** “I think it would be safer and cheaper. I don’t see anything wrong with it.”

**Male 1:** “Personally, I wouldn’t have a problem with it.”

Question 7 asked group members about their knowledge of an Amish community school located in an adjacent county. All of the participants had no prior knowledge of such an arrangement. During the explanation of the community school concept, none of the participants indicated any prior knowledge of any Amish community school.

Question 8 asked the participants to give their opinion on a Amish school that would be funded by state and local tax dollars. While there was reception to state and local funding, a few of the participants felt federal funding would be rejected by Amish Elders.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Male 1:** “I don’t think that would be a problem.”

**Male 2:** “No.”

**Female 2:** “No.”

**Moderator:** “What other kind of funding would people would have a problem with?”

**Female 2:** “I don’t think there would be a problem with any of the funding. There definitely would be a lot of questions about the funding and the Elders are definitely going to know where all the funding is coming from.”

**Moderator:** “The certain funding as opposed to versus other funding. Is that the issue with the Elders?”

**Male 2:** “I think it would be more like a federal funding.”

**Male 1:** “Yes, that’s what I would say.”

Question 9 asked participants about using old public school buildings. Much of their dialogue was focused on how the schools were built and funded; they did not have any opposition to the location. This led to an extensive dialogue on the process of creating and building a new private Amish school.

**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?”

**Male 2:** “I think that would be better if they are going to go that route anyway.”

**Moderator:** “Better than what?”

**Male 2:** “Better than keeping the private schools.”

**Female 2:** “I think that would be a good idea too, especially if they are just sitting empty and that would be cheaper instead of building all these community school houses.”

**Moderator:** “Is it a lot of work and resources to building school houses?”

**Male 1:** “Not too much.”

**Moderator:** “When you put up a school house, how does that process work?”

**Male 2:** “They usually have so much a church member. The whole Geauga county area would pay so much a church member and use that money to build a school.”

**Moderator:** “So the whole settlement would have ownership of the school.”

**Female 2:** “Is that what they do with a community school, too?”

**Moderator:** “No.”

**Male 1:** “Everybody gets together and helps build it. There’s no labor involved. It’s all volunteer.”

**Moderator:** “So it’s funded by everybody in the community?”

**Male 1:** “Right.”

**Moderator:** “What about the property? How does that work?”

**Male 1:** “Same thing, usually someone donates it or they take the money and buy it.”

**Female 2:** “If they buy it, then they add that into the total.”

**Moderator:** “Then they get together and put the school up and look for a board to operator it.”

**Female 2:** “Well they vote.”

**Moderator:** “Who votes on that?”

**Female 2:** “The school members.”

**Male 2:** “The school members in the area where the kids are going to school.”

**Moderator:** “So if we built one over here, would all of you be involved in that?”

**Female 2:** “Right, they have parent/teacher conferences once a month.”

Question 10 asked participants about the disadvantages of a proposed Amish community school. They responded with various opinions. One participant revealed that at one time he/she was a teacher at a private Amish school.

**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “I guess it would be the computers.”

**Female 2:** “They wouldn’t be learning the German.”

**Moderator:** “If you did a community school, you could do them without computers and you could put German in there. As long as you follow the state guidelines you would have to have English, Math, Reading, probably a science; but you say that Science isn’t taught in Amish school right now.”

**Female 1:** “They have Ohio History and Geography, but no science.”

**Moderator:** “Did you teach at one time?”

**Female 1:** “I was a helper.”

**Male 1:** “I think years ago they used to teach agriculture.”

**Moderator:** “If they had those sciences, do you think they would be allowed?”

**Female 2:** Oh, absolutely. I don’t see a problem with that.”

**Moderator:** “So it’s not a problem with science, it’s just that they don’t have it basically.”

**Female 2:** “I don’t know why they don’t have it.”

Question 11 asked about the advantages of an Amish community school. The common theme was economic advantages. Extensive discussion led to conversation about how private Amish schools are funded within the Amish community.

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “No tuition.”

**Male 1:** “Less expenses.”

**Moderator:** “What about transportation?”

**Male 1:** “Yes, that would definitely be a plus.”

**Moderator:** “You would get transportation from a bus. If this would occur, you could have an Amish school bus go around and pick up all the Amish kids and drive them to the school. What is your opinion with Amish kids being on the bus with English kids?”

**Male 2:** “It wouldn’t be any different than it is now.”

**Male 1:** “That’s what I was going to say, especially if they go to public schools.”

**Moderator:** “Do you send your kids to public schools?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “So basically the big advantage is economics.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”



**Moderator:** “If you were to have a private Amish school, what would that cost the family? Is it by the kid?”

**Male 2:** “By the family.”

**Female 2:** “By the family.”

**Male 1:** “It would average anywhere from \$150 to \$200 per month.”

**Moderator:** “So that’s what it would cost per family.”

**Male 1:** “Some of them would find it cheaper if they have more kids.”

**Moderator:** “What is a typical number of kids in a school?”

**Male 2:** “I would say an average is 175 probably. Oh, do you mean the number of kids?”

**Moderator:** “Yes.”

**Male 2:** “Probably 45 to 50, maybe.”

**Female 1:** “They don’t like to have more than 60 or 70. That’s high. They don’t like that much in school.”

**Female 2:** “Thirty in each class.”

**Moderator:** “So 5 or 6 kids could be from the same family, so they are splitting the cost per family not per kid.”

**Male 1:** “You are still paying the same price whether you have one child or six of them.”

Question 12 inquired about the participants’ thoughts and attitudes towards state mandated testing. There were mixed thoughts on testing. Some participants viewed testing as positive for benchmarking while others felt it was an unnecessary burden to the school.

**Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Male 2:** “I think it puts a lot of stress on the kids.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that.”

**Moderator:** “Do you like to know if your child is doing well and learned something throughout the year?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, definitely.”

**Female 2:** “I don’t see a problem with state testing.”

**Moderator:** “In the Amish school do they have an end of year exam to see how well they did all year?”

**Male 1:** “They have a six weeks test.”

**Moderator:** “Standard tests?”

**Female 2:** “Yes, standard tests.”

**Male 1:** “You get a report card every six weeks.”

Question 13 asked about parental involvement within an Amish community school. The parents were unsure of what level involvement they would have due to currently sending their children to public school. As the dialogue progressed it was clear that there was intent to eventually send their children to private Amish schools.

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Male 2:** “We don’t know.”

**Male 1:** “Right. We hear that they help with activities and fund raisers for supplies and materials.”

**Female 2:** “I really don’t know what we will have to do but we will find out soon enough.”

Question 14 asked the participants who would have the authority to create a public funded Amish community school. Their response indicated Amish leaders. In addition, they shared comments on how leaders are organized within the local Amish settlement.

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Male 1:** “I would say it would have to be 10 of the Elders.”

**Moderator:** “The 10 oldest Elders. Do you know who all the 10 Elders are? It’s the settlement right?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, It’s the settlement.”

**Moderator:** “Do you know who all the 10 Elders are or does that change every year?”

**Male 1:** “It changes every year.”

**Moderator:** “Does it change because someone passes away?”

**Male 1:** “All the time if someone passes or if they are not able to due to an injury or something else.”

**Moderator:** “So once they are an Elder, they are an Elder until they can’t do it anymore.”

**Male 1:** “Yes, exactly.”

**Moderator:** “And it’s usually the oldest Bishops.”

**Male 1:** “The oldest 10.”

**Moderator:** “So they would be the ones who do it. Have you heard of the Amish Superintendent’s?”

**Female 2:** “Yes. They would be able to help you.”

**Moderator:** “Do they have a say in that or is it still the Elders?”

**Female 2:** “He would be in with them because he has pretty much the say so. He does a lot of things with the school.”

**Male 1:** “It still comes down to what the 10 Elders would say.”

#### **Demographic Data for Focus Group 4**

The fourth focus group was conducted on September 6, 2012, with three participating Amish leaders. The three male participants’ ages ranged from 50 to 67 years with the common characteristic of being recognized as Amish leaders. None of the participants had children that were still of school age. However, all of the participants’ children attended a private Amish school. Among the participants in the focus group there was an Amish Bishopric, an Elder, and a past Amish School Superintendent.

#### **Results for Focus Group 4**

Question 1 asked participants about their knowledge of the curriculum in public and Amish schools. One member expanded on the fact that sciences and consumer sciences were learned through training at home. All three participants felt that advanced or vocational training would be taught at home after completing the eighth grade.

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Male 2:** “Some of them are okay and mostly needed.”

**Male 3:** “We would have Math, English, and History in school. As far as the Agricultural Science and Family Consumer Science and the craft that is one reason why the kids go to eighth grade and are home after that. That is what the ones that live on a farm would be taught at home. The ones that don’t live on a farm would be out working in the fields and learning a trade.”

Question 2 queried the participants’ opinion of technology in the school setting. All three members felt there was no place for technology in the classroom. They did go on to expand that many Amish workers received on-the-job training and utilized technology with their current job. There was no opposition to technology at the work place.

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

**Male 3:** “We don’t use calculators in school at all.”

**Male 1:** “As far as technology I don’t think we need to add any courses to what we currently have.”

**Male 2:** “I would say no technology.”

**Moderator:** “What about trades where they might have to learn how to use a cash register or a computer in a trade or bookkeeping?”

**Male 3:** “On-the-job training. That’s the way it usually works.”

**Moderator:** “So, those types of skills are taught on the job.”

**Male 2:** “Yes, I know a lot of Amish that are very computer illiterate because they have worked to learn the skills on the job. I know some men in Kraftmaid that are experts at it.”

**Moderator:** “Exactly, that’s what I was going to mention. There’s a guy at Kraftmaid that does all the computers.”

**Male 3:** “There’s an Amish girl working at Middlefield Bank in Orwell. She’s on the computer and there are quite a few girls that work in stores which basically would be with your cash registers, but as far as computers it would be pretty basic.”

Question 3 prompted a response about the purpose of education in relation to preparing their youth for the work force. Only one participant responded to this question. The other two members advocated his comments through a silent verification.

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 3:** “To communicate through English through your writing and your reading. To go on to view their history, geography, and spelling so they can write. As far as the arithmetic whatever numbers they would need to deal with construction. So it’s very important.”

Question 4 allowed the focus group members to express who they felt would best operate an Amish community school. The dialogue led to a discussion of the governing structure of their choice.

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “The Amish Superintendent is doing a superb job of running our schools now.”

**Moderator:** “The Amish Superintendent is in charge of the whole settlement.”

**Male 1:** “Yes he is.”

**Moderator:** “Obviously he can’t run everything so if you had a unique one, he might oversee it but who would be the ideal structure there?”

**Male 3:** “A board?”

**Male 1:** “Community school board.”

Question 5 gave the participants an opportunity to vocalize the obstacles they thought would prevent the formation of an Amish community school. The dialogue of this group produced one unique answer. One leader brought up the shortened school year that was previously negotiated and did not want to lose that shortened school year for agrarian purposes.

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 2:** “First thing that I would think of would be too much government state involvement.”

**Male 1:** “One thing would be a certified teacher’s salary.”

**Moderator:** “Salary too expensive to pay for a certified teacher?”

**Male 3:** “Although he said the tax would pay that fund. Again, too many strings attached. We have our exemption with the school agreement we have right now with the 160 days versus the 180 days and if the state would come in, we would have to change the school year. Not good at all for agriculture.”

Question 6 was designed to gather input on the subject of busing and Amish attitudes towards the public school bus system. Although they thought busing was safe, group members expressed a preference for their children to walk to school.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 3:** “Everybody lives close enough and nobody has far to walk. We do have some who walk on the state road. Actually, they do not walk on the state road, they’re off to the side of the state road through the fields. They come across the lots so they don’t have to walk on the state road. The other would be the township road but just across the road so all of our children are walking off the road.”

**Moderator:** “So you are saying you would rather have them walk versus ride a bus or a taxi?”

**Male 2:** “Correct.”

**Moderator:** “What about safety? Do you think buses are safe to ride?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, absolutely.”



**Moderator:** “Would it be permissible if Amish children would ride the bus with English children?”

**Male 3:** “As far as riding together that’s not a problem at all.”

**Male 1:** “That’s not an issue at all.”

Question 7 asked about any prior knowledge of an Amish community located in another county within the state. Only one of the leaders had prior knowledge of the existing community school.

Question 8 centered on the issue of government involvement and their receptiveness to an Amish community school funded by state and local tax dollars. The Amish leaders were very concerned about mandates and unwanted regulations.

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Male 1:** “I would be skeptic.”

**Moderator:** “Why?”

**Male 1:** “Because of the government involvement. Like you said there are some catches in it. We need to follow some of their guidelines and some of their rules. I would have to see what those would be first.”

**Moderator:** “Federal or state government or government involvement in general?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, in general I would say.”

**Male 2:** “Until we knew what the strings all were and the hoops that we had to jump through, it’s hard to make a concrete decision.”

**Moderator:** “So you would like to hear all the conditions before you would agree to something like that?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

Question 9 gave the participants an opportunity to express receptiveness to the possibility of an Amish community school located in an unused public school building. The Amish leaders indicated that attitudes from various communities would depend on their age and willingness to be more progressive than older leaders.

**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?”

**Male 2:** “I think there would be a lot of different opinions. There are so many Amish out there and some of them are more aggressive like the Amish Superintendent. But a lot of them are older ministers and older board members and are still very old fashioned. There’s just too big of a community for everyone to see things the same way, I think. I don’t think it would ever, but maybe some day in the future, but for now I don’t see it happening at all.”

**Male 3:** “I don’t either. And another reason is we try to keep our classes smaller and stay a little more on the one-on-one and also participate in fundraisers. We try to keep fewer kids per class so they can focus a little bit more. But, it really helps to get a big

group together. Then we're going to get involved in busing and taxi which is going to make the cost go up, rent of the building. or whatever. At this point, I don't think it would be feasible at all."

**Male 1:** "And I totally agree with that. I would much rather send my children to a school with 40 or 50 pupils than to a school with a couple hundred. That has always been the goal for the Amish school as smaller schools 50 or 60 pupils than to divide the schools."

Question 10 asked what would be a disadvantage to Amish parents who send their child to an Amish community school. Amish leaders indicated that there would not be any negative implications. All three group participants believed that it was up to the parents where their children go to school and to choose a public school is acceptable.

**Moderator:** "What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?"

**Male 2:** "As far as the family I couldn't think of any."

**Male 3:** "The people who send their children to the public school have no issues there."

**Male 2:** "Right, exactly. If we did have a community school and somebody did set one up and somebody would send their children, I don't think there would be any issues."

**Male 1:** "Not among the Amish."

**Moderator:** "So choice is basically individual to the parent."

**Male 2:** “Yes. I don’t think anybody has looked down upon anyone who sends their kids to public schools.”

**Male 3:** “No, it’s more accepted now than 10 years ago.”

Question 11 asked group members about the advantages if an Amish community school were formed. Amish leaders indicated that cost would be the only advantage that they could foresee. Two of the three participants clearly voiced the financial advantage as the major advantage of the community school format.

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “Advantages would be cost. You could save quite a bit of money in a year or two. By the time you pay tuition and have our fundraisers once or twice a year, it takes a lot of effort and money.”

**Male 3:** “Another advantage would be financial at this point. They could use a public school.”

**Male 2:** “That’s the only one that I could see off the top of my head.”

Question 12 asked the participants to voice their opinions about state mandated testing. Many participants engaged in benchmarks and cut scores for testing. However, one member voiced a negative concern due to the future role technology has in state testing.

**Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Male 3:** “Personally, I would rather that it stays the way it is as far as the state. As far as what other people think, I’m not exactly sure. But when you get into that you’ll also get into technology or especially as far as computers and online because I think a lot of their stuff anymore is this year they are starting to record more and more grades and testing online which we wouldn’t participate in.”

Question 13 asked what level of parental involvement the Amish community would embrace. It was evident that parent participation was viewed very highly. Amish leaders felt that their parents are highly involved with their schools.

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Male 2:** “I would say all parents or most, at least, are very involved in the school; the funding, the running of the school, the teachers. We have a monthly board meeting that supposedly most of the parents show up every month. And they talk to the teacher one-on-one. It’s like your parent/teacher conference, but we have one once a month. And after the board meeting they go up to the teacher and ask how this kids doing and that kids doing and what kind of help

he needs. There is a lot of involvement in the Amish schools and parents.”

**Male 3:** “Very involved. Yes, just like he said. And if there are any problems, the teacher and parent communicate in between and if there is anything else that needs to be done, the school board would get involved. So that is taken care of right away and everybody is involved.

**Moderator:** “Like financial support and fundraising?”

**Male 3:** “Correct.”

Question 14 asked the participants who would have the ability to create a public funded school. The leaders indicated that the Amish Superintendent along with board and Elder support would have the authority to allow a community school model.

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Male 2:** “I would say if something new comes up or if there is something we need to change, a lot of times they will go to our 10 oldest Bishops and have a meeting to see what they think and a lot of times it goes by their decision.”

**Male 3:** “As far as presenting it, I would say it would be presented by the Superintendent.”

**Male 1:** “Yes. I would agree. The Superintendent heads the county board.”

**Moderator:** “When you say the county board, is it this county or multiple counties?”

**Male 3:** “We call it the county board, but they’re supervising the whole Amish community which is multiple counties (Geauga, Trumbull, Portage, and Ashtabula).”

### **Summary**

It was apparent that each group had its own dynamic and personality. Each group consisted of unique Amish community members with different socio-economic backgrounds. Each group had unique situations as to how and where their children were educated. One group’s children were all out of school, and its members held a more authoritative view point. All these factors weighed on each group’s response.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary of the Study

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century, the majority of Amish parents sent their children to the local public schools. During that time schools were smaller in size and more localized in the communities that their participating students lived. Closer to the middle of the century Amish leaders started to argue against the new laws that extended the school year and consolidated schools (Johnson-Weiner, 2007). Following years of legal battles in several states and in the Supreme Court (*Wisconsin v. Yoder et al.*, 1972), the Old Order Amish established their own schools. These schools have exponentially grown over the years and one Ohio settlement currently has over 71 active private Amish schools.

Many Amish leaders keep a strong hold on their cultural beliefs. However, in order to ensure the survival of their culture they have adjusted to the modern work force. While there is great resistance to progress, they have also been willing to negotiate. In education they have refused to concede to modern ways. On other fronts, they have been willing to make dramatic changes (Kraybill, 2001).

In the early 1990s school laws changed and flexibility of school design and choice became more prominent. The purpose of this dissertation study was (a) to expose Amish parents and leaders to the newer, more flexible school formats and (b) to obtain any



interests or opinions Amish leaders may have toward a proposed public funded Amish community school.

It was decided that focus group research was the most effective strategy to collect useful descriptive data. Discussions between the participants provided for an honest exchange of viewpoints about each of the asked questions (Fern, 2001). The descriptive data enabled the researcher to gather viewpoints of Amish participants and examine the possibilities of a potentially altered Amish school format. The benefit of utilizing this research methodology lay in the richness of the participant answers. Their replies allowed the researcher to analyze their viewpoints, which could not have been achieved through the use of surveys or questionnaires.

Each focus group was audiotaped by the facilitator while the moderator asked the assigned focus group questions. The purpose of the focus group format was to try to gain insight into how participants addressed certain issues as a whole rather than individually. The facilitator recorded field observations to capture the entire character of the discussions. Four sets of audio tapes were transcribed onto paper for data analysis. The analysis process sorted the data from all four focus groups and then coded it into categories that were specific to responses to each question asked. Common themes and opinions regarding specific prompts were then identified to provide a basis for developing proper inferences (Weiss, 1995). Responses to some focus group questions fell into common themes which led to collective analysis.

Each focus group started with a complete explanation of how community schools currently function. As part of the conversation, Amish participants were briefed on the landmark court cases that allowed for the development of private Amish schools and on

how community school law has evolved since the early 1990s. It was made clear to all participants that a proposed Amish community school would be funded by state and local tax dollars as well as some level of government involvement.

As the researcher evaluated the data, it became evident that the answers to several questions were interconnected and led to common viewpoints. As a result, it was decided to summarize the responses and offer suggestions based on collective attitudes, beliefs, and viewpoints toward a proposed Amish charter school.

### **Conclusions**

As the researcher reviewed the data, it became evident that all responses could be categorized into six common themes. The researcher drew conclusions within the themes of (a) location/locality, (b) finance, (c) safety and social concerns, (d) curriculum, (e) government involvement, and (f) organization and authority. The data from the four focus group discussions was coded to fall within these categories.

#### **Location/Locality**

Several participants noted that proximity to their residence was of importance to them. Members from all four groups preferred that their children's school be within walking distance. Upon further inquiry, it was discovered that these viewpoints were the result of a desire to have a local community oriented school. Many parents expressed their desire to be involved with their schools, and proximity to the facility factored into their ability to be active with school programs.

Opinions of the participants reflected past research studies regarding school locations. During the protests against school consolidations in the 1950s, the Amish wanted to keep their local schools within walking distance. They did not want their

children to be bused away and nor did they want their children assigned to separate rooms with different teachers. They repeatedly pled for a one-room school house format (Kraybill, 2001). Interestingly, these are the same views the focus group participants expressed throughout the group sessions. Even those participants who sent their children to a public school preferred locations close to home with only one classroom teacher. This is similar to past research that indicated Amish parents' fear of their students passing from teacher to teacher and from subject to subject. Amish parents are afraid that their students would encounter bewildering ideas that would challenge their folk wisdom (Kraybill, 2001).

There was general consensus that school located closer to the student's home would enable Amish parents to participate in school support programs. Some female participants voiced their desire to be active in providing lunches to the students, and school proximity would have an effect on their ability to provide those services. The strong desire for a small local school was evident.

### **Finance**

Several of the focus group questions provided insight on the costs involved of the private, Amish education to the Amish community. All participants knew that students who went to the public school did not have transportation or tuition costs and those students who went to private Amish schools did. Participants divulged the funding format of dividing the total costs of the school operations by family not by the individual student. Interestingly, several participants indicated that new private Amish school buildings are funded through a settlement building fund. Funds are acquired from all the members in the Amish settlement and distributed when a new school building is needed

in a specific location. This spreads out new school costs over hundreds of Amish parents, not just the few in the new school location.

The majority of all the participants in all four groups indicated that transportation costs were a burden on Amish parents. The cost of transportation was responsible for a significant amount of tuition costs.

When the participants compared the costs involved for a private, Amish school with a government funded, community school, the majority of them indicated that the cost was “worth it to avoid not giving up anything” (personal conversation, August 2, 2012). A majority of the Amish participants were worried about losing the things they desire in their school if the government got involved. None of the participants wanted government involvement and clearly understood that a government funded, community school would have some level of government regulation.

Several participants did not have a negative opinion of taking funds from the government as long as they paid into the system themselves. They had no problem with the idea of funding a school with their local tax dollars or a problem with a funding scenario from the state. Amish parents realize that state and local funding is from their property taxes, state sales taxes, and state income taxes—all of which they currently pay.

The collective opposition opposed and feared government regulation and control. Previous research minimized funding as an obstacle for Amish groups to have their children attend the private Amish schools. Financial burden is rarely documented as a reason not to promote the building of their Amish parochial schools. What research does indicate is that limited government involvement and religious freedom outweighs any financial burden when it comes to appropriate education for school (Johnson-Weiner,

2007). However, this research does support the fact that the main reason Amish parents send their children to the public school is financial. These same participants would prefer to send their children to an Amish private school and many had plans to transfer them as soon as resources were available.

### **Safety and Social Concerns**

Focus group members did not give any indication of unsafe feelings when attending either Amish parochial schools or public schools. When participants were asked about transportation to and from school, safety concerns did evolve. Several participants were more comfortable with a bus as a mode of transportation. Two participants commented that bus transportation was very safe and that led into further discussion of how the disadvantages of riding with non-Amish children outweighed the advantages of safe transportation.

It became apparent that Amish parents send their children to public school for two major reasons. The first is that Amish parochial schools do not start in kindergarten. Many Amish parents like to give their children a head start with an English based education before they send them to Amish schools. The second reason is strictly economics. Young Amish parents struggle with the tuition costs associated with attending a private Amish school. These parents indicated that they would send their children to public school until it was more affordable to send them to a private Amish school. This comes to pass sooner than one would presume due to the fact that tuition costs are by the family unit and not per student.

The group of Amish leaders indicated that many Amish parents feel pressure to enroll their children in private Amish schools. They indicated that some communities

have old fashioned leaders who produce a church environment that strongly encourages private Amish schools. One Elder expressed acceptance of Amish parents who send their children to the public schools. It was very clear from the group of Elders that other Amish community members would not look negatively at a parent who has chosen to send their children to a public school. However, social pressures within the Amish parent participants seem to be minimal as indicated by obvious lack pressure to have their students attend Amish private school. On the other hand, many quotes indicated that Amish parents felt an obligation to send their children to the private Amish parochial schools.

### **Curriculum**

The data gathered from both the focus group discussions and past research leads to the conclusion that several of the subjects taught in private Amish schools are similar to subjects taught in the public school (Dewalt, 2006). Basic subjects such as spelling, writing, reading, math, and history are common to both Amish and public school curriculums. The only subject that is included in state standards that is not highly emphasized in the Amish schools is science. Participants indicated that Amish curriculum did not emphasize science because it was a discovery type of subject. Research shows that Amish school leaders tend to avoid advanced science due to its ability to stray away from the concept of remaining plain (Johnson-Weiner, 2007).

When participants were asked about science being taught as agricultural science or family consumer science, they were more receptive to the idea but felt it would be a decision that Elders would have to make. The group that contained leaders indicated that sciences and technologies are used in the workforce by the Amish workforce and they

receive instruction on the job. They indicated that this training was not allowed in school but needed for job performance. Homemaking skills and consumer sciences were also taught at home by their parents as needed.

Evident throughout the focal group discussions was that Amish parents want German taught as a language. German is the basis of their first spoken language. Participants also stated that Amish children should learn, to speak, and to communicate using the English language throughout school. Several participants indicated that they prefer to send their children to the public school to receive practice with the English language since private Amish schools do not have kindergarten.

Religion did not appear to be a subject that was included as part of the main curriculum. Some participants indicated that religion was taught by parents and in church. However, a few parents did indicate that school days in the private Amish schools often start with prayer.

### **Government Involvement**

Government involvement was the strongest common concern among all the participants. In general, the idea of a community school is not completely objectionable to the participants. There are many aspects that Amish parents and leaders like about the community school format. However, they all share the same common concern of government involvement. The idea of having restrictions or regulations placed on their school made every participant hesitant to be open to the idea of an Amish community school. History is full of documentation that the Amish feel government regulation sometimes interferes with their ability to fully practice their religion.

Amish believe that God instituted civil government for the punishment of evil and the protection of the good as well as regulation of policy to run our country. Therefore they do not resist, despise, or condemn the state. However, they are taught to honor and obey God, and if the government's work conflicts with God's work then they will take a passive stance toward the policy (Robinson, 2005). This is clearly the attitude that focus group participants expressed during this study.

One participant from the group of Elders indicated that it took years of negotiation between Amish leaders and state officials to get approval of their shortened agrarian based school year. One of their concerns about an Amish based community school would be the requirement to extend the school year to an approved state format. They argued in the past for a shortened school year in order to teach their children skills at home as well to be conducive to allowing their students to get exposure to the work force.

Another common theme is that the Amish people are a proud people. They only take from the government what they pay into the government. The idea of property tax and sales tax funding a community school was acceptable to the participants. However, they have a very skeptic attitude concerning other federal tax revenues. One participant mentioned that that they do not pay the social security tax and were skeptical of what type of tax would fund an Amish based community school. Government efforts to address social welfare issues have dramatically expanded in recent years. Many of these issues are linked to low farm incomes. These programs raise conflicting issues with Amish religious beliefs and the social structure of the Amish community. The Amish rejection of worldliness leads to the desire to separate from a larger society (Kraybill,



2001). The Amish approach to social welfare flows from their own practices and social structure which enhance their desire to participate in government programs. This was a point of contention with the majority of all participants within all four groups.

Group participants objected to the requirement of state certified teachers and state mandated testing. Several participants did not feel that Amish leaders would favor a non-Amish, state certified teacher. Many have no objection to their students being taught by a public teacher in a public school. However, many of the participants expressed the opinion that Amish students need to be taught by an Amish teacher when attending an Amish school. Some data indicated the reason participants desire an Amish teacher is for the religious and German support needed for the Amish school.

When asked about state mandated testing, there seemed to be a mixed consensus on the concept. Some participants indicated that they encouraged the benchmarking of student progress. Others expressed that high stake testing is too taxing on the students and the desire to avoid high stake testing. All participants support progress or exit exams and indicated that cut scores are up to each individual Amish parochial school.

### **Organization and Authority**

It was evident from all groups and especially the group consisting of Amish leaders and school officials that any decisions on new school formats would be made by community officials. All participants indicated that there is one existing Amish Superintendent that presides over all Amish schools in the settlement. He operates with an elected board, and they all are accountable to the Elders of the church settlement. Elders are defined by the participants as the ten most tenured Bishops. One participant indicated that Elders are replaced only when one would die or become incapacitated.

It is apparent from the data that any presentation of an alternative school format must be addressed with the acting Amish Superintendent which would later lead to discussions with the Elders. This study focused on parents' views with one group consisting of an Elder and a past Superintendent. Many of the participants from Group 4 indicated that a community school proposal needs to be presented to Elders and the acting Amish Superintendent.

One participant in Group 4 indicated that some of the younger parents and new Elders are more progressive than some of the more senior ones. Many younger parents have the desire to send their children to public school to acquire the education they would need to work in an increasingly industrial environment (Johnson-Weiner, 2007). There is some evidence to suggest that there are Amish interests to have schools grounded in the past to start adapting for the future.

### **Recommendations**

This research utilized focus group research methodology to explore the viewpoints of Amish participants on community schools. This methodology was appropriate due to the varied education levels of the participants. Studies using focus groups would be a preferred format for follow up studies.

In summation, this project identified several attitudes that current Amish community members have towards a new community school format.

- Participants generally embrace the idea of a school system that would limit their out of pocket costs.
- Participants favor smaller and more local schools and want to be involved in their schools.

- Participants want limited government involvement and will only accept government funding from a source that they have paid into.
- Participants feel that newer parents and leaders are more receptive to changes but will be very cautious.
- Participants want Amish values embedded within their schools.

One recommendation that this researcher would make would be to further educate Amish parents, leaders, and communities on the community school concept. An appropriate follow up to this study would be to write a grant that would fund a program that would create culturally appropriate education for Amish community members for alternative schools. Amish communities and Amish leaders have been slow in the past to integrate new ideas and are often resistant to change (Kraybill, 2001). It would take a considerable amount of time and ongoing education for leaders to make changes that would intrude on their normal paradigm. Changes that are contemplated in this study could take several years.

Another suggested follow up study would be to gather data from a range of areas within the whole Amish settlement. This study gathered participants within one public school boundary. It would further enrich the study if several boundaries were explored. Communication within the same settlement is limited compared to the overall population. Cultural and religious practices vary to some degree within the same settlement due to the vast number of Amish leaders and various church groups. Newer settled areas may contain Amish community members more receptive to others and a study to supply data may shed light on this subject and would enrich this study.

### **Dissertation Summary**

Amish leaders have been reluctant and skeptical of any change in their educational ideas (Johnson-Weiner, 2007). When Amish leaders do make concessions to adapt to future needs it is for the best interest of their cultural survival (Kraybill, 2001). This research was designed to expose Amish parents and leaders to the concept of community schools that are now available due to newly acquired laws. In addition, this research intended to produce descriptive data on the viewpoints of Amish parents and Amish leaders.

The data indicated that while Amish leaders do feel financial burdens with their private schools, it does not outweigh unwanted government regulation within their schools. The data also show that Amish participants are willing to learn about a public community school format but defer all decision making to Amish leaders. If anything, this research supports the need for additional studies and culturally appropriate education of how an Amish focused community school could be created.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL**



One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555  
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July 10, 2012

Dr. Robert Beebe, Principal Investigator  
Mr. William Nye, Jr., Co-investigator  
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology & Leadership  
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol Number: 193-2012  
Title: The Receptiveness of the Amish Community to a Community School Designed  
Specifically for Amish Culture and Needs

Dear Dr. Beebe and Mr. Nye:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 3 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Kasvinsky  
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Research Compliance Officer

PJK/cc

c: Dr. Richard McEwing, Chair  
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology and Leadership

**APPENDIX B****INFORMED CONSENT FORM****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP SESSION**

Youngstown State University

**Prospective Focus Group Participant:**

Please read this consent form carefully. Should you have any questions, please ask before you decide to participate.

**Title of Study:**

THE RECEPTIVENESS OF THE AMISH COMMUNITY TO A COMMUNITY SCHOOL DESIGNED SPECIFICALLY FOR AMISH CULTURE AND NEEDS

**Purpose of the study:**

This study will obtain data concerning the attitudes, beliefs, and relationships between the Amish and the public schools of a school district located in northeast Ohio that has a large number of Amish residents. A focus that is specific to this study is to gather opinions of Amish parents as well as Amish leaders who have input with the Amish families who live within school district boundaries. Another goal of the study is to examine the willingness of Amish parents and leaders to consider public education, particularly in the format of a community school. It is a goal of this study to help design a plan to build better relationships between the Amish community and the local public schools. The collection of this information will seek to answer the following questions:

- What are the current attitudes of Amish communities and Amish leaders towards working with the public school system in creating an Amish Community School?
- How willing are Amish groups to explore ideas in order to benefit from the public funded Community School format?
- What are the major obstacles that prevent a slight change in the way today's Amish are being taught school?
- Who within the Amish communities have the authority to allow a change and can work with officials from the public schools?

The Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor for this study is Dr. Robert Beebe. William R. Nye Jr. is serving as the Co-Investigator/Student Investigator. This research has been approved by the Youngstown State University Human Subject Research Committee.

APPENDIX B (cont'd)Page 2

The information from this study is being collected through the use of focus group research. Focus group research consists of a group interview that is conducted by a moderator. You will be asked to answer fifteen predetermined questions concerning the research questions. The session should last approximately 120 minutes.

Four focus group sessions will be conducted at a Circle Creek Cabin Restaurant and participants must have school age Amish children or have some type of authority on how Amish students are educated in their private school settings. Transportation will be provided for those who participate in the study.

The focus groups will be recorded with audio tape recording equipment. The Investigator will be present during the session to record notes for clarification purposes. Recordings and field notes will be kept on file for seven years in a secure office to which only the Investigator or authorized personnel will have access.

Confidentiality:

The identity of all individuals will be kept anonymous. All participants will be referred to by a number when addressed during the research as well as in any recordings. A direct quote may be used in results however no names or other identifying information will be associated with the quote. Your non-compensated participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences by notifying the Moderator of your wishes. Because of the nature of a focus group, any information that is shared up to this point cannot be withdrawn.

Please feel free to contact William R. Nye Jr., co-researcher at (440) 537-1061, or Dr. Robert Beebe, principal researcher at (330) 941-2128, if you have any question about the study or if you choose to withdraw from the study.

Participation:

Your participation in this focus group study is greatly appreciated and will add to current knowledge in the field of education. This study is part of a research study whose results will be published.

I the undersigned understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description as outlined above. I am eighteen (18) years of age or older and I agree to participate.

---

 Signature of Participant

---

 Date

APPENDIX B (cont'd)

Page 3

I the undersigned give permission to be audio tape recorded during the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX C****FOCUS GROUP 1 TRANSCRIPT**

This focus group was conducted on August 2, 2012 with three male and two female Amish parents who ranged in age from 24 to 40 years. This group had the common characteristic of sending their children to private Amish schools. The parents in this focus group represented 17 Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the eighth grade.

The focus group format consisted of an introductory explanation of the community school concept followed by a series of several questions. The responses to these questions follow:

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator** “Why do you want them to know those things?”

**Female 2:** “To help them later in life.”

**Male 2:** “So they can make a living later in life.”

**Male 3:** “To communicate with other people.”

**Male 3:** “Important thing is to learn.”

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 2

**Male 2:** “Arithmetic and Reading.”

**Female 1:** “English but we do not want technology. We think you need to learn to do math by hand. You won’t have a computer when you build a house or barn.”

**Male 1:** “Spelling and Religion.”

**Female 2:** “German one day a week.”

**Male 3:** “The same that they were saying.”

**Moderator:** “Any other things other than their regular stuff that you think they should know in Amish School. What about things like arts or crafts or what do they do?”

**Female 2:** “They make different things like calendars and stuff for us for Christmas.”

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion? Is that what you think education is all about?”

**Male 3:** “Yes.”

**Female 2:** “Yes.”



## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 3

**Male 2:** “Yes, I think that education is needed to help our children prepare to do jobs in the future. Some require thinking such as math skills. Writing skills are needed to be successful in the population today.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Female 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “Elders.”

**Male 3:** “Elders is probably the main person.”

**Moderator:** “Anyone else have any thoughts about who should be the operator? Do you have a board that’s local now?”

**Female 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “Who’s involved in the board?”

**Male 3:** “Like an Elder would be the Superintendent. He would get information from the other Elders to help run the school system.”

**Moderator:** “How does the board work?”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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**Male 2:** “They get voted in from the community.”

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 2:** “One thing is that they would have an English teacher and probably would have to have computers. The Elders would not allow computers.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think if there were computers it would be a problem?”

**Male 2:** “Right, I think so.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that and you want to keep it as independent as possible as far as having the public involved.”

**Male 3:** “There would be a problem if the children were taught the same way in the Amish school as they are taught in the English School.”

**Moderator:** “Anything like government involvement?”

**Female 2:** “The Elders and Superintendents do not like government involvement especially if it is Federal.”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 2:** “I feel it is safer with a bus.”

**Moderator:** “Does anyone else have an opinion on a school bus picking them up versus them walking to school?”

**Male 3:** “I think it would be a good idea.”

**Moderator:** “What about who would be on the bus? Any opinion on that?”

**Female 2:** “They would have to be picked up with non-Amish children?”

**Moderator:** “Does that bother you if they were picked up with non-Amish children?”

**Female 2:** “The order on the bus would bother me.”

**Male 2:** “It wouldn’t bother me about that.”

**Moderator:** “Currently, there is a community school near Holmes County that serves mostly Amish Children. Can you tell me what you know about the experiences of the children, their families, and their communities with this school?”

**Female 2:** “No.”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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**Male 2:** “No.”

**Male 1:** “No.”

**Female 1:** “No.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Female 2:** “Tuition isn’t all that much really.”

**Male 2:** “The tuition isn’t a big problem. It is high to an extent but I think it is worth it.”

**Male 1:** “I agree with that. It’s worth paying tuition versus giving up some of the other stuff that you would have to give up if it was funded by the state.”

**Moderator:** “What do you think they would have to give up?”

**Male 1:** “You would have to be more involved as far as educated or rules. We would have to give up our Amish teachers. Teachers would have to have a degree.”

**Female 1:** “I feel the same way.”

**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school.”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 7

building versus keeping the current private schools open?"

**Male 2:** "I really wouldn't but how would you keep other people out?"

**Moderator:** "So you would have a problem."

**Male 2:** "Right, if it headed that way they couldn't say that this guy couldn't come to school because he's not Amish."

**Moderator:** "So you want to make sure that it would be all Amish."

**Male 2:** "Right."

**Male 3:** "It might not be good if there's too many kids in one school."

**Male 1:** "I agree with that too. If you have too many kids in one school."

**Female 1:** "Too many kids and too many parents sometimes causes problems."

**Moderator:** "Populous might be too much. In your opinion, would you rather have smaller units in school? That kind of where the 60 rule comes from other than the building code."

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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**Male 2:** “Yes, it wouldn’t work too much. I don’t think it is a good idea to have a school like our school with a 100 kids. It would be too much.”

**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Female 2:** “For me one thing would be that they would have to use modern technology. I would not want my children using that.”

**Male 2:** “And religion is another thing that’s not being taught in public schools.”

**Female 1:** “And the discipline.”

**Female 2:** “And they took the prayer out of the public schools quite a while ago, right?”

**Moderator:** “Correct.”

**Male 3:** “And that is something they would do away with, don’t you think?”

**Moderator:** “Yes, in the public school you are allowed to pray but you are not allowed to promote or prohibit any

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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religion. You can't have organized prayer because if you have organized prayer, someone might have different religious preference. You're allowed prayer on your own, but that just how the rules go."

**Moderator:** "What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?"

**Male 3:** "Money."

**Moderator:** "Is there any other advantages you would see? What about transportation, anything with transportation?"

**Male 1:** "Just like now, we have to transport our children. There again it would be money."

**Moderator:** "Do you think school buses are safer than vans?"

**Male 2:** "I think the bigger the bus would be safer than a van. You would have a lot more kids on a bus than in a van."

**Moderator:** "So you don't like the larger volume of kids in one vehicle."

**Male 2:** "Right."

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

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**Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t really care for it.”

**Moderator:** “You would not want your kids take the state tests.”

**Male 2:** “I don’t think it is anything we want.”

**Male 3:** “I feel the same way. I wouldn’t want them taking the state tests.”

**Moderator:** “You wouldn’t want them taking the state tests.”

**Male 3:** “Probably not.”

**Moderator:** “Is there anyone here interested in seeing how their kids did in Math compared to other kids?”

**Moderator:** “You wouldn’t want to see how they would score on the tests compared to other kids. How does a child get promoted in school? Do they have to pass a certain test?”

**Female 2:** “Right.”

**Moderator:** “So you have your own testing system.”

**Female 2:** “Right.”

**Moderator:** “Is there certain kind of tests they give them?”



## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page11

**Moderator:** “What kind of test do they give them?”

**Female 2:** “They have tests at the end of each chapter in their book. They have a test on what they learned and those grades go on their report card.”

**Moderator:** “Do they ever get retained if they are not doing well?”

**Female 2:** “Yes.”

**Male 2:** “They should get retained.”

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Female 2:** “Have our children prepared for their lessons and help them study.”

**Male 1:** “Help them study and help them with their homework.”

**Male 3:** “Says the same.”

**Moderator:** “What about fundraisers? Would you help the facilities? What would you do there?”

**Male 2:** “We have fundraisers.”

**Moderator:** “What are the fundraisers for?”

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 12

**Male 2:** "They help with the costs."

**Moderator:** "Specific costs. What costs?"

**Male 1:** "Any costs, for the teacher and for the tuition for the kids."

**Moderator:** "Anything like materials, too?"

**Female 1:** "Their school supplies."

**Moderator:** "What about their food? How do they do food?"

**Male 1:** "They pack their lunches."

**Male 2:** "Pack."

**Female 2:** "Pack."

**Moderator:** "Does anyone get together and cook lunch for them?"

**Female 1:** "Twice a year."

**Moderator:** "Do they have a picnic or something?"

**Female 1:** "Take hot lunches to school twice a year."

**Moderator:** "When are those?"

**Female 1:** "Usually November and February."

**Moderator:** "Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?"

## APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 13

- Male 2:** “The Amish Superintendent, but they would still have to go to the Elders and Bishops.”
- Male 1:** “The Elders and Bishops.”
- Moderator:** “Is there a specific Elders and Bishops you have to go to? Are they in one big area settlement?”
- Male 2:** “It would be the Elders and Bishops from the settlement.”
- Moderator:** “Is there certain ones that are Elders? Is there a list of them?”
- Male 3:** “Actually my wife’s dad would be one of them.”
- Moderator:** “So her dad was a Bishop for a long time. Do the Elders act like Bishops? In other words are the Elders acting Bishops?”
- Female 1:** “Yes.”
- Moderator:** “And they are the ones who basically make the call.”
- Female 2:** “The whole community has to agree to it.”
- Moderator:** “Would they have more pull over the Amish Superintendent?”
- Male 1:** “They would rule over the Amish Superintendent.”

APPENDIX C (cont'd)

Page 14

**Male 2:** "Yes."

**APPENDIX D****FOCUS GROUP 2 TRANSCRIPT**

This focus group was conducted on August 7, 2012 with two male and two female Amish parents who ranged in age from 23 to 42 years. This group had an even mixture of parents who sent their children to the public school and who sent their children to the private Amish school. The parents in this focus group represented 9 Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the eighth grade.

The focus group format consisted of an introductory explanation of the community school concept followed by a series of several questions. The responses to those questions follow.

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Male 1:** “I think those are good subjects. The only thing I would like to see taught would be the German language.”

**Female 2:** “German needs to be taught to keep the students up on the language.”

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 2

**Male 2:** "I don't think they need any of those technologies."

**Male 1:** "I would rather not have any technologies either."

**Moderator:** "How do they learn their Arithmetic in school?"

**Female 1:** "They add with their paper and pencils."

**Moderator:** "What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today's economy and workforce?"

**Male 1:** "I think it helps them to be self sufficient."

**Moderator:** "Do you think they should have skills and technology to prepare them for a career (such as to be a carpenter)?"

**Female 1:** "Yes, they learned that in eighth grade."

**Female 2:** "It helps our children be ready to work as adults. They need to know math and reading to run a business."

**Moderator:** "What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?"

**Female 2:** "Usually a board governed by the parents."

**Moderator:** "Is that how you do it now in your Amish schools?"

**Male 1:** "I would feel most comfortable that way."

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 3

**Moderator:** “What about an Amish Superintendent or the Elders? Do you think they should have some say? Who runs your board?”

**Male 1:** “It’s all voted in by the parents. The parents of the children in that district have a right to vote to elect the board. It’s by a majority vote.”

**Moderator:** “Does that person make all the decisions?”

**Male 1:** “It’s the board. It’s either 3 to 5 people to keep it uneven.”

**Moderator:** “What does that board do? Do they hire the teacher and run the facility?”

**Male 1:** “Yes, hire a teacher, maintenance, janitor work.”

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 1:** “Well it depends on how big it would get, how many pupils and if they have any say so or that.”

**Moderator:** “I believe you are right. That’s a concern you don’t want to get too big.”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 4

**Male 1:** “Another concern might be electricity or how much say they would have as far as religion.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 2:** “I think it would be alright except we don’t have spring breaks and days off like public schools.”

**Moderator:** “You may have a different calendar.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “How many total days do they go to school?”

**Male 1:** “160.”

**Moderator:** “I think we have 178. Your summer is way longer because you don’t have Christmas break. Are you against busing or would you rather have the kids walk to school?”

**Male 1:** “Now in our district they can all walk, but where it would be farther; I think it would be something that could be considered.”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t be against it.”

**Female 1:** “Busing would be good.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think it is safer than walking?”



## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 5

**Female 1:** “Yes, I think it is safer.”

**Moderator:** “Currently, there is a community school near Holmes County that serves mostly Amish Children. Can you tell me what you know about the experiences of the children, their families, and their communities with this school?”

**Female 2:** “I didn’t know anything about it.”

**Female 1:** “I didn’t know anything.”

**Male 1:** “I didn’t know it existed.”

**Male 2:** “I didn’t know anything about it.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Male 1:** “I wouldn’t have any problem with it if it were tax dollars that we paid. I do have a problem with government aid, as long as it was tax dollars.”

**Female 1:** “I agree.”

**Female 2:** “I agree.”

**Male 2:** “I wouldn’t have a problem with it but I think I would rather stay like it is.”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 6

**Moderator:** “What would be the benefits for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “It would cost less to operate.

**Female 1:** It would be safer riding the bus to and from school although I don’t know if I would like Amish students riding the bus with the regular kids.”

**Male 1:** “If many of the things could be paid for then it would take much of the pressure for Amish families to pay tuition. Although, paying tuition would be better than having federal government control.”

**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 1:** “One thing about paying tuition it gives you a sense of belonging or helping. It makes you responsible for the school. It could be lost if it was free.”

**Moderator:** “You like the ownership or closeness.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 7

**Moderator:** “What about distance to schools. You like to keep it close to home? Why?”

**Male 1:** “I think it is nice.”

**Moderator:** “A community school would have to have a regular classroom teacher some Amish teachers as well. Would that be a disadvantage to everybody?”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be a little hard for the Amish to accept until they get used to it. I think at first people would be cautious about it.”

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 1:** “If they had to go far as far as the bus would travel normally there would be less time and taxi expense. No tuition would definitely be an advantage.”

**Female 2:** “It would be an advantage not to have to pay tuition.”

**Moderator:** “Is your tax included in your tuition?”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “How is that organized?”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

Page 8

- Male 1:** “Usually you figure all expenses for the year and divide by the number of parents and pay that monthly.”
- Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”
- Female 2:** “I think it is a good idea.”
- Female 1:** “I agree.”
- Moderator:** “Why do you think it is a good idea?”
- Female 1:** “It gives them a challenge and a goal.”
- Male 1:** “I think it would be nice to make sure we are on track with the rest of the state.”
- Moderator:** “Do they have some kind of tests in Amish school?”
- Male 1:** “They do test them but I don’t think it is the same test for every school until they are in eighth grade then they have a year end test.”
- Moderator:** “What happens if they don’t pass that test?”
- Female 2:** “I don’t know.”
- Male 1:** “I can’t say truthfully that I know of anybody that never did.”

## APPENDIX D (cont'd)

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**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Female 2:** “We usually have hot lunches.”

**Moderator:** “How often is that done ?”

**Female 2:** “Twice a year, three times, maybe.”

**Moderator:** “What else do the parents do?”

**Male 1:** “They clean the schools. They bring in firewood. They fix things. They pay tuition.”

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Female 2:** “We would probably ask the Elders.”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be a local decision but the Elders and the Superintendent would advise us.”

**Female 1:** “I say the same thing.”

**APPENDIX E****FOCUS GROUP 3 TRANSCRIPT**

This focus group was conducted on August 18, 2012 with two male and two female Amish parents. The parents ranged in age from 23 to 36 years and had the common characteristic of sending their children to the local public school. These focus group members represented 7 total Amish school age children ranging from kindergarten to the fifth grade.

The focus group format consists of an introductory explanation of the community school concept followed by a series of several questions. The responses to these questions follow.

**Moderator:** “Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?”

**Female 1:** “Science.”

**Male 2:** “The family of science is something that we don’t do now.”

**Moderator:** “You don’t do science?”

**Female 1:** “No.”

**Moderator:** “What about German?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What other courses would you teach in Amish school?”

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 2

**Female 1:** “Spelling.”

**Female 2:** “Handwriting.”

**Female 1:** “Vocabulary.”

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

**Female 2:** “I have no idea.”

**Moderator:** “Do you think they should have any technologies at all?”

**Male 1:** “I think it would be best not to.”

**Moderator:** “Do they use calculators?”

**Female 2:** “No, it’s all brain.”

**Moderator:** “Does that encourage them to be able to do that without any help?”

**Female 2:** “Yes, especially when they become carpenters. They will not have a calculator in front of them when they are trying to do all the things that they need on the job.”

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 3

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 2:** “No, I think they shouldn’t have to learn computers but that’s a lot of it education is all about.”

**Male 1:** “Yes that is why we send our kids to school. They need to be prepared to read and write in order to do work or business.”

**Female 2:** “Absolutely.”

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “I would say a little older guy; somebody with experience with raising kids.”

**Female 2:** “Definitely an Elder.”

**Moderator:** “How are your schools governed now?”

**Male 2:** “The board president runs the school and helps with all the fund raisers, taxi service and teacher.”

**Male 1:** “The president is elected by the parents and we all take turns being president by voting each year. Sometime the president is in charge



## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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for more than one year.”

**Male 2:** “And if they can’t handle that, the Superintendent takes over.

**Moderator:** “The Superintendent will take over if they can’t handle that.”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Female 2:** “Yes, he will step in.”

**Moderator:** “Do you feel that a board of Amish would run your school?”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Female 2:** “Definitely, one takes board and community works together.”

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

**Male 2:** “I think if there is a possibility of computers being in there. I think that’s a good possibility of stopping it.”

**Female 2:** “I would have to say government funding because a lot of the Elders don’t want anything to do with

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 5

government funding. I think that would be a big issue.”

**Moderator:** “Any kind of government funding or certain areas?”

**Male 1:** “I’m not sure about that.”

**Male 1:** “I’m not sure if they have certain things they go by or not. What can go and what can’t go for funding?”

**Male 1:** “And as far as religion maybe. I don’t know if that would affect it or not.”

**Female 2:** “Yes, would they be able to do the Bible reading and the morning prayer; everything that they do in Amish school? Keep the religion in it.”

**Moderator:** “So you would want religion in the schools.”

**Female 2:** “Absolutely.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 1:** “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with it other than if we are paying taxes as long as it doesn’t I mean we got enough bad names already. Is that

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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going to give us more of a bad name being we don't pay some of the stuff that you do?"

**Moderator:** "You pay taxes?"

**Female 2:** "We pay land taxes, state taxes and school taxes."

**Moderator:** "Are you opposed to kids riding on the bus?"

**Female 2:** "I think it would be safer and cheaper. I don't see anything wrong with it."

**Male 1:** "Personally I wouldn't have a problem with it."

**Moderator:** "Currently, there is a community school near Holmes County that serves mostly Amish Children. Can you tell me what you know about the experiences of the children, their families, and their communities with this school?"

**Male 2:** "No."

**Female 2:** "No idea."

**Male 1:** "No."

**Female 1:** "No."

**Moderator:** "What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?"

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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**Male 1:** "I don't think that would be a problem."

**Male 2:** "No."

**Female 2:** "No."

**Moderator:** "What other kind of funding would people would have a problem with?"

**Female 2:** "I don't think there would be a problem with any of the funding. There definitely would be a lot of questions about the funding and the Elders are definitely going to know where all the funding is coming from."

**Moderator:** "The certain funding as opposed to versus other funding. Is that the issue with the Elders?"

**Male 2:** "I think it would be more like a federal funding."

**Male 1:** "Yes, that's what I would say."

**Moderator:** "What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?"

**Male 2:** "I think that would be better if they are going to go that route anyway."

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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**Moderator:** “Better than what?”

**Male 2:** “Better than keeping the private schools.”

**Female 2:** “I think that would be a good idea too, especially if they are just sitting empty and that would be cheaper instead of building all these community school houses.”

**Moderator:** “Is it a lot of work and resources to building school houses?”

**Male 1:** “Not too much.”

**Moderator:** “When you put up a school house, how does that process work?”

**Male 2:** “They usually have so much a church member. The whole Geauga county area would pay so much a church member and use that money to build a school.”

**Moderator:** “So the whole settlement would have ownership of the school.”

**Female 2:** “Is that what they do with a community school, too?”

**Moderator:** “No.”

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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- Male 1:** “Everybody gets together and helps build it.  
There’s no labor involved. It’s all volunteer.”
- Moderator:** “So it’s funded by everybody in the community?”
- Male 1:** “Right.”
- Moderator:** “What about the property? How does that work?”
- Male 1:** “Same thing, usually someone donates it or they  
take the money and buy it.”
- Female 2:** “If they buy it, then they add that into the total.”
- Moderator:** “Then they get together and put the school up and  
look for a board to operator it.”
- Female 2:** “Well they vote.”
- Moderator:** “Who votes on that?”
- Female 2:** “The school members.”
- Male 2:** “The school members in the area where the kids are  
going to school.”
- Moderator:** “So if we built one over here, would all of you be  
involved in that?”
- Female 2:** “Right, they have parent/teacher conferences once a  
month.”

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**Moderator:** “What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “I guess it would be the computers.”

**Female 2:** “They wouldn’t be learning the German.”

**Moderator:** “If you did a community school, you could do them without computers and you could put German in there. As long as you follow the state guidelines you would have to have English, Math, Reading, probably a science; but you say that Science isn’t taught in Amish school right now.”

**Female 1:** “They have Ohio History and Geography, but no science.”

**Moderator:** “Did you teach at one time?”

**Female 1:** “I was a helper.”

**Moderator:** “If they had a science like agriculture science, weather and gardening, would that kind of science would be allowable or are they strictly against Science?”

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**Male 1:** "I think years ago they used to teach agriculture."

**Moderator:** "If they had those sciences, do you think they would be allowed?"

**Female 2:** "Oh absolutely, I don't see a problem with that."

**Moderator:** "So it's not a problem with science, it's just that they don't have it basically."

**Female 2:** "I don't know why they don't have it."

**Moderator:** "What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?"

**Male 2:** "No tuition."

**Male 1:** "Less expenses."

**Moderator:** "What about transportation?"

**Male 1:** "Yes that would definitely be a plus."

**Moderator:** "You would get transportation from a bus. If this would occur, you could have an Amish school bus go around and pick up all the Amish kids and drive them to the school. What is your opinion with Amish kids being on the bus with English kids?"

**Male 2:** "It wouldn't be any different than it is now."



## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 12

**Male 1:** "That's what I was going to say, especially if they go to public schools."

**Moderator:** "Do you send your kids to public schools?"

**Male 2:** "Yes."

**Male 1:** "Yes."

**Moderator:** "So basically the big advantage is economics?"

**Male 2:** "Yes."

**Moderator:** "If you were to have a private Amish school, what would that cost the family? Is it by the kid?"

**Male 2:** "By the family."

**Female 2:** "By the family."

**Male 1:** "It would average anywhere from \$150 to \$200 per month."

**Moderator:** "So that's what it would cost per family?"

**Male 1:** "Some of them would find it cheaper if they have more kids."

**Moderator:** "What is a typical number of kids in a school?"

**Male 2:** "I would say an average is 175 probably. Oh, do you mean the number of kids?"

**Moderator:** "Yes."

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

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- Male 2:** “Probably 45 to 50 maybe.”
- Female 1:** “They don’t like to have more than 60 or 70. That’s high. They don’t like that much in school.”
- Female 2:** “Thirty in each class.”
- Moderator:** “So 5 or 6 kids could be from the same family, so they are splitting the cost per family not per kid.”
- Male 1:** “You are still paying the same price whether you have 1 child or 6 of them.”
- Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”
- Male 2:** “I think it puts a lot of stress on the kids.”
- Male 1:** “I agree with that.”
- Moderator:** “Do you like to know if your child is doing well and learned something throughout the year?”
- Male 2:** “Yes, definitely.”
- Female 2:** “I don’t see a problem with state testing.”
- Moderator:** “In the Amish school do they have an end of year exam to see how well they did all year?”
- Male 1:** “They have a six weeks test.”

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 14

**Moderator:** “Standard tests?”

**Female 2:** “Yes, standard tests.”

**Male 1:** “You get a report card every six weeks.”

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Male 2:** “We don’t know.”

**Male 1:** “Right, we hear that they help with activities and fund raisers for supplies and materials.”

**Female 2:** “I really don’t know what we will have to do but we will find out soon enough.”

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Male 1:** “I would say it would have to be 10 of the Elders.”

**Moderator:** “The 10 oldest Elders. Do you know who all the 10 Elders are? It’s the settlement right?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, It’s the settlement.”

**Moderator:** “Do you know who all the 10 Elders are or does that change every year?”

**Male 1:** “It changes every year.”

## APPENDIX E (cont'd)

Page 15

**Moderator:** “Does it change because someone passes away?”

**Male 1:** “All the time if someone passes or if they are not able to due to an injury or something else.”

**Moderator:** “So once they are an Elder, they are an Elder until they can’t do it anymore.”

**Male 1:** “Yes, exactly.”

**Moderator:** “And it’s usually the oldest Bishops.”

**Male 1:** “The oldest 10.”

**Moderator:** “So they would be the ones who do it. Have you heard of the Amish Superintendents?”

**Female 2:** “Yes. They would be able to help you.”

**Moderator:** “Do they have a say in that or is it still the Elders?”

**Female 2:** “He would be in with them because he has pretty much the say so. He does a lot of things with the school.”

**Male 1:** “It still comes down to what the 10 Elders would say.”

**APPENDIX F****FOCUS GROUP 4 TRANSCRIPT**

This focus group was conducted on September 6, 2012 with three participating Amish leaders. The three male participants' ages ranged from 50 to 67 years with the common characteristic of being recognized by peers as Amish Leader. None of the participants had children that were still of school age. However, all of the participants' children attended a private Amish school. Among the participants in the focus group there was representation of an Amish Bishopric, an Elder, and a past Amish School Superintendent.

The focus group format consisted of an introductory explanation of the community school concept followed by a series of several questions. The responses to these questions follow:

**Moderator:** "Math, English, Ohio History, Agriculture Science, Family Consumer Science, and crafts are possible community school course offerings. Do you favor these subjects being taught to Amish students? Why?"

**Male 2:** "Some of them are OK and mostly needed."

**Male 3:** "We would have Math, English and History in school. As far as the Agricultural Science and Family Consumer Science and the craft that is one reason why the kids go to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are home after that. That is what the ones that live on a farm would be taught at home. The ones that don't live on a farm would be out working in the fields and learning a trade."

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 2

**Moderator:** “What type of courses and technologies do you believe would provide the best educational opportunities for Amish children?”

**Male 3:** “We don’t use calculators in school at all.”

**Male 1:** “As far as technology I don’t think we need to add any courses to what we currently have.”

**Male 2:** “I would say no technology.”

**Moderator:** “What about trades where they might have to learn how to use a cash register or a computer in a trade or bookkeeping?”

**Male 3:** “On the job training. That’s the way it usually works.”

**Moderator:** “So, those types of skills are taught on the job.”

**Male 2:** “Yes, I know a lot of Amish that are very computer illiterate because they have worked to learn the skills on the job. I know some men in Kraftmaid that are experts at it.”

**Moderator:** “Exactly, that’s what I was going to mention. There’s a guy at Kraftmaid that does all the computers.”

**Male 3:** “There’s an Amish girl working at Middlefield Bank in Orwell. She’s on the computer and there are quite a few girls that work in stores which basically would be with your cash registers, but as far as computers it would be pretty basic.”

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 3

**Moderator:** “What do you think about the idea that the purpose of educating children is to prepare them to be competitive in today’s economy and workforce?”

**Male 3:** “To communicate through English through your writing and your reading. To go on to view their history, geography and spelling so they can write. As far as the arithmetic whatever numbers they would need to deal with construction. So it’s very important.”

**Moderator:** “What or who is the ideal operator of a community school that would serve your community?”

**Male 2:** “The Amish Superintendent is doing a superb job of running our schools now.”

**Moderator:** “The Amish Superintendent is in charge of the whole settlement.”

**Male 1:** “Yes, he is.”

**Moderator:** “Obviously he can’t run everything so if you had a unique one, he might oversee it but who would be the ideal structure there?”

**Male 3:** “A board.”

**Male 1:** “Community school board.”

**Moderator:** “What are some of the obstacles that might prevent the formation of an Amish focused Community School?”

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 4

**Male 2:** “First thing that I would think of would be too much government state involvement.”

**Male 1:** “One thing would be a certified teacher’s salary.”

**Moderator:** “Salary too expensive to pay for a certified teacher.”

**Male 3:** “Although he said the tax would pay that fund. Again, too many strings attached. We have our exemption with the school agreement we have right now with the 160 days versus the 180 days and if the state would come in, we would have to change the school year. Not good at all for agriculture.”

**Moderator:** “Because you have a short school year compared to what the state requires which is 178 days.”

**Male 3:** “Right.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on a public busing to get Amish children safely transported to school?”

**Male 3:** “Everybody lives close enough and nobody has far to walk. We do have some who walk on the state road, actually they do not walk on the state road, their off to the side of the state road through the fields. They come across the lots so they don’t have to walk on the state road. The other would be the township road but just across the road so all of our children are walking off the road.”



## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 5

**Moderator:** “So you are saying you would rather have them walk versus ride a bus or a taxi.”

**Male 2:** “Correct.”

**Moderator:** “What about safety? Do you think buses are safe to ride?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, absolutely.”

**Moderator:** “Would it be permissible if Amish children would ride the bus with English children?”

**Male 3:** “As far as riding together that’s not a problem at all.”

**Male 1:** “That’s not an issue at all.”

**Moderator:** “Currently, there is a community school near Holmes County that serves mostly Amish Children. Can you tell me what you know about the experiences of the children, their families, and their communities with this school?”

**Male 2:** “I have.”

**Male 1:** “No, tonight’s the first time I heard about it.”

**Male 3:** “My first time also.”

**Moderator:** “What is your opinion on sending your children to an Amish Community School if it were funded with state and local tax dollars?”

**Male 1:** “I would be skeptic.”

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 6

**Moderator:** “Why?”

**Male 1:** “Because of the government involvement. Like you said there are some catches in it. We need to follow some of their guidelines and some of their rules. I would have to see what those would be first.”

**Moderator:** “Federal or state government or government involvement in general?”

**Male 2:** “Yes, in general I would say.”

**Male 2:** “Until we knew what the strings all were and the hoops that we had to jump through, it’s hard to make a concrete decision.”

**Moderator:** “So you would like to hear all the conditions before you would agree to something like that?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “What are your thoughts about locating an Amish Community School in an unused public school building versus keeping the current private schools open?”

**Male 2:** “I think there would be a lot of different opinions. There are so many Amish out there and some of them are more aggressive like the Amish Superintendent. But a lot of them are older ministers and older board members and are still very old fashioned. There’s

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

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just too big of a community for everyone to see things the same way, I think. I don't think it would ever, but maybe some day in the future, but for now I don't see it happening at all."

**Male 3:** "I don't either. And another reason is we try to keep our classes smaller and stay a little more on the one on one and also participate in fundraisers. We try to keep fewer kids per class so they can focus a little bit more, but it really helps to get a big group together. Then we're going to get involved in busing and taxi which is going to make the cost go up, rent of the building or whatever. At this point I don't think it would be feasible at all."

**Male 1:** "And I totally agree with that. I would much rather send my children to a school with 40 or 50 pupils than to a school with a couple hundred. That has always been the goal for the Amish school as smaller schools 50 or 60 pupils than to divide the schools."

**Moderator:** "What would be the disadvantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?"

**Male 2:** "As far as the family I couldn't think of any."

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

Page 8

**Male 3:** “The people who send their children to the public school have no issues there.”

**Male 2:** “Right, exactly. If we did have a community school and somebody did set one up and somebody would send their children, I don’t think there would be any issues.”

**Male 1:** “Not among the Amish.”

**Moderator:** “So choice is basically individual to the parent.”

**Male 2:** “Yes, I don’t think anybody has looked down upon anyone who sends their kids to public schools.”

**Male 3:** “No, it’s more accepted now than 10 years ago.”

**Moderator:** “What would be the advantages for Amish families who would send their children to get a free public education through a community school format?”

**Male 2:** “Advantages would be cost. You could save quite a bit of money in a year or two. By the time you pay tuition and have our fundraisers once or twice a year, it takes a lot of effort and money.”

**Male 3:** “Another advantage would be financial at this point. They could use a public school.”

**Male 2:** “That’s the only one that I could see off the top of my head.”

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

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**Moderator:** “Community schools are required to have all their students take the state tests for evaluation purposes. What are your thoughts on state mandated testing?”

**Male 3:** “They have their tests every 6 weeks and they have their report cards that they have to fill out and they have a curriculum that they do go by that they have to meet that.”

**Moderator:** “Is there end of the year exams?”

**Male 2:** “Yes.”

**Male 1:** “Yes.”

**Moderator:** “So is state mandated testing a pro or con?”

**Male 1:** “Probably the biggest thing would be with the state setting the criteria, or as of now, it is up to the individual school to set their own. I know some schools are 65 grade average and others are 70 what they use for their failing mark. Am I right?”

**Male 3:** “Ours was always 70. Now if there is a 65, I’m not exactly sure that public schools may use A, B, C, and D. I’m not sure if they use grades any more.”

**Moderator:** “They just give you point value, but I think they have a benchmark. You have to make certain points and it all depends on how many points are on the test.”

## APPENDIX F (cont'd)

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**Male 3:** “Personally I would rather that it stays the way it is as far as the state. As far as what other people think, I’m not exactly sure. But when you get into that you’ll also get into technology or especially as far as computers and online because I think a lot of there stuff anymore is this year they are starting to record more and more grades and testing online which we wouldn’t participate in.”

**Moderator:** “Please describe how you help in the formal education of your children, including interaction with teachers and other school staff.”

**Male 2:** “I would say all parents or most, at least, are very involved in the school; the funding, the running of the school, the teachers. We have a monthly board meeting that supposedly most of the parents show up every month. And they talk to the teacher one on one. It’s like your parent/teacher conference, but we have one once a month. And after the board meeting they go up to the teacher and ask how this kids doing and that kids doing and what kind of help he needs. There is a lot of involvement in the Amish schools and parents.”

**Male 3:** “Very involved. Yes, just like he said. And if there are any problems, the teacher and parent communicate in between and if

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there is anything else that needs to be done, the school board would get involved. So that is taken care of right away and everybody is involved.”

**Moderator:** “Like financial support and fundraising.”

**Male 3:** “Correct.”

**Moderator:** “Who has the ability to decide to create a public funded community school tailored for the Amish?”

**Male 2:** “I would say if something new comes up or if there is something we need to change, a lot of times they will go to our 10 oldest Bishops and have a meeting to see what they think and a lot of times it goes by their decision.”

**Male 3:** “As far as presenting it, I would say it would be presented by the Superintendent.”

**Male 1:** “Yes, I would agree. The Superintendent heads the county board.”

**Moderator:** “When you say the county board, is it this county or multiple counties?”

**Male 3:** “We call it the county board, but there supervising the whole Amish community which is multiple counties (Geauga, Trumbull, Portage and Ashtabula).”