

Capstone:

What Does It Really Take?

A Case Study of Public School Excellence in Spite of It All

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### **Dedication**

The journey to this capstone was made possible by the loving support of my husband and puppies; my friends and family; Vanderbilt Peabody College faculty; and LLO cohort 3.

I dedicate this capstone to innovative programs in the Saginaw Public School District, especially the Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (formerly known as the Center for the Arts & Sciences), its founders, educators, and community of supporters. SASA has provided a platform for success to generations of students and demonstrates what excellence in public education looks like.

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## Executive Summary

**Area of Inquiry.** Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (SASA) is a nationally-ranked application-based public magnet middle and high school program located in Saginaw, Michigan in which students select a concentration for intensive study (up to 3 hours a day, 5 days a week), in addition to their core subject requirements. SASA students compete, and regularly win awards, accolades, and scholarships at the state and national level through their concentrations which include Language Arts, Global Studies, Dance, Theatre, Visual Art 2-D, Visual Art 3-D, Math/Science, and Voice/Keyboard. And yet, SASA is not part of a wealthy district. What's more: the school is located inside an old Montgomery Ward department store in a struggling, light industrial area of a working class town.

As such, SASA goes against the grain in several key respects related to larger discussions of public education as well as education in high-poverty areas:

- Magnet program serving multiple counties
- High-performing school in an economically depressed area
- Strong and consistent focus on arts education in spite of broad slashes to arts funding
- Persistence of a concentration program in spite of increased demands for Math and ELA testing and accountability

What emerges is the fundamental question at the core of effective school research: What does it really take to make an effective school? SASA offers the opportunity to determine what is needed for a public school to succeed even with a high poverty rate. The goal of this Case Study is to contribute to the existing literature on creating and scaling effective, innovative public

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school models designed to produce extraordinary results even in spite of what appear to be sub-optimal financial, political, or community conditions. In other words: “How does SASA survive and thrive given its status as a high-poverty school in a high-crime, high-unemployment, low-income area?” Understanding the history and evolution of SASA, as well as the current factors in its success can provide lessons to education leaders across the country on how to succeed in spite of circumstances that would otherwise present as obstacles including:

- Growing inequality across district budgets
- Increased focus on high-stakes tests, particularly reading and mathematics
- Fewer advanced options in struggling districts

How SASA is able to navigate these obstacles in a setting that would otherwise struggle to provide a gifted and talented program provides lessons for other schools that want to offer not only similar programming but to make gains across the board for their students.

**Questions.** The Effective Schools literature creates the foundation for this line of inquiry and is influenced by the other specific concepts at play within the SASA model:

- High-Performance/High-Poverty Schools;
- Project-Based Learning;
- Hybrid Block/Traditional Scheduling Model;
- Magnet Schools;
- Performing/Visual Arts Programs
- Gifted/Talented Programs

These concepts inform a more general theoretical framework of factors (as detailed in the conceptual framework section) for evaluating impacts and effects, which include:

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- Instruction
- Leadership
- Finance
- Politics
- Community

Cutting across the five factors is the element of chronology. How the factors influenced the start of the school may be quite different in navigating the school's continued operation today.

Therefore, the research questions of central import to this Case Study are:

1. How did the five factors (instruction, leadership, finance, politics, and community) foster the historical development of the school?
2. How do these five factors (instruction, leadership, finance, politics, and community) continue to support the school to be successful?

Specific sub-questions within these questions are geared toward identifying the differences in understanding between the administrator and teacher perspectives.

**Findings.** A five-factor qualitative analysis of available documents and extensive interviews with 18 current and former SASA teachers and administrators suggest the following findings are of primary importance to SASA's initial and continued success. Leadership collaborated, networked, and built a coalition of political and community good will by addressing the community's educational needs in order of greatest utility, including the establishment of a Voc/Tech Career Training Center before developing SASA's Gifted and Talented programming. The concentration concept was an adaptation of the Voc/Tech concentration methodology. SASA's concentration instruction centers on project-based learning which fuels engagement,

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confirms relevance, and provides authentic assessment opportunities in the form of local, state, and national convenings, projects, and competitions. The concentration program confers identity upon students and teachers in the SASA community while SASA's application-based approach breeds a culture of choice and success among students. Financially, the magnet model and Michigan's Schools of Choice policy give SASA the membership it needs to continue offering services by providing a broader reach and therefore higher population and access to surrounding district funding than the host district can provide. To provide further stability in an increasingly tight budgetary climate, leadership established a foundation to support high-cost programs and annual expenses. In addition, teachers routinely engage in creative fundraising efforts including leveraging their students' concentration talents to win financial awards and create commissioned works. Members of the SASA community thrive on a culture of trust and respect which sustains morale amid unstable times. And through 40+ years of shifting demographics; local, state, and national policy; financial ups and downs; and competitive pressures, adherence to SASA's core mission and vision has been key to its continued success.

**Recommendations.** The reason I chose to create a case study for this school is because every time I describe how the school operates, where it operates, and what it is able to accomplish, my educational practitioner colleagues routinely tell me, "it doesn't sound possible" or "that wouldn't work in my district" or "it's too complicated" or "it sounds like a wealthy district or a private school." Therefore, recommendations are offered not to improve SASA, but rather to suggest how other schools and districts can emulate the SASA model to achieve greater results in terms of teacher satisfaction, student engagement, authentic learning opportunities, as well

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as state and national recognition, all while working within the budgetary limitations of the public school model:

- Give students the gift of engagement, identity, and grounding in their studies by allowing them to select a concentration.
- The application-based Magnet School approach offers multiple benefits in terms of student buy-in, larger resource pools, and disruption to problematic neighborhood/district school models.
- Begin with a half-day model in which students can focus on their concentration before moving into a full-day option.
- Be mindful of both internal and external validation measures in the spirit of project-based learning.
- Hire educators with a foothold in industry as well as academia.

What is learned in the quest for “What it takes” to be successful in spite of the obstacles is that we should not expect new outcomes from one-note formulas. Indeed SASA blends multiple threads of scholarship into its practice: Magnet School, Arts Education, G/T Programming, Concentration-Based Education, HP/HP best practices, and the practices of Effective Schools, and not one of these could be affixed with more influence than another in SASA’s success. Rather, educational outcomes are more powerful when inventiveness, innovation, and irreverence drive structure.



## Introduction

**Partner Organization.** Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (SASA) is a nationally ranked application-based public magnet middle and high school program located in Saginaw, Michigan in which students select a concentration for intensive study (up to 3 hours a day, 5 days a week) in addition to their core subject requirements. SASA students rank, compete, and regularly win awards, accolades, and scholarships at the state and national level through their concentrations which include Language Arts, Global Studies, Dance, Theatre, Visual Art 2-D, Visual Art 3-D, Math/Science, and Voice/Keyboard. And yet, SASA is not only not located in a wealthy district. The school resides inside an old Montgomery Ward department store in a blighted area of a working class town.

**Area of Inquiry.** SASA goes against the grain in several key respects related to larger discussions of public education as well as education in high-poverty areas:

- Magnet Program serving multiple counties
- An extremely high-performing school in an economically depressed area
- Incredibly strong and well maintained focus on the arts in spite of broad slashes to arts funding even in more well off districts
- Persistence of a concentration program in spite of increased demands for Math and ELA testing and accountability

What emerges is the fundamental question at the core of effective school research: What does it really take to make an effective school? SASA offers the opportunity to determine what is needed for a public school to succeed even with a high-poverty rate. When schools are

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generally as good as the tax base that goes into them, figuring out how to fight the statistics and work against the system to create a school that is truly great where people may least expect it is precisely the research that saves the concept of public schools from the claws of income inequality.

**Project Goal and Broader Relevance.** The goal of this Case Study is to contribute to the existing literature on creating and scaling effective, innovative public school models designed to produce extraordinary results even in spite of what appear to be sub-optimal financial, political, or community conditions. In other words: “How does SASA survive and thrive given its status as a high-poverty school in a high-crime, high-unemployment, low-income area?” Understanding the history and evolution of SASA, as well as the current factors in its success can provide lessons to education leaders across the country on how to thrive in spite of circumstances that would otherwise present as obstacles including:

- Growing inequality across district budgets.
- Rapidly increased focus on high-stakes tests.
- Hyperfocus on test-specific reading and mathematics preparation as well as fewer advanced options in struggling districts.

How SASA is able to navigate these obstacles in a setting that would otherwise struggle to provide a gifted and talented program provides lessons for other schools that want to offer not only similar programming but to make gains across the board for their students.

## Organizational Context

Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy (SASA) is a nationally ranked public magnet middle and high school program located in Saginaw, Michigan. The school was originally founded as the Center for the Arts and Sciences (CAS) in 1981 and operated as a half-day immersion program where students could focus intensively on a specific subject 3 hours a day, 5 days a week.

Middle School students attended in the morning. High School students attended in the afternoon. The subjects of focus included Language Arts, Global Studies, Dance, Theatre, Visual Art 2-D, Visual Art 3-D, Math/Science, and Voice/Keyboard. Students attended a traditional middle or high school for the remainder of their coursework during the opposite half of the day. In 1999, CAS expanded to include a full-day middle and high school option and changed its name to SASA. Students could continue to attend the half-day program option, returning to a traditional middle or high school for the 2nd half of their day or could elect to attend SASA full time, receiving their required core instruction for half the day while continuing to focus on their concentration subject for the other half of the day.

<b>Pillars of the student experience include</b>	
Daily	2-3 Hours of Concentration Instruction
Monthly	Living Arts: “Through programs conceived and presented by students themselves and through exposure to the creative ideas and skills of staff members or visiting experts and artists, the Living Arts program establishes a rich climate of understanding and appreciation for the creative connections among the arts, sciences and humanities.”

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Every 6 weeks	Concentration-focused Project-Based Community Outreach including real-world application and confirmation of learning for greater community good. Examples: Performances, Art Installations, Community Improvement Projects, Applied Environmental Science, Community Media
Every Semester	Cross-concentration demonstrations, workshops, and showcases
Every Year	Competition in state, national and international events, awards, workshops, tests, and contests by concentration: Writing Awards, Art Competitions, Science Fair, Math Olympics, National Merit, Model UN, Theatre, Dance, Voice Competitions

<b>Students additionally participate in:</b>	
Accelerated Daily Study in the Core 4	Math, Science, Language Arts, Global Studies
1-3 electives per day	Band (Beginner, Intermediate, Concert, Jazz); Foreign Language, PE, Dance, Elements of Music, 2D Art Design, 3D Art Design, Creative Writing, Art/Literary Magazine Publication, Personal Finance, Theatre, Speech, Study Skills, Film in Literature, Leadership, Robotics, STEM
ExtraCurricular Activities	Sports, Yearbook, Language Clubs, Robotics, School-wide Musical, Dances, Student Council, Conferences, Honor Society, Concentration-Specific Clubs, Community Outreach Clubs
Free Dual Enrollment	Courses at Delta College, Saginaw Valley State University, and Online
Advanced Placement	Lit/Lang; Lang/Comp; Environmental Science,

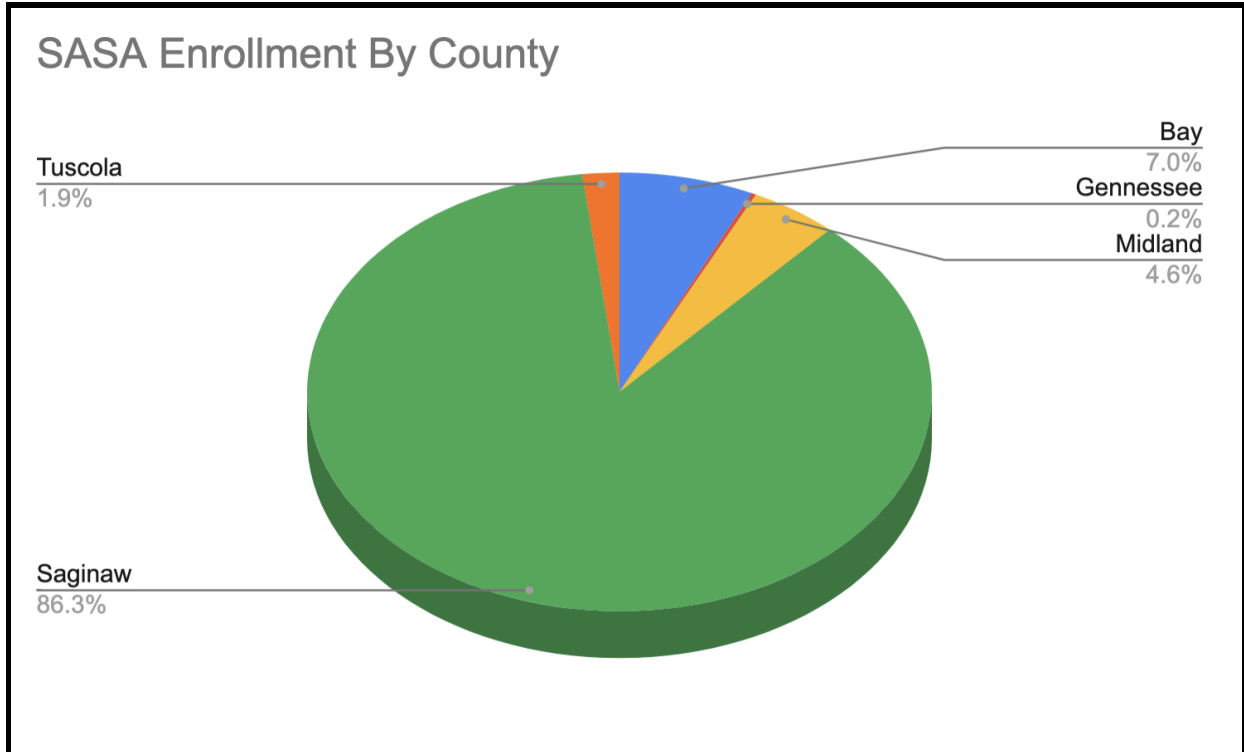
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	Computer Science, Physics, US History, Chemistry, Calc AB and BC, European History, US Government, and more
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SASA’s mission statement holistically cites a collaborative team in its vision: “The Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy faculty, staff, students, parents and collaborative community commits to specifically serve the gifted and/or talented student.” In addition, SASA “will promote a system of education that:

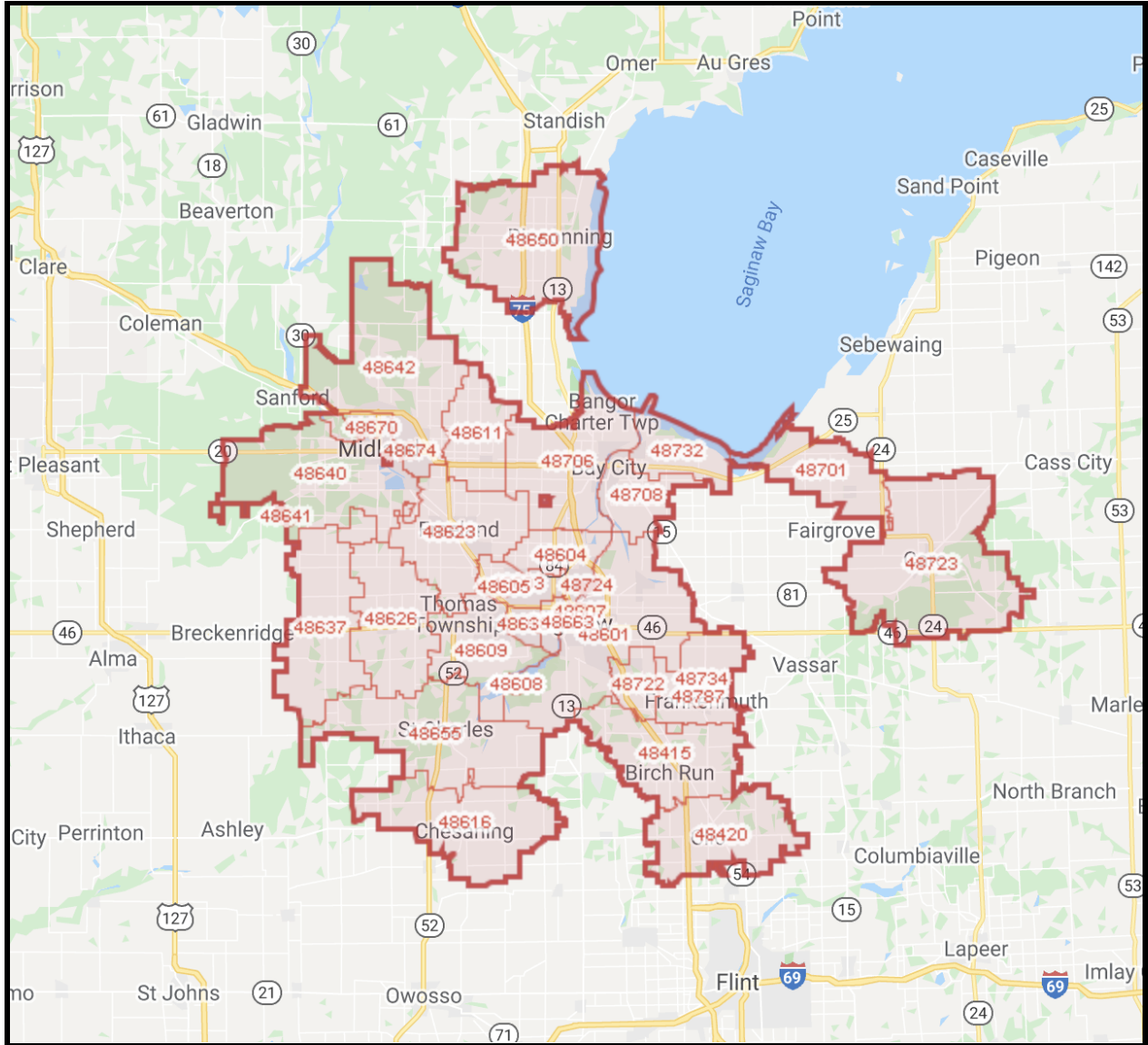
- Ensures the highest level of academic achievement.
- Prepares students in career pathways in our ever-changing technological world.
- Provides collaborative instruction to promote creative and productive learning. (Open House, 2017)

The school has been “expanding and enhancing learning opportunities for gifted/talented students in the Tri-County (Saginaw, Bay City, Midland) area since 1981” (About SASA, 2021) with some students being bussed or traveling independently from up to 40 miles away every day. SASA also counts students from neighboring Tuscola and Genesee Counties (1.9% and .2%, respectively) among its enrollment, though the majority of students from AY 2020-21 come from Saginaw County (86.3%), Bay County (7%), and Midland (4.6%).



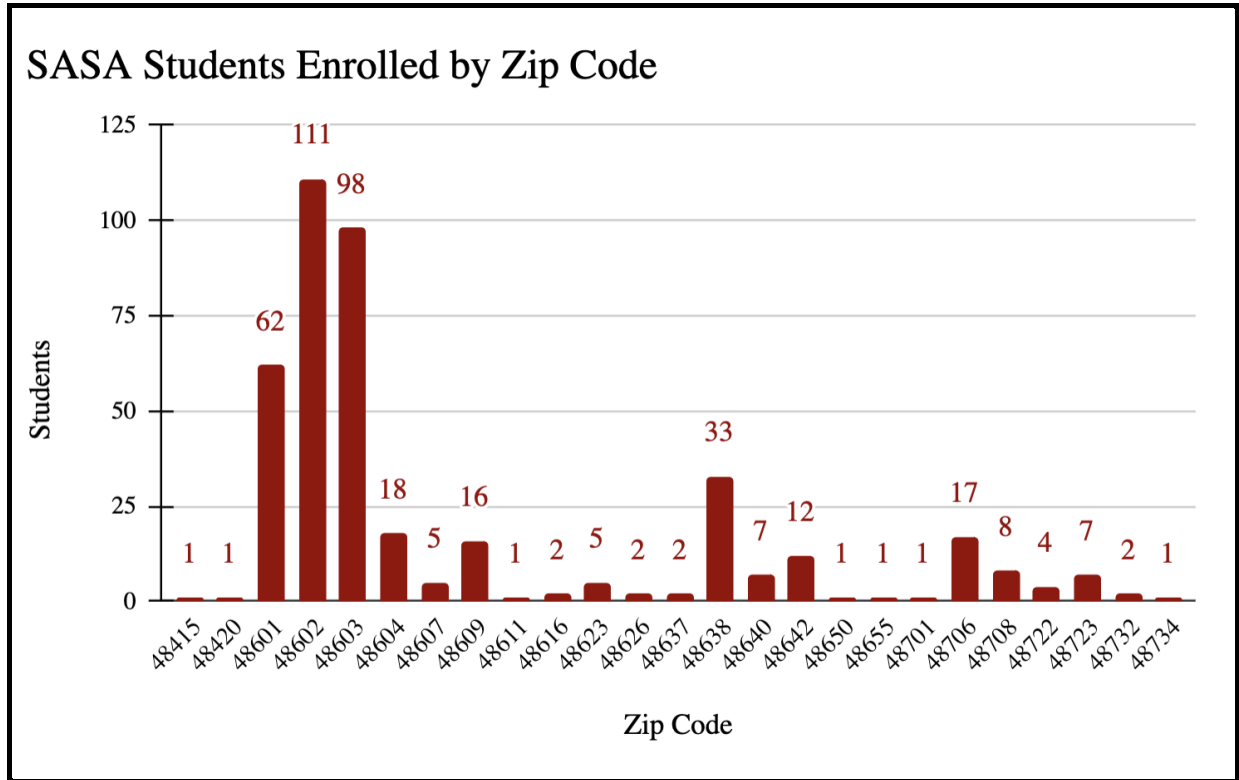
*Note: Based on Academic Year 2020-21, School Districts in Michigan are not County-Based. Each County often includes multiple districts and districts can span portions of multiple counties. Saginaw County includes twelve districts; Both Bay and Midland County each include 8 districts; Genessee County includes 22 districts while Tuscola County includes 9 districts.*

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*Note: Zip Code Distribution based on 2020-2021 Student Enrollment*

Currently, the program includes students from 25 zip codes in the Tri-County area.



*Note: Distribution figures based on 2020-2021 Student Enrollment*

Students within Saginaw Public School District, whether full-day or half-day students are provided free bus service to and from SASA. Students coming from out of district from across the tri-county area are either carpooled, driven by their parents/drive themselves, or pay for a bus service.

Over the years, SASA has amassed a reputation of excellence with students regularly winning countless state, national, and international awards and scholarships. Yes, SASA students perform well on AP examinations, and SASA regularly ranks among the top 20 high schools in Michigan for College Readiness and College Curriculum Breadth (USNEWS, 2020) but more interestingly, according to the SASA website:



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*“The school has produced two Presidential Scholars, three Congressional pages, many State and International Science and Engineering Fair Award winners, top award winners in the Michigan Mathematics Prize Competition, Blue Lake and Interlochen scholarship recipients, top national student poets, Scholastic Writing and Art Award winners, and Governor’s Traveling Art Award exhibitors, to name just a few. ICONs, our art and literary magazine, has earned a Gold Crown and annual national awards for excellence from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.”*

<b>SASA Recognitions</b>	
Gold Medallion School	Best of High Schools, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, per U.S. News and World Report
Blue Ribbon School	2019 National Blue Ribbon School
100%	Graduation Rate
Top 5%	Of all Michigan High Schools and all National High schools, per U.S. News and World Report
Top 20%	Of all Magnet High Schools, Nationally, per U.S. News and World Report
Creative School of Distinction	ArtServe MI Kennedy Center "Creative Ticket" School of Distinction for Michigan
Governor’s Award	Governor's Arts Award MI Exemplary Education Institution

SASA students compete annually at the state and national level in their concentration and routinely win top honors in their competitions. Preparation for County, State, and National Science Fair, Math Olympics, Model UN, as well as State and National Performing Arts and Literary Competitions forms a key component to the curriculum and instruction.

<b>Annually These Students</b>	
Compete	In every concentration against the best of the best from public and

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	private schools across the country
Win	Michigan Youth Arts, National and International Science Fair, Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards, Literary Magazine Awards, Spelling Bee, Michigan Band and Orchestra Competition, Michigan Thespian Competition, State Geography Bee, Michigan Youth Shakespeare Festival, National TEAM, State and National Robotics Competitions, Innovation Competition
Demonstrate	Excellence in top 5% on State tests, PSAT, SAT, ACT; including multiple National Merit Scholars;
Receive	Millions in scholarships (average \$60k per senior); Dozens of State and National Theatre, Dance, Art, ELA, Math, Science, Band, Voice/Keyboard, and Global Studies awards
Matriculate	To the best universities, art schools, and performing arts programs in the country

Admission to the program is application based and students apply to gain entry both into their concentration as well as to the school in general. The process includes a written application, report card/transcript review, two letters of recommendation from past teachers, and general written cognitive test created by SASA as well as specific requirements for each concentration including additional tests, auditions, and/or portfolio reviews (2017 SASA Open House Presentation):

- Art students take a drawing test – a simple still life, line drawing and bring a portfolio of 8-10 pieces of their best artwork. 1 cartoon maximum
- Dance students provide a demonstration of skills
- Voice/Keyboard students prepare a selection and perform
- Theatre students prepare and perform a monologue

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Beyond the concentration program, the remaining core and elective instruction is also advanced which means full time students are performing at an incredibly high level for their concentration and at least an above average level for the remainder of their coursework. Students can still elect to attend SASA half-time for the concentration only just as in the original CAS model and return to a traditional school for the remainder of their daily instruction. If a student succeeds in their concentration application but perhaps does not perform as well on the general application, the student may still be invited to enroll as a half-day student. In addition, if a student does enroll as a full day student but struggles with instruction outside their concentration, they may be invited to enroll as a half-day student until they can increase their performance in the other subjects.

The middle school and high school schedules are as follows:

<b>Middle School Daily Schedule</b>	
Breakfast (provided free of charge)	7:30-8:05 am
Concentration Instruction	8:05-10:55 am
Lunch (provided free of charge)	10:55-11:35 am
5th Hour	11:40-12:25 pm
6th Hour	12:31-1:16 pm
7th Hour	1:22-2:07 pm
8th Hour	2:11-2:56 pm

<b>High School Daily Schedule</b>	
Breakfast (provided free of charge)	7:30-8:25 am

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1st Hour	8:25-9:13 am
2nd Hour	9:13-10:01 am
3rd Hour	10:05-10:53 am
4th Hour	10:53-11:40 am
Lunch (provided free of charge)	11:40-12:20 pm
Concentration Instruction	12:25-2:30 pm
8th Hour	2:32-3:20 pm

Students who concentrate in Math/Science, ELA, or Global Studies fulfill their other Core 4 requirements in the remaining hours and then supplement with multiple electives. Students who concentrate in the Visual or Performing Arts concentration (Dance, Theatre, Voice/Keyboard, Visual Arts 2-D, Visual Arts 3-D) complete their Core 4 with their remaining hours and possibly take on one elective.

<b>SASA Courses, Electives, and Extracurricular Activities</b>	
<p>Typical SASA Middle School courses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mathematics (Math 6, Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry)</li> <li>● Science (Earth/Physical/Life/Pre AP Environmental Science)</li> <li>● Social Studies (ancient civilizations to early U.S.)</li> <li>● Language Arts (Reading, Writing, Grammar, Listening, Speaking)</li> <li>● Rounds (Gr. 6 – Keyboarding, Phys. Ed., Speech, Organizing and Using a Planner, etc.) or Spanish Gr. 7-8 (1A &amp; 1B)</li> </ul>	<p>Typical SASA High School courses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mathematics (4 years required)</li> <li>● English (4 years required)</li> <li>● Science (3-4 years)</li> <li>● Social Studies (3 years)</li> <li>● Band (Elective)</li> <li>● Spanish/Foreign Language (2 years)</li> <li>● Other Visual or Performing Arts Concentration or elective(s) (1 Year)</li> <li>● Yearbook, Film in Literature, Writing for Publications, Robotics, AP, SCC, dual enrollment or online</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Band (Beginning Band, Advanced Beginning, Intermediate, Gr. 8 Concert)</li> </ul>	
<p>Middle School Extracurricular activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community Education Sports (6<sup>th</sup> grade)</li> <li>● Basketball (7-8)</li> <li>● Volleyball (7-8)</li> <li>● Theatre Productions</li> <li>● Track (7-8)</li> <li>● Dances (6-8)</li> <li>● Jujitsu</li> <li>● Spelling Club (6-8)</li> <li>● Math Counts (6-8)</li> <li>● First Tech Challenge(6-8)</li> <li>● Student Council (6-8)</li> <li>● National Junior Honor Society (7-8)</li> <li>● Cheerleading (7-8)</li> <li>● After school tutoring (6-8)</li> <li>● Various clubs: student initiatives</li> </ul>	<p>High School Extracurricular activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Literary Publications</li> <li>● Yearbook</li> <li>● Model U.N. Club</li> <li>● School wide Musical</li> <li>● Dances</li> <li>● Theatre Productions</li> <li>● Michigan Youth Arts Festival, MSBOA, MVMEA</li> <li>● National Honor Society</li> <li>● National Art Honor Society</li> <li>● Science &amp; Engineering Teams</li> <li>● First Robotics</li> <li>● Soccer (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Football (w / Valley Lutheran HS) (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Basketball (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Cross Country (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Volleyball (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Track &amp; Field (Full Day only)</li> <li>● Student Council</li> <li>● Conferences and tours</li> <li>● Clubs of Student Interest (Chemistry, Mathematics, Ultimate Frisbee Club, Multicultural Club, Philosophy Club)</li> </ul>

In order to remain in good academic standing, the following requirements are in place (2017

SASA Open House Presentation):

- Students must maintain a “C” average minimum in all courses and a “C+” or better average minimum in Concentration program to remain a student in good standing at SASA.

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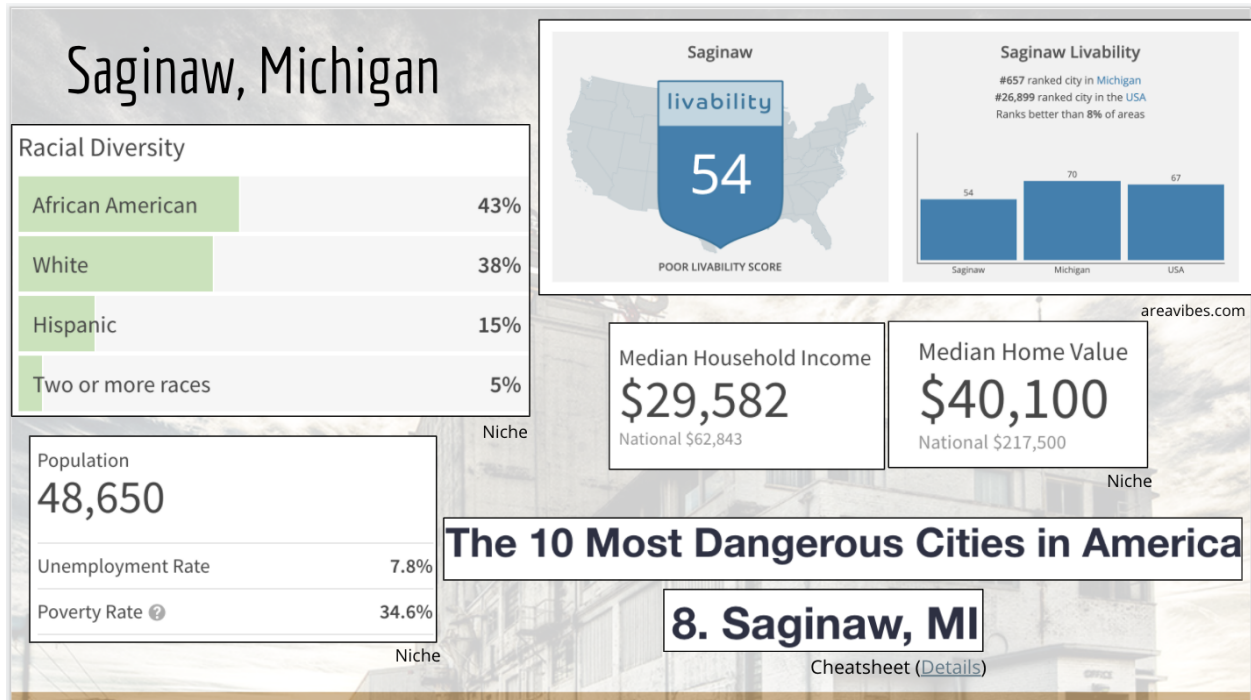
- Students failing to meet standards for performance are placed on Academic Probation at Term 1 and provided additional support to aid success. Progress is monitored at each grading window (8 times/year).
- Students may be reduced to ½ day or be required to leave SASA within 1 semester, if the necessary improvements are not made.
- Students must commit to studying a minimum of 2-3 hours/day.
- Students are expected to be in attendance a minimum of 90% of the school year.

SASA's graduation rate is 100% with most students attending college on merit as well as need-based scholarship. SASA alumni embark on successful careers in and beyond their field of study and, as a 1999 graduate of the CAS program (concentration: English Language Arts), I can personally attest to the impact CAS/SASA has made in my skillset as a writer and professional drive as a business owner and educator.

Stepping beyond SASA's curricular model, reputation, and success, contextual factors offer a more nuanced profile of this school, and beg further questions. When I describe my experience at this school to others, they assume it is either a private school or at least located in a wealthy district, neither of which is true. In fact, far from it. 35% of Saginaw's 50,000 residents live below the poverty line. The median household income is \$30,000 and the median home value is \$40,000 (Saginaw Public Schools, 2021). The unemployment rate in Saginaw is more than double the national average and Saginaw regularly ranks in the top 10 most dangerous places to live in America based on violent crimes incidents per 1,000 residents (Rawes, 2016). Areavibes

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gave Saginaw a livability score of 54 which ranks Saginaw better than only 8% of areas in the country.

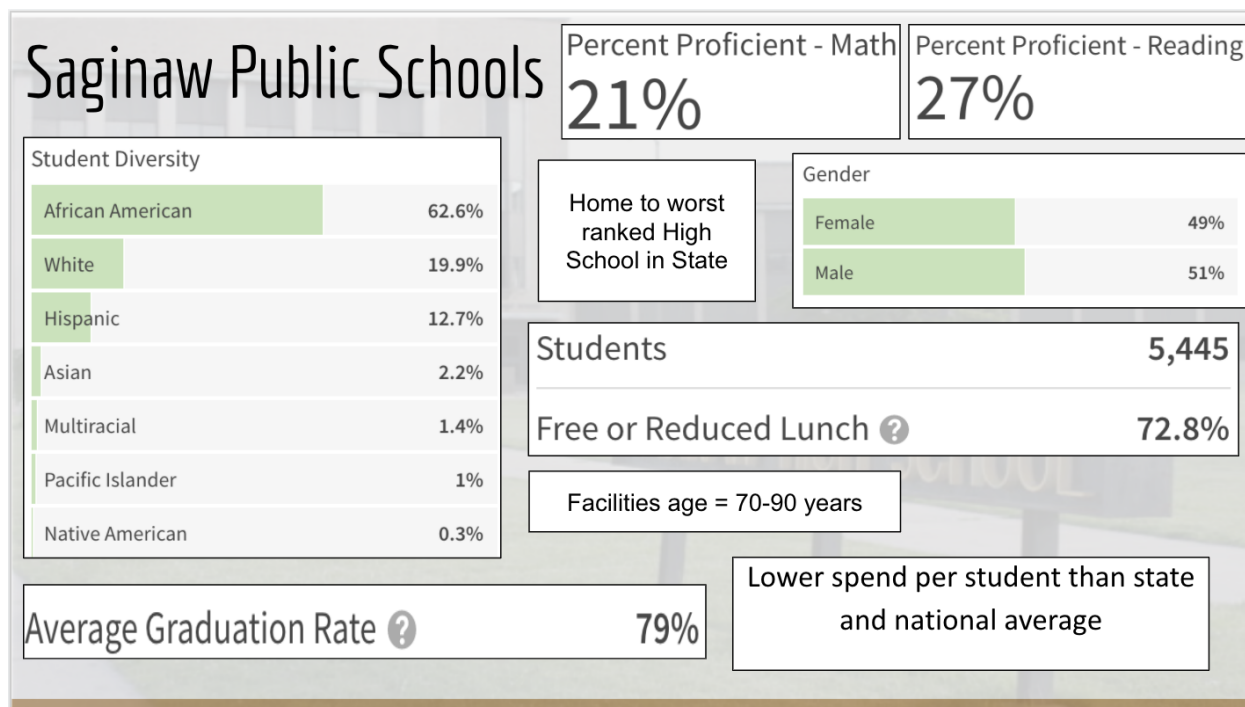


*Note: Slide from Capstone Presentation, April 2021*

The school district in which SASA is housed, Saginaw Public Schools (SPS), tells an all-too-common story for a high-poverty school district: 73% of the roughly 5500 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch; 63% are African American; 20% are White; 13% are Hispanic; 2% are Asian; 1.4% are Multiracial; 1% are Pacific Islander; and .3% are Native American (Students at Saginaw Public Schools, 2021). Annual spending per student is higher than that of the state average as well as SASA (\$10,901 and \$10,148, respectively). Several Facilities are 70-90 years old. Average test proficiency scores for math and reading are in the 20th percentile

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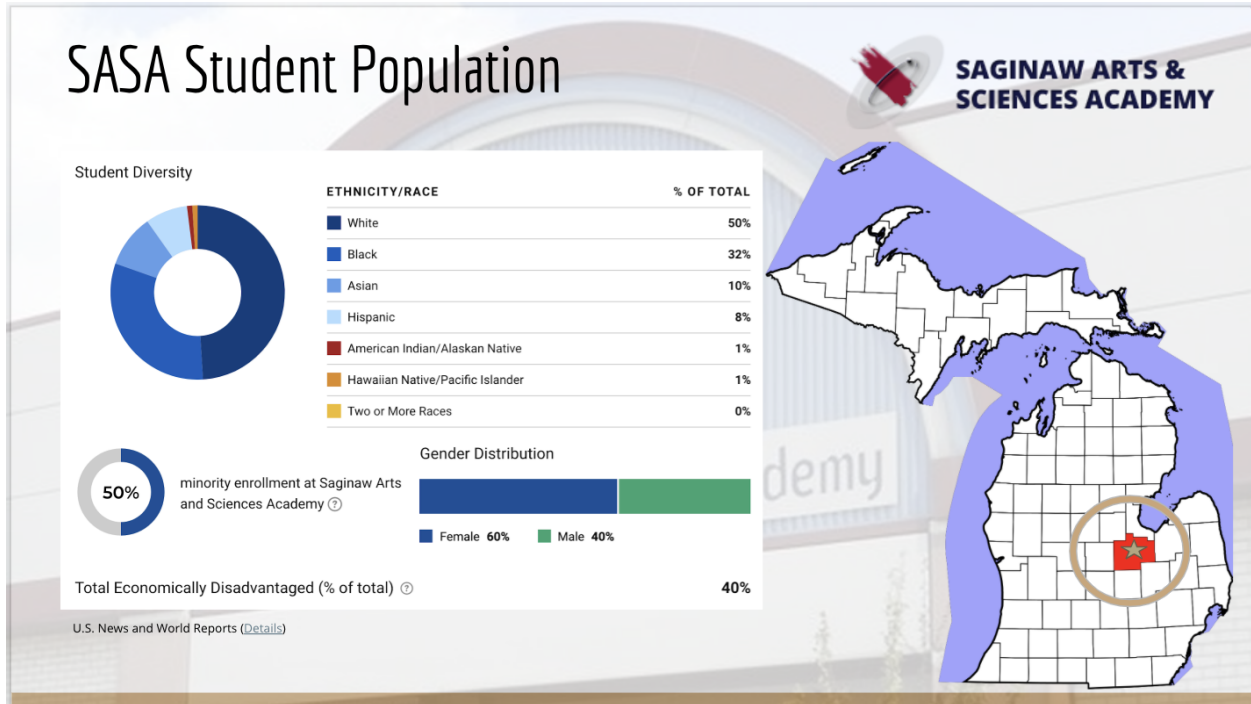
range and the district houses some of the lowest ranked schools in the state (Higgins, 2016).



*Note: Slide from Capstone Presentation, April 2021*

Of SASA's 580 students, 40% are eligible for free or reduced lunch; 50% are White; 32% are African American; 10% are Asian; 8% are Hispanic; 1% are Native American; and 1% are Pacific Islander. SASA's free or reduced lunch eligibility is lower than SPS, but higher than or equivalent to surrounding counties as well as Michigan averages. SASA counts students from neighboring Tuscola and Genesee Counties (1.9% and .2%, respectively) among its enrollment, though the majority of students from AY 2020-21 come from Saginaw County (86.3%), Bay County (7%), and Midland (4.6%). The table provides a contextualization and comparative understanding of demographic and socioeconomic statistics as they relate to the environment in which SASA operates.





Note: Slide from Capstone Presentation, April 2021

	SASA (within SPS) <sup>1</sup>	Saginaw Public Schools <sup>2</sup>	Saginaw Township Schools <sup>3</sup>	Midland Public Schools <sup>4</sup>	Bay County Schools <sup>5</sup>	Michigan Public Schools <sup>6</sup>	USA Public School Students <sup>7</sup>
Annual Per Student Spending	\$10,148 (2019) <sup>13</sup>	\$11,858 (2019) <sup>12</sup>	\$9,930 (2019) <sup>12</sup>	\$10,356 (2019) <sup>12</sup>	\$9,826 (2019) <sup>12</sup>	\$10,901 (2019) <sup>12</sup>	N/A
# Students	519	5445	4789	7634	7504	1.47m <sup>8</sup>	50.04m <sup>8</sup>
Free/Reduced Lunch Eligible	42%	72.8%	44.2%	28.2%	50.3%	50.3% <sup>8</sup>	52.6% <sup>8</sup>
White	48.7%	19.9%	58.1%	86.2%	79.7%	65.28%	46%
African American	32.9%	62.6%	18.3%	2.2%	3.8%	17.9%	15%

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Asian	10.2%	2.2%	4.1%	4.3%	.6%	3.46%	.05%
Hispanic	6.6%	12.7%	14.7%	4.2%	9.6%	8.25%	27%
Native American	.8%	.3%	.2%	.4%	.6%	.6%	.009%
Pacific Islander	.6%	1%	.4%	.2%	0	.08%	.003%
Multiracial	.2%	1.4%	4.3%	2.7%	5.8%	4.42%	.04%
Student/Teacher Ratio	19:1	16:1	19:1	19:1	18:1	18:1 <sup>9</sup>	16:1 <sup>10</sup>

*Note. Data are from Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy (2021)<sup>1</sup>; Saginaw Public Schools (2021)<sup>2</sup>; Students at Saginaw Township Community Schools (2021)<sup>3</sup>; Midland Public Schools (2021)<sup>4</sup>; Bay City School District (2021)<sup>5</sup>; Student Enrollment Counts Report (2021)<sup>6</sup>; Bustamante, J. (2019)<sup>7</sup>; Digest of Education Statistics (2019)<sup>8</sup>; Public Schools Student:Teacher Ratio Statistics in Michigan (2021)<sup>9</sup>; Average Public School Student: Teacher Ratio (2021)<sup>10</sup>; Average Public School Student: Teacher Ratio (2021)<sup>11</sup>; Based on General Fund Expenditures from Michigan Public School Districts Ranked By Selected Financial Data (2018-2019) (2020)<sup>12</sup>; State and Federal Programs (2021)<sup>13</sup>*

The building that houses the SASA school is a former Montgomery Ward department store on the west side of the city, right along the river, next to the railroad tracks, surrounded by empty lots, a struggling strip mall, light industrial, and a gas station. There are no homes in the area. If you were unaware of SASA's reputation, you would assume the building is another warehouse but it's really a complicated geode: windowless and unimpressive on the outside, with award-winning students and teachers on the inside. Daily, these dedicated people pass through the halls, which are buckling and shifting over the sawdust foundation upon which the building was constructed. The building is on the remains of a lumber mill. The walls and floors have bubbles and pockets. The plumbing regularly backs up. The HVAC system is taxed. A new

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theatre and gym were constructed for the school in the late 2000s, and due to the sawdust foundation, are secured upon 40+ foot pylons driven down to the bedrock. And while the building has been described as 5 years from condemnable, what matters most is what continues to happen in this building in spite of the setting.



*Note: Slide from Capstone Presentation, April 2021*

SASA goes against the grain in several key respects related to larger discussions of public education as well as education in high-poverty areas:

- Magnet Program serving multiple counties
- An extremely high-performing school in an economically depressed area
- Incredibly strong and well maintained focus on the arts in spite of broad slashes to arts funding even in more well off districts

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- Persistence of a concentration program in spite of increased demands for math and ELA testing and accountability

What emerges is the fundamental question at the core of effective school research: What does it really take to make an effective school? SASA offers the opportunity to determine what is needed for a public school to succeed even with a high-poverty rate. When schools are generally as good as the tax base that goes into them, figuring out how to create a school that is truly great, in spite of the wealth gap, is what saves the concept of public schools from the claws of income inequality.

## Organizational Area of Inquiry

The goal of this Case Study is to contribute to the existing literature on creating and scaling effective, innovative public school models designed to produce extraordinary results even in spite of what appear to be sub-optimal financial, political, or community conditions. In other words: “How does SASA survive and thrive given its status as a high-poverty school in a high-crime, high-unemployment, low-income area?” Understanding the history and evolution of SASA, as well as the current factors in its success can provide lessons to education leaders across the country on how to thrive in spite of circumstances that would otherwise present as obstacles including:

- **Growing inequality across district budgets.** According to EdBuild (2020), “non-white school districts get \$23 billion less than white school districts despite serving the same number of students.” High-Poverty school districts on average, both predominantly white and non-white, receive over \$2,000 less per student in state and federal aid than low-poverty predominantly white schools. State-by-state school funding formula comparisons using EdBuild’s 23Billion report show unconscionable disparities in funding between high- and low- poverty school districts. However among funding disparity studies, Michigan’s funding formula appears to be a relatively bright spot in terms of state funding equality and redistribution. For example, while it is reported that predominantly nonwhite high-poverty school districts in Massachusetts have an average of 12% less funding than predominantly low poverty white schools, Michigan’s state funding formula suggests only a 1% difference between high-poverty predominantly nonwhite schools and low-poverty white schools. Though Michigan funding on average

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is lower than the national average in low poverty nonwhite schools, it is higher in high-poverty nonwhite schools than the national average as well. This case study will also examine the impact of Michigan's funding formula on SASA's spending and perhaps offer clues as to how SASA is able to survive and thrive amid generally low overall funding.

- **Rapidly increased Focus on High-Stakes Tests.** Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), active from 2001-2015, every state was required to annually test students in reading and math in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. Failure to post and improve upon standardized test scores led to harsh punitive measures tied to funding and school governance. Though the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 retracted some of the harshest federal penalties associated with less than desirable test scores, high-stakes testing is still a fundamental part of ESSA. In addition, states must come up with another accountability measure in addition to high-stakes testing but must also still post annual results across socio-demographic subgroups against state-determined proficiency targets. Test results still determine funding and governance at the state level which means high-stakes testing still results in an increased focus on test preparation against the two tested areas: reading and mathematics. This increased focus takes time away from other core subjects as well as electives which, for schools in which the test scores are generally lower, means a compounding effect of fewer and fewer options as more and more focus is placed on getting students to pass the tests. This leads to the next problem:

- **Hyperfocus on Test-Specific Reading and Mathematics Preparation as well as Fewer Advanced Options.** For struggling districts, focus on passing high-stakes tests means hyperfocus on the test subjects potentially to the detriment of other subject offerings as well as advanced levels. The likelihood that a high-poverty school will offer advanced subjects such as Calculus, Physics, AP or IB courses, or Algebra in Middle School drops below 75% the frequency of low poverty school districts (GAO, 2018). Even though research consistently shows a positive correlation between arts education and scholastic achievement and that the correlation is strongest for lowest income students (Catterall, 2009; Brown, et al, 2010; Neville et al, 2008), high-poverty schools are less likely to have access to arts education offerings.
- **Should including more hours of instruction translate to Breadth of survey courses vs Depth of Exploration?** While the debate over Block vs Traditional scheduling continues without clear evidence of an overall winning formula, there is strong evidence to suggest that extended learning times (Patall et al, 2010) “can be a particularly effective means to support student learning for students who are most at risk of school failure.” Further, because high-poverty students are less likely than “their more affluent peers to have education resources outside of school, they may benefit more from increased school time” (Silva, 2007). The SASA model follows a hybrid approach including extended/block time for a concentration as well as several periods for survey exploration of other subject matter. Further evidence suggests in-depth study of a particular area during high school supports greater success in the college application of the subject. In Schwartz et al (2009) students who reported covering at least 1 major topic in depth in high school

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science, for a month or longer, were found to earn higher grades in college science than did students who reported no coverage in depth. By contrast, “students reporting breadth in their high school course, covering all major topics, did not appear to have any advantage in chemistry or physics and a significant disadvantage in biology.” This research suggests support for a SASA like model in which depth in a single subject may constitute a greater link to future success than breadth across multiple subjects.

How SASA is able to navigate these obstacles in a setting that would otherwise struggle to provide a gifted and talented program provides lessons for other schools that want to offer not only similar programming but to make gains across the board for their students.



## Literature Review

To bring as much contextual understanding to SASA, and to create a framework for further analysis, I included several areas of inquiry within the literature review and then triangulated amongst those areas for themes to drive further inquiry. The SASA model suggests a review of literature on Effective Schools, High-Performance/High-Poverty Schools, Project-Based Learning, Hybrid Block/Traditional Scheduling Model, Magnet Schools, Performing/Visual Arts Programs, and Gifted/Talented Programs. Beginning with the basic concept of effective schools, the literature review will then move into specific literature around effective schools within an HP/HP setting, and then move on to supporting literature regarding HP/HP schools that use a modified block scheduling models, HP/HP schools that operate as Magnet Schools, HP/HP schools with heavy emphasis on the Performing and Visual Arts, and finally HP/HP schools with a Gifted/Talented program. Each area is explored below for suggestions to aid in the creation of a conceptual framework.

**Effective Schools.** A broad review of effective school literature stemming from the effective schools movement of the 1960s (Coleman, et al, 1966) and refined over the following decades (Edmonds, 1982; Lezotte & Pepperl, 1990; Brookover, et al, 1995) isolates several key qualities of effective schools including:

- High-Quality Instructional Leadership
- Clear and Focused Mission
- Safe and Orderly Environment
- Climate of High Expectations

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- Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
- Positive Home-School Relations
- Sufficient Opportunity to Learn/Student Time on Task

More modern additions to effective schools literature support these qualities (Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; Trujillo, 2013; Daly and Finnigan, 2013) with articulation of instructional practices that go beyond “high quality” to elucidate effectiveness in the age of high-stakes testing. In addition to a clear and focused mission (coherent organization structures, Trujillo, 2013) strong instructional leadership, and frequent progress monitoring, focused professional learning as well as standards-aligned curricula are now also measures of note (Trujillo, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2013).

**High-Performing/High-Poverty Schools.** The existing literature would classify SASA as a High-Performance/High-Poverty (HP/HP) school and support its candidacy for observational study and possible inclusion in scholarship on extracting and extrapolating abstracted best practices for creating HP/HP schools. (Carter, 2000; Bryk et al, 2010). Each factor in turn further develops the profile of this HP/HP school. Across the literature, several common features emerge about high-performing high-poverty schools in contrast with lower-performing high-poverty schools (Kannapel et al, 2005; Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; Garcia-Velasquez, 2019; Parrett & Budge, 2020) including:

- High expectations and a belief that all students in the school can succeed at high levels
- Collaborative decision making including non-authoritarian school principal
- Teacher investment in student success and strong work ethic
- Strategic assignment of staff with a growth mindset

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- Caring and respectful interaction among stakeholders and regular teacher-parent communication
- Dedication to equity, diversity, and inclusion

Many of these HP/HP school traits understandably overlap with those of effective schools in general but by narrowing in on the traits that are most successful for high-poverty schools we gain an understanding of the effective school traits that make the biggest impact within a high-poverty setting. A side-by-side comparison of effective school and HP/HP school traits reveals a majority overlap in concepts regardless of a specific context for the high-performance school.

Effective School Traits	High-Performance/High-Poverty School Traits	Commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate of High Expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High expectations and a belief that all students in the school can succeed at high levels</li> </ul>	<p>A virtual direct comparison of a common community trait</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-Quality Instructional Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative decision making including non-authoritarian school principal</li> </ul>	<p>Both bodies of research suggest a requirement of high-quality instructional leadership with the HP/HP literature expanding on the concept to discuss specific qualities that define high quality in the context.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and Focused Mission</li> <li>• Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic assignment of staff with a growth mindset</li> </ul>	<p>Strategic assignment of staff who have a growth mindset suggests application of a clear and focused mission toward high performance</p>

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		within the high poverty context.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Positive Home-School Relations</li> <li>● Safe and Orderly Environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Caring and respectful interaction among stakeholders and regular teacher-parent communication</li> </ul>	Creation and maintenance of a safe congenial community environment both within and beyond the school as well as connection and looping in of parents are important regardless of effective school context.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sufficient Opportunity to Learn/Student Time on Task</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher investment in student success and strong work ethic</li> </ul>	Investment in success and time on task are necessary for successful instructional uptake.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dedication to equity, diversity, and inclusion</li> </ul>	One area not covered by the effective schools literature but for which a revision is called for.

Within a HP/HP environment a culture of high expectations coupled with sufficient opportunities does not specifically suggest the methodology or format for instruction, just that there is one that is effective. In addition, when it comes to school effectiveness, we need to go deeper than the standard racial, gender, and socioeconomic factors to create real interventions (Jacobsen et al, 2012). Review of the literature around the next two concepts covers two areas of uniqueness in the SASA model: a widespread use of Project-Based Learning combined with a modified Block Scheduling approach.

**Project-Based Learning.** While high-stakes testing is now a fact of life in K-12 schools, and frequent progress monitoring is an effective schools quality, the literature is hesitant to suggest

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current high-stakes testing efforts should be the ultimate goal or achievement aim of such efforts (Hamilton, et al, 2013). Rather, progress monitoring can move beyond just preparation for the current model of cloze-question high-stakes assessments toward a performance model that includes authentic, real world projects, interactions and validations (Darling-Hammond, 2014) also known as project-based learning. These could include conducting an experiment, writing an analysis, creating a work of art, performing a work of drama, and other project-based instructional products routinely created in the classroom. And while traditional high-stakes testing models prevail at the state level, project-based learning scholarship suggests positive effects on overall student achievement including high-stakes tests scores for students who participate in the model. (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Hernandez-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009; Mergendoller & Thomas, 2005)

More specifically, students in high-poverty areas appear to make the most gains with a project-based instructional approach. (Geier et al, 2008; Gordon et al, 2001). In fact, students using a project-based learning model are suggested to perform as high as or better on high-stakes tests including AP examinations than students using a more traditional model of instruction (Gallagher & Stepien, 1996; Parker et al, 2011; Parker et al, 2013).

**Hybrid Block/Traditional Scheduling Model.** The literature around the efficacy of block vs. traditional scheduling models is mixed, depending on the goal of the program. While schools under study generally either use a traditional schedule (7-8 classes per day of about 50 minutes of instruction) or a Block schedule (2-3 classes every other day of 80-120 minutes of instruction) there is not as much research covering the concept of a modified block schedule in which only one subject of instruction is delivered in a block while the remaining subjects are delivered in a

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traditional schedule. While there is literature to suggest increased instructional time and block scheduling helps students obtain a richer, deeper understanding of a particular subject (Picucci et al, 2004; Dobbie & Fryer, 2013), there is also literature to suggest that end of year high-stakes tests outcomes are stronger in a traditional schedule format (Gruber & Onwuegbuzie, 2001; Ford, 2015). However, for the Block vs. Traditional model debate to be fully relevant, the research should take into account the school's context in a high-poverty setting. How does that context change the debate? In investigation spanning both Block and Traditional scheduling models, the research suggests block scheduling to offer an advantage to "alienated student populations" among whom african american students were included (Bernstein et al, 2008) as well as students in high poverty schools (Picucci et al, 2004). Block scheduling also impacts student and parent perceptions of performance (Veal, 2000) as students in a block schedule felt their grades were improved over how traditional schedule students felt about their grades. For a school such as SASA to employ a hybrid model of block scheduling for one subject and traditional scheduling for the remaining subjects, it would be subject to the strengths and weaknesses of both models. Block for one subject supports deeper exploration of a single subject area and when paired with a project-based approach could support the existing literature suggesting the strength of depth vs. breadth in student exploration (Gallagher & Stepien, 1996; Parker et al, 2011; Patall et al, 2010; Silva, 2007; Schwartz et al, 2009). Traditional scheduling appears to support slightly better performance on high-stakes tests (Gruber & Onwuegbuzie, 2001; Ford, 2015).

**Magnet Schools.** Originating in the 1960s, Magnet schools were tasked with three main goals:

1. Provide innovative educational programming

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2. Attract students from across traditional district boundaries
3. Assist with desegregation efforts following Brown V. Board of Education

The research suggests they have been generally effective with desegregation efforts (Arcia, 2006; Steel & Levine, 1994) because their implementation requires working across district boundaries which often serve as fences of racial as well as socioeconomic segregation. How each magnet school fulfills the first goal of a magnet school, to offer innovative educational programming, varies widely. The most common magnet school themes (Polikoff & Hardaway, 2017) include:

1. STEM
2. Performing and Visual Arts
3. Health/Medicine

Other themes include global/international studies, hospitality, automotive, foreign-language based, agriculture, Montessori and gifted/talented (Polikoff & Hardaway, 2017).

Magnet School admission is based on application but selection can range from lottery to academic ability, essay, test, recommendations, behavior or a combination thereof. In spite of a widely held belief that magnet schools are always academically selective, 3 out of 4 magnet Schools use a lottery system for admission. (Fast Facts about Magnet Schools, n.d.) Magnet schools routinely enroll a larger proportion of minority and high-poverty students than their traditional district counterparts while maintaining higher performance levels than their traditional counterparts (Fast Facts about Magnet Schools, n.d.). Yet magnet schools comprise less than 4% of all public schools which is even less than Charter Schools (Polikoff & Hardaway, 2017). Michigan, where SASA is located, is among the most frequent sites for magnet programs

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with a prevalence of 12%, which is actually greater than the state's Charter School count (10%) (Polikoff & Hardaway, 2017). The literature suggests students in magnet schools generally perform as well as or better than students enrolled in traditional public schools (Gamoran, 1996; Blazer et al, 2012; MSOA, n.d.). While this could be attributed to higher quality students due to selection criteria, lottery-based admissions should control for this phenomenon.

Attributes of a magnet program may play a role in student achievement (4 Key Benefits of magnet Schools for Children, 2016), including:

- Specialized focus that is of interest to the student;
- The concept of choice to attend;
- Shared interest and community, and
- Greater diversity within the student body.

Magnet schools are not without controversy as they are routinely accused of skimming the best students from traditional schools and generally cost more to start and maintain (Chen, 2019)

There is also evidence to suggest magnet school impacts on desegregation are waning (Chen, 2019) and criticism on a narrow curriculum offering. However, can the same be said for a magnet school such as SASA that offers all of the focuses that traditionally are themes of several different magnet schools?

The final two concepts of import to this literature review represent two different themes for magnet schools in common use in public schools today and both are in use at SASA.

**Performing/Visual Arts Programs.** Constituting the second most popular type of magnet School program, Performing Arts-focused programs are still relatively rare. While arts education in public schools finds popular support in public opinion polls (Americans for the Arts, 2005)



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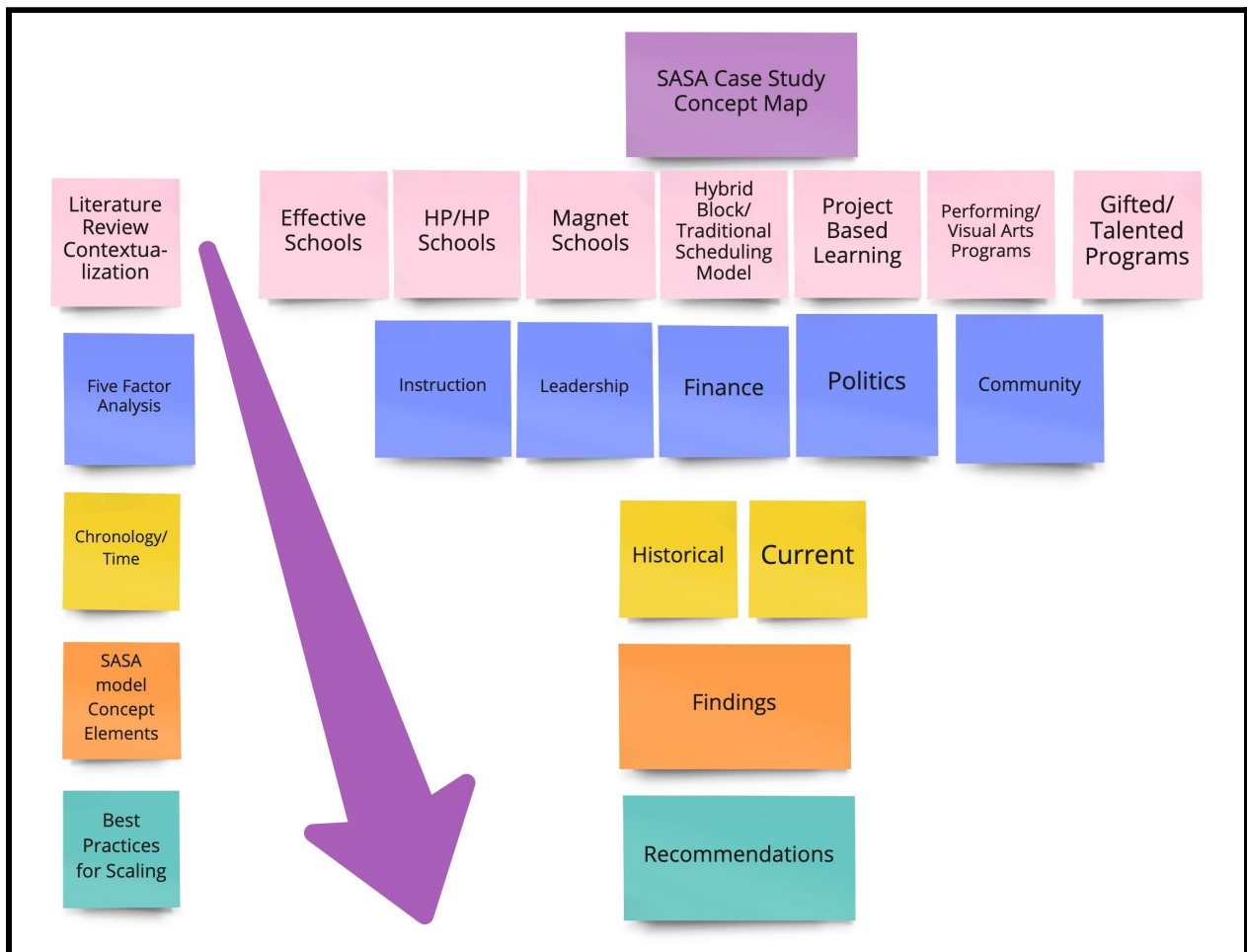
availability of arts education programs is neither universally available in public schools nor offered with frequency. Size of school positively correlates with the presence of an arts program (Elpus, 2020) though offerings vary widely. Presence of an arts program does not seem to bear a relationship with the school's racial/ethnic composition but, there is a negative correlation between presence of arts program and proportion of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch (Elpus, 2020). The research into the impact of performing and visual arts courses on student success is well studied with positive correlations between arts education access and student behavior and achievement in other courses. (Elpus, 2020) SASA's model, in which all students are exposed to the arts frequently through electives and living arts assemblies, and students can concentrate in an area of the arts (Dance, Theatre, Voice/Keyboard, Visual Art 2-D, Visual Art 3-D) for 2-3 hours daily suggests a highly unusual approach within a high-poverty setting. However, it is one that may make the greatest impact given context.

**Gifted/Talented Programs.** About 6% of public school students are enrolled in gifted and talented (G/T) programs with an estimated further 5% on waiting lists to join existing programs (*Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted Education*, 2021). While demand for G/T programs is healthy, there are no federal funds for such programs and state programs vary widely in terms of funding and availability. Separate G/T programs find the same controversy as Magnet programs in accusation that they skim from the comprehensive schools and classes. Schools in High- and Low-poverty contexts report having gifted programs, but low-poverty students are more than twice as likely to participate and minority students, regardless of poverty level, are far less likely to participate (Yaluma & Tyner, 2018).

## Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework for this case study acknowledges the following:

- Multiple concepts are at work within the SASA model,
- This case study is an examination of how all of these concepts are part of the model's architecture.
- The concepts necessarily interplay to produce success.
- One aim of this case study is to extrapolate and make cross-cutting themes that might aid in a holistic understanding of the SASA model.



*Note: Conceptual Framework of Inquiry*

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The first broad topic of research is Effective Schools which was modified by the subtopic of Effective Schools within a High-Poverty setting, otherwise known as HP/HP. Recognizing the overlap in themes present within both bodies of literature, the remaining concepts explored within the Literature Review were viewed through their own lens with the added context of how those concepts exist in a high-poverty environment. From there, the concepts of Block and Traditional Scheduling Models find a Hybrid approach that appears to offer success in its focus on one concentration subject for the block accompanied by traditional scheduling for the non-concentration subjects. From there, how the program leverages the concentration time using a Project-Based Learning approach contextualizes and provides deeper understanding, engagement, and validation of instructional content within at least the concentration block. From there, the governance model of the school uses a magnet approach to cut across district boundaries to serve and pull from a larger base of talent. That the magnet school uses multiple magnet School themes including Performing and Visual Arts, STEM, Global Studies, Literature, as well as a Gifted and Talented Focus creates sort of a meta-magnet focus. To understand how all of these concepts interplay with one another rather than exploring each concept in isolation in this Case Study, factors were extrapolated to provide a more abstract framework.

Effective School and HP/HP School literature hits on the organizational factors of: Leadership, Community, Instruction, Finance, and Politics. How these factors interplay to produce positive or negative results within a public school, or any educational organization, for that matter, suggests a more cohesive set of lessons than looking only at the concepts that were extrapolated to create these factors. Each concept further develops and justifies this five factor approach. Factors are defined below.

**Leadership.** Effective schools demonstrate effective leadership. (Edmonds, 1982; Lezotte & Pepperl, 1990; Brookover, et al, 1995) An effective school leader is someone who “promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources” (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Given the innovative, multi-concept approach SASA employs in its school model, it is important to understand the qualities of leadership that make this possible. There are three lenses of leadership that will be explored in the data:

- Transformational: The leader works with team members to identify needed change, envisioning and executing the change as a team.
- Collaborative: The leader engages collective intelligence to deliver results across organisational boundaries when ordinary mechanisms of control are absent. It’s grounded in a belief that all of us together can be smarter, more creative, and more competent than any of us alone, especially when it comes to addressing the kinds of novel, complex, and multifaceted problems that organisations face today. (Oxford Leadership, 2016)
- Instructional: An instructional leadership mindset includes an intense moral purpose focused on promoting deep student learning, professional inquiry, trusting relationships and seeking evidence in action (Timperley, 2011).

The study of leadership practices at work within SASA will be examined through these three lenses - transformational, collaborative, and instructional leadership theory - and will be applied not only to the actions of administrators but also teachers. What are the leadership practices and qualities that exist or need to be cultivated or considered to foster successful creation and

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continuation of a program like SASA? It is possible that what makes SASA leadership effective would not work in another context but that is why the remaining factors of Instruction, Community, Politics, and Finance must also be examined for their contributions to a successful model.

**Instruction.** How effective schools model and manage instruction is certainly not one-size-fits-all, and where instruction differs within an HP/HP environment, or a successful magnet school focusing on as many themes as SASA, or a school using project-based learning, allows us to create a more nuanced Case Study. Taking these instructional model concepts in isolation yields literature that generally supports their use given certain circumstances, but how often are these instructional models truly used in isolation from one another? More importantly, what are the elements related to the instructional factor that SASA administrators and teachers find to be most effective or at least in greatest influence of the overall success of the organization? Beyond instructional practices, what are the instructional cultures, expectations, and policies in existence at SASA?

**Finance.** Beyond the theoretical concepts discussed above, there are basic questions of a historical, financial, and logistical nature. Effective schools focus differently on their financial operations (Edmonds, 1982; Lezotte & Pepperl, 1990; Brookover, et al, 1995). Of paramount importance is to understand how SASA is funded. Saginaw, like many districts in states all over America, uses a combination of Federal, State, and Local taxation and funding. In Michigan, with the passage of Proposal A in 1994, the state now provides 80% of funding while local sources must make up the remaining 20% (Summers, 2019). The goal of Proposal A was to provide greater parity of spending across rich and poor districts without unnecessary burden on local

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property taxes. A collateral benefit (whether intended or not) is the “significant positive effect on student performance in the lowest-spending districts as measured in state tests” (Roy, 2011).

As adapted from Jefferson (2005) the most important finance questions may be as follows:

What are the spending differences, if any, for SASA students? Does SASA require extra funding for its students? If so, how does it obtain that funding? And more importantly, what is the money being spent on? It is suggested that SASA students make do with less funding (Knake, 2019) but from my initial understanding, SASA is actually a revenue-generating enterprise for the Saginaw Public School District because they draw students, along with half or all of their tuition dollars, from neighboring districts.

**Politics.** As an HP/HP magnet school housed inside a challenged school district that cuts across districts to gather membership, understanding how SASA navigates and finds footing within Saginaw Public Schools and the Tri-County area raises questions of trust, legitimacy, and equity which require that SASA have political advocates within local government (both of the city and the school district) to support its continued survival. It also requires that SASA exist in an environment that supports magnet programs and at least allows but more likely encourages cross-district attendance (School Choice) for at least some of the student body. What are the political factors that support this model and an overall model inter-district cooperation?

Wong and Shen’s (2007) study of success in mayoral control of school districts highlights the importance of certain political elements: results-driven, election-based, public-facing, negotiation and power over certain governance levers that can influence school success.

Likewise, effective Superintendents are found to focus on results, goals, communication of those goals, board alignment and transparency of process (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

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From the beginning, SASA students have been encouraged to compete at the state and national level, raising the profile of the school even while other schools within the district struggle academically. What in the political environment of the City of Saginaw and Saginaw Public Schools supports this contrast? To what extent do these political elements help SASA and Saginaw's leadership navigate the complexities of housing such an unusual school within the school district?

**Community.** A broad factor of influence within effective schools is that of community. To define this factor, we need to look at the community outside of the school and within the school. What factors about the external community allow for and even encourage SASA to exist as it does, where it does? And what forces, cultures, attitudes, and practices are at work within the SASA community that drive its success. I look to Preston et al (2017) and Shannon & Bylsma (2007) in their extensive literature reviews on the subject of HP/HP schools and community, a central focus is how to seed a culture of continued support within the community of operation. How does SASA communicate to its community that it successfully meets a need, earn the community's respect and confidence, and continue to receive support from the community?

**Time.** Cutting across the five factors is the element of time and chronology. How the factors influenced the start of the school may be quite different in navigating the school's continued operation today. The Conceptual Framework further includes a historical vs modern facet across the five factor analysis to understand the evolution from start-up to sustainable model over the last 40 years. Historically, what was the impetus for starting the school? Who started it? How and Why? How has the school changed over time?

## Research Questions

The purpose of this Case Study is to gain an understanding of the factors that contribute to and have contributed to the longitudinal success of SASA in the face of what some data might describe as overwhelming obstacles. The Effective Schools literature creates the foundation for this line of inquiry and is influenced by the other specific concepts at play within the SASA model (HP/HP Models, Magnet Schools, etc) to inform a more general theoretical framework of factors for evaluating impacts and effects. The factors include Instruction, Leadership, Finance, Politics, and Community as detailed in the conceptual framework section. Cutting across the five factors is the element of chronology. How the factors influenced the start of the school may be quite different in navigating the school's continued operation today. Therefore, the research questions of central import to this Case Study are:

1. How did the five factors (instruction, leadership, finance, politics, and community) foster the historical development of the school?
2. How do these five factors continue to support the school to be successful?

Specific sub questions within these questions are geared toward understanding the differences in understanding from and administrative as well as a teacher perspective.



## Project Design

**Data Collection.** Data collection focused on exposition of the five factors of impact on school performance including Leadership, Politics, Finance, Community, and Instruction as well as exposing comparisons and contrasts across three cross-factor influences:

1. Historical vs. Current Operations
2. Administrator vs. Teacher perspective
3. Within SASA vs. Outside SASA

As the purpose of this case study is to understand what makes SASA successful, understanding how SASA navigates the five factors of impact on school performance is paramount; as is gaining a comparative understanding from within and outside the organization as well as across roles and time.

**Instruments and Tools.** Data collection relied almost exclusively upon in-depth one-to-one interviews. As the primary method of data collection, interviews were chosen to allow each participant a greater opportunity to provide explanations, anecdotes, and stories. As a case study whose goal is to craft the story of one school's excellence in spite of its obstacles, qualitative interviewing via open-ended questions within the five-factor framework allowed a greater depth of discovery and exposition to interview subjects. Two interview protocols were developed and are explained and described below, but using the interview method allowed flexibility to diverge from the protocol as necessary to understand the historical development and current operations of the program. The five factor analysis was used to frame each interview protocol. One-to-one interviews were chosen over surveys to capture a more accurate profile, voice, and perspective of each participant and to take advantage of the two-way nature

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of the method to draw out more detail. Focus Groups were considered but ultimately not pursued because the method allows for less individual participant exposition and the purpose was not to confirm insights gained through other methodologies but rather understand the story from multiple perspectives.

**Recruitment and Sampling.** Interview participants were recruited through a key stakeholder and network approach (snowball sampling) that occurred in two waves. Wave 1: Historical: a former instructor at CAS connected me to half of the participants comprising the historical and legacy administrators, teachers, and founding program members. Wave 2: Present Day: The principal of SASA paved the way to discussion with current SASA teachers and administrators. Participation in this case study was voluntary. In Wave 1, nine participants were interviewed, in some cases over multiple sessions. In Wave 2, nine additional participants were interviewed. Wave 1 consisted of 5 teachers and 4 administrators, with an average district or SASA-specific tenure of more than 25+ years of service. Several Wave 1 participants were either part of SASA's founding process or joined the school shortly thereafter. Wave 2 consisted of 1 administrator and 8 teachers, with an average district or SASA-specific tenure of 10-20 years of service. Every participant appeared eager and motivated to discuss what makes SASA special.

Participant	Position	SASA Tenure	Wave
1	Teacher	15+ years	Wave 1: Historical
2	Admin/Superintendent	40+ years in district	Wave 1: Historical
3	Teacher	30+ years	Wave 1: Historical
4	Admin/Principal	20+ years in district	Wave 1: Historical
5	Teacher	30+ years	Wave 1: Historical

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6	Teacher	25+ years	Wave 1: Historical
7	Admin/Principal	30+ years in district	Wave 1: Historical
8	Teacher	30+ years in district	Wave 1: Historical
9	Admin	25+ years in district	Wave 1: Historical
10	Admin/Principal	15+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
11	Teacher	15+ years in district	Wave 2: Present Day
12	Teacher	20+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
13	Teacher	15+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
14	Teacher	10+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
15	Teacher	10+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
16	Teacher	2+ years (10+ in district)	Wave 2: Present Day
17	Teacher	20+ years	Wave 2: Present Day
18	Teacher	5+ years	Wave 2: Present Day

*Note: Participant Demographics*

**Data Collection Sequence and Details.** Originally, plans were made to complete observations and interviews in person on location. Given travel and safety restrictions related to Covid-19, Data collection consisted of one-on-one Zoom interviews with each participant, ranging in length from 60-120 minutes. Classroom observations were not possible due to travel restrictions and lack of in-person sessions. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed manually by Scribie transcription services. Interviews generally were conducted in two phases: Historical and Present Day. Two interview cohorts were created with historical interviews spanning most of November and December 2020. Present-Day interviews were conducted mostly in December 2020 and January 2021, with some interviews occurring at earliest

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convenience for the participant but falling outside of the Cohort schedule. Arranging the interviews into two cohorts allowed for a systematic progression through the two research questions and evolution of the five factors utilizing the chronology and cause/effect that would most likely follow.

**Conceptual Framework Influence.** Two Interview Protocols were developed for the process, one focused on participants who identified largely as teachers and the other focused on participants who identified largely as administrators. Each interview protocol addressed each of the five factors of this project's conceptual framework with respect to the position of administrator or teacher. The same protocol was designed to be used by both historical and present-day cohort participants, depending on role identification as either teacher or administrator.

Beginning with the Teacher protocol, each interview touched on the five factors. Where the historic cohort was interviewed, present-tense questions were modified to past-tense and teachers were asked to recall their experiences at the time with each factor.

### **Teacher Interview Protocol**

#### **Project Background:**

- When I explain the history, organization, location, and accomplishments of SASA, most colleagues assume it is a private school. When I explain that it is a public magnet school, they don't believe it is possible to replicate. I'd like to spend time with you discussing your experiences with SASA and how it came to be and continues to operate to this day.

#### **A. Interviewee Background**

- What is your role at SASA?
- Tell me about your background before coming to SASA, including your educational background and what you did before becoming a SASA instructor.

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- How would you say your position at SASA is different from past teaching positions?
- Why did you come to work at SASA?

### Factor 1: Instruction

- Walk me through a day of teaching at SASA. How is the class structured in terms of students? In terms of instruction?
- What are your requirements for your students and what are those based on?
- What instructional and assessment requirements and goals do you need to meet?
- How would you compare how you meet those requirements at SASA vs. how you meet them at another school?
- What are the greatest challenges in teaching these students?
- What are your measuring sticks for success during the year?

### Factor 2a: Community Perspective (within SASA)

- Describe a typical SASA student for me.
- Describe the SASA community; What would you say is the level of community involvement of SASA?
- What supports are in place within SASA?
- What challenges do you face in terms of community at SASA?

### Factor 2b: Community Perspective (outside SASA)

- What is the greater community perspective of SASA (those outside of SASA)?
- How do you think SASA is positioned within the community? What role does it play?
- What would you say is the level of community involvement of SASA?
- What about Community support?

### Factor 3: Leadership

- What do you define as the leadership here at SASA?
- How does leadership support you?
- How are you treated as a teacher?

### Factor 4: Finance

- What financial or funding issues do you see at play at SASA?
- How would you compare SASA funding issues with those from other schools?
- If you need money for .... How do you get it?

### Factor 5: Politics

- What obstacles do you see to getting your job done?

- In your time at this school, what do you see as having improved or declined?

While an effort was made to progress through the five factors in order, conversation often skipped from one area to another based on relation of one story to another. The Administrative protocol followed the same Background plus 5-Factor flow, but with different emphasis in each area.

### **Administrator Interview Protocol**

#### **Project Background:**

- When I explain the history, organization, location, and accomplishments of SASA, most colleagues assume it is a private school. When I explain that it is a public magnet school, they don't believe it is possible to replicate. I'd like to spend time with you discussing your experiences with SASA and how it came to be and continues to operate to this day.

#### **A. Interviewee Background**

- What is your role at SASA?
- Tell me about your background before coming to SASA including your educational background and what you did before becoming a (name administrative role relative to SASA)
- How would you say your position at SASA is different from past positions?
- Why did you come to work at SASA?

#### **Factor 1: Instructional Perspective**

- What sets SASA instruction apart from other schools?
- Describe a typical SASA student for me/difference from students elsewhere.
- Describe a typical SASA teacher for me/difference from teachers elsewhere.
- What instructional and assessment requirements and goals do you need to meet?
- How would you compare how you meet those requirements at SASA vs. how you meet them at another school?

#### **Factor 2a: Community Perspective (within SASA)**

- What defines the SASA community?

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- What makes the SASA community different from other schools in the district/across counties?

### Factor 2b: Community Perspective (outside SASA)

- What do you think is the external community's perspective of SASA?
- How do you think the school's location within this community impacts it?

### D. Leadership

- What latitude do you have as a leader of this school?
- How do you choose to lead/Leadership style?
- What do you define as the leadership here at SASA?
- How does your leadership support you?

### E. Finance

- What is the funding model for students in SPS? How about SASA? How is it different? Where does SASA funding come from?
- What financial or funding issues do you see at play at SASA?
- How would you compare SASA funding issues with those from other schools?
- If you need money for .... How do you get it?

### F. Politics

- What political hurdles does SASA face? How about in comparison with other schools in Saginaw/outside Saginaw?

## Data Analysis

**Methodology.** Over 25 hours of interviews were manually transcribed by Scribie transcription service using a blend of automated first-pass transcription followed by manual clarification and clean-up performed by a human. Interview transcripts included timestamps as well as audio/video companion files. Interview files were uploaded to the MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 software program. Each interview was hand-coded using a three-round coding process to identify primary factors, themes within each factor, and sub-themes within each theme.

*Coding Round 1:* Round one coding for each interview coded each portion using one of eight primary codes.

1. Interview Opening/Capstone Background
2. Interview Subject Background
3. Leadership
4. Financial
5. Instruction
6. Political
7. Community
8. Interview Closing

*Coding Round 2:* Round two coding for each interview went in-depth to each Primary Factor to identify themes within each factor. For example, within Community discussion branched between External Community (outside of SASA) and Internal Community (within SASA) to illustrate not only the differences between SASA and other schools within the district and beyond, but also to elucidate the pressures and forces at work that shape community culture within and beyond SASA. Beyond External and Internal Community, themes within these two broad categories suggest the following theme categorizations:



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- External Community
  - District Relations/Issues
  - City Relations/Issues
  - Competition with Other Districts
  - Outside Perspectives/Misconceptions of SASA
- SASA Community
  - Differences between SASA and other Schools
  - Sources of Support
  - Private School Impression
  - The Building and Neighborhood
  - Evolution of Program
  - Student Culture
  - Concentration as Identity
  - Application School/Student Buy-in
  - SASA Geographic Reach

*Coding Round 3:* Round three coding for each interview focused on exposition of the themes for each factor into subthemes. For example, within the Community factor, the themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below. Tables of the remaining 4 factors are included in the Appendix.

Subfactors	Themes	Sub-Themes
External Community	District Relations/Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Superintendent</li> <li>● Union</li> <li>● District Issues</li> <li>● Schools of Choice</li> <li>● Competition for Students</li> </ul>
	City Relations/Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dwindling Population</li> <li>● Financial Struggles</li> <li>● Community Struggles</li> </ul>
	Competition with Other Districts	

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	Outside Perspectives/Misconceptions of SASA	
SASA Community	Differences between SASA and other Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class Size</li> <li>● Teacher Expectations/Dedication/Competitiveness</li> <li>● Teachers from Industry</li> <li>● Student Performance Levels/Expectations</li> <li>● Lack of Resources</li> <li>● Living Arts Program/Importance of Arts</li> <li>● Perspectives on Grade Levels</li> </ul>
SASA Community	Differences between SASA and other Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class Size</li> <li>● Teacher Expectations/Dedication/Competitiveness</li> <li>● Teachers from Industry</li> <li>● Student Performance Levels/Expectations</li> <li>● Lack of Resources</li> <li>● Living Arts Program/Importance of Arts</li> <li>● Perspectives on Grade Levels</li> </ul>
	Sources of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community/Business</li> <li>● SASA Foundation</li> <li>● Admin-Teacher</li> <li>● Teacher-Teacher</li> </ul>

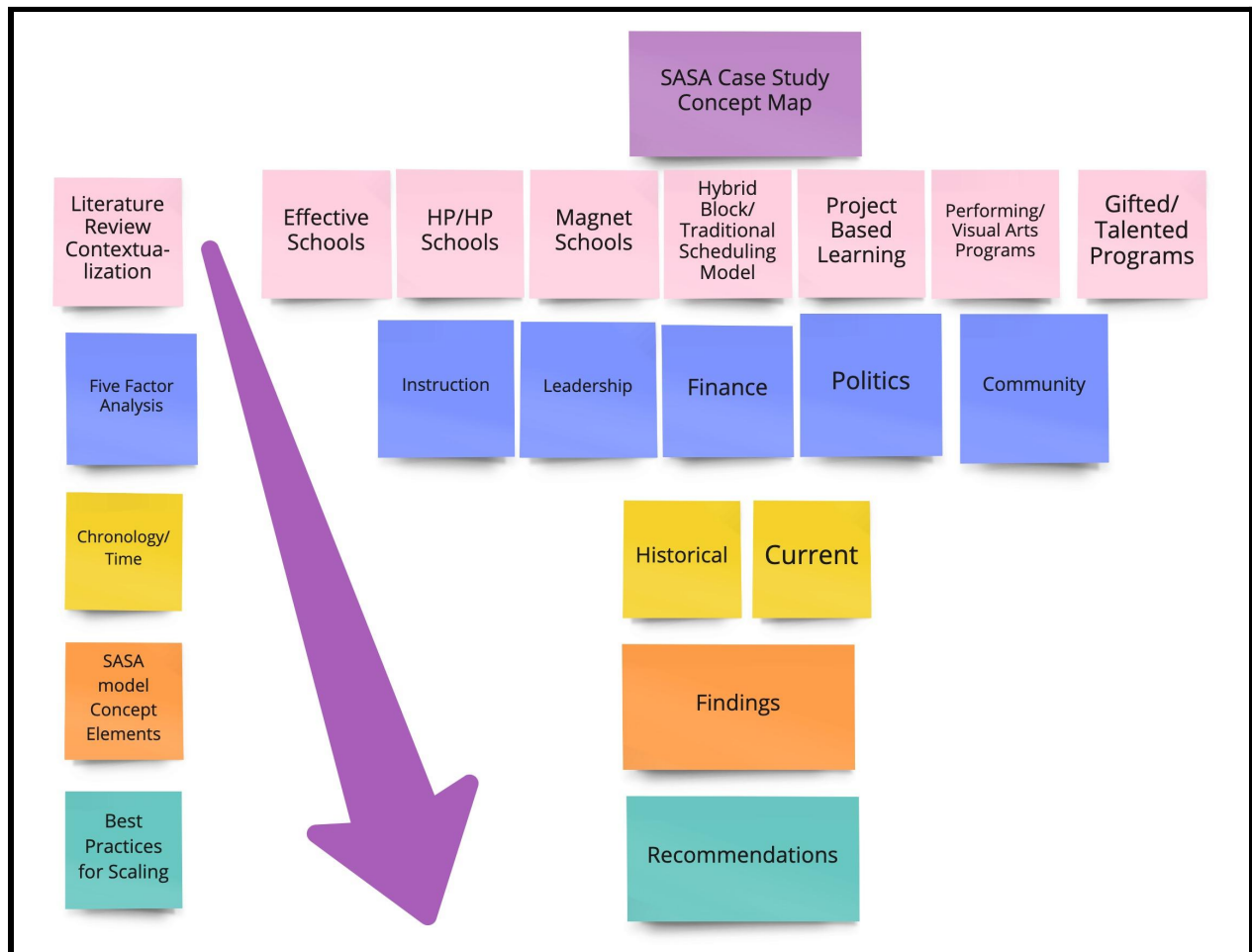
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student-Student</li> <li>● Teacher-Student</li> <li>● Parents</li> <li>● Teacher-Parent</li> </ul>
	Private School Impression	
	The Building and Neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Old Building</li> <li>● The New Campus</li> <li>● Neighborhood/Redlining</li> </ul>
	Evolution of Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Could it happen today?</li> <li>● Origin of Model</li> <li>● Program Changes</li> </ul>
	Student/Peer Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acceptance of Diversity</li> <li>● Peer Motivation</li> <li>● Social Status/Issues</li> </ul>
	Concentration as Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project-Based</li> <li>● Competitions</li> <li>● Annual Concentration Activities</li> <li>● Cross-Concentration</li> <li>● Student Driven</li> </ul>
	Application School/Student Buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Culture of Success</li> <li>● Students choose to be here</li> </ul>
	SASA Geographic Reach	

*Note: Exposition of Community Factor across Themes and Sub-Themes based on Interview Process*

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During the coding process, while every effort was made to isolate each portion of response to a single factor for further sub-coding, about half of the coded transcription text was cross-coded against multiple factors. For example, the concept of “Support” works across the factors of Community, Leadership, and Finance with different meanings. The theme of the “Concentration Program” plays a large role across the factors of both Instruction and Community. The cross-pollination of themes and subthemes against multiple factors is most easily understood via the concept mapping visualization envisioned here:



**Concerns and Limitations.** The primary concerns within the analysis process are related to the limitations of a case study that relies almost exclusively upon interview testimonials. The storytelling process provides a great deal of rich, in-depth data as well as anecdotes and allows for real-time exploration and probing of themes. Interviewing is also far more useful for a discovery process in which data is open-ended and qualitative in nature. Interviews were not structured to confirm an understanding of events, they were structured to learn about the targeted subject matter within a framework of factors. However, the following limitations apply to the design of this case study and should be taken into account when evaluating the study's findings and broader application.

1. **Interviewer has a personal connection with the case study Institution.** As a successful graduate of the SASA program, I have identified this program as one of the most unusual and formative of my educational career. It has helped me to achieve success and is objectively also a successful program based on external measures. Certainly, this connection introduces a personal bias but could also be considered a strength given my knowledge of the program is deeper than that of a researcher who does not have the same experience with the program. Given the data and evidence to suggest the comparative success of the program demonstrated through objective measures, the interviewer's subjective experience with the program should not pose a problem.
2. **The case study is framed as a success story.** interview protocol is aimed toward identifying factors that have contributed to success. During the interview process, the success of the program was acknowledged by every participant but challenges to greater success were also identified. While those challenges will be discussed in the findings,

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none were deemed as an overall obstacle to continued program success at present level.

These challenges exist even as the program achieves and maintains accolades suggesting the challenges are less powerful than the factors that contribute to program success.

3. **Interview participation was voluntary.** Selection bias must be factored into the Case Study findings as with any voluntary study participation. That said, over 20 in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview protocol that solicited feedback based on factors of success as well as challenges.
4. **Historical development data is more limited than desired.** While many key participants in the creation, development, and sustainment of the program were available and interviewed, their recollections required surveying back over 40+ years of program existence. In addition, unfortunately, some key historical participants passed away before this project began.
5. **This case study reflects the perspectives of current and former SASA teachers and administrators involved in SASA's creation and continuance.** It does not reflect the perspectives of teachers and administrators who have never worked at/for SASA but have worked in the same district. It does not reflect the perspectives of current or former SASA students or parents except where interview participants may hold an additional role as a former student or parent.
6. **SASA community/class observation was intended but ultimately not possible.** Class observations were originally to be completed using the CLASS-S observational framework to identify high-quality instructional interactions. However, due to Covid-19's impact upon class schedules and the lack of in-person instruction, class observations

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were not feasible nor could they be considered representative of a normal instructional scenario. As a result this case study was modified away from demonstrating examples of successful instructional practices based on the CLASS-S framework. Instead, teachers were asked to describe successes and challenges in the instructional process and did so with candor.

## Findings

The conceptual framework serves as the organizational model for analysis of findings using the Five Factors as general guideposts and the element of time as a modifier within each factor. The research questions that framed this Case Study and its findings are:

1. How did the five factors (leadership, instruction, finance, politics, and community) foster the historical development of the school?
2. How do these five factors continue to support the school to be successful?

The element of time is key to distinguishing how the five factors were helpful in starting the school and in sustaining long-term success and indeed each factor served a role in finding and sustaining long-term success. Findings are aggregated across the five factors for general themes and modified where necessary to support the element of time.

### **Finding 1: Leadership found success with a model and reused it**

The history of SASA begins with leadership and more specifically the choices and vision of the Saginaw Public Schools then-Superintendent (referred to as founding superintendent for the remainder of this case study). The SASA program, then conceived as a half-day gifted and talented program called The Center for the Arts and Sciences, was born after the success of another half-day program concentration-style program created in Saginaw. To understand SASA, one has to understand the history of that other program: Saginaw's Career Opportunity Center (COC, now known as Saginaw Career Complex (SCC)) in the early 1970s.

The founding superintendent had been working as a teacher in Saginaw Public Schools for more than a decade while building houses, just as he had done as a child with his father, in the



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summer to supplement his salary. He was called up from an assistant principal position at one of the middle schools by the then superintendent to act as interim assistant superintendent of instruction. His predecessor had begun work on a promise made to the city of Saginaw to build a vocational training and career center for high school students as well as adult learners. Over the course of the summer, the founding superintendent put together plans in collaboration with others in the administrative group to build and fund the capital expenses associated with starting what is currently known as Saginaw Career Complex (SCC). Like the later CAS program, SCC offered secondary students the opportunity to concentrate on a subject of their interest for 3 hours per day (in addition to attending a host high school just as with CAS), but for trades, including but not limited to studies in Automotive repair, Construction, IT, HVAC, Medical Careers, Cosmetology, Culinary and Hospitality Management, and others. Also like CAS, the founding superintendent designed the program to serve Saginaw as well as surrounding counties. However, at the time, the mechanism of a magnet program was both nascent and not a good fit for organization based on the SCC focus. The founding superintendent succeeded in securing capital funding from federal and state sources but was required to implement the build out within one year. What would become the SCC was created in response to factory town Saginaw's needs for vocational training that would help high schoolers who had no plans and/or resources to attend college, as well as out-of-work automotive and industrial factory workers retrain for other professions. The build out actually yielded a significantly larger vision that would answer the training needs not only for Saginaw but had plenty of capacity for the surrounding counties as well. Unfortunately, there was no mechanism (such as School Choice) by which the founding superintendent could invite students from other counties to enroll in

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SCC. Well, there was one mechanism. The founding superintendent chartered an academy within SCC to take advantage of new Charter School regulations that allowed school funding to be used out of district. "We went from our COC to the charter school, and the state called me up and said, "Well, you can't charter a school through a public school superintendency, and your Board of Education." I said, "Have you ever read your policy?" And they said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Read your policy. If universities can do it, public school districts can do it. You haven't made it impossible for any of us to do it. And we have done it, by the way, it's done" (founding superintendent, 2020).

If SCC sounds like a passion project, it was. The founding superintendent's dissertation topic at University of Michigan leveraged a newly created state requirement that school districts in Michigan provide career education. He tapped into a widespread need in his doctoral work and continued to do that with each new initiative. SCC was connected with the local community college, Delta, in a way that provided not only resources for SCC but also gave SCC graduates advanced standing in Delta's associate and trade programs. Construction students at SCC continued with the founding superintendent's summer habit of building homes for credit. Given building was in his blood, the idea of building more programs seemed a foregone conclusion. With the success of SCC firmly in place, the founding superintendent went to work applying a similar formula for Gifted and Talented education: The Center for the Arts and Sciences. "I don't believe there was anybody writing anything that would come close to what I could envision in my mind for this school district." (founding superintendent, 2020) As a winning formula at SCC, the half-day concentration program was a rational application for a Gifted and Talented school as well. Building a full day gifted and talented high school might have been too much of a

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financial and political stretch but the half-day concept was working in Saginaw at SCC so the founding superintendent lobbied hard to make it happen. “And so at that point, I called my team together and I said, “Do you think that we can financially arrange to have a two half-day program pull out from the two high schools for the children that come out of these highest gifted and talented settings, and are capable of extremely higher things than were in a traditional educational program. And “That's funny,” my finance guy said, “We'll never be able to afford it. We're a meat-and-potatoes school district.” And I said, “Well then, you better go back to Ohio 'cause this is not gonna be meat and potatoes” (founding superintendent, 2020). When asked if he thought CAS would have happened had the SCC not happened first, he replied “Well, I can tell you it wouldn't have happened if I wasn't there. I'm not being cocky about that, but the financial issue would have reigned large, and I had to be able to tell the board why we needed to do this and how it was gonna be done, and they... I'll give them credit, they got behind me and approved some of these things. But I knew this too, that if I made a big move like that and it didn't work, I would be looking for another superintendency or becoming the Dean of the University of Michigan School of Ed, one or the other” (founding superintendent, 2020).

### **Finding 2: Leadership built programs in order of need**

The founding superintendent's solution for many problems presented over his administrative tenure was to build a program to address a set of specific needs. The key was addressing the needs in the order that made most sense for the community. Career and vocational training served a pressing need in the 1970s during the downturn of the area's factory economy. While

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there had been interest and demand for a gifted and talented program for years, from a utilitarian perspective, the founding superintendent knew plans for gifted and talented programs would not pass before plans for vocational and technical programs. When elementary students were unable to pass the state test by the end of the year, he built a summer school program for them so as not to hold them back. When more special education opportunities were needed, programs were built for it. When households increasingly became two-income, the Charles Stewart Mott community schools model was brought into Saginaw Public Schools to create greater utility of the school buildings after traditional classes concluded for the day. In the afternoons and evenings, K-12 schools across the district hosted latch-key programs for children with two working parents and Adult education programs for parents looking to gain skills for workforce advancement. “When I came to Saginaw, we had 33 schools in the city of Saginaw, 33...They were all neighborhood schools. So kids could walk to them, because mothers didn't have a car. Mom stayed at home, dad went to work, and kids walked to school and sometimes they walked home for lunch, too. That was the population that the 50s 'Baby Boomer babies grew up in” (former SASA principal, 2020). As the population and economy shifted in the 70s, schools needed to play a larger role within the family. “So the schools become, really, the hub of your community, your neighborhood. And that's where people make friends and learn, and share interests and parenting tips” (former SASA principal, 2020). The community schools concept not only met new needs among the community but also created relevance in supporting the schools even for residents who did not have students in the district. “So when we went for those millages, they would want to support the schools that they were

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involved with, see? So whether you had kids in them or not, you had a stake in that school succeeding in your neighborhood” (former SASA principal, 2020).

After CAS was established, the founding superintendent embarked on one more project to meet another set of needs and that was an Adult learning center known as Ruben Daniels Lifelong Learning Center (RDLLC) where nontraditional students could complete their high school education. RDLLC offered childcare early on to make it easier for women who left traditional high schools due to pregnancy to return to the classroom with fewer obstacles.

“Whether you were gifted and talented, whether you were special education, whether you wanted vocational-technical, whether you were college prep; the founding superintendent didn't care what program kids were headed toward, he just wanted to make sure that every student in the district had the opportunities that they needed” (former SASA principal, 2020).

Saginaw Public Schools was not a wealthy district in the 1970s and 80s and that status has not changed. The difference leadership made in this scenario was assessing needs and then prioritizing those needs based on utility to the community. With the success of SCC firmly in place, the founding superintendent could take on his next major project - to similarly address the needs of the area's gifted and talented students. Area parents had been asking for gifted and talented programming for some time, and once he fulfilled the promise of career training, he could turn his attention to gifted and talented programming. At the same time CAS was developed (1981), the founding superintendent took note of some innovative programming at one of Saginaw's 24 neighborhood elementary schools, Handley, and encouraged its transformation into a program for the creative and academically gifted (PCAT). The program was and is application and test based, just like CAS/SASA. Together, Handley, and CAS offered Gifted

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and Talented programming to students in elementary, middle, and high school. In order to meet the need from a resource perspective, Handley and CAS would have to serve as centralized hubs for G/T programming, rather than spreading G/T programming across 24 schools. Handley and CAS would operate against type in an era and area defined by neighborhood schools, to meet membership requirements and make more efficient use of resources, they would operate as magnet schools in the early years of the concept.

### **Finding 3: Leadership Collaborated, Networked, and Built a Coalition of Political and Community Good Will**

If it sounds like the founding superintendent made decisions unilaterally, that would be far from the truth. To build these programs, he pressed his staff to come up with creative solutions, and leveraged not only the goodwill he amassed as a superintendent for the city, but also his membership in multiple regional, state, and national coalitions. He was a founding member of the Middle Cities Education Association dedicated to helping superintendents in school districts across Michigan that were struggling with economic depression. Eventually he earned an invitation to join the Mid America Association at the national level, an honor reserved for the country's top superintendents. He was also a member and eventual chair of the Urban Educational Alliance and on the Board of Governors of the University of Michigan School of Education, his 3-time alma mater through Undergraduate, Masters, and his doctoral work. Making connections with local industry partners was always leveraged as a two way street. Local businesses looking for talent out of SCC regularly took apprentices and donated funds and equipment to the school including, unsurprisingly for the area, automotive repair equipment

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(from General Motors) as well as equipment from Dow Chemical. Using the Understanding by Design model of development, under the founding superintendent's leadership the program sought the needs from local employers and built their programs to meet those needs.

- “We built at least one house a year, sometimes two, and we collaborated with the realtors and the building trades people. It fit right in, we had household electricity, we had electronics. Well, it's, you know... All of the roles that we had out there seemed to come together and feed in” (founding superintendent, 2020).
- “And they were telling us what the new enrollees needed to have in the way of skills, to be walking right in and a good worker for their companies. And they were hiring these kids right out of high school. And some of these kids were getting top jobs. When we were doing engineering, when we started in '72, there were engineering lab tables where the designers did it on these big tables and they were quite expensive. But by the time we got halfway into this program we were doing engineering drafting on computers and we were having print-outs. We had big print-outs so that they could have the drawings the way the people that wanted to build these projects wanted the drawings done. So, we were doing stuff like that. One of the kids that came out of that program went right to the head of that company's engineering program, because he was the only one that could do it on a computer” (founding superintendent, 2020).
- I told [General Manager of Saginaw Steering Gear, a division of General Motors] "I'd really like to have General Motors products in our career center, and I'd like to have as current a product as we could get." I said, "What do you guys do when you put demonstration cars out and you really work them hard to see if there's any glitches and

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that kind of stuff. What do you do with those?" He says, "Well, we can't sell them obviously, so we just scrap them." I said, "how about scrapping them to me..." "How many of those do you have?" He said, "I could probably get you a couple of those."

In addition to leveraging community and industry partners, the founding superintendent built up the training and education of his district staff to meet needs. For example, Several staff members were sent for a summer institute to Ohio and educated on the CIPP (context, input, process, and product) model of evaluation. "And once you do that, you realize the basis for exceptional learning. And what we started immediately after that was we focused on reading and mathematics in elementary school, and we evaluated the things that students needed to know and be able to do to be promoted from one grade, from first grade to second grade to third, up the ladder, and then we built our own tests for near the end of the school year, the last two weeks, each student at each grade level in elementary school would take these tests" (founding superintendent, 2020). Rather than solely relying on state measures, SPS worked to internally measure performance. It could be argued the founding superintendent used the CIPP model on virtually every initiative. It could also be argued that building educational programs was in his blood as both of his parents and siblings were in educational leadership. "When my mom and dad were first in their administrative years they developed the first full high school in the little town of Marion, it was a big agricultural town, a few miles south and east of Cadillac. So, they were builders too" (founding superintendent, 2020). Though, such a pedigree needn't be a requirement, the founding superintendent would suggest what is required to be a good leader:



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- Attitude: “It's about your attitude, and it's about what you think people can do. And if you've set it up right, you'd be amazed at how kids can function just... I was having fun. We had a great team” (founding superintendent, 2020).
- Business Sense: A recognition that education is an industry in itself and the people running public school districts may represent the biggest budget in their town. “The other thing, most of the people in education superintending now don't have a business head, they're not business-oriented. And unfortunately, education is the biggest business in most communities, with the exception of places like General Motors or Midland, with Dow. And I used to say to [the General Manager of Saginaw Steering Gear] and the other people, I said, “Well, you guys better keep up there because I don't wanna become the biggest industry in the city of Saginaw, I've gotta have you guys, too” (founding superintendent, 2020).
- Coalition Building Skills: “We had quite a program going on there, and we became pretty much the major lobbyist for education for the state of Michigan. There's things like that that you have to do, you gotta bring the people along” (founding superintendent, 2020).
- Investment: the founding superintendent spent almost his entire career in the Saginaw Public Schools district, beginning as a science teacher, then leader of the teacher's union, then principal, then assistant superintendent and finally superintendent, a position he held for 23 years before retiring in 2001. This is a tenure the founding superintendent understands as an outlier and a longevity he does not take lightly. “When I was named superintendent in Saginaw, the Middle Cities guys said to me, “You

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know, the life expectancy of an urban superintendent in the state of Michigan is two years and four months."

When asked if he thought what he did could be done today, he was conflicted. "I don't know if there are people... People are not willing to lose a job. You know what I mean? If you're gonna go out there and nobody else is doing it, you know you're alone, but you know you're right.

Now, that's the way I think. If it had continued and the people had risen up in saying, "Well, we don't need this career COC, it's gonna dumb our kids down and make them into factory workers and all this stuff." Some of those kids made more than most of the people did who were complaining about it by the time they walked out as seniors. But...You have to have the answers to those groups, otherwise you're probably gonna lose your job."

As SCC and CAS became more well established and proved their models, leveraging the good will of the community became necessary to make up for financial deficits.

"We didn't necessarily have the supplies, but we had the promise of those wonderful experiences. The money was there for the kids to go to competition and things. In the beginning, I don't think they had the wherewithal to raise it suddenly or anything like that...In the beginning, there was no per-student cost, it was all considered above budget and Mr. Birdsall and Mr. Folds would go in and negotiate for, "This is what I need to run the school for this year." And if something more was needed, I'm sure he was able to go forward with that. We had the community support, the support of the board, and a passion that parents and teachers and students brought to that school that just... They would not accept anything, but more. Everything was... They wanted more" (former SASA principal, 2020).

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To this day, leveraging industry partnerships is a signature method for supporting the more resource-intensive concentrations at SASA. “3D art is very, very expensive. We spend over \$10,000 just in kiln clay for competitions, and then you have dissections and science fair stuff, and so how do we make it work? One, we have a very, very, very strong parent group, and they do fundraising for us, and pretty much if we ask, we receive... We are so blessed because our parents figure it out for us, partnerships and grants, I'm constantly writing grants to get money in, so I have a huge partnership with Huntington Bank, who's right on the corner from us, and I also work very closely with the Saginaw Community Foundation...HSC is a huge supporter of us, Hemlock Semiconductors. So we work with them pretty much anybody who I can work with, we work with... And then in return, our students give back to our community, so our students have painted the murals downtown, so we're reciprocating some of those community partnerships that we have. So that's one of the things, one way we get some of the funding. The other way is grant writing, huge. We do donors choose, and a lot of the big corporations will help support different projects that we have. We've been doing that for years, and we still do that. And we get that funded every year, usually GM or Ford will fund the supplies and things for projects like that... that's how we make it work. We just make it work here” (SASA principal, 2020).

Networking also required time with State Legislators to educate them on how the school funding models worked. Retired Saginaw Public School district CFO recalls regular visits to the Capitol in Lansing during critical state funding discussion to explain how the funding formulas worked and impacted students. “In fact, I was told at one time I had to register as a lobbyist. I said, "Why, I'm just here educating." And they said, "No, you're trying to get money for K-12." I said, "I'm educating legislators. They don't understand our funding." In fact, I had a laptop and

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cellphone before most people did, because I'd spend two to three days at Lansing and still try to do my job" (former SPS CFO, 2021). "They had no concept, they would throw numbers on a wall, and if the Republicans disagreed and Democrats would fight like crazy. That's what they wanted. And if it was the Republicans who threw the money on the wall, the Democrats would fight with them like crazy...It took myself and several other business managers from around the state to keep meeting with these people and letting them know what they're doing with the base [state per student funding] that they're gonna rely on in years to come" (former SPS CFO, 2021). He recalls when the state offered aid for gifted and talented programs including grants and seed funding to start new programs, but also recalls it was catch as catch can and varied year to year.

### **Finding 4: Magnet Model and Schools of Choice Give SASA the Membership it needs to Continue**

A creative program requires a creative approach to funding and that's what it took for SASA to be successful in a less well-funded district like SPS. To support a hub for the gifted and talented, SASA reached out to surrounding districts, most of which were smaller and with fewer resources, to bolster membership and bring in the per-student funding necessary to support programming. As with other schools in SPS, SASA worked off local millage, (for which the founding superintendent said "And frankly, I was pretty good at passing millages, and we never lost a millage since I was superintendent. And at one point, we were able to pass three different millages at the same time.") and the state match. Retired Saginaw Public School District CFO recalls the campaign to earn the buy-in and cooperation of districts across the tri-county area to gain enough membership to support SASA. " We had to do some salesmanship with the

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superintendents, because nobody likes to lose students when they're counting heads for money. The way we were able to help convince them was, number one, we would provide the bussing. Number two, they would have no expense involved, except giving up that half-time student, giving up the half-time student means they didn't have to hire additional staff. They would save even in that respect, and they would also save in other aspects of the thing, because we would be covering a lot of the expenses for that student for the day, that they would not normally have to" (former SPS CFO, 2021). SASA began pulling 50% of all out-of-district per-student funding, not only from the smaller, less resourced districts, but also from more affluent districts based on the quality, focus, and rigor of SASA's G/T programming. This meant, in some cases, a half-day student's membership might bring in more than the per student membership of an SPS in-district student. Prior to the passage of Proposal A in 1994, Michigan's richest school districts spent about three times as much per pupil as Michigan's poorest" (Goenner, 2011) Former SPS CFO confirmed that while Saginaw was usually favorable toward millages, the town could not raise the same kind of per-student funding as more wealthy districts. For this reason, out of district membership was key to supporting a special program like SASA. In 1996 with the passage of Schools of Choice, under Governor Engler, SASA's status as a magnet program found growing membership from across the tri-county districts and beyond. "The state of Michigan, at that point, said you could attend a magnet program if... So it could have been like a career technical center or a gifted and talented center, or a math science center. You could do that if you lived in any county that was contiguous to the county that that school district was in" (former SASA principal, 2020).

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Even neighboring districts reluctant to lose in-district membership could no longer say no to parents and students who wanted to attend SASA. Even as districts started to offer dual enrollment to area community colleges to try to maintain G/T student membership, former SPS CFO remarks, the cost was out of line with the offering. “We had to point out to them that what they were taking, even though they already had that student for one hour, for that one gifted program, they were losing almost 30% of their state aid because that's what the college charged” (former SPS CFO, 2021). Core to program sustainability, especially when the program works against the grain of traditional offerings, former SPS CFO suggests an approach that may sound simple but is perhaps key: “Well, how do you afford it?” You have to understand, what are the funding sources? And then, how do you make the funding sources fit your program” (former SPS CFO, 2021).

### **Finding 5: Leadership Established a Foundation to Support High-Cost Programs and Annual Expenses and Other Creative Ways to Raise Money**

In the early years of the program, the administration had an ability to produce extra revenue where needed to make up for shortfalls. Several former teachers commented that during the first 20 or so years of the program’s existence, funding was made available to take care of shortfalls:

- “My favorite financial story is that [one former principal] would never let anybody NOT go to Higgins Lake [an annual writing retreat] because they couldn't afford it. I mean, I don't know where he came up with the money but, you know, he did. Yeah and... I don't

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know how he kept it a secret, that... I didn't even know where it came from" (former SASA teacher, 2020).

- "We had to have graphing calculators, those were over \$100 a piece. And I won an award as a teacher, I don't know if [one former principal] might have been involved in that, but I was given a hundred and some dollar little stipend and I just gave it to [them] and said, "Can I use this to buy a graphing calculator? 'Cause I need one" (former SASA teacher, 2020).

Virtually all former teachers acknowledged significant belt-tightening with regards to discretionary funding around 2000. To maintain a more consistent source of supplemental funding during lean years, former SPS CFO worked with former SASA principal to establish a foundation for SASA, from which to draw upon for supplemental materials and above-cost programming fees. "We were able to lobby at one point, where the state started putting money into a categorical called, "Gifted and talented funds", and we were able to draw some there, but it wasn't... I'd get more out of the foundations in a year than we got out of the state" (former SPS CFO, 2021). Saginaw Public Schools has a district-wide foundation to which businesses and alums continue to donate for above-budget capital and resource needs. Taking a leaf from the District's foundation initiative, Leadership established a Foundation just for SASA. "Parents in SASA and Handley didn't trust the district because these two schools got screwed at every turn. When every other school in the district got new computers out of federal monies, did the district pony up general funds to make sure Handley and SASA got new computers, too? No. They gave us the ones that came out of the old lab at North when North School was torn down. We cobbled together networks as best we could and made them work until our parents could

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raise us enough money to refurbish that lab. And they did. And then they replaced every computer in the media centers in the district. And did Handley and SASA get any? No. So our parents put together an effort to raise money and they raised \$28,000 or \$40,000 or something to be able to do another lab in the media center for us. So I know in the seven years that I was at SASA and the two years after I left, so a 12-year span, parents put almost \$100,000 into the school just for technology that the district did not provide, that they provided to every other school in the district. And it just pissed people off. So before I left, I started the SASA Foundation with a group of parents that worked with me through the Parent Advisory Council” (former SASA principal, 2020). Handley had started a foundation years before which was yielding, by one former SASA principal’s estimation, \$30,000 annually in extra income. The principal’s goal was to set up a similar foundation for SASA to draw upon for concentration grants, field trip expenses, competition costs, and above-budget supplies and materials. “But we’ve got probably \$75,000 in that account now, and we’re getting an income stream of about \$5,000 a year that we can give back to the school. And I’d love to see that reach the \$30,000 that Handley has, but Irene Hensinger was at it a long time before I was. So hopefully, it’ll still get there” (former SASA principal, 2020)

The current SASA principal confirmed the support the SASA foundation is able to provide.

“Thank God for [the former SASA principal]... We now have the SASA foundation because of her.

We do fundraisers and raise money for SASA and it goes into the SASA foundation and that’s

how we make it work” (SASA principal, 2020). SASA Foundation is one of several funding

initiatives teachers, students, parents, and administrators use to bring costs for competitions,

supplies, and field trips within reach. SASA is part of a district identified as a Title I district but



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is one of three schools in the district that does not receive Title 1 federal funds (State and Federal Programs, 2021). In addition, there was a sense that SASA is usually last in the district to receive new materials, upgrades, and resources, and the leadership team has come to expect that. As a conditioned response, the expectation has been set that teachers need to be more self-reliant for discretionary spending so SASA teachers and administrators are used to looking for funding for special projects elsewhere. Every teacher had stories of how they creatively fund projects and initiatives that are out of budget. And even though the team voiced consistent concern over funding pressures that have increased class sizes and required creativity in terms of resource allocations, there is widespread adherence to the SASA mission. As such, making up for shortfalls with creative means is a point of pride within the program and the ethos of operation. Concentration teachers have established department accounts through sponsorships, revenue-generating activities, and fundraising efforts, often by leveraging the gifts and talents of SASA students. Dance and Music Recitals, Theatre Performances, Art and Literary Publications are some of the ways in which students within the concentrations support their own costs. “When I saw the writing on the wall, being on the School Improvement Team, that there could be years where [budget deficits] could happen, we started raising money. And so I had thousands of dollars in my activity account that I earned and the kids earned, and no one can take that. So we would raise about \$3,000 a year with the Haunted Art Gallery...so we never came into a year with an empty stock room without materials. It was always replenished. I knew that I had to continue to do things to raise money, and so luckily with community partners, a lot of competitions came into our lives. And luckily, we won those competitions most years. And so, one of them was a community calendar and we would get thousands of dollars each year from

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that” (former SASA teacher, 2020). Through a classroom candy and supply store (Feldmart), one teacher has been helping students raise money to go on the annual field trip to Washington, D.C. since 1999. “I’m able to raise money to help support the costs of all the kids who normally wouldn’t be able to afford to go to DC. Plus, there’s other scholarship applications I help those kids with. So we have nearly 100% of our eighth graders go to DC every year, like usually 90 to 95 out of 100 kids go every year. So from the money standpoint of my trips, there’s so much money out there if you know how to apply for it...I do other fundraising through DonorsChoose, and every year I do between a \$500 to \$1,000 project on anything I could possibly need and throw in anything that I may not need, but it would be nice to have. And so I guess money for me is not an issue because I have everything I could possibly need. I have very nice TVs in my room and a nice computer system and a nice sound system and any supplies I need, any other technology I need, I just request it in DonorsChoose. I started a project early last December, and it was fully funded within a couple, maybe three weeks. Actually, it was early November, by the end of November, fully funded like \$700 project. So, I think for money, any teacher who wants the money can get it with the effort that they need to put forth in DonorsChoose. It might take a couple hours to do it, but it’s done. It’s done, and 100% of my projects over the last 15 years have been funded, fully funded within a month in most cases, one time within a day” (current SASA teacher, 2020). Another teacher took advantage of wholesale and auction opportunities to secure otherwise expensive equipment. “Well, I learned that there was a property disposition building at University of Michigan, so we would drive down periodically whenever we were off school, and we’d go through and buy old equipment” (former SASA teacher, 2020).

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Several teachers commented on the generosity of parents who routinely provide additional resources to make ends meet including:

- Anonymously paying the field trip or competition fees for other students in the class who otherwise could not afford to attend.
- Purchasing or donating lab or sound equipment for classroom use.
- Raising funds through the Parent-Teacher Association for new capital costs.

This generosity from SASA parents appeared to come across regardless of their income as they either directly donated or led fundraising efforts to help defray costs.

### **Finding 6: Concentration Instruction Centers on Project-Based Learning which fuels Engagement, confirms Relevance, and provides Assessment opportunities in the form of Local, State, and National Competitions**

Just as with SCC, CAS leverages real world partnerships and connections to create enriching experiences for students in which the education confirms its own relevance by showing its broader application. One could say CAS started with Science Fair. Before project-based learning became popular, founding superintendent used his science background and contacts with the University of Michigan to bring researchers up to do field work in the area. Some stayed on for a position at the CAS. One of the first science teachers built a machine to detect earthquakes that was so sensitive, when there was an earthquake, even a very small one, virtually no one in town knew about it, but the teachers and students who were monitoring the equipment were aware. “I encouraged him to call the appropriate people in the state to tell them that this happened in

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Saginaw and they had totally missed it. They didn't even know it had happened, but our kids did.” (founding superintendent, 2020)

For the River Quality Project, founding superintendent recruited fellow University of Michigan researcher Bill Stapp, who had been sampling river water around the globe, to do the same work with the Saginaw River. Early CAS science students worked with the researcher to investigate what was in the Saginaw River.

*“And the neat part about it was he had computers that, if you bought this computer for your student group team of kids, they can make contacts with these students all over the globe that were doing water quality studies. And so they were talking to each other, learning from each other, it was a really global event. And when we started out, the Dow settling tanks in a big rainstorm would run over into the Tittabawassee River. And if you know anything about Dow, they got three, four rivers coming into the Tridge right there in the heart of Dow, in the heart of Midland. And this stuff would come running down the Tittabawassee, the Shiawassee, the Flint, the Bad River and then into the Saginaw River. And we were doing Saginaw River studies. And every year, the students who worked on that printed a paper, I mailed it to the Saginaw news. I'd mail it to the TV stations and we would have the... We usually picked Arthur Hill High School auditorium because it was big and convenient and they would give an annual report. And then I'd invite the heads of the hospitals, the people who were city council members, the city waterworks, the sewer department. We'd invite them all to this thing and I'd have the media there to embarrass them if they didn't come.*”

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*[chuckle] And so actually, we were looking for benthic organisms that show the quality of life in the river. And if there's no benthic organisms, you got problems. And that river got cleaned up so much that recently, the Sturgeon came back. Sturgeons don't go into nasty water." (founding superintendent, 2020)*

From there, a Unit-by-Unit project-based approach was adopted early on in the school's other concentrations as well. Visual and performing arts students approached recitals, performances, and arts projects that might span weeks or months. Language arts students approached writing projects in a similar fashion while hands-on science, social studies, and mathematics projects are also part of the curriculum. Early in the school's tenure, the process of creating things to demonstrate understanding and application of skills was part of the program and serves, as with Project-Based Learning, as a more authentic assessment opportunity. While SASA students today are required to complete high-stakes tests, and teachers expressed concern over the time required to administer the high-stakes tests, these tests were not cited by any teachers as what they use as a measuring stick for annual progress. This signals a consistent theme among instructions both former and current. Before high-stakes testing took on more relevance in the early 2000s with the Cherry Commission, assessment opportunities and progress measurement at CAS was left to the instructors to determine. While instructors now also prepare students for the high-stakes test, their focus on what they used then and now for measuring sticks is decidedly more project-based.

Annual local, state, and national competitions were commonly cited as a measuring stick of sorts for student progress. Arts Festivals and Competitions, Science Fair, as well as Math and

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Social Studies Competitions were listed by almost every teacher, former and current, as authentic assessment opportunities.

“The first year I was at SASA, 2004-2005, we had in the ELA concentration, which was 27 [students] that year, I had 16 kids accepted for MYAF, and on that designation alone, I was the Michigan Creative Writing Teacher of the Year, which was both funny and an honor, because it was such a challenging year. But at the same time, I realized what we were doing at SASA creative arts-wise was so far and above different than what other schools were doing that our kids... Even with me as a brand new teacher, where I felt like I was floundering, we still swept the state in terms of what we submitted for MYAF. And that was what shifted my perspective to what was really important for these kids. Analysis, it's gonna come. You get it in college. I've taught freshman writing and sophomore writing, college writing now for eight years. What you don't get in high school, you get in college, right? But what shapes your identity as a learner, you get in high school. And that's really, really important. (current SASA teacher, 2020)”

In addition, due to the nature of the PBL approach, many of the concentrations operate with a portfolio model where students collect and reflect on their projects over the course of the year as well as year over year, particularly in Visual, Performing, and Language Arts concentrations.

The stimulus for Project-Based approach varies widely depending on the concentration but most teachers, both former and current, discussed ways in which projects, be it writing, art, performance, demonstration, or fair often include community outreach. Community projects, ranging from public works of art to performances to research such as the early River Project are common at SASA. Several teachers discussed cross-concentration projects as another variety to their project-based approach. One example was a project called the Degas Program at Detroit

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Institute of Art which facilitated collaboration between the Visual Arts 2-D and Dance concentrations. "We did a lot of cross-curricular projects together," (former SASA art teacher, 2020) "but one was studying the work of Degas and the impressionists. And then all students, whether they were art or dance, went into the dance studio and worked in dance, and all students worked in art. We were drawing and sculpture from the dancers modeling for us. And then the final art project was that they would use their sketches from the dancers modeling and their sculptures for the poses of figures in movement. Whether they made it a dancer or not, it didn't matter, but figures in movement. And then we went around the building and on the grounds, and they found environments to put those figures then, and that was their final project. In dance, they put together a dance that was involved with the DIA program on Degas. And they were the only student group to perform, I believe." Former Dance Concentration Instructor recalls the partnership: "Well, there was this opportunity and I thought, "Well, I guess I could try that as well as anyone else." And it was a collaborative project in that you had to have appropriate music, probably classical. Ours was classical. And then the dancers. And we had to costume that piece and the like. I can't remember who really sponsored that, but whoever did, it was the Detroit area. A teacher down there encouraged me to have my dancers apply it. She said, "There won't be many high school dancers that apply." Well, there were. There was a high school division and a college division. And this is what I know [former SASA teacher] wants me to tell you, that we were the only high school accepted. Everyone else was college. And it was a nice feather in our cap. We got to go down, perform. Yeah, it was a big deal."

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While competitions and projects factor heavily into assessment methodology, several teachers wanted to make sure to point out that measuring progress is a daily process.

- “Typically, we'll use things like art contests, Scholastic Art and Writing [as a measure of success]...but I think when the student wonders about something or searches something out on their own, that to me is another huge measure of success. When I see students just creating art at home without me giving them an assignment, that's another measure of success, but that's not necessarily the one that's going to be recognized by your school” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- “I think it just has to vary per student because you get students coming in with different skill sets anyway, in different fields of experience, I'll get some students who've been in multiple productions before they were even in the sixth grade, and I get students who've only been in their church's Christmas play, where they still were allowed to have the script in their hand. And so I think you just have to measure that with each of them, and for me, I always go back to self-assessment. I ask the students to set goals for themselves and to reflect back on what they were able to accomplish and where they see themselves and where they would like to improve. And then use that, I used to have a tiered system where students would work on one tier and the expectations were different, and then on there were three different tiers and there were just more expectations the higher you were on the tier, but I even found that to be too restricting because the students got caught up in quantity of things to be done instead of... Doing less, but doing it better” (current SASA teacher, 2020).



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There is another element to measuring progress within the concentration programs that is less obvious without deeper understanding of the program structure. With few exceptions, the concentration instructor is the same throughout the student's career at SASA, from Grade 6-12, During the first 20 years of the program, the three-hour blocks of concentration instruction were delivered to students across a grade band in the same class - middle school students in the morning, high school students in the afternoon. As the school converted to full time to offer a comprehensive curriculum in addition to their concentration instruction, certain concentrations divided classes into smaller grade bands as needed. However, concentration instructors who still see students across multiple grades repeatedly commented on the benefits (and challenges) of this arrangement.

- “The pro is obviously just sort of that consistency that you get in instruction, right, and the knowledge that you get with that particular teacher-student relationship becomes one that is just stronger over time, because I can see students and their growth and where they're at and where they need to be challenged, and you can just kind of put all of those pieces together throughout the years and you... Sometimes you don't even... You're still close to it that you don't step back and see the big overall growth until you're forced to step back and look at it whether that's their pictures that show up in your feed or looking back on an old performance or something like that, you are like oh my gosh. So you have that strength and you also just sort of have, like, if a teacher is realizing that a student is struggling, I'm the first person they come to, is there a concentration teacher because I'm probably the one that can motivate them to do better or to help

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them to refocus or to give that teacher the insight that they need, about what's going on with that student maybe in their personal lives" (current SASA teacher, 2020).

- "They would come in the morning, still finishing their breakfast, [chuckle] and the younger kids were very different than the older kids. The younger kids did not know one another as well. By the time you got to be a senior, you could have been there since sixth grade, in the same class. I could have had these kids the same time, so I really saw them progress, and you had the time to build a program. I've worked a lot with the Michigan Dance Council, and they would also be high schools, they could be private studios, but for the most part, they were high schools who offered dance. And the teachers were always so jealous of what I had because they said, "You can have the same student year after year and you can build a program." And I will say, our school in the field of dance was very well-known in the bigger areas of Michigan and respected. They'd always say things like, I recall, "Wonder what kind of costumes they're gonna wear to youth arts? They have artists that actually design their costumes and they don't have to order out of a catalog, they have these terrific opportunities of working with other departments and putting their knowledge on top of the dance instead of seeking it out themselves" (former SASA teacher, 2020).
- "Once I got into it and realized that, okay, if I'm gonna have ninth through 12th graders, I can't teach the same thing every year like some teachers do. So I sort of developed one year, more emphasis on American literature, next year more emphasis on British and European literature, another year the multicultural kind of thing, it's Hispanic and Black, African-American authors and that sort of thing so... And then the fourth year was sort

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of a catch-all, anything I'd missed in the [chuckle] previous three years, from the literature standpoint. Now from a writing standpoint, there were a lot of things that were repeated" (former SASA teacher, 2020).

### **Finding 7: The Concentration Program Feeds Engagement and Confers Identity in the SASA Community**

The Concentration Program was viewed by virtually every participant as not only a signature component of the SASA experience but key to a student's overall success. Two reasons were repeatedly identified for this.

1. Student Engagement in their concentration keeps them motivated even through their non-concentration studies.
2. Concentration selection confers a sort of identity upon students and both frames and centers their experience throughout their time at SASA.

"The big difference that no one else can match is the Concentration Program. We are able to let kids pick dance or theater or voice keyboard or visual arts or Math Science or Language Arts Global Studies, and they get to spend most of their morning or their entire morning focusing only on that area that they have true passion for. And then they get the regular academic classes in the afternoon or in the morning, depending on whether they're middle or high school, no one else can offer that. Every other school that has a gifted program, it's just higher rigor, but it's still that 40-minute block of time. If you have a true passion for visual arts, what can a teacher accomplish in a gifted-hour program in 40 minutes? How deep can you get every single day? You can't. Where at SASA we have a ton of time" (current SASA teacher, 2020).

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The Concentration acts as an anchor, a frame, and a motivator for the student's experience.

"You as a student are spending a majority of your day, two to three hours a day, in an area you love, you're not in an area because, you're not sitting in Mr. Smith's class, and you hate that class, you know that if you don't do what you need to do it in Mr. Smith's class, you're not gonna be here for three hours in art class, which is what you love, and you're gonna do anything you can because these kids, you know, think about it, where else can you go and dance for three hours a day?" (SASA principal, 2020). "Or if you really love debate and you really love the world and you love current issues, what would be better than sitting for two hours a day in a classroom that's not a traditional classroom focused on global studies? Because that's the other thing about SASA. We're not a traditional brick and mortar. You're not sitting row by row by row in classes. Our classrooms don't look like traditional classrooms, kids are in fishbowl circles and they're in debate areas and they're moving around" (SASA principal, 2020).

The Concentration also confers an identity upon students that teachers and administrators found to be more useful, more productive, and perhaps motivating in and of itself.

- "Kids come into SASA with an identity beyond themselves. I'm not just John Smith. I'm not just Patty Kennedy. I'm a language arts student. I'm an artist. I'm a dancer. I'm a math science kid. I'm a poet. And so where in a lot of schools, kids are jockeying to find out which crowd they fit in with, our crowds are academically based, so kids immediately create an academic identity that becomes primary to who they are within the school... These 26 kids are all in the sixth-grade language, arts, global studies concentration classroom because you really like language, arts and global studies, because you really like dance, because you really like music. And we try and give kids

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special experiences within those concentrations that nobody else in the school has, that creates also a flavor of distinction for them that they don't just participate in all the school-wide programs. But if you're in the language arts program, you go on the 9th-through 12th-grade writing retreat at Higgins Lake, or you get to go to Michigan Youth Arts if you're chosen in dance. Or in global studies you are in the Model UN program” (former SASA principal, 2020).

Indirect benefits to the Concentration approach were also discussed:

- “We don't have cliques. I have been all over the country. I've been in education for almost 23 years now. We don't have cliques at SASA...Everybody gets along with everybody, and you'll see Johnny sitting at a lunch table one day with this group, and two days later, sitting with another group and nobody says a word. We don't have bullying. We don't have fights. Since I've been here, we've had one fight, and I wouldn't even call it a fight, it was more of a pushing match. We don't have that here. We don't have what traditional schools have. And I think the identity of being with that group of people in a supportive area where you can be anyone you wanna be, just because you're smart, you're not getting picked on in that traditional high school” (SASA principal, 2020).
- “I'm teaching in heaven as far as behavior problems are concerned” (current SASA teacher, 2020).

What Concentration confers upon the community might be summed up in two words: ‘Climate and culture.’ When you come here, when kids come here, they know the focus is academics, and our sole focus is academics or talent, and we ensure that we're supporting each other

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through concentrations to ensure that everybody's supported" (SASA principal, 2020).

Concentration is ingrained in the culture of the school. "When people say, "Why does it work?" It works that way because everybody in the community supports it, everybody. The custodians bought into it. I would hear custodians say, "What concentration are you in?" Because that's how they got to know the kids. It gave them something to talk about. It was a connection they could make. They knew who their friends were then, they knew who their teachers were" (former SASA principal, 2020).

### **Finding 8: Concentration Cohorts form in 6th grade and proceed through multi-grade classes**

Students start their seven year journey at SASA in the 6th grade, in a grade still considered elementary level in some locations, to springboard into the middle school experience. "That sixth grade component is huge because there are some secondary models that are [grades 7-12] and having those sixth graders here to train them for the middle school experience...and get them started early is a big benefit" (Former SASA principal, 2021). While SASA does accept students in later grades, several interview participants pointed to the benefits to student preparation of earlier concentration study. "Once they're in that [concentration] program they build those bonds with the same teachers they'll often see in high school" (SASA principal, 2021). Having students begin their concentration study in middle school builds what interview participants see as a "synergistic effect" for their high school experience. The 6th grade experience feeds the middle school experience which feeds the high school experience, which in turn feeds the middle and 6th grade experience. Another signature feature of the SASA

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mode: cohorts often experience their concentration studies within multi-grade classes in which lower grade and upper grade students exchange modeling and mentorship. “The older group creates the model mentorship for the younger ones so they can see if they stick with this, what they can do and what they can become, so then once they get there, they have a responsibility to transfer that back to the younger ones, because they remember being in those shoes...” (SASA principal, 2021). The peer effect created by a multi-grade classroom experience inspires the lower grades while conferring responsibility and a sense of accomplishment upon the upper grades. “[Middle school students] are seeing what the high school is producing...because they're sharing hallways and display space...[For example] the Voice/Keyboard program: the middle schoolers get to see the high school performance to say, ‘Wow, we can compose when we're that age and know our music better....so when you're in the younger grades you're looking up to the 11th and 12th graders for guidance and mentoring’” (SASA principal, 2021).

### **Finding 9: SASA Nurtures a Culture of Trust and Respect**

At the administrative level, in the same manner the founding superintendent originally set up the program to run with a different model of governance from the other schools in the district, the principals are used to running rather autonomously provided they meet their enrollment numbers.

A consistent message from current and former SASA principals and teachers is a sense of both trust and respect. The teachers, past and present, indicated the principals placed a great deal of trust in them to be successful and did not interfere with their daily operations.

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- “Teachers have a lot more freedom here, so I want that to stay the same. I don't have someone micromanaging every little thing I do in the classroom. They're actually given a lot more respect here” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- “I was so grateful that I could pretty much create my own curriculum, and [the principal] wasn't always looking over my shoulder, but if he asked questions about it, I could explain it to him. And as long as the results were there I didn't have to follow [requirements]” (former SASA teacher, 2020).
- “[The Principal] never criticized me ever and he just supported me 100% all the time when I wanted something, which I didn't really want much. I wanted good books and he would go along with what I suggested, so I was really fortunate to have a good principal like that” (former SASA teacher, 2020).

In turn, that trust and respect is instilled by teachers into their students.

- “There's a lot of trust that I have earned over the years that I take to heart, because trust is a trait that has to be earned, and I tell that to students. If you want me to trust you to work out in the hall, you have to prove that to me, and I get that a lot with the staff” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- “We loop cadres of students and there's trust there they have with me. They know who I am. And generally, I am more strict in seventh grade. And then as I can see that maturity, I am more trusting that they would do what they need to do. It's more of a, "Here's what I need from you, and I will come find you if it looks like you're not delivering, but I'm gonna trust you to go do that," and people respond” (current SASA teacher, 2020).



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That trust is also expressed from administrator and teacher to parents as well in terms of how expectations are set of student and parent involvement at the school. “Oh I make sure to let them know, my expectation is that you are part of SASA’s family, and that means parent, this is what our expectations are of you. And we say, your kid can't do this on their own. Here's what we need to do and 99% of the parents will do anything they can, because they know that this is the best school they can be in in Saginaw” (SASA principal, 2020). And while there is trust in place between teachers and students, when student performance slips, teachers and administrators consistently say they contact parents immediately to correct the situation. “One thing that makes SASA successful is there's a great parent communication component. If a kid doesn't do their homework, I call the parent, every time. And most teachers [at SASA] do that; there is a strong communication with parents (current SASA teacher, 2020).”

### **Finding 10: As an Application-Based Program, SASA Community Breeds a Culture of Choice and Success**

On my first day at CAS, the Principal held an assembly and told all of us new middle school students “You have earned the right to be here.” That ethos continues to this day with students both choosing to attend the school but also entering the school with a sense of accomplishment by being admitted through a fairly rigorous and selective process. The Culture of Choice, referred to by several teachers and administrators as “Buy-in” pairs with and feeds the Culture of Success. “Most people know when they hear SASA, they think of great things. We've been in the news for mostly positive things over my entire career, a lot of accomplishments, a lot of successes. Science, there are kids who have gone on to International

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Science Fair and robotics teams that have gone on to the state championships of Michigan almost every single year...we have so many students represent [SASA] at Michigan Youth Arts Festival, and we dominate. We don't always come in first, but we dominate...Most of what we do results in great success" (current SASA teacher, 2020). The Culture of Success is stoked frequently through benchmark activities as students are encouraged to enter local, state, and national competitions and fairs to showcase their performance, portfolios, and projects. This section is about students buying in and having a sense of accomplishment on day 1.

"I think every school in the country ought to be application-based. I really do. And I say that because the kids feel themselves, by being accepted for that program, that they've already achieved something just coming through the door. And that having to be performance-based when you're there doesn't allow them to choose to be lazy. Teachers [at SASA] will bust their ass for any kid who's working. It doesn't matter whether he's at the top of this class or somewhere at the very bottom. If he's working as hard as he possibly can, those teachers will do all they can to make sure that child is successful" (former SASA principal, 2020). Several teachers discussed the concept of student buy-in as not only integral to SASA culture but core to student engagement and intrinsic motivation. "Something that's really important is you need kids to all buy in. Everybody has to buy in to what they're doing. And once they buy into it, you can do whatever you want in that classroom. You can get kids to achieve to the highest level like what I said, when I told my students, I said, "You guys, here's this opportunity, it's a fundraiser for literacy, and they want creative pieces on gratitude through the pandemic. What do you guys think? Should we go for it?" And I got them to buy in, and I said, "Do you think this is worthy? Do you think we're ready to do this?" And they were like, "Let's do it." And I said, "Okay, here's

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the catch. We have four days to submit." And they were like, "Oh." But they bought in" (current SASA teacher, 2020).

That Culture of Choice applies not only to the student but the teachers and administrators as well. SASA presents an unusual teaching and administration opportunity that many staff members admit is both non-traditional and not for everyone. "You have to have a teacher that buys in, you have to have kids that buy in, you have to have a teacher who believes it's not a job, it's a way of living. It's a lifestyle. So you need a teacher who's willing for this to be their lifestyle, "This is my mindset," and that's not the same thing as a teacher who goes to work for a job"(current SASA teacher, 2020). The Culture of Success is reinforced by the teachers within their concentrations but also in their own capabilities outside the classroom. While some SASA teachers are career educators, others came to teaching from industry or continue to work in industry as practicing artists and scientists.

- "We have a lot of pride with the staff...We have a lot of talented teachers, that's another humongous part of our success" (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- "SASA is good at attracting teachers who have high expectations and expect that growth mindset and you don't have to instill it. You're not spending half of your time motivating. Everybody [at SASA] has applied. Not everyone has the intrinsic motivation but they have some kind of motivation, whether it be their parents pushing them to do something or whatever it is, they wanna be there. And sometimes at another school, you're spending a lot of your time just trying to convince them that it's okay to just be" (current SASA teacher, 2020).

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- “The biggest difference is I teach here, I teach content, I teach skills, I teach technique. And you try to do that [at other schools] but in my other positions, I spent the majority of my time putting out fires, dealing with student trauma, calming down students with fights, sending kids to the cafeteria to get some food because they haven't eaten. You know what I'm saying? There's so much [in terms of] interpersonal social problems and conflicts with a lot of my students that to get to depth with the content was very challenging. You did, but not at the same level. Teaching at SASA is like what I thought teaching was, when I was in college. You still have the same issues. You have the social challenges but just not to the measure that I have had in my other positions” (current SASA teacher, 2021).

The respect and admiration teachers had for one another and their accomplishments both as teachers and practitioners came through clearly in the interviewing process. “A lot of things intersect magically, a really uniquely motivated student population and a lot of teachers with sort of deep, rich skill sets and experience beyond just being in a school. I think it's tough if you were a student at a high school who became a student at a college and then became a teacher in a school. All anybody knows there is academia and that limits you somewhat. You kind of rely heavily on curriculum that really isn't designed to provide context. And I'm all about context. And I look around and I really like the staff, although I wouldn't teach the way [other SASA teachers] teach, but that's good. And the kids talk about their experiences, they talk about lots of rich, interesting content that has context that they can really see the meaning” (current SASA teacher, 2020). At the same time, SASA teachers consistently pointed out what became a common misconception to teachers outside of the school: that teaching at SASA is easier.

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- “Teachers in other schools think we’re skimming the cream of the crop...We had district meetings and there was always that little bit of an edge that, "Oh well, of course, of course you can do this because you've got the kids that can do it" (former SASA teacher, 2020).
- “The fact that we're poaching their kids, their top kids. And it was almost as though SASA was taking from other schools in the district, whereas in reality, we're offering something different for the kids, we're trying to specialize. If these kids are strong in an area, you promote it” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- Teachers were in awe of the support that the teachers at SASA had. That "You'd really get the time to have your costumes painted by another department in school. You really did a collaboration with the math department. Are you kidding me?" And yeah, I think by the time I retired, there wasn't a department I hadn't collaborated with” (former SASA teacher, 2020).
- “You pour your heart and soul into these kids, and you really want to see them be successful. Sometimes you just wonder, these kids that aren't as focused, are they not getting it, or is it a rebellion thing? So I always just kinda question, because so many of these kids, they'll challenge you. And I would say that teaching at SASA is a challenge, and there's a lot of teachers that might tell you, "Well, you've got all these smart kids, so of course your job's easy." No, no, it's the opposite because if you don't know what you're talking about, they know it. They know you don't know what you're talking about. So some of these teachers... I guess the word is bluffing. You have these teachers that they don't wanna admit that they don't know an answer. I tell the kids, "I don't know

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everything." If I don't know something, let's look it up. A lot of times, I've shocked them by the silly stuff that I know. I said, "You guys, a lot of this is higher order thinking, it's tough." Or the fact that "You don't know something, admit it. You don't know, let's look it up. Now that's why we have references"(current SASA teacher, 2020).

### **Finding 11: Adherence to the Core Elements of the Mission and Vision is Critical**

The vision originally set out under Foster Gibb's Superintendency of a concentration-based gifted and talented program that would draw students from across the region and compete at the national level is upheld to this day through several adjustments including:

- Transition to a Full Day program (with a half-day option) from a purely Half-Day Program
- Increased focused on high-stakes state testing
- Less per student funding/capital resources
- Significant decrease in area population

Through these changes, the mission-critical program elements identified by virtually every interviewed participant were protected and preserved:

- The Concentration Program including all the original concentrations
- Application-based Gifted/Talented Focus
- Magnet School drawing from multiple counties

And yet, there is also an undercurrent that also appears to be somewhat mission critical, a sort of underdog persona conditioned by the school's nontraditional status. Forty years of being different and looking different and being treated differently from other schools seems to invite the same response: Acceptance and an attitude that they will just make it happen anyway.

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“We're out-performing all of these other schools without the same supports that those schools have...I always tell people we're the diamond in the rough. We're in the heart of Saginaw. And what's on the outside? We are an old Montgomery Ward building. We're not a school, we don't look traditional. It's the magic inside the classrooms and the instruction that we do that makes us who we are...Tell me another school where a train runs through the middle of your soccer field?...we have dance studios in our facility that are way too small, yet we're sending kids to Juilliard from Saginaw, Michigan. And so we just make it happen” (SASA principal, 2020).

And yet, this juxtaposition of high achievement without all the resources has become part of the culture and perhaps therefore integral to the mission, which in the 40 years of the school's nontraditional existence and yet high levels of success raises the question: what does it really take to be successful? And perhaps, more to the point, what does it mean to be successful? Is having all the resources all that important if students can make outstanding achievements without them? Should SASA be considered resource-rich rather than lacking in resources given the experiences, talented staff, parental and student engagement? As a full day program, SASA now fights a slightly different battle from when it was a half-day program. Pressure is high to provide students with the full array of elective, sport, and extracurricular activities they might have going to a larger traditional high school. While there are a healthy number of options for non-concentration study and activity, there appears a constant pressure to compete more directly with larger traditional high schools, which if not careful, might pull SASA too far from its mission. When money was spent on things that were considered irrelevant to the mission, the SASA community retaliation was swift. Several participants mentioned the actions of one SASA

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principal (referred to below as “the other principal” and “they”) whose tenure was short lived, partly because of how they spent the school’s modest discretionary funds.

- “[The other principal] just wanted to make it another [traditional high school], and it wasn't intended to be that. And [they] didn't buy into the mission so [they] weren't doing a good job with it. And when [they] told me [they'd] canceled online classes so [they] could buy new rugs for the entryways, I about lost my sh\*t. I mean, we had an online learning lab where kids could do online college-level classes or online high school level classes where we didn't have class size. [They] eliminated it, eliminated the funding for it...just so [they] could buy rugs for the doorways that said SASA on them” (former SASA principal, 2020).
- “We had some very, very, very unhappy families. [Their] vision was different than the vision that... We had always been at CAS and SASA. And I get it, I don't necessarily think it was ill intent, but it just wasn't the vision, and [they] just weren't the right fit as an administrator here, and I think that's very important being in administration for as long as I've been in, you have to have the right leaders in the right place” (SASA principal, 2020).
- “They made a really bad principal decision, a couple of people after me, and we lost... SASA lost like 250 kids under them. It was terrible, it was just terrible. [They're] gone now. And [the current SASA principal], who was a teacher at SASA when I was there, is now the principal. And she understands the program, she understands the mission, she knows how to make it work” (former SASA principal, 2020).



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- “If you don't have the leadership that sets an example of acceptance and inclusion and open-mindedness and an empathy about our students as human beings, and as people who are coming from life experiences that are as diverse as their religious backgrounds and race and gender and everything else, if you don't have an understanding of that from the staff, then it's not gonna... It's not going to filter down to the students either. And so I think... You see that. Like, I know that the Science teachers completely appreciate everything that the Theater kids do, and you know what, they come to my shows all the time. And the kids see that and they know that. And that is where you... Like with anything, you see it, if the teachers are emulating it, the students will pick up on that too” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- “[The other principal] turned off families...turned off kids. That was rough. [The other principal] would try to call out certain teachers like [they] would pick on the young teachers. And I wasn't gonna deal with it. I was pretty headstrong...We lost a lot of students, families, and the PR around the building was terrible, as far as what SASA stood for. So we're rebounding, but it only takes one bad year or two bad years to really impact a school our size. When half the kids come from out of district, you can't upset those families. Our standards, I felt like, were lowered” (current SASA teacher, 2020).

Part of the Mission and ingrained in the culture of the school is the role of diversity and inclusion. Teachers and Administrators often discussed the high level of school diversity and cohesion, but also the ways in which SASA encourages it. Students typically enter as 6th graders and remain through high school with their peers. Students work closely within and also across their concentrations.

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- “Families that are really focused on wanting their kids to have that multicultural experience without bullying, without a lot of judgment, still choose SASA. And I think it's one of the most wonderful things about the school is that all of these people come together with all these different backgrounds, and everybody's accepted for who they are” (former SASA principal, 2020).
- “Kids hang out with other kids that they have interest in. It doesn't mean that mom's... Parents are upper class or if they're on welfare, if these kids have similarities, they hang out together, they're friends, it's in... And they don't care that... Things aren't based on what they look like or who's got what. It's really what you like, and it's really awesome to see so many different kids. And when I say diversity, I'm not just talking racial diversity. I'm talking wealth gap type of stuff, and religion. And my son coming out of Merrill to here, what some kids... He would see some of his friends from Merrill and they'd make comments about somebody and he'd defend them because some kid said some type of a... It was like a Muslim joke, and my son just went off and said, "That's offensive. That's racist." Because some of his friends are Muslim. But you don't see that. You don't see that, these kids are kind of blind to that” (current SASA teacher, 2020).
- This is a big one, diversity. It is such a diverse school. You go to our cafeteria at lunch time, at almost every table in the cafeteria, we have a couple of kids who are maybe Indian-Pakistani, a couple kids who are African-American and Hispanic, you got a couple white kids. You look at the tables in our cafeteria, you look at friendships in the hallways, you look at the kids who interact with each other throughout our school and concentrations, whatever, and it's so diverse. And it... There's just not that controversy

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that you so often hear in the news about racial tensions and racial issues. It is such a diverse school where there's just so much respect for each other. That's another thing that helps us to stand out. You don't see that in other schools. I'm sure it exists, but you don't go to many schools and look in the cafeteria and see the diversity that you see in our school, and it is very diverse and. It's not like five tables of African-Americans and two tables of the Indian kids and nine tables of the white kids. It is just diverse. There's so many friendships in our program and our school that involve pure diversity. So there's a lot of cultural diversity happening in our building. It's very cool to see. I think a lot of it, again goes back to history. Kids come in as sixth graders and see this and experience this. It's one of those things that it just has always happened and because it's always happened... And again, sixth graders come in, they come in the cafeteria and see all this diversity happening, they see all these friendships, and see the culture that we offer at SASA, it's just... It's part of who we are. I don't know if I have a better answer than that” (current SASA teacher, 2020).

## Recommendations

The purpose of this research project has been to tell the story of how one public school has developed an incredibly creative approach and achieved excellence in spite of resource and environmental obstacles that thwart similarly disposed schools elsewhere. The reason I chose to create a case study for this school is because every time I describe how the school operates, where it operates, and what it is able to accomplish, my educational practitioner colleagues routinely tell me, “it doesn’t sound possible” or “that wouldn’t work in my district” or “it’s too complicated” or “it sounds like a wealthy district or a private school.” The purpose of these recommendations, therefore, is not to offer SASA ways in which it can improve as an institution, but rather to suggest how other schools and districts can emulate the SASA model to achieve greater results in terms of teacher and student engagement, authentic learning opportunities, and achieve state and national results all while working within the usual budgetary limitations of the public school model.

### **Recommendation 1: Give Students the Gift of Engagement, Identity, and Grounding in their Studies by Allowing Them to Select A Concentration.**

The most commonly cited difference between SASA and other schools the teachers and administrators had worked with is SASA’s signature Concentration program, which offers students the ability to choose a subject in which to focus their studies for 2-3 hours per day. Such a move may appear contrary to current trends in which offering students more options and hours in a traditional schedule. Can the student accomplish all requirements and still take a 2-3 hour dance class per day? The evidence suggests this is not only possible, but for the student whose passion is dance, art, theatre, math/science, or another subject, it may yield

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greater engagement and success in that area while still accommodating the student's other curricular needs. A review of the schedules in this Case Study illustrates the logistics of the concentration program against a master schedule. One method is not necessarily better than the other, but is it possible that deeper experiences in one subject are more beneficial to the student than several more superficial experiences across multiple subjects. Assuming breath can still be achieved or a well-rounded education, can adding depth in a particular area offer a way to anchor the student's experience, offering a more rewarding opportunity?

### **Recommendation 2: The Application-Based Magnet School Approach Offers Multiple Benefits in terms of Student Buy-in, Larger Resource Pools, and Disruption to Problematic Neighborhood/District School Models**

Interview participants repeatedly indicated that without the Magnet Model's reach across districts, SASA would struggle to fulfill membership needs to retain all concentrations and opportunities. Additionally, students would not benefit from a broader peer group experience afforded by the multi-county affiliation. Also, because SASA is an application-based school, students have to make a choice to apply, audition, test, and ultimately choose to attend the program. This sense of buy-in indicates greater engagement but also feeds greater engagement. The students who remain in the program are making a choice with each passing year between SASA and perhaps attending a school closer to home or within their neighborhood. Finally, that the student has applied to and been accepted to attend the program confers, as many interview participants indicated, a sense of accomplishment on day 1. Students feel special because they are special. They've earned the right to be there and the power that feeling has to motivate was discussed several times during the interview process. It is by no means a requirement that the

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school operate in an application-based Magnet model to produce success, but depending on community population, gaining enough membership of students who want to be there and will put in the work needed to succeed at a high level may require working outside the traditional lines.

### **Recommendation 3: Begin with a Half-Day Model in which Students Can Focus on their Concentration before moving into a Full Day Option.**

While it may make running the school day logistically harder to arrange for transportation between home schools and the program, committing to a half-day program before a full day comprehensive school does allow for a more streamlined proof of concept to emerge, develop and find success in the signature program before adding schedule and resource complexities such as sports, electives, and core curriculum. Offering a half day program also allows a split schedule for middle and high school so instructors can be hired for a full day of instruction.

Focusing on the core components of the concentration, separated by a middle school and high school grade range allows concentration instructors to consider and refine the components of the concentration at the two levels that prepares students for success and ultimately allows instructors to focus on honing the best practices to ensure success of the program. A practical component to consider is program prestige, which is nurtured by student success. Students split into two tranches - middle and high school - and further divided into cohorts within each tranche (generally by grade band) while grade bands remain in the same class allowing older students to serve as mentors to younger students. Yes, it is likely class differentiation is required across grades within a tranche, but the longer concentration time frame (2-3 hours) allows more easily for grade-band specific differentiation exercises while still allowing for whole group

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exercises, and, perhaps more critically, time for individual students to immerse themselves into their craft while remaining focused, unencumbered by additional classes, or more realistically requiring them to take the entirety of their homework assignment home with them, along with all their other homework. The goal is to provide specific, defined space to focus on this subject; in other words: to concentrate on their concentration. If it is logistically more feasible to form a concentration program within an existing comprehensive school, the following two recommendations should still be considered as best practices.

### **Recommendation 4: Be mindful of both internal and external validation measures in the spirit of Project-Based Learning**

Competition isn't everything, but it is an interesting way to validate your school's efficacy if your students are routinely present at the state and national fairs, workshops, and programs. As an authentic formative as well as summative assessment within a project-based curriculum, local, state, and national events facilitate a grounding as well as external validation. Additionally, competition encourages students to think beyond the classroom, the curricular standards, and the four walls of the school to understand how their concentration practice can be applied to the external world and in particular to try on a vocation as a career. Once out in the 'real world' students need to understand perhaps the more practical elements of the concentration in terms of career application. Validating their learning and understanding the practical application within a practice environment helps them to understand whether the careers available to this field are truly for them. If this sounds like vocational training, it is. As demonstrated by adapting the concentration-based Voc/Tech model for the G/T program, apprenticeship, as a concept, has

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a far broader application and can save students tens of thousands of dollars in tuition by avoiding the wrong path.

### **Recommendation 5: Hire Educators with a Foothold in Industry as well as Academia**

While several concentration instructors at SASA entered as career educators, a very specific phenomenon was at play at SASA that supported the other recommendations on this list: those educators either maintained industry ties as educators by being both classroom instructors and practitioners in their craft or those educators left industry as successful practitioners and retrained as educators. In either case, the practical application of their concentration focus as educators was embedded in their instruction. And this practical application was validated in the local, state, and national conferences, fairs, and competitions they attended, juried, or showcased their students year after year. It would not be enough to pluck a practitioner from industry and place them in the classroom. Every teacher interviewed who came from industry retrained formally as an educator, completed student teaching and usually a number of years as an educator in other contexts before coming to SASA. Equally, successful teachers at SASA maintained industry ties to validate and calibrate their practices in the classroom on a regular basis. The duality of practical and academic experience benefited both educators and students. The power in these recommendations, like the SASA school model itself, and the academic literature that supports its implementation, is in their collective application as a model of models. If the Literature Review reads like a collection of several scholarly ideas amalgamated into one, it is because that is exactly what it took for SASA to be as successful as it has been. Magnet School, Arts Education, G/T Programming, Concentration-Based Education, HP/HP best practices, and the practices of Effective Schools; not one of these threads of academic study



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could, in practicality, be affixed with more influence than another in SASA's success. Perhaps, what we learn in the quest for "What it takes" is that we should not expect new outcomes from old or one-note formulas. Practical application does not work that way. Perhaps, educational outcomes are more powerful when inventiveness, innovation, and irreverence drive structure. Perhaps, in the spirit of the program founder, school leaders need to be willing to risk their job to create programs that are successful in spite of it all. Perhaps as a leader when you know you're alone, but you know you're right, you need to find a way to do it anyway.

## Conclusion

**Purpose.** The reason I chose to create a case study for this school is because every time I describe how the school operates, where it operates, and what it is able to accomplish, my educational practitioner colleagues routinely tell me, “it doesn’t sound possible” or “that wouldn’t work in my district” or “it’s too complicated” or “it sounds like a wealthy district or a private school.” Therefore, recommendations are offered not to improve SASA, but rather to suggest how other schools and districts can emulate the SASA model to achieve greater results in terms of teacher satisfaction, student engagement, authentic learning opportunities, as well as state and national recognition all while working within the usual budgetary limitations of the public school model:

- Give Students the Gift of Engagement, Identity, and Grounding in their Studies by Allowing Them to Select A Concentration.
- The Application-Based Magnet School Approach Offers Multiple Benefits in terms of Student Buy-in, Larger Resource Pools, and Disruption to Problematic Neighborhood/District School Models.
- Begin with a Half-Day Model in which Students Can Focus on their Concentration before moving into a Full Day Option.
- Be mindful of both internal and external validation measures in the spirit of Project-Based Learning.
- Hire Educators with a Foothold in Industry as well as Academia.

The goal of this Case Study was to contribute to the existing literature on creating and scaling effective, innovative public school models designed to produce extraordinary results even in

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spite of what appear to be sub-optimal financial, political, or community conditions. In other words: “How does SASA survive and thrive given its status as a high-poverty school in a high-crime, high-unemployment, low-income area?” Understanding the history and evolution of SASA, as well as the current factors in its success can provide lessons to education leaders across the country on how to thrive in spite of circumstances that would otherwise present as obstacles including:

- Growing inequality across district budgets.
- Rapidly increased Focus on High-Stakes Tests.
- Hyperfocus on Test-Specific Reading and Mathematics Preparation as well as Fewer Advanced Options in struggling districts.

How SASA is able to navigate these obstacles in a setting that would otherwise struggle to provide a gifted and talented program provides lessons for other schools that want to offer not only similar programming but to make gains across the board for their students. What is learned in the quest for “What it takes” to be successful in spite of the obstacles is that we should not expect new outcomes from old or one-note formulas. Indeed SASA blends multiple threads scholarship into its practice: Magnet School, Arts Education, G/T Programming, Concentration-Based Education, HP/HP best practices, and the practices of Effective Schools, and not one of these could be affixed with more influence than another in SASA’s success. Rather, educational outcomes are more powerful when inventiveness, innovation, and irreverence drive structure. SASA goes against the grain in several key respects related to larger discussions of public education as well as education in high-poverty areas:

- Magnet Program serving multiple counties

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- An extremely high-performing school in an economically depressed area
- Incredibly strong and well maintained focus on the arts in spite of broad slashes to arts funding even in more well off districts
- Persistence of a concentration program in spite of increased demands for Math and ELA testing and accountability

What emerges is the fundamental question at the core of effective school research: What does it really take to make an effective school? SASA offers the opportunity to determine what is needed for a public school to succeed even with a high poverty rate. When schools are generally as good as the tax base that goes into them, figuring out how to fight the statistics and work against the system to create a school that is truly great where people may least expect it is precisely the research that saves the concept of public schools from the claws of income inequality.

**Findings.** Qualitative analysis involving the five factors (leadership, instruction, financial, political, and community) of documents and extensive interviews with 19 current and former SASA teachers and administrators suggest the following findings are of primary importance to SASA's initial and continued success. Leadership collaborated, networked, and built a coalition of political and community good will by addressing the community's educational needs in order of greatest utility, including the establishment of a Voc/Tech Career Training Center before developing SASA's Gifted and Talented programming. The Concentration concept was actually a reapplication of the Voc/Tech Concentration methodology, which was and is incredibly successful, in a G/T environment. SASA's Concentration Instruction Centers on Project Based Learning which fuels Engagement, confirms Relevance, and provides Assessment opportunities

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in the form of Local, State, and National Competitions. The Concentration Program confers Identity upon Students and Teachers in the SASA Community while SASA's application-based approach breeds a culture of choice and success among students. Financially, the Magnet Model and Michigan's Schools of Choice Policy Give SASA the Membership it needs to Continue offering services by providing a broader reach and therefore higher population and access to surrounding district funding than the host district can provide. To provide further stability in an increasingly tight school budgetary climate, leadership established a Foundation to Support High-Cost Programs and Annual Expenses and Teachers routinely engage in creative fundraising including leveraging their students' concentration talents to win financial awards and create commissioned works. Members of the SASA community thrive on a culture of trust and respect which sustains morale amid unstable times. And through 40+ years of shifting demographics, local, state, and national policy, financial ups and downs, and competitive pressures, adherence to SASA's core mission and vision has been key to its continued success.

**Limitations.** It will likely be observed that SASA's programming caters to students who are already considered gifted and talented and therefore more likely to achieve high success regardless of environment. However it should be noted that even if SASA's program rigor may only be handled by a subset of the population, the concept of an application-based magnet school in which students are able to focus on a concentration does not require the program to only cater to gifted and talented students. It is the factors of choice, application, and concentration that interview participants credited most with student engagement and buy-in. Following behind, the project-based nature of the program provided external validation of the curriculum in preempting the question "how will I use this in real life?" Interview Participants

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who commented on the differences between their time at SASA vs other schools suggested the idea of applying to a program, of making a choice to attend a certain school, and of selecting a concentration might be beneficial to many more students, particularly when those concentrations include as broad a collection as SASA (Language Arts, Global Studies, Dance, Theatre, Visual Art 2-D, Visual Art 3-D, Math/Science, and Voice/Keyboard). “I think it [a concentration program at another school] would be wonderful and it might help with the desire ... to be at school. I think probably more so in high school...with the desire to be there... Middle school level, I just think they would enjoy it more and probably help with their disposition of getting through the day and having something to look forward to that they really enjoy” (current SASA teacher, 2021). Additionally, it should be remembered that SASA’s concentration approach first found success at Saginaw Career Complex, the city’s Voc/Tech school in which the concentrations were different but the concept of choice, application, concentration, and project-based learning were the same.

**Continued Inquiry and Impact.** Further inquiry would provide practical validation of the recommendations provided in this case study.

- Give Students the Gift of Engagement, Identity, and Grounding in their Studies by Allowing Them to Select A Concentration.
- The Application-Based Magnet School Approach Offers Multiple Benefits in terms of Student Buy-in, Larger Resource Pools, and Disruption to Problematic Neighborhood/District School Models.
- Begin with a Half-Day Model in which Students Can Focus on their Concentration before moving into a Full Day Option.

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- Be mindful of both internal and external validation measures in the spirit of Project-Based Learning.
- Hire Educators with a Foothold in Industry as well as Academia.

What is the impact on other schools that are already following some of these recommendations and what do we have to learn about revisions we should make to our public school models to replicate and amplify the successes of the SASA model? What if the model were in use in any district or region with a similar socioeconomic and demographic profile? What long term social and economic impacts might emerge if we cut across antiquated and segregated district lines; give students an avenue for their passion, a choice in their education, and the feeling of success from day one? What if leadership created opportunities rather than follow the tired rote curricular paths, worried more about student engagement than job security? What if we encouraged and trusted teachers who have a passion not only for theory but also for practice? What an interesting nation we would be if we followed the SASA model.

## Epilogue

After 40 years in a former department store, SASA will soon have a new home. A local bond passed in the fall of 2020 (as the research for this case study was in process) that will see the formation of a new K-12 gifted and talented campus, to be located on the site of one of the former comprehensive high schools. The department store will be demolished, making way for a new campus where the two comprehensive high schools will consolidate into one.



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# Appendices

## SASA Master Schedule



SASA MASTER SCHEDULE 2020-21

Middle School	8:05-9:35	9:40-10:55	10:10-10:55	10:05-10:53	10:55-11:35	11:40-12:25	12:31-1:16	1:22-2:07	2:11-2:56
<b>High School</b>	<b>8:25-9:13</b>	<b>9:13-10:05</b>	<b>10:05-10:53</b>	<b>10:55-11:35</b>	<b>11:40-12:20</b>	<b>12:25-1:25</b>	<b>1:22-2:07</b>	<b>2:30-3:20</b>	
ALLAN	CHEM 00045-01	ASTRONOMY 00062-01	PHYSICS 00055-01	CHEM 00045-02					
APLEGATE		G/T THEATRE MS- 57311-01	FILM IN LIT.-LAFILM01	PREP					
BANGERT	PREP	SPANISH 2-HS 04042-03	SPANISH 3-04043-02	SPANISH 4-04044-01					
BARNES	PREP	G/T SCI-PHYS/EARTH(O) - 50112-02							
BEHE	PREP	G/T LIFE SCI. 6 - 50110-02							
BOHLINGER	P.E.-HS-S1 -HP0801-02 / Health/HS/52-HP0832-02	P.E.-HS-S1 -HP0801-03 / Health/HS/52-HP0832-03							
BUBLITZ	G/T DANCE MS- 57111-01								
CAMPBELL	HS ADV. ALG/TRIG 03047-01	HS GEOMETRY 03045-01	HS GEOMETRY 03045-02						
CORRIGAN	HS INSTR. MUSIC 07065-01	Jazz Band 07073-02							
DOUD	AP US HISTORY 01038-01	G/T 6 GLOBAL STUDIES 52012-01							
EWALD	G/T VISUAL ART MS- 57411-01								
FELDMAN	G/T GLOB STUD. 8 - 52212-01	9:35-10:10	SOC STUDIES 8 01807-01						
FERGIN	G/T VOICE/KEY MS- 57511-01		PREP	10:55-11:35					
GIROUX	G/T VISUAL ART MS- 57411-02		PREP	3D ART DESIGN 07031-01					
GOETZE	G/T ELA 6 52011-01	G/T ELA 8 52211-01	ELA 7 02703-02						
HOWARTH	Creative Writing 02283-02	PREP	ELA 7 02703-02						
ISOTALO	G/T GLOB STUD.(7) 52112-01	9:35-10:10	SOC STUDIES 7 01207-04	Writing Pub. LA311-04					
JOINER	G/T PRE-ALG.(6) 50109-01	9:35-10:10	MATH 6 03603-04						
KOWALSKI	PERS. FINANCE 03042-02	Pre-Calc 03053-02	PREP	PRE-CALC 03053/01					
LATESKY	G/T Alg (7) 50111-01	9:35-10:10	BIO(9-12) -00031-03	BIO(9-12) -00031-04					
LENEWAY	G/T GEOM(7) - 50113-01	G/T GEOMETRY(7) - 50113-02		GEOM 03045-02					
RANSFORD	PREP	G/T ELA 7 - 52111-01							
MILLER	G/T PRE-AP ENV. 50114-01	G/T PRE-AP ENV. SCI. 50114-02							
MORNINGSTAR	Explore Lit. 020609-01	PREP	Explore Lit. 020609-02	Explore Lit. 020603-03					
OLIVERA	WORLD HIST 9/10 01035-01	WORLD HIST 9/10 01035-04		PREP	AP US GOVT - 01065-01 /ECON01066-02				
SCHNEIDER	WLD LIT/COMP 02279-01	AP US GOVT - 01065-02	APRNG LANG. 02206-01	WLD LIT/COMP 02279-02					
SEXTON	YEARBOOK 02031-01	SPANISH 1-HS 04041-01	SPANISH 2-HS 04042-02	SPANISH 1-HS 04041-02					
POLZIN	HS Robotics	Tech Corp	HS Robotics						

Effective as of 9.14.20. Subject to Change.



# Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy

School District of the City of Saginaw

**OPEN HOUSE**

February 15, 2017

6:00 P.M.



## OPEN HOUSE FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS FEBRUARY 15, 2017

Welcome

Staff Introductions

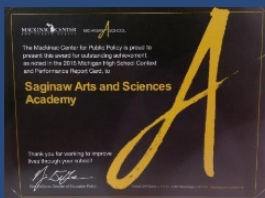
Admissions Packet

Application (List Of Testing Dates On Back)

Evaluation Checklists (To Be Completed By Teachers)

Building Map (Included In Admissions Packet)

SASA Programs (Included In Admissions Packet)



*“SASA ranked as #4 of the Top 20 High Schools in Michigan as listed in 2016 Michigan Public High School Context and Performance Report Card by the Mackinac Center”*



### Vision Statement

**Saginaw Arts & Sciences Academy will extend learning opportunities for all students, in every core subject, preparing students to enter postsecondary career pathways in an ever-changing technological world.**

### Mission Statement

**The Saginaw Arts and Sciences Academy faculty, staff, students, parents and collaborative community commits to specifically serve the gifted and/or talented student.**

### SASA will promote a system of education that:

- Ensures the highest level of academic achievement.
- Prepares students in career pathways in our ever-changing technological world.
- Provides collaborative instruction to promote creative and productive learning.

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## SASA Achievements

<p>AP Classes, On-Line Courses, Dual Enrollment; majority of all AP tests taken were passed at level 3 or higher out of possible 5, which results in for college credit for certain courses, when the student matriculates at a participating college/university.</p>	<p>On the 2016 SAT, our 11<sup>th</sup> graders surpassed the district, state, and the National Mean Score of 980 with a score of 1169.</p> <p>Ranked #8 in Michigan with highest SAT scores!</p>	<p>Our students' MSTEP scores were double and triple the state averages of proficient students in Math Science, English and Social Studies at every grade level.</p>
<p>Two National Merit Scholars in 2010, 2011, 2012 &amp; 2016</p> <p>One National Merit Scholarship Program Semi-Finalist in 2013</p> <p>One National Merit Finalist – 2014</p> <p>Two National Merit Achievement Program Semi-Finalist – 2015</p>	<p>On the 2016 PSAT, our 10<sup>th</sup> graders surpassed the district, state, and the National Mean Score of 937 with a score of 1113.</p> <p>On the 2016 PSAT, our 9<sup>th</sup> graders surpassed the district, state, and the National Mean Score of 874 with a score of 986.</p>	<p>Award Winning Teaching Staff: Barnes &amp; Noble "My Favorite Teacher"; Saginaw News "Crystal Apple Award"; MCET "English Teacher of the Year"; American Chemical Society's "Chemistry Teacher of the year", Scholastic Art &amp; Writing Award Gold Key Teaching Awards, etc.</p>
<p>ACT Average Scores: 2015-16: 25.6 Highest Composite ACT Score (36) earned in 2012 by one SASA student (only one-tenth of one percent of ALL test takers earns this distinction)</p>	<p>SASA finished 2<sup>nd</sup> place closely behind Interlochen in the Scholastic Annual Writing Competition. Grades 8-12 earned 64 total awards primarily from the ELA Concentration classes.</p>	<p>6 teams qualified in the A.H. Nickless Innovation Award Competition and earned grants of \$1000 for each team to conduct research for the next round of competition in April.</p>

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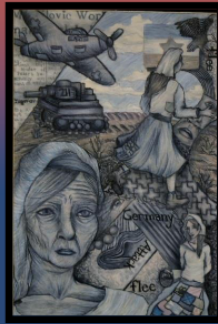
# SASA Achievements

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High School Theatre concentration competed at the Michigan Thespian Fellowship and scored excellent or superior in adjudications in their individual events. One student was awarded a \$30,000 scholarship to Rochester College.	US News & World Report America's Best of High Schools, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016	Became full day program (grades 6-10) in 2000-01; First graduation in 2002; Awarded North Central Accreditation in 2008-09
Selected as a MI Youth Arts Festival Team in Dance, Writing and Art; #1 and other top rankings in area Art shows and competitions	Majority #1 Ratings in MSBOA (Band and Orchestra) Competitions and MSVMA (Voice) Competitions	North Central Accreditation Extended through June 2018
1 <sup>st</sup> Place Individual & Team in Saginaw County Spelling Bee Winners for Consecutive years	MI Youth Shakespeare Festival Medalist competitors State Finalists in Geography Bee and Reader's Digest Word Power Contest VFA Essay Contest Winners	Local, Regional, National TEAM Competitions - NOBCChE; First Robotics with SCC – Saginaw County Science Fair Awarded FIRST Robotics Grants for high school & middle school teams
Local, State & International winners: SCSEF, MISEF, ISEF (Science Fair Competitions)	New textbooks for grades 6-12 in Science, Mathematics and Social Studies	Over 3.0 MILLION or more in Scholarships each year for classes of 2003 and beyond. \$3,341,642 for the 48 graduates in the Class of 2016
Saginaw County Art Awards and Scholastic Literary Magazine (ICONS) Awards distinction	Scholastic Art & Writing Awards –Gold Key Winners in English and Visual Arts 2004 - 2016	New Chromebook Carts, Computers, 3D and Laser through the efforts of the SASA Parents and the SASA Technology Committee



Middle School Science Fair 2017



Bella Campbell – Gr. 6

## Scholastic 2D Art Award Winners 2017

Gold Key Award Winners



Maddie McFarland Gr. 12



Middle School First Tech Challenge- Two Teams!



Middle School Science Fair 2017

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## CAREER & COLLEGE FAIR



**COMMUNITY  
PROFESSIONALS &  
MOCK INTERVIEWS**



**COLLEGE  
REPRESENTATIVES**



## Admissions Requirements

- Completed Application
- Written test (all students)
- 2 current Teacher Recommendations/ Evaluations on checklist form provided in packet
- Transcripts (high school) and/or current year report card w/attendance, grades and discipline report
- Audition for V/P Arts





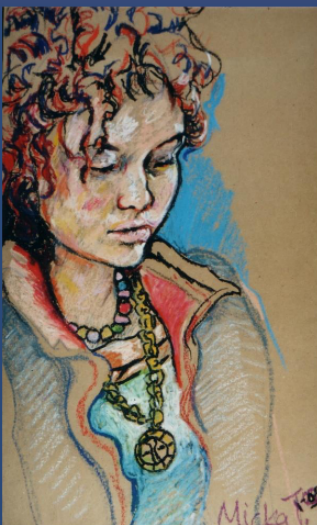
## When is the Application Reviewed for Admission?

Not until ALL requirements are met and ALL needed documents are COMPLETED and RECEIVED

(i.e., SASA Application received, SASA written test taken, TWO teacher recommendations received, current year report cards/transcripts received, V/P arts audition completed and audition accepted)

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## What About Auditions & Drawing Assessments?



- SASA teachers and administrators will review applications and will call students individually to set up auditions
- Art students take a drawing test – a simple still life, line drawing and bring a portfolio of 8-10 pieces of their best artwork. 1 cartoon maximum
- Dance students provide a demonstration of skills
- Voice/Keyboard students prepare a selection and perform
- Theatre students prepare and perform a monologue

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## SASA Performance Requirements

- Students must maintain a “C” average minimum in all courses and a “C+” or better average minimum in Concentration program to remain a student in good standing at SASA
- Students failing to meet standards for performance are placed on Academic Probation at Term 1 and provided additional supports to aid success. Progress is monitored at each grading window (8 times/year).
- Students may be reduced to ½ day or be required to leave SASA within 1 semester, if the necessary improvements are not made
- Students must commit to studying a minimum of 2-3 hours/day
- Students are expected to be in attendance a minimum of 90% of the school year

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## SASA Concentration Options

- Dance (Gr. 6-12)
- Voice/Keyboard (Gr. 6-12)
- Visual Arts 2D & 3D (Gr. 6-12)
- Math/Science (Gr. 6-12)
- Language Arts/Global Studies (Gr. 6-8)
- Theatre (Gr. 6-12)
- Language Arts (Gr. 9-12)
- Global Studies (Gr. 9-12)

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## **Middle School Daily Schedule**

### **AM Concentration for Full Day OR Half-Day Students**

**Math/Science & Lang. Arts/Global Studies 8:05 to 10:55 AM**

**Visual & Performing Arts (V/PA) 8:05 to 10:05 AM**

**Half- Day Students: Daily Schedule is 8:05 AM to 10:55 AM**

### **Full Day Student Schedule – PM additional**

**Lunch 10:55 AM to 11:35 AM**

**5<sup>th</sup> hour 11:40 AM to 12:25 PM**

**6<sup>th</sup> hour 12:31 PM to 1:16 PM**

**7<sup>th</sup> hour 1:22 PM to 2:07 PM**

**8<sup>th</sup> hour 2:11 PM to 2:56 PM**

**Full Day Students: Daily Schedule is 8:05 AM to 2:56 PM**

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## **Typical SASA Middle School Courses**

- **Mathematics (Math 6, Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry)**
- **Science (Earth/Physical/Life/Pre AP Environmental Science)**
- **Social Studies (ancient civilizations to early U.S.)**
- **Language Arts (Reading, Writing, Grammar, Listening, Speaking)**
- **Rounds (Gr. 6 – Keyboarding, Phys. Ed., Speech, Organizing and Using a Planner, etc.) or Spanish Gr. 7-8 (1A & 1B)**
- **Band (Beginning Band, Advanced Beginning, Intermediate, Gr. 8 Concert)**

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## Typical Schedule: Middle School Math/Science Concentration

### 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Pre-Algebra  
G/T Earth Science  
English Lang Arts  
Social Studies  
Rounds  
Beginning or  
Adv. Begin. Band

### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Algebra  
G/T Physical Sci.  
English Lang Arts  
Social Studies  
Spanish (Elective)  
Interm. Band (Elective)  
Physical Ed. (Elective)

### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Geometry  
G/T Pre AP Environ. Sci.  
English Lang Arts  
Social Studies  
Spanish (Elective)  
Concert Band (Elective)  
Physical Ed. (Elective)

**NOTE:** Students in this Concentration may only choose two electives from those listed under their grade level.

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## Typical Schedule: Middle School Language Arts/Global Studies Concentration

### 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Language Arts  
G/T Global Studies  
Math 6  
Science 6  
Rounds  
Beginning or  
Adv. Begin. Band  
(Elective)

### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Language Arts  
G/T Global Studies  
Pre-Algebra  
Science 7  
Spanish (Elective)  
Interm. Band (Elective)  
Physical Ed (Elective)

### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

G/T Language Arts  
G/T Global Studies  
Algebra  
Pre AP Environmental Sci  
Spanish (Elective)  
Concert Band (Elective)  
Physical Ed

**NOTE:** Students in this Concentration may only choose two electives from those listed under their grade level.

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## Typical Schedule: Dance, Theatre, Visual Arts (V.A.), or Voice/Keyboard (V/K)

### 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Dance/Theatre/V.A. or V/K  
 Social Studies  
 Language Arts  
 Math 6  
 Science  
 Rounds or Band

### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

Dance/Theatre/V.A. or V/K  
 Social Studies  
 Language Arts  
 Pre-Algebra  
 Science  
 Band or Spanish or P.E.

### 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Dance/Theatre/V.A. or V/K  
 Social Studies  
 Language Arts  
 Algebra  
 Science  
 Band or Spanish or P.E.

The Visual Arts, Dance, Theatre, and Voice/Keyboard Concentrations meet for a 2 hour block, which is why there is only one elective in the student's schedule.  
 Students must be able to take all 4 cores (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies).

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## High School Schedule

### Full Day HS Student Daily Schedule

1 <sup>st</sup> hour	8:25 AM to 9:13 AM
2 <sup>nd</sup> hour	9:13 AM to 10:01 AM
3 <sup>rd</sup> hour	10:05 AM to 10:53 AM
4 <sup>th</sup> hour	10:53 AM to 11:40 AM
Lunch	11:40 AM to 12:20 PM

### PM Schedule for Full Day OR Half-Day Students

Concentration:	*12:25 PM to 2:30 PM
Core or elective class:	2:32 PM to 3:20 PM

Full Day Students: Daily Schedule is 8:25 AM to 3:20 PM

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## Typical SASA High School Course of Study

- Mathematics (4 years required)
- English (4 years required)
- Science (3-4 years)
- Social Studies (3 years)
- Band (Elective)
- Spanish/Foreign Language (2 years)
- Other Visual or Performing Arts Concentration or elective(s) (1 Year)
- Yearbook, Film in Literature, Writing for Publications, Robotics, AP, SCC, dual enrollment or online

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## Extra Curricular Activities Middle School

- Community Education
- Sports (6<sup>th</sup> grade)
- Basketball (7-8)
- Volleyball (7-8)
- Theatre Productions
- Track (7-8)
- Dances (6-8)
- Jujitsu
- Spelling Club (6-8)
- Math Counts (6-8)
- First Tech Challenge(6-8)
- Student Council (6-8)
- National Junior Honor Society (7-8)
- Cheerleading (7-8)
- After school tutoring (6-8)
- Various clubs: student initiatives

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## Extra Curricular Activities High School

- Literary Publications
- Yearbook
- Model U.N. Club
- School wide Musical
- Dances
- Theatre Productions
- Michigan Youth Arts Festival, MSBOA, MVMEA
- National Honor Society
- National Art Honor Society
- Science & Engineering Teams
- First Robotics
- Soccer (Full Day only)
- Football (w / Valley Lutheran HS) (Full Day only)
- Basketball (Full Day only)
- Cross Country (Full Day only)
- Volleyball (Full Day only)
- Track & Field (Full Day only)
- Student Council
- Conferences and tours
- Clubs of Student Interest (Chemistry, Mathematics, Ultimate Frisbee Club, Multicultural Club, Philosophy Club, others)

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## Transportation to/from SASA

**Saginaw Public School District**  
**Residents:** bus transportation provided

**Saginaw Public School District**  
**Half-day Students:** buses provided between schools

**Out of District\*:** Parents drive and/or carpool; Midland or Bay City/Sawmill

**\*Bus available for a fee**



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# Application Review Timelines

- **Current SASA students:**  
February-April
- **New Applicants (early window), Full Day enrollments:** March-May
- **New Applicants, Half-day enrollments:** May-June
- **New Applicants (late window), Full-Day enrollments:** June-July



## Interview Protocols

### Teacher Interview Protocol

#### Project Background:

- When I explain the history, organization, location, and accomplishments of SASA, most colleagues assume it is a private school. When I explain that it is a public magnet school, they don't believe it is possible to replicate. I'd like to spend time with you discussing your experiences with SASA and how it came to be and continues to operate to this day.

#### A. Interviewee Background

- What is your role at SASA?
- Tell me about your background before coming to SASA, including your educational background and what you did before becoming a SASA instructor.
- How would you say your position at SASA is different from past teaching positions?
- Why did you come to work at SASA?

#### Factor 1: Instruction

- Walk me through a day of teaching at SASA. How is the class structured in terms of students? In terms of instruction?
- What are your requirements for your students and what are those based on?
- What instructional and assessment requirements and goals do you need to meet?
- How would you compare how you meet those requirements at SASA vs. how you meet them at another school?
- What are the greatest challenges in teaching these students?
- What are your measuring sticks for success during the year?

#### Factor 2a: Community Perspective (within SASA)

- Describe a typical SASA student for me.
- Describe the SASA community; What would you say is the level of community involvement of SASA?
- What supports are in place within SASA?
- What challenges do you face in terms of community at SASA?

#### Factor 2b: Community Perspective (outside SASA)

- What is the greater community perspective of SASA (those outside of SASA)?
- How do you think SASA is positioned within the community? What role does it play?

## CAPSTONE: SASA CASE STUDY

- What would you say is the level of community involvement of SASA?
- What about Community support?

### Factor 3: Leadership

- What do you define as the leadership here at SASA?
- How does leadership support you?
- How are you treated as a teacher?

### Factor 4: Finance

- What financial or funding issues do you see at play at SASA?
- How would you compare SASA funding issues with those from other schools?
- If you need money for .... How do you get it?

### Factor 5: Politics

- What obstacles do you see to getting your job done?
- In your time at this school, what do you see as having improved or declined?

## Administrator Interview Protocol

### Project Background:

- When I explain the history, organization, location, and accomplishments of SASA, most colleagues assume it is a private school. When I explain that it is a public magnet school, they don't believe it is possible to replicate. I'd like to spend time with you discussing your experiences with SASA and how it came to be and continues to operate to this day.

### A. Interviewee Background

- What is your role at SASA?
- Tell me about your background before coming to SASA including your educational background and what you did before becoming a (name administrative role relative to SASA)
- How would you say your position at SASA is different from past positions?
- Why did you come to work at SASA?

### Factor 1: Instructional Perspective

- What sets SASA instruction apart from other schools?



## CAPSTONE: SASA CASE STUDY

- Describe a typical SASA student for me/difference from students elsewhere.
- Describe a typical SASA teacher for me/difference from teachers elsewhere.
- What instructional and assessment requirements and goals do you need to meet?
- How would you compare how you meet those requirements at SASA vs. how you meet them at another school?

### Factor 2a: Community Perspective (within SASA)

- What defines the SASA community?
- What makes the SASA community different from other schools in the district/across counties?

### Factor 2b: Community Perspective (outside SASA)

- What do you think is the external community's perspective of SASA?
- How do you think the school's location within this community impacts it?

### D. Leadership

- What latitude do you have as a leader of this school?
- How do you choose to lead/Leadership style?
- What do you define as the leadership here at SASA?
- How does your leadership support you?

### E. Finance

- What is the funding model for students in SPS? How about SASA? How is it different? Where does SASA funding come from?
- What financial or funding issues do you see at play at SASA?
- How would you compare SASA funding issues with those from other schools?
- If you need money for .... How do you get it?

### F. Politics

- What political hurdles does SASA face? How about in comparison with other schools in Saginaw/outside Saginaw?

CAPSTONE: SASA CASE STUDY

**Coding Tables**

**Factor: Leadership** The themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below.

Sub-Factors	Themes	Sub-Themes
District		
Union		
Setting Expectations of Parents		
The Website/Marketing Efforts		
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Admin</li> <li>● Teacher</li> <li>● Student</li> <li>● Superintendent</li> <li>● Turnaround Principal</li> <li>● The Bad Principal</li> </ul>	
Time Pressures		
Attitude/Outlook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Playing to win</li> <li>● Not Playing not the lose</li> <li>● Attitude of Success</li> <li>● What you Think People Can Do</li> <li>● Meeting Needs</li> <li>● Problem/Solution Orientation</li> <li>● Startup Mentality</li> <li>● Wearing Multiple Hats</li> </ul>	
Building Coalition/GoodWill		
Real World Application		
CIPP Moel		
Consistency of Testing Experience/Test often		

CAPSTONE: SASA CASE STUDY

Making do with Less/Dealing with Financial Pressure		
Single Drivers for Program Change		
Founding of SASA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Original Vision</li> </ul>	

**Factor: Political** The themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below.

Sub-Factors	Themes	Sub-Themes
The New Bond		
Community and Board Support/Work with it		
NCLB		
District Pressure		
Working with Industry		
Redistricting/Bussing		
Millages		
District Holdouts/SASA Advantages		
Competition with Other Districts		
The Bad Principal		
Per Student Funding		
State Gifted Program Initiative		
Cherry Commission/Concentration Time Reduction		
Scheduling Issues		

CAPSTONE: SASA CASE STUDY

Middle Cities Education Group		
Shift in Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emphasis on Testing</li> <li>● State Requirements</li> </ul>	
Union Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Exceptionally Qualified</li> </ul>	
Proposal A		
Engler/Schools of Choice		

**Factor: Instruction** The themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below.

Sub-Factors	Themes	Sub-Themes
Program Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New Building</li> <li>● Competition</li> <li>● Full Day Program</li> </ul>	
College Matriculation/Communication of Program		
Remediation		
Testing Requirements		
Typical Day in the Classroom		
Passionate Instructors/Students		
Advanced Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dual Enrollment</li> </ul>	
Centering Instruction on Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Annual Events</li> <li>● Performances</li> <li>● Measuring Stick for Growth</li> </ul>	

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Voc/Tech Style/Format		
Mott Model		
Concentration Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Math/Science Program</li> <li>● Science Fair</li> <li>● Arts Focus</li> <li>● Performing Arts</li> <li>● Social Studies</li> <li>● ELA</li> <li>● Project Based</li> <li>● Real World Incorporation</li> <li>● Spiraled Instruction/Same Teacher for Years</li> </ul>	
Gifted Instruction/Accommodation for Social Issues		
Quality of Teachers/Ownership of Material		
Electives		
Sense of Accomplishment		
Scheduling Issues		
Class Structure		

**Factor Finance** The themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below.

Sub-Factors	Themes	Sub-Themes
Schools of Choice		

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Electives/Sports Costs/Workarounds		
Struggling City		
Scholarship Money for Graduates		
Concentration Hours Reduction		
Business-Minded Superintendent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Play to win rather than not to lose</li> <li>● Family of Academicians</li> <li>● Meet the Community Needs</li> </ul>	
Old Building/Campus Improvements		
Need for Funding/Lack of Resources		
New Bond		
Can't Afford Not to Work/Community Schools		
Proposal A		
Financial Support	Federal Funding	
	Community Business/Foundation Support	
	Alumni Giving/Trust Fund	
	Student Financial Support	
	Parent Financial Support	
	District Financial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Union Pressure</li> <li>● Millages</li> <li>● Pressure to Increase Class Size</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of Trust in District</li> </ul>
	Teacher/Admin Financial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Feldmart</li> <li>● Department Savings Accounts</li> </ul>
	Money from Surrounding Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How SASA supports SPS</li> </ul>
	Initial Seed Money	
	Per Student Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Title 1</li> </ul>

**Factor: Community** The themes and sub-themes which emerged over the course of interview analysis are organized in the table below.

Subfactors	Themes	Sub-Themes
External Community	District Relations/Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Superintendent</li> <li>● Union</li> <li>● District Issues</li> <li>● Schools of Choice</li> <li>● Competition for Students</li> </ul>
	City Relations/Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dwindling Population</li> <li>● Financial Struggles</li> <li>● Community Struggles</li> </ul>
	Competition with Other Districts	
	Outside Perspectives/Misconceptions of SASA	
SASA Community	Differences between SASA and other Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class Size</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher Expectations/Dedication/Competitiveness</li> <li>● Teachers from Industry</li> <li>● Student Performance Levels/Expectations</li> <li>● Lack of Resources</li> <li>● Living Arts Program/Importance of Arts</li> <li>● Perspectives on Grade Levels</li> </ul>
SASA Community	Differences between SASA and other Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Class Size</li> <li>● Teacher Expectations/Dedication/Competitiveness</li> <li>● Teachers from Industry</li> <li>● Student Performance Levels/Expectations</li> <li>● Lack of Resources</li> <li>● Living Arts Program/Importance of Arts</li> <li>● Perspectives on Grade Levels</li> </ul>
	Sources of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community/Business</li> <li>● SASA Foundation</li> <li>● Admin-Teacher</li> <li>● Teacher-Teacher</li> <li>● Student-Student</li> <li>● Teacher-Student</li> <li>● Parents</li> <li>● Teacher-Parent</li> </ul>



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	Private School Impression	
	The Building and Neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Old Building</li> <li>● The New Campus</li> <li>● Neighborhood/Redlining</li> </ul>
	Evolution of Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Could it happen today?</li> <li>● Origin of Model</li> <li>● Program Changes</li> </ul>
	Student/Peer Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acceptance of Diversity</li> <li>● Peer Motivation</li> <li>● Social Status/Issues</li> </ul>
	Concentration as Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project-Based</li> <li>● Competitions</li> <li>● Annual Concentration Activities</li> <li>● Cross-Concentration</li> <li>● Student Driven</li> </ul>
	Application School/Student Buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Culture of Success</li> <li>● Students choose to be here</li> </ul>
	SASA Geographic Reach	