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The Power of a Promise

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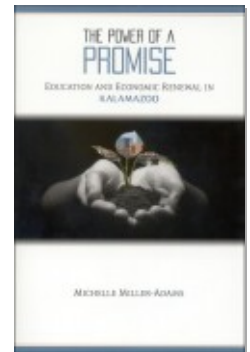
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Impact on Students and Schools

In the months following the unveiling of the Kalamazoo Promise, a growing number of communities, large and small, announced plans to develop their own programs inspired by what was happening in Kalamazoo. The first cities to signal their intentions did so only a few months after the introduction of the scholarship program. These included Newton, Iowa, a company town adjusting to the imminent departure of the Maytag Corporation; Hammond, Indiana, a shrinking industrial city on the south shore of Lake Michigan; and Flint, Michigan, the distressed former home to General Motors' main production facilities and the setting for Michael Moore's movie *Roger and Me*. Leaders in these communities saw in Kalamazoo something akin to their own challenges and recognized the potential of the scholarship program to transform both a struggling school system and a troubled economy.

By the first anniversary of the Kalamazoo Promise in November 2006 the floodgates had opened, with city after city announcing its own version of the program. From large, industrial cities in the Northeast to small, resource-dependent towns in the South, this movement was reinforced by two local indicators released in the summer and early fall of 2006: an enrollment jump of close to 10 percent over the previous year for KPS, and an apparent increase in housing prices within the district. Newspapers across the nation printed leads like this one, which appeared in the Warren, Ohio, *Tribune-Chronicle* (2007): "Since the 'Kalamazoo Promise' began in November 2005, the school district has had the biggest enrollment growth in the state, and home prices rose 6.8 percent, even though the rest of Michigan has seen home prices decline."

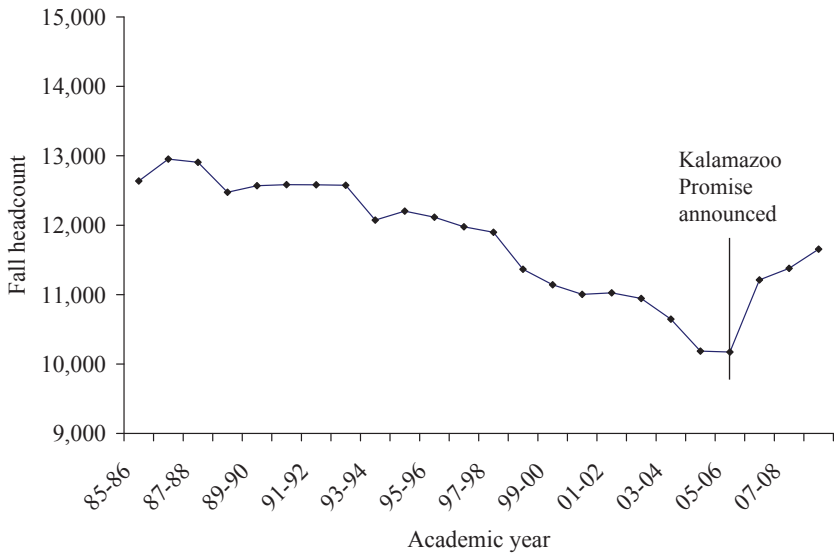
These two developments—the reversal of an urban school district's long-term enrollment decline, and the potential economic benefits of a scholarship program as reflected in the real estate market—offer an ideal rubric for assessing the initial impact of the Kalamazoo Promise. This chapter surveys what has happened to Kalamazoo's students and schools as an immediate result of the Promise, while Chapter 6 turns to the question of economic impact.

ENROLLMENT GROWTH IN THE KALAMAZOO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Much of the national and local media coverage of the Kalamazoo Promise has emphasized its impact on individual students and their families, but the most immediate beneficiary of the scholarship program was the school district itself. Within a few days of the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise, KPS officials had received more than 100 e-mails and phone calls from families interested in transferring into the district. While the assumption of an enrollment increase was widely shared, it was anyone's guess what its size and distribution might be.

One of the annual challenges for public school administrators is to forecast how many students will show up for the first day of school. Advance registration is not required, and public schools are legally bound to accommodate any student residing in a district even if he or she arrives in the middle of the semester. So, planning for a new school year—including decisions about class size, teachers, and bus routes—is a complex endeavor. With an unprecedented intervention such as the Kalamazoo Promise, the exercise was all the more difficult.

During the summer months of 2006, KPS officials publicly projected a net increase of 450 students over the previous year. Instead, 1,040 more students were enrolled in class for the September 27, 2006, head count that largely determines state funding, bringing the district's total enrollment to 11,212, up 10 percent over the previous year. The "blended count" (based on a combination of enrollment from September and the previous February) was 10,993, an increase of 899 students, or 8.4 percent. As Figure 5.1 shows, this increase marked the reversal of a long-term downward trend in KPS enrollment that, at its high point in the late 1960s, had reached 18,956 before falling to 10,187 in 2004–2005, the year before the Promise was announced.¹ In reality, the enrollment figures represented an even larger shift, since two years earlier the district had lost 500 students and in a typical year district officials would have projected an annual loss of 350 (Associated Press 2006a). In fact, as the Warren *Tribune-Chronicle* had reported, the numerical increase in KPS students was the largest increase in enrollment in 2006 among Michigan's 552 school districts. (In percentage

Figure 5.1 Long-Term KPS Enrollment Trend

SOURCE: Data provided by KPS.

terms, the district ranked fourth among systems with at least 50 students [Mack 2007a]).

The rise in enrollment, although twice as high as projected, was accommodated relatively smoothly. Much of the increase came in elementary school buildings where there was room to expand, and the district had purchased extra materials, outfitted additional classrooms, and lined up substitute teachers in case its estimates had been too cautious. In addition to the 71 teachers hired before the beginning of the school year (a number that includes replacements for retiring teachers), another 29 teachers were hired after classes had started. The addition of several new bus routes completed the transition picture. While the first few weeks of the term were reportedly a bit chaotic in the more crowded buildings, the adjustment period was short lived.

Gains in enrollment were spread throughout the district, with most at the elementary level where the number of students increased by 12.8 percent over 2005. Middle school enrollment rose by 5.2 percent and high school enrollment by 6.8 percent. Double-digit percentage increases occurred in 9 of the district's 16 elementary schools, with espe-

cially large gains at schools in mixed-income neighborhoods and at two magnet schools.² Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts was the only middle school to register a substantial enrollment jump (15.6 percent), while Kalamazoo Central High School grew by 11.4 percent and Loy Norrix High School by 2.1 percent. The district's alternative schools also grew in size, including the Reach and Teach program for students who have been expelled, where enrollment rose 21.3 percent, from 61 to 74 students.³

The monetary value of the new students in terms of the state's per-pupil foundation grant of \$7,556 was \$6.8 million.⁴ The costs associated with the larger student body in terms of staffing, supplies, and transportation amounted to \$4.1 million, which meant that KPS did not have to cut its budget for the first time in many years. Deputy Superintendent Gary Start has been preparing the district's budgets since 1983, when enrollment stood at about 12,500. "I've done a lot of budget cuts," says Start, explaining the vicious circle that until 2006 had affected Kalamazoo along with almost every other urban school system in Michigan. "Urban districts throughout the state are declining enrollment districts. All urban districts are subject to constant budget cutting, and what that creates is a downward spiral. You lose students so you cut the budget because you don't have the money, and the act of cutting the budget—be it adversarial negotiations or budget cuts (like closing buildings)—that creates a loss of more students, which means you cut again."⁵ Over the seven years prior to the Kalamazoo Promise, KPS had to trim about \$20 million from its budget (the 2006–2007 annual budget was \$103 million), with finances made even tighter by increases in the cost of health care premiums, teachers' pensions, and energy prices. These nondiscretionary increases required the district to reduce program services simply to pay for ongoing fixed costs. As Dr. Brown commented about a promised increase in state funding of \$250 per student that had been budgeted for 2006–2007, "I'm getting supposedly \$250 more per kid per year. That \$250 is going right into my adults."⁶

The Kalamazoo Promise eased this financial bind, but only slightly. As Start points out, in school budgeting there is often a misperception about the connection between available resources and what they actually buy; for example, 10 new teachers spread across 25 school buildings will make only a dent in class sizes. For 2006–2007, approximately 1 percent of the total budget, or \$1.7 million, was available for new

programs and additional teachers. “It’s way better than a \$5 million cut,” said Start before the budgeting process began, “but the other side of the coin is that I’ll be seriously lobbied with all kinds of great ideas to spend money. The belief that there is lots and lots of money and we can do anything we want could even make budget negotiations more difficult than in the past.”⁷ In fact, the school board faced a major challenge in deciding how to allocate the available funds, with the administration proposing four new programs, only two of which could be funded (see below).

Assessing the enrollment impact of the Kalamazoo Promise is made more complex by the need to account not only for new students but also for those who have opted not to leave. “One of the biggest factors [in rising enrollment] is that people are choosing to stay,” explains Start. “Where we had a lot of students exiting before, now they’re staying.”⁸ The number of KPS residents who sought waivers to enroll in other public school systems in the region, which historically had averaged 350 a year, declined to 248 the year after the Promise was announced. And the fall-to-winter head count for 2006–2007 showed a net loss of 131 students, well below historical levels of 250–350 per year. The conclusion of the 2006–2007 academic year brought more positive news, when KPS granted diplomas to 567 graduating seniors, up 10 percent over the previous year. Especially notable was a 31 percent rise in the number of African American students graduating.

ENROLLMENT IMPACT ON NON-KPS SCHOOLS

When the Kalamazoo Promise was announced, one of the first concerns voiced by observers was the potential negative impact on neighboring school districts, as well as private and charter schools. Kalamazoo County, with a population of 240,000, encompasses nine separate school districts, and their proximity to each other means that families living in one district can switch to another by moving only a few miles in any direction. This easy mobility is one of the factors that facilitated flight out of Kalamazoo and contributed to KPS’s past enrollment decline. With the Kalamazoo Promise providing a substantial incentive for families with school-age children to move into KPS, neighboring

school districts feared that the scholarship program might reverse this pattern of outward migration. Kalamazoo is also home to many families that have opted out of public school altogether, choosing private or parochial schools or homeschooling, and there was uncertainty about whether the new incentives provided by the Kalamazoo Promise would draw some of these students into the public school district.⁹

Early evidence suggests that KPS's enrollment increase did not come solely, or even primarily, at the expense of neighboring districts. An examination of the data for students entering KPS in fall 2006 showed that they came from 88 different Michigan communities and 32 different states.¹⁰ Almost half of the newly entering students had moved to the district from outside Kalamazoo County, suggesting that the Promise had brought a substantial number of new families to the county. But with about 500 students transferring into KPS from neighboring public, private, or charter schools, much of the first-year enrollment impact resulted from a shift in the distribution of students and families throughout the region rather than growth in their number. (The economic impact of population shifts is discussed in the next chapter.)

The increase in enrollment was especially pronounced within the broader regional context. Twenty of the 33 school districts in southwest Michigan reported enrollment declines from the previous year, and 8 of those reported a drop of at least 3 percent. Some of this decline was simply a continuation of ongoing trends related to the weak economy and population loss. But some of it was also due to the impact of the Kalamazoo Promise. One of the steepest drops came in the Comstock public school district that borders Kalamazoo; it lost 274 students, or 9.4 percent of its enrollment. Of these, 85 transferred into KPS. Parchment, a second school district that lost students, is also contiguous with KPS. In these communities, a new school district can be accessed by moving across the street or down the block—an especially easy choice for renters who don't need to worry about selling their homes in a depressed real estate market. In the past, such shifts have resulted in net losses for KPS and increased enrollment for Comstock and Parchment, whereas in 2006 the direction was reversed.

The only school district in the region of comparable size to KPS is Portage Public Schools, which for years had been the district of choice for many middle-class families with young children. While Portage experienced a decline of 212 students to 8,649, this amounted to only

2.3 percent of its enrollment. In the fall of 2008, net enrollment in the Portage Public Schools was down by only 12 students.¹¹ Portage Public Schools officials say that job losses at Pfizer were as important a factor as the Kalamazoo Promise and, indeed, KPS records showed only 70 students from the city of Portage entering KPS in 2006.

It was expected that the Kalamazoo Promise would hit private and charter schools especially hard, and the numbers bore this out. Most of the private and parochial schools in the area suffered enrollment declines, although these too had been under way for some time and reflected economic conditions as well as competition from KPS. Enrollment at the area's Christian and Catholic school systems, each of which serves over 1,000 students, fell about 6 percent in 2006–2007 over the previous year. Two of the four small, secular private schools were down in size, while the third held steady and the fourth expanded slightly with the addition of a new facility. The steepest enrollment decline in the area—21.9 percent, or a loss of 84 students—was experienced by Kalamazoo Advantage Academy, a public charter school that had become one of the schools favored by low-income African American families because of its small class sizes, an emphasis on discipline (including the wearing of uniforms), and parental dissatisfaction with levels of minority student attainment in the public schools. The Kalamazoo Promise, as well as the perception of improvement in the public schools, changed the calculus for many low-income families who were now willing to give the public schools another try.¹²

In August 2007, Kalamazoo Advantage Academy responded to the drop in enrollment by announcing that it would provide its students with college scholarships equivalent to that percentage of the Kalamazoo Promise they would forfeit by attending the charter school for grades K-8. The Gift for Tomorrow program, offered by Mosaica Education Inc., the company that operated the school, would cover 35 percent of college tuition for students who attended for all nine years instruction is offered, thereby eliminating the financial incentive that would motivate Advantage Academy parents to move their children to KPS before high school. Few people understood this as a business decision that made excellent financial sense for Mosaica. Charter schools receive the state foundation grant per student enrolled each year (for 2007–2008 the amount was \$7,638). The total financial loss in operating funds to Kalamazoo Advantage Academy for the 2006–2007 school year was

thus in the neighborhood of \$650,000. If the charter school were able to retain a single student for his or her first nine years of school, that would be worth almost \$70,000 (at current state funding levels). If that child did attend KPS for grades 9-12, then decided to go to college, the 35 percent portion of the scholarship for which Mosaica would be responsible would have been calculated after all other sources of financial aid were applied for and would amount to a trivial sum compared to what the company had received to educate that child. (As it turns out, the Gift for Tomorrow program is now useful mainly by way of illustration, since Kalamazoo Advantage Academy lost its charter due to poor test scores and declining enrollment, and closed its doors before the 2008–2009 academic year began.)

It is hard to disentangle the multiple reasons for the enrollment declines experienced by non-KPS schools. While the Kalamazoo Promise was clearly a factor, it was probably no more significant than the restructuring of local firms and a struggling state economy that has forced many families to leave Michigan to find jobs. Of course, these economic factors are also a drag on any potential enrollment increase for KPS. In September 2007, KPS experienced its second consecutive enrollment gain, but of a much smaller magnitude than the previous year, with net new enrollment of 166 students or 1.5 percent over the previous year. Enrollment grew by 276 students, or 2.4 percent in 2008—a number that included many former students from the charter school that had closed. Observers agree that, despite the attraction of the Kalamazoo Promise, enrollment will not increase substantially until the local economy improves. “I think there’s a real desire for folks to come here, but no jobs to fund that desire,” KPS spokesman Alex Lee has said (Mack 2007b). But even the more modest increases of 2007 and 2008 and their distribution across the grade levels have meant that an elementary school building taken out of use in 2003 returned to its former status and is now home to four kindergarten classes from a nearby school. This recommissioning of one of the many school buildings that had fallen out of use as enrollment in KPS declined is a small but potent sign of a public school system that appears to have turned the corner in terms of enrollment.

WHO IS USING THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE?

In its simplest incarnation, the Kalamazoo Promise is about creating incentives for KPS graduates to extend their education beyond high school. The nature of this incentive, however, varies according to a student's educational aspirations and family income. In other words, while the Kalamazoo Promise can be said to offer something for everyone, that "something" is not the same for everyone. Pam Kingery, executive director of Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, which serves students at many different levels of need, is an astute observer of this tiered effect. While she believes that all of the following groups will benefit from the Kalamazoo Promise, she points out that the nature of those benefits will vary.¹³

- For middle- and upper-middle-class students who already plan to go to college, the availability of the Kalamazoo Promise alleviates much of the debt burden they and their families will face and frees up college savings for other purposes, including graduate school.
- For middle-class students who may not be sure about college, the Kalamazoo Promise creates a tangible incentive for them at least to consider postsecondary education, while encouraging full-time attendance and alleviating the need many college students have to work full time.
- For the children of working-class families who aspire to go to college but for whom the financial barriers are too high, the Kalamazoo Promise creates a new set of opportunities. ("If we do this well and create some other supports to help them navigate the system, I think we will mobilize another group of this working-class, first-generation population," says Kingery.)
- For low-income students, the Kalamazoo Promise opens up a new sense of possibility and hope, especially for younger children who may lack college-going role models in their own families but who will now spend their K-12 years in a school system that expects them to continue their education beyond high school.

Kingery is most concerned about those students who are so far behind in terms of their academic skills that they can't attempt college without serious intervention. "If we don't figure out how to remediate that, we won't have really fulfilled the true potential of the Promise," says Kingery.

Not only does KPS's diverse student body complicate the task of providing support to students, it also complicates the analytical task of assessing the Kalamazoo Promise. It is not enough to ask how many students receive a scholarship or what schools they choose to attend. Instead, any evaluation of the program's impact must address what these students would be doing in the absence of the scholarship. Would they be attending less expensive schools, or perhaps be living at home instead of on campus? Would they be working full or part time while in school? How much debt would they or their parents be assuming if the scholarships were not available, and how might this affect their subsequent career and educational choices? Has the scholarship limited the choices of students who now feel compelled to attend in-state or public universities? In investigating these questions, it is also critical to keep in mind the long-term nature of the program, which is set up to continue in perpetuity. The impact on student options and decision making may be quite different a decade or two after the program's introduction than it is in its early years.

With these caveats in mind, the analytical task begins with an examination of who used the Kalamazoo Promise in the first three years it was offered. As Table 5.1 shows, of 517 graduates in the class of 2006, 409 were eligible to receive scholarships based on their KPS residency and attendance. Some of those eligible did not apply for the scholarship either because they did not plan to attend college, had already decided to attend a private or out-of-state school, or had received scholarships from other sources. Forty students had their applications approved on appeal.¹⁴ Among those eligible, 73 percent (or 303 students) used their scholarship to enter college in fall 2006. Data for the class of 2007 and class of 2008 show gradually improving results, with increasing rates of eligibility and scholarship usage in the first semester following graduation. A different set of numbers suggests the value of the scholarship program's flexible terms of use. By the fall of 2008, 342 students or 83.6 percent of eligible students from the class of 2006 had used some portion of their scholarship, as had 405 students or 80.8 percent from

Table 5.1 Kalamazoo Promise Summary Data

	2006	2007	2008	Total
Number of KPS graduates	517	579	548	1,644
Eligible for the Promise	409	501	474	1,384
% of graduates eligible for the Promise	79.1	86.5	86.5	84.2
Number of graduates using the Promise the first semester after graduation	303	359	370	—
% of eligible students using the Promise the first semester after graduation	72.7	74.6	78.1	—
Number of graduates who have used the Promise ^a	342	405	370	1,117
% of eligible students who have used the Promise ^a	83.6	80.8	78.1	80.7

^aStudents who have used at least some portion of their scholarships as of fall 2008.
SOURCE: Data provided by Kalamazoo Promise administrator.

the class of 2007. This suggests that while most Kalamazoo Promise users begin college immediately after graduation, others are entering postsecondary institutions a year or two after graduation.

In a July 2006 editorial, the *Kalamazoo Gazette* noted the high proportion of students planning to attend college, calling it “amazing,” especially since the Kalamazoo Promise had been announced only nine months earlier. “Many at-risk students—those who come from low-income families with low levels of educational achievement—certainly were not even thinking about college when they woke up on November 10, 2005, the day the Promise was announced . . . It is astonishing how a rare opportunity like this can make young people with few prospects suddenly begin to envision a life of greater possibilities and shift gears quickly” (*Kalamazoo Gazette* 2006a).

With only three years of data, it is early to detect patterns in usage, but several interesting findings have already emerged. First, while the demographic profile of students eligible for Kalamazoo Promise scholarships closely matches the demographic profile of the graduating class, eligible students have used the scholarship at different rates depending on their race and gender. As Table 5.2 shows, female graduates have used the Promise at a slightly higher rate than male graduates and with one exception (African American females from the class of 2006), African American students, both male and female, have used

Table 5.2 Demographic Data for Kalamazoo Promise Users

Class	Number of graduates	Eligible for the Promise	% of graduates eligible for the Promise	Number of graduates who have used the Promise ^a	% of eligible students who have used the Promise ^a
2006	517	409	79.1	342	83.6
Female	247	196	79.4	170	86.7
African American	94	72	76.6	64	88.9
Hispanic	21	17	81.0	12	70.6
Caucasian	128	106	82.8	93	87.7
Male	270	213	78.9	172	80.8
African American	101	71	70.3	52	73.2
Hispanic	14	11	78.6	9	81.8
Caucasian	147	124	84.4	107	86.3
2007	579	501	86.5	405	80.8
Female	303	265	87.5	215	81.1
African American	130	113	86.9	84	74.3
Hispanic	15	13	86.7	13	100.0
Caucasian	148	133	89.9	114	85.7
Male	276	236	85.5	190	80.5
African American	129	104	80.6	82	78.8
Hispanic	9	8	88.9	6	75.0
Caucasian	126	115	91.3	96	83.5
2008	548	474	86.5	370	78.1
Female	263	230	87.5	183	79.6
African American	128	108	84.4	85	78.7
Hispanic	8	7	87.5	3	42.9
Caucasian	119	108	90.8	89	82.4
Male	285	244	85.6	187	76.6
African American	117	97	82.9	65	67.0
Hispanic	16	15	93.8	11	73.3
Caucasian	144	125	86.8	105	84.0
Total	1,646	1,384	84.1	1,117	80.7

^a Students who have used at least some portion of their scholarships as of October 2008.
SOURCE: Data provided by Kalamazoo Promise administrator.

the scholarship at a lower rate than white students. When it comes to socioeconomic level, the pattern of scholarship usage matches closely the demographics of the graduating class. For example, 33.5 percent of Promise users from the class of 2006 came from low-income families (as measured by eligibility for the federally subsidized lunch program), relative to 34.9 percent of low-income graduates in the class of 2006 overall. For the class of 2007, 31.3 percent of Promise users were classified as low-income, relative to 36.9 percent of the graduating class.¹⁵

A second finding is that the overwhelming majority of Promise users have opted to enroll at local institutions. A full 70 percent of scholarship recipients from the class of 2006 attended either WMU or KVCC (see Table 5.3). While this number seemed high to many observers, it was less surprising in light of WMU's free room and board offer, which drew students who might otherwise have gone elsewhere, including to more selective schools, such as Michigan State University or Kalamazoo College. KVCC, which is open to all high school graduates, was the school of choice for many of those students who did not have college plans at the time the Promise was announced. Yet the pattern recurred in subsequent years, even though WMU's free room-and-board offer was not renewed, and by fall 2008, over 60 percent of Kalamazoo Promise recipients were enrolled at a local institution (see Figure 5.2). The pattern of strong local scholarship use suggests that many students are opting to remain close to home, whether for financial reasons or because of their familiarity with local institutions. It also provides a direct economic benefit to the local economy and means that the costs of the program have been lower than anticipated (KVCC tuition is substantially lower than tuition at the state's four-year universities). The other two largest recipients of Promise students have been the state's two leading universities, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. A dramatic rise in the number of KPS graduates attending the University of Michigan—from just 12 in 2005 to 49 in 2008 (Mack 2008a)—suggests that many of the district's most academically talented graduates are opting to use their scholarships to attend the state's premier educational institution rather than go out of state or opt for a private college.

Of course, the value of the Kalamazoo Promise lies not just in being admitted to college but in succeeding once there. The third early finding is that during the first two years of the program, college persistence rates for Kalamazoo Promise students were in line with national

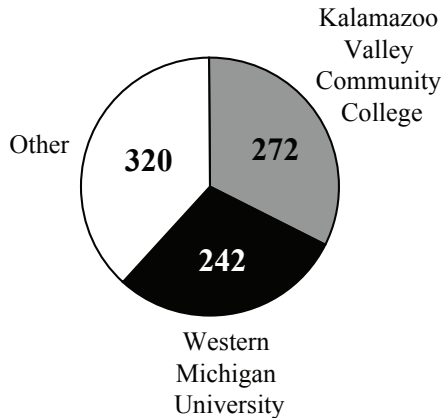
Table 5.3 College and University Attendance by Kalamazoo Promise Users, Fall Semester 2008

School	Total	Percentage
Four-year universities		
Central Michigan University	17	2.0
Eastern Michigan University	9	1.1
Ferris State University	21	2.5
Grand Valley State University	20	2.4
Michigan State University	105	12.6
Michigan Technological University	8	1.0
Northern Michigan University	9	1.1
Oakland University	2	0.2
Saginaw Valley State University	2	0.2
University of Michigan	95	11.4
Western Michigan University	242	29.0
Wayne State University	14	1.7
Total four-year universities	544	65.2
Community colleges		
Glen Oaks Community College	2	0.2
Grand Rapids Community College	4	0.5
Kellogg Community College	3	0.4
Kalamazoo Valley Community College	272	32.6
Lansing Community College	4	0.5
Lake Michigan College	1	0.1
Washtenaw Community College	4	0.5
Total community colleges	290	34.8
Combined total	834	

SOURCE: Kalamazoo Promise administrator.

norms, with 59 percent of scholarship recipients from the class of 2006 still enrolled in school in fall 2008.¹⁶ However, retention rates varied widely across the schools attended by Promise recipients.¹⁷ Academic performance by the first group of Kalamazoo Promise recipients attending a four-year university during their freshman year (2006–2007) was within the norm for all first-year students at these institutions. None of the 18 students attending the University of Michigan lost his or her scholarship. At Michigan State University, 3 of 31 Promise users (or 8 percent) had their scholarships suspended in the fall of 2007 and 3 more

Figure 5.2 Number of Kalamazoo Promise Users Attending Local Institutions, Fall 2008



SOURCE: Kalamazoo Promise administrator.

received warnings. At WMU, 13 of 104 Promise users (or 12.5 percent) had their scholarships suspended while another 15 received warnings. At the local community college, however, the percentages were much higher, with two-thirds of Promise users unable to maintain a 2.0 GPA.

In fall 2008, 51 percent of class of 2007 users who started at a community college were in good academic standing, compared to 87 percent of class of 2007 users who started at a university.¹⁸ This gap suggests the widely varying degrees of college readiness of KPS graduates and poses a major challenge for the school district. But freshman retention rates reflect more than simply a student's academic preparedness. Bob Jorth's conversations with Kalamazoo Promise recipients on probation and those who lost their scholarships suggest that many of these students were overextended, taking too many classes and working too many hours at one or more jobs. In 2008, rules requiring full-time college attendance by Kalamazoo Promise users were changed to permit students at KVCC to attend part-time. (Part-time attendance at other institutions is allowed on a case-by-case basis.) For other students, their grades had foundered on a lack of appreciation of the demands of college-level work or poor time management skills. Still others responded to the freedom of a college setting by choosing not to study or go to

class, suggesting a low level of social and emotional preparedness. Thus, strategies to improve college success for KPS graduates must include not only stronger academic preparedness but also the acquisition of skills that many children of college graduates take for granted.

At KVCC, where the need for remediation is highest, a number of such strategies have been put in place. The school has a transitional studies program for students who need support in basic skills, including a course called College Success Strategies, which focuses on reading comprehension, note taking, outlining, time management, research skills, and test awareness. Students in the district's high schools can dual-enroll in these courses before graduation to help them prepare for a smoother transition to college. Once at KVCC, they have access to the Student Success Center, inaugurated in 2007, which offers traditional services such as tutoring and career counseling, while also helping students with practical needs like financial planning, transportation, and child care. Other colleges provide varying levels of support to incoming freshmen. Some schools have summer preparatory programs for students who are the first in their families to attend college. At Michigan State University, incoming students may be required to take remedial courses as part of the condition of admission, and students on probation are required to meet with an academic adviser who connects them with support services. At other schools, support systems are available but not mandatory. Western Michigan University, for example, offers tutoring, mentoring, counseling, career and graduate school planning, and other resources designed to enhance a student's education and success, but there is no automatic referral system for struggling students.

Students in the class of 2006 were privileged to be the first to receive the scholarship, but they were also disadvantaged in having so little time to accommodate to the new reality. The sudden introduction of the Kalamazoo Promise six months before graduation affected students in varying ways. Some chose to attend more expensive schools or live away from home because tuition costs would now be covered. Others opted for a public in-state university over a private college or out-of-state school. Still others gave up their places at more selective institutions to accept WMU's room-and-board offer. The most difficult decisions were those faced by students who had never intended to go to college. Presented with the potential for a full scholarship as their K-12 education neared its end, some scrambled to get into schools with

competitive admissions policies while others opted for community college with open enrollment policies. Others abandoned their plans for military service now that their college education would be free.

The announcement of the program also stimulated some changes in attitude about high school and college. A survey of KPS high school students given six months after the Promise was introduced found that almost half the students reported that teachers were expecting more from them and that the availability of information about higher education opportunities had increased. One-third of the students surveyed said they were working harder in school because of the Promise, and more than 20 percent indicated in written responses that the Promise had changed their life by making college a possibility (Miron, Spybrook, and Evergreen 2008). For many students, the Kalamazoo Promise did not mark the critical dividing line between college and no college, but it did ease their concerns about the financial strain of higher education. "It gave me more confidence and reassurance that I really could go to college and be a nurse without having to worry about so much debt," wrote one student (p. 7), while another commented, "Now I can afford to go to college and still afford to take care of my daughter" (p. 18).

Much remains to be done to ensure that students fully understand the implications of the Kalamazoo Promise. Stories shared by students both publicly and privately suggest a lingering misconception of the terms of the scholarship. Despite plentiful information to the contrary, some students still believe they have a guaranteed right to go to the college of their choice, not understanding that they need not only to graduate from high school but also earn the grades needed for admission and remain in good academic standing once enrolled. "Students now think they can slide through and get mediocre grades," said Jaquay Ollie, a 17-year-old senior at Kalamazoo Central. "Work ethic in the schools is starting to diminish. Students see this as a gift you don't really need to earn." Other students have adopted the attitude that they won't need to work hard once they get to college because "it's not their money" (Tibor 2007). Some of the attitudinal changes have been more positive. Sherry Ransford, a high school English teacher at Kalamazoo Central who retired in 2008, commented that her more advanced students were palpably more relaxed and less competitive during the college-admission and financial aid season since the Promise had been announced. In past years, students would apply to colleges but until financial aid pack-

ages were announced would have no idea whether or not they would be able to afford to attend. With the financial pressure removed, the focus shifted to getting into the best school possible and the extent of competition with one's peers was eased. On the other hand, Ransford noted that even as soon as the second year, students seemed to have shifted from seeing the Kalamazoo Promise as a gift to more of an entitlement.¹⁹

ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS

In August 2007, Michael Rice, former superintendent of the Clifton, New Jersey, public school district became superintendent of KPS. Superintendent Janice Brown had announced her retirement in December 2006 after serving in the position since 2000.²⁰ Dr. Rice moved quickly to establish his priorities for the district and enlist community support for them. Within weeks of the beginning of his term, KPS contracted with Phi Delta Kappa, a national education organization, to conduct a curriculum audit that would assess the district's strengths and weaknesses in comparison to national standards. In his first months on the job Dr. Rice created advisory councils of staff members, union leaders, parents, and students with whom he meets monthly. He launched a strategic planning process to develop year-by-year expectations for students and parents covering academic, cognitive, and social skills. The hours devoted to testing were reviewed with the goal of freeing up additional instructional time. New procedures were introduced for reinstating students who had been suspended or expelled, and hiring and evaluation practices for teachers were strengthened.

Much of Dr. Rice's message focused on the need to treat the Kalamazoo Promise as a process rather than a "carnival prize" awarded at graduation. At a reception in Kalamazoo's Northside neighborhood early in the school year, Dr. Rice put aside pleasantries in favor of candid dialogue with African American leaders. "We're not doing kids any favors when we tell them, 'Stay in school and you'll get the Promise.' The fact is, you have to read well, you have to write well, you have to do math well to succeed in college. That's the dirty little secret" (Mack 2007d). In all of Dr. Rice's extensive interactions with community groups, he asked for the continued involvement of parents and resi-

dents. “Everybody involved in crafting the expectations [for students and the adults that support them] would be responsible for helping to fulfill those expectations. If you want to put your oar in the water, God bless you, but then you need to keep your oar in the water” (Mack 2007e). At the same time, Dr. Rice has voiced concern about the multiple efforts under way to support student achievement: “There’s enormous goodwill in this community—people starting programs, people wanting to help. There are all these wonderful things, but the issue is to what extent we’re working together and what times we’re working against each other. The cohesion needs to improve very, very substantially” (Mack 2007f).

Dr. Rice has also stressed the value of making decisions about programs based on clear evidence of their effectiveness. The Kalamazoo Promise has brought to the fore a number of challenges for the district, the most pressing of which is a seemingly intractable gap between the academic achievement of middle- and lower-income students. (The close correlation between income and race in KPS—and indeed throughout the nation—makes the achievement gap by income a rough proxy for the black-white achievement gap.²¹) While a variety of strategies have been implemented to address the achievement gap, in Dr. Rice’s view insufficient resources have gone into measuring and reporting on their results. He is adamant about the need for assessment and seems willing to ruffle some feathers along the way: “If we’re doing something and it’s not having the results we want, we have the right and responsibility to be flexible and make changes,” Rice has said. “We don’t want to be stuck on stupid” (Mack 2007f).

The district’s priorities, all of which to some degree predate the Kalamazoo Promise, include increasing academic rigor, reducing the dropout rate, deepening the college-going culture, and addressing behavior problems that interfere with student learning. These interlocking goals are congruent with a broader state and national context that emphasizes testing as a gateway to promotion and tighter curriculum requirements.

Increasing Academic Rigor

“The literature is clear that high expectations drive student achievement,” says Dr. Rice (Mack 2008b). Several initiatives to raise expecta-

tions are under way, ranging from new practices governing promotion from one grade to the next to the crafting of a community commitment to increase student success. Kalamazoo Public Schools for many years had a policy of social promotion for students in kindergarten through 8th grade based on research claiming that providing support services to failing students is preferable to holding them back. The counterargument is that social promotion reduces the incentives for students to maintain their academic progress and contributes to large numbers of high school freshmen being held back or dropping out. (In recent years, approximately one-third of KPS freshmen have ended the school year without earning enough credits to move on to the 10th grade.) In March 2007, KPS announced a plan that broke with the tradition of social promotion. Struggling students in the 1st and 8th grades are now offered support services during the school year. If they fail to gain ground they are required to attend summer school. Those students who do not comply must repeat the grade, while those who do are evaluated to determine whether or not they should advance. In 2007, 150 or 15 percent of 1st graders and 175 or 21 percent of 8th graders were required to attend summer school. Overall, the district enrolled about 1,500 students in summer 2007, compared to 900 the previous year, at a cost of \$800,000, almost double that of summer 2006 (Mack 2007i).

Testing requirements, too, have been tightened. In part to assess whether schools are making adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind law, the state of Michigan now requires all juniors to take the Michigan Merit Exam, which includes the American College Test (ACT), in order to graduate. This means that the ACT has become one of the de facto requirements for receiving a Promise scholarship. The test, which had been administered on a Saturday at a cost of \$70 per student, is now given during the school day and costs nothing. In a district seeking to prepare every graduate for some form of higher education, having an ACT score is an important step in helping students decide where to apply to college. In addition, those who score high enough are eligible to receive a \$4,000 Michigan Promise merit scholarship. (Promise recipients can use these funds for books and transportation, substantial costs not covered by the Kalamazoo Promise.)

In 2007, the state of Michigan also introduced more rigorous high school graduation requirements. The decision was controversial, with educators concerned that many high school students who are unable to

meet the existing requirements would now be that much further from being able to graduate (Bartik and Hollenbeck 2006). While KPS's graduation requirements were already closely aligned with the 2007 law, the new requirements do pose a challenge to some of the district's alternative education programs that have fewer requirements and lack the resources to teach the science and language classes that are part of the new state rules. The new graduation requirements take effect for the class of 2011.

An emphasis on academic rigor cuts both ways for KPS. On the one hand, it increases the likelihood that students who graduate from high school will be better prepared to succeed in a postsecondary setting. On the other hand, it raises the bar for all students, meaning that those who are already struggling will need to meet even higher standards and may be more inclined to give up. This is why KPS's approach to academic rigor seeks not just to strengthen standards but also to enlist students, parents, and the broader community in ensuring that every student succeeds.

The recognition that schools cannot operate in a vacuum was reflected in the district's 2007–2008 strategic planning process, which focused on crafting a set of expectations for students and the adults who support them. Year-by-year academic goals were established to correlate with state benchmarks while social expectations were developed through a participatory process that involved 250 volunteers from the community. Presented in five subcommittee reports and summarized in a colorful wall chart posted in schools and community venues are expectations for every year of a child's development (KPS 2008). For example, a kindergartner is expected (among other things) to be able to count to 30, play cooperatively with others, and recognize letter sounds, while his or her parents are expected to attend all parent-teacher conferences and provide children with a quiet space to do their school work. Educators are expected to reinforce positive student behaviors and base their instructional decisions on data. The broader community is expected to support and provide positive, enriching after-school activities and ensure that every elementary school student has a relationship with at least one adult who supports their educational development. Dr. Rice has called the exercise "the beginning of our long-term effort to improve schools for children by creating clear and high expectations for both children and adults" (Mack 2008b). Galvanizing diverse audiences

around a common set of expectations can also help increase accountability and support for low-income and minority children who are more likely to struggle in school.

Reducing the Dropout Rate

The Kalamazoo Promise requires KPS to ensure that, in Dr. Rice's words, "every child is college ready" by the time he or she graduates from high school. This is a formidable challenge that begins with keeping students in school. Like urban districts throughout the nation, KPS has grappled with high dropout rates that are especially acute for minority students. For KPS in 2007, the dropout rate after four years in high school was 20.8 percent: 16 percent for white students versus 24 percent for African American students, a disparity of 8 percent. For the same period, the four-year graduation rate was 69 percent: 78 percent for white students compared to 63 percent for African American students, a disparity of 15 percent.²² While the Kalamazoo Promise provides an incentive for students to stay in school, other, more direct interventions are needed to reduce the dropout rate. Among those initiated at the high school level, some prior to the Kalamazoo Promise, are the reopening of the district's alternative high school, the introduction of smaller learning communities within the large high schools, freshman academies to ease the transition from middle school, and the expansion of in-school and out-of-school credit recovery programs to enable students to regain missing credits and graduate. The district has also introduced targeted interventions, such as early literacy programs, that strengthen academic performance before dropping out becomes an option. Other initiatives, including the federally funded GEAR UP program, provide middle and high school students with a range of supports, including college visits and innovative summer experiences.

Deepening the College-Going Culture

The Kalamazoo Promise does much to increase the attractiveness of postsecondary education, but a deeper cultural shift is needed to support the higher-education aspirations of all KPS students. Heightened awareness of postsecondary education is reflected in the college pennants that line hallways and appear on teachers' doors, classroom visits

by students and faculty from local colleges and universities, and many in-school programs that ask students to think about potential careers and the education required for them. Frequent invocation of the Kalamazoo Promise by teachers and administrators also plays a part: “There’s a common language that the kids are beginning to use about going to college,” says Tisha Pankop, an English teacher at Loy Norrix High School. “They ask each other ‘Aren’t you going to college? Where are you going to college?’ And I find more students anticipating going to college as a result of the Promise.” Yet the barriers facing students are formidable. “In one class, I have two homeless students,” continues Pankop, “a student who’s a mom and one who’s about to be, and two who are the primary caregivers for siblings. Most of the kids who have supportive families, or families where someone has gone to college, are pretty realistic about what it takes to succeed. It’s the kids who’ve never done it before who are not realistic. They’ll say, ‘I’m going to be a basketball star, a lawyer, a doctor,’ but they don’t have a clue what they are up against.”²³

Several programs designed to help build an understanding of what is required for college success were catalyzed by the announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise. Kalamazoo Communities In Schools began organizing an annual College Awareness Week that brings community volunteers into the elementary schools to read to second graders. The book selected for the program, a copy of which every child receives, is *I Know I Can*, by Wendy Rouillard, which introduces students to four furry creatures exploring the types of careers they want to pursue. Kalamazoo Communities In Schools also initiated a “Promise Fellows” program that pairs Americorps/VISTA volunteers with first graders attending summer school to boost their literacy skills (Mack 2007g). Students from Kalamazoo College and volunteers from the Junior League and other civic organizations participate regularly in literacy projects with elementary school children. Other programs run the gamut from GEAR UP–sponsored visits to WMU for middle school students to college fairs at KPS elementary schools, from a college-prep program specifically for Hispanic youth to mentoring through the African American woman’s organization, the LINKS, Incorporated.

Changes in school policies that push in the direction of greater academic rigor include a new system of weighting grades for advanced placement classes (an extra point is awarded) to reward students for

taking more advanced courses. A second change is the introduction of pluses and minuses to the grading scale to give students an incentive to work toward better grades and to give teachers more grading options.

There have also been new efforts in the community to provide one-on-one relationships for students who need extra support in school and in navigating successfully the high school to college transition. A number of area churches have created tutoring and mentoring programs or expanded existing programs. Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, which inherited an earlier Chamber of Commerce–sponsored mentoring program (the Kalamazoo Area Academic Achievement Program), introduced a program called “Promise coaching” that for two years piloted a life-coach model to help first-generation, college-bound high school students prepare for getting into college. Big Brothers Big Sisters has scaled up its mentoring programs, doubling the number of children served and developing new methods of recruiting mentors by partnering with schools, businesses, and religious institutions. The Promise has had an impact not only on the availability of mentors, but also on the focus of the organization’s programs. “Mentors are coming forward at a much higher rate than anticipated,” says Big Brothers Big Sisters executive director Peter Tripp. “We’ve been able to encourage [them] to take a more active role in kids’ education, school performance, and career interests. That’s always been a piece of these relationships, but because of the Promise it has become more meaningful.”

Efforts such as these are especially important for students who are the first in their families to attend college and who may lack the basic knowledge about what is involved. Evidence suggests that it is not financial barriers that constitute the primary roadblock to attending college—after all, a multitude of scholarships are available for low-income students—but rather a lack of academic and social preparedness, an absence of college-going role models, a less than supportive peer group, and the need for hands-on support to access the college admissions and financial aid process. The barriers, of course, are not insurmountable, but children who face them are at a distinct disadvantage. Kalamazoo Public Schools teacher Tisha Pankop recounts her own experience.

I was the first in my family to go to college. I knew I wanted to go, but I couldn’t fathom how I was going to do it. I didn’t have anyone helping guide me through it, and so when everyone else was applying for college when we were seniors I didn’t even think

about it, but at the end of my senior year I got a little scholarship and I thought ‘Well, I have this money and I don’t want to waste it,’ so I went to the community college. But when I’d go home to my family, there was no one to ask me about how things were going. They just didn’t understand. I wound up going to three different colleges, and it took me seven or eight years until I graduated. A lot of that had to do with not having that support.²⁴

Pankop and others believe that a supportive individual is the single most important intervention a student can be offered. “Kids need support, not just information. They need someone to follow up and ask, ‘Are you getting enough sleep? Are you studying enough? What classes are you taking? What else are you up to?’” The support person does not need to be a parent or formal mentor. Teachers can play this role, as can a friend’s parent. In the case of Joanne Sloan, it was her husband, himself a first-generation college graduate who went on to earn a graduate degree, who served as her inspiration and supporter. Ms. Sloan had drifted away from high school before graduation, but after meeting her husband went back for a GED and attended college—a big step for a woman whose father was a blue-collar worker with a 6th grade education. “Education did not have a high value in my home,” says Sloan. “My parents never went to even one of my parent-teacher conferences.” Her husband’s experience was different: “His mom encouraged him to reach. She did value an education and she knew that he was smart, that he could go on.”²⁵ From the first days of their marriage, the Sloans instilled in their two children the expectation that they, too, would go to college. The expectation was backed by the Sloans’s commitment to prepaying their children’s college tuition through the Michigan Education Trust even when finances were tight (“It was pretty much like an extra house payment,” says Sloan about their monthly contributions). Their children, both products of KPS, now have access to both the Kalamazoo Promise and their MET savings. Their daughter attends Michigan State University and their son, now in middle school, has his eye on the University of Michigan. Both expect to complete college without taking on any debt.

Addressing Behavior Problems

Since the 1970s, KPS has suffered from negative stereotypes related to its status as an urban school district serving a student body with a large poor and minority population. Kalamazoo Public Schools officials trace some of this back to the racial unrest of the desegregation era and argue that most of the negative comments come from people who haven't been inside a KPS building for years. Parents are sometimes surprised when they visit their children's schools to find a high degree of supervision and an orderly environment. Still, annual surveys by the district show student behavior regularly among the top concerns for both students and their parents, and teachers are the first to acknowledge that students with behavioral problems interfere with the learning of others.²⁶

The district has taken an aggressive approach to preventing and managing behavioral problems for several years. The implementation of a positive-behavior and literacy-support model within the district's elementary and middle schools stresses consistent rules and focuses on interventions, academic and otherwise, to address student behavior. The district reopened its alternative high school and related programs in 2005–2006 (the previous program had been closed, and students with alternative education needs transferred to neighboring districts). A police liaison at each of the comprehensive high schools serves as a deterrent to illegal behavior, as well as a resource for conflict resolution. Despite these efforts, the rate of suspensions remains extremely high (in 2006–2007, 30 percent of all high school students were suspended at least once, and the 857 students involved averaged three suspensions each). The suspension and expulsion rates are especially high for African American males (Mack 2007f,h).

The Kalamazoo Promise has placed the school district's management of behavioral problems under greater scrutiny. In September 2006, officials took action after fights broke out at a basketball game between the two large high schools. The students involved were suspended, and an upcoming football game between the schools was rescheduled for a Saturday morning. One of the high schools canceled its homecoming dance because of threatened disruptions, but the decision was reversed when a group of seniors pledged to discourage any violence. At a subsequent board meeting, two mothers whose children had just transferred

into a KPS middle school complained about disruptive behavior and fighting. A series of incidents at Loy Norrix High School the following year, including fights in a park across the street that spilled onto campus, drew renewed attention to school security. Tensions were especially high in 2007, a year during which five teenagers were the victims of homicide in the city of Kalamazoo. In December 2007, the school board voted to approve the new superintendent's recommendation to add several hundred security cameras at the high schools, as part of a system to provide additional surveillance of corridors, stairways, lobbies, parking lots, student entrances, building perimeters, the cafeteria, and the gym. Dr. Rice and his staff are also considering improved video surveillance of school buses and the addition of buzzers, intercoms, and cameras at the main entrances to the district's elementary schools.²⁷

"Some of the kids are so full of anger that they're self-destructing in middle school and high school," says Scott Hunsinger, who has taught middle school in the district since 1995. "The Promise does very little for those kids. If you really want to transform them, it will take parenting classes and other kinds of support. You would need a whole other Promise to do that." The paradox, of course, is that the families that need help the most are the hardest to reach. "The public schools are expected to be the silver bullet for a whole range of societal ills," continues Hunsinger.²⁸ This may be an unfair expectation, but schools are one of the few places where the hardest-to-serve children can be found, provided support programs start early enough. The middle school behavior program initiated by KPS in 2008, as discussed in the following section, is a sign that educators recognize high school may be too late for particular interventions.

Increasing academic rigor, reducing the dropout rate, deepening the college-going culture, and addressing behavior problems all share the common goal of increasing the likelihood that students enrolled in KPS will graduate from high school and be prepared to succeed in some kind of postsecondary program, whether it be a four-year college, a two-year college, or a career or technical training program. Much work remains to be done. In a pattern that roughly mirrors the national experience for urban school districts, close to one-third of KPS students drop out before graduation. Among those who do graduate, half attend a four-year college and the other half opt for a two-year program. Of those KPS graduates who enroll at KVCC, approximately one-third graduate, one-

third end up on probation, and one-third drop out. In very broad terms, according to Dr. Rice, this means that fewer than half the students who enter high school navigate successfully the transition to postsecondary education, a situation that is deeply problematic for educators, young people, and the nation's economic health.²⁹

DIFFICULT TRADE-OFFS

The impact of the Kalamazoo Promise, as well as broader changes in the nation's educational system, guarantees that KPS is a district in transition. But the question of its ultimate shape or even its current direction has been made more complex by the introduction of the Promise. Perhaps the most fundamental issue any school district faces is who it serves. The short answer is easy: all KPS students and their families. The longer answer must address the competing needs of different groups of students and their families. In the case of KPS, these groups include the roughly one-third of students who have significant problems in school, the most advanced students who need special challenges to remain engaged, and those in between. The task of serving these diverse groups is even more difficult in a climate of limited resources. The middle-income families that the region is trying to attract from an economic development standpoint will look at KPS to see if it offers the kinds of choices and opportunities that more affluent suburban school districts provide. The lower-income students who make up the majority of the district's enrollment will now pay a much steeper cost—the forfeiture of a free college education—if they do not succeed in school. The “revolution of rising expectations” brought about by the Kalamazoo Promise means that time is short for the school district to produce visible results that speak to the needs of both audiences.

The trade-offs and conflicts that can emerge from this dynamic are most evident in the context of budgetary decisions. In spring 2007, the school board faced the task of allocating funds for new programs for the coming academic year. Earlier that spring, Dr. Brown had proposed raising the cap on enrollment in kindergarten through 3rd grade classes from 24 to 29 (26 for kindergarten) at the district's five lowest-poverty elementary schools in order to maintain the cap at 17 at the six highest-

poverty schools. (The other five elementary schools would have kept the 24-student cap.) In suggesting the plan, the superintendent cited rising enrollment as well as changes in federal grant rules mandating smaller class sizes for high-poverty schools. Arguing that “equity does not mean equality,” the superintendent presented the case that high-poverty schools need smaller classes because so many students are at risk of academic failure.

The outcry was immediate and intense. Parents from the affected schools flooded a meeting of the school board threatening strategies ranging from recalls to petition drives to e-mail campaigns. “I have no problems pulling my kids out and going to Otsego” [a neighboring public school district], said one parent. “I would like the Promise, but I don’t need it” (Mack 2007j). Another said, “It smacks of bait and switch—come to KPS and we’ll raise class size . . . I told my husband, we can put our child back in Montessori so fast it can make their heads spin. But that’s not what I want, and it’s not what they want” (Mack 2007k). Having promoted small early elementary class sizes as essential for student learning, the district had boxed itself in on the question. The board, which had not yet signed off on the class-size plan when it was floated, overruled the superintendent within a matter of weeks. One result was that the coming budget debate was constrained by the need to add teachers to maintain existing class sizes, at a cost of roughly \$600,000.

It is worth noting that KPS parents appear to accept the principle that class sizes may differ across the district based on the percentage of low-income children being served; in other words, that schools facing challenges related to a high-poverty population are entitled to additional resources. It was the scale of the imbalance—17 students per class versus as many as 29—that brought the parents of children at the mixed-income schools out in force.

Given the outcry, keeping class sizes constant in the mixed-income elementary schools became the top priority for the budget. As for the remaining available funds, the board was presented with four options, only two of which it could afford: a 1 percent across-the-board pay increase for teachers, a small reduction in the size of core high school classes through the hiring of six new teachers, the introduction of a behavior program for high school or middle school students, and changes in a Spanish/English dual-language program that enjoyed strong support

from the parents of those who participated. Until fall 2007, students at one of the district's elementary magnet schools had the option to enroll in a dual-language program taught half in Spanish and half in English. The program was popular with many of the district's Hispanic families, as well as a vocal group of white parents; however, its location as a separate entity within an inner-city school had created a two-tiered system, with the lower-achieving students (many of them African American) not participating in the dual-language curriculum. When the district announced plans in 2006 to phase out the program to focus on improving the school's test scores, parents of the immersion students organized a campaign to retain the program or move it to a new site. The proposed behavior program had no parallel advocacy group—almost by definition, the parents of most of these children are not prone to show up at school board meetings or write letters to the editor—but administrators, teachers, and parents have long argued that behavior problems must be addressed before the critical transition to ninth grade. In the final budget, advocacy or not, the board opted to fund the first two priorities—a small teacher raise and a modest class-size reduction—a decision that spread the benefits of the additional funds as widely as possible. It also left behind an angry group of parents of dual-language students and a pressing need for services for those students whose behavior is responsible for much of the disruption in the middle and high schools.

A year later, when the 2008 budgeting process occurred, both the dual-language program and a middle school behavior program were funded. Of the projected new resources of \$1.35 million available for 2008–2009 (relative to an operating budget of \$120 million), \$755,000 was allocated to the behavior initiative—a full-year program requiring new teachers and facilities—while \$332,000 went to fund a dual-language curriculum that would serve K-4th grade students in its first year, then expand to all elementary grades. The dual-language program would be housed in a refurbished elementary school near the city's center that had been closed almost three years earlier, a decision that reflected both the need for new space in light of expected enrollment growth and the strong support of neighborhood leaders for reopening the shuttered school.

The largest budget initiative was the introduction of full-day kindergarten at 14 of the district's 17 elementary schools, a move that was paid for entirely through reallocation of the district's federal Title I budget at

no cost to local taxpayers. At two schools, where fewer than 40 percent of students are low income, and at the new dual-language school, the state of Michigan prevented KPS from using the Title I funds that would pay for full-day kindergarten. Instead, parents of prospective kindergarten students at those three schools were given the opportunity to move their children to one of the other 14 schools or stay at their current school, which would provide half-day kindergarten accompanied by a half day of wraparound, a child care program led by paraprofessionals. In all, the 176 students in full-day kindergarten in 2007–2008 would become approximately 900 in 2008–2009—an increase of roughly 400 percent. Kalamazoo Public Schools kindergartners would receive an estimated 371,000 additional instructional hours under this plan.

The choices made in the first three post-Promise budgets offer some insight into the balancing act KPS performs as it strives to increase the achievement of low-income children while providing the enrichment opportunities that middle-income families demand. This balancing act brings to mind Albert O. Hirschman's theoretical insights into the process of organizational decline. According to Hirschman, when people are dissatisfied with a product, they have two options: "exit" by switching to a competing product (or school district) or "voice," the process of agitating and exerting influence for change from within (Hirschman 1970). In the past, exit was the preferred path for families disenchanted with KPS who voted with their feet by switching districts or sending their children to private or charter schools. With the new incentives provided by the Kalamazoo Promise, more families are choosing to stay and fight. As in other policy arenas, the poor tend to have less "voice" than those who are better off, which makes it a particular blessing that many of the middle-income parents who have chosen KPS precisely because it is a diverse school district are prepared to advocate not just for their own children but for their children's less well-off classmates.

Middle-class families may no longer be leaving the district, but they are becoming more vocal about its shortcomings. At the same time, advocates for at-risk children are demanding that they too be prepared to utilize the Kalamazoo Promise. Teachers are feeling the strain. Classes are packed, with some high school classes at the 37-student maximum.

The expectations engendered by the Kalamazoo Promise are stressful, in part because they seem out of reach to those in the classroom day in and day out. Yet the Kalamazoo Promise is a universal program, avail-

able to every graduate of KPS provided that the minimal attendance and residency requirements are met. For the most part, teachers are embracing that challenge and recognize that triage and tracking are no longer acceptable strategies. Since the announcement of the program, teachers' expectations of their students have risen as well. According to researchers at the WMU Evaluation Center, the Promise has created a renewed sense of urgency and excitement in the schools that has helped teachers define priorities, increase support for students, and push college as an option for more of the student body (Jones, Miron, and Kelaher Young 2008). As Theresa Williams-Johnson, a teacher with 20 years of experience at Hillside Middle School, reports, "Before the Promise, I did a lot of talking to students about college and about finishing high school. When I would ask, 'How many of you are going to college?' there was never a time when I got every kid to raise their hand. Every hand goes up now. I can promise you, every hand will go up this year."³⁰

"As much as you say it doesn't matter, we're middle-class people teaching sometimes very low-income children," says Sue Larsen, a music teacher at a high-poverty elementary school and the mother of three KPS students. "You can't help but make a judgment that these kids are bound for college and these kids aren't. [The Kalamazoo Promise] really changed my mind set. The first thing you think is that we have to make all of these children college ready. That meant looking at all of my students like my children, truly not as anybody else's children."³¹

Sherry Ransford, another KPS teacher, agrees: "It used to be that teachers could say, 'You can be anything you want to be,' and not mean it at all," she says. "There is no way that they could legitimately believe what they were saying. Now they can. I think we all stepped up with the Promise. All of us now really believe that all kids should be college ready. It was pointless before. Why make a kid college ready when they wouldn't be going, when that was beyond our ability?"³²

An apt metaphor is offered by middle school teacher Scott Hunsinger. "To me, the Kalamazoo Promise is nothing short of a miracle. It gives hope to kids who would not have been able to afford college. It removes one of the biggest hurdles stopping them from getting a college education. Bam! It took one of those hurdles away. But what's happening to teachers is that we're going through a psychological process of feeling so grateful that this big hurdle's gone, but then starting to realize how many other hurdles are there that were probably not as

clear to us before. We usually never got beyond that first hurdle. Now we're realizing all the other hurdles that lie beyond it, and that can be deflating and depressing."³³

What are those hurdles? A lack of academic preparation and insufficient literacy, low expectations that some adults have for students and that some students have for themselves (multiple generations of non-college-going means that many students still don't believe they can or should go to college, Kalamazoo Promise notwithstanding), inadequate attention to the non-academic skills needed to succeed in college, and, for some, mental health issues related to psychological and social trauma. Hunsinger calls it a stern reality check. "If your goal is to serve kids from struggling low-income families who never would have had a shot of going to college and are way behind academically, this is a huge challenge. It may take generations." But Hunsinger and his colleagues are also optimistic: "One of the reasons the Promise is a gift and a blessing is that the conversation we're having has changed. We would not be as ambitious about the number of struggling kids we're going to help get into college if not for the Promise."³⁴

Notes

1. Enrollment data presented in Figure 5.1 begins in the mid-1980s, after the demographic surge related to the baby boom had aged out of the K-12 system.
2. The elementary schools with the largest increases in enrollment were Milwood Elementary, 25.9 percent; Parkwood-Upjohn Elementary, 23.9 percent; Woodward School for Technology and Research, 19.5 percent; Lincoln International Studies School, 18.3 percent; Indian Prairie, 17.5 percent; and King-Westwood Elementary, 14.2 percent (data provided by KPS).
3. Data provided by KPS.
4. Figure derived from 899 blended enrollment increase multiplied by \$7,556 foundation grant for 2006–2007.
5. Author's interview with Deputy Superintendent for Business, Communications, and Operations Gary Start, KPS, March 22, 2006.
6. Author's interview with Dr. Janice Brown, Superintendent, KPS, June 30, 2006.
7. Author's interview with Gary Start, March 22, 2006.
8. Ibid.
9. Estimates put the number of children in grades K-8 who opt out of the public schools at 4,000, or more than one-third of total KPS enrollment (Mack 2006i).
10. This informal assessment was carried out by Bob Jorth, Kalamazoo Promise administrator, based on data provided by KPS.

11. Author's conversation with Tom Vance, Community Relations, Portage Public Schools, September 8, 2008.
12. One of the more unusual responses to the Kalamazoo Promise came from a banker at a Connecticut-based investment firm that underwrites bonds for charter schools, who asked whether the Kalamazoo Promise donors are philosophically opposed to the charter school movement; author's notes, 2006.
13. Author's interview with Pam Kingery, executive director, Kalamazoo Communities In Schools, January 27, 2006.
14. The appeals process involves submitting a letter with appropriate documentation to the appeals committee, a three-person committee appointed by the board. The appeals committee reviews the material and makes a decision on whether the student will receive a scholarship and for how much. Appeals are limited to seniors. The committee meets approximately quarterly. Students with a short lapse or lapses with significant enrollment in KPS are those most likely to receive some kind of scholarship, usually related to family hardship, emotional issues, learning needs, custody, abuse, or neglect. Reasons such as out-of-district residency or not graduating from KPS do not get approved. Approximately 75 percent of those submitted to the committee by Bob Jorth are approved.
15. These percentages are substantially lower than either the 65 percent low-income proportion of KPS enrollment overall or the 56 percent low-income designation of district high school students for two reasons. First, low-income students become less likely to apply for free and reduced-price lunch assistance as they reach middle and high school. Second, it is likely that low-income students are over-represented among those who fail to complete high school, thereby lowering the proportion of free and reduced-price lunch recipients within a graduating class. Data provided by KPS. Overall free and reduced-price lunch numbers are from October 2007 data.
16. Retention data reported by Bob Jorth, Kalamazoo Promise administrator.
17. The rules governing continued eligibility for the scholarship generally mirror the "satisfactory academic progress" requirements of the state's public colleges and universities. Students must complete 75 percent of the credits for which they enroll and receive a GPA of at least 2.0, or a C average. If these criteria are not met students are put on academic probation for one semester. If the situation still does not improve their scholarship is suspended. The scholarship can be reinstated if a student returns to good standing with a 2.0 G.P.A. or higher. This provision holds true for 10 years following the student's graduation from KPS unless interrupted by military service (see <https://www.kalamazoopromise.com>).
18. See note 16.
19. Author's interview with Sherry Ransford, KPS teacher, January 8, 2008.
20. For the 2007–2008 year, Dr. Brown stayed on in a consulting role she had worked out with the board before her retirement. This was a controversial arrangement, but was accepted because the plan had been developed before the school board knew whether or not it would be hiring an experienced administrator and because of Dr. Brown's connection to the Kalamazoo Promise donors; see Mack (2007c).

In September 2008, Dr. Brown was appointed executive director of the Kalamazoo Promise organization.

21. According to KPS data from October 2007, 81 percent of African American students in KPS qualify for the federally subsidized free and reduced-price lunch program as compared to 40 percent of white students.
22. The 2007 graduation rate, which the state of Michigan calculated for the first time based on a four-year cohort graduation rate, includes only “on-time” graduates—those who complete high school within four years. The dropout rate includes those who left high school permanently at any time during the four-year period for their cohort or whose whereabouts are unknown. The difference between the two rates is attributable to those students who did not graduate on time but also did not drop out during the four-year period (Center for Educational Performance and Information 2008).
23. Author’s interview with Tisha Pankop, KPS teacher, December 19, 2007.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Author’s interview with Joanne Sloan, KPS teacher, July 26, 2006.
26. This finding is not unique to KPS. In national polls, respondents consistently identify a lack of discipline, fighting, and violence as among the biggest problems facing the public schools (Rose and Gallup 2007).
27. Kalamazoo Central High School will go from having 16 cameras to 129, Loy Norrix High School will go from 42 to 164, and the Kennedy Center, which houses alternative programs, will go from 15 cameras to 22. Norrix has the most because of its sprawling layout. A federal grant covered the \$288,000 cost of the cameras, and the district spent another \$131,000 from its 2006 bond issue to install the cabling infrastructure (Press News Service 2007).
28. Author’s interview with Scott Hunsinger, KPS teacher.
29. Author’s interview with Michael Rice, KPS Superintendent, April 1, 2008.
30. Author’s interview with Theresa Williams-Johnson, September 19, 2008.
31. Author’s interview with Sue Larsen, KPS teacher, May 26, 2008.
32. Author’s interview with Sherry Ransford, KPS teacher, January 8, 2008.
33. Author’s interview with Scott Hunsinger, KPS teacher.
34. *Ibid.*

