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Race, Class, and Parental Advocacy for Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

By

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**Introduction**

Greenville is a pseudonym for a majority white, middle to upper-middle-class suburb of Detroit. The suburb has two public high schools, Greenleaf and Bluesky. In 2019 the estimated median household income was $125,100 and the town demographics were around 87% white (City-Data, 2021). Greenville parents have many privileges when it comes to advocating for their children. These advantages include being able to use cultural, social, and economic capital in their advocacy. In this project, I interviewed 8 parents and two professional advocates to better understand how class and race privilege impact how parents advocate for their children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and attention deficit disorder (ADD). Given the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the town, I evaluated how race and class privilege make an impact on the advocacy strategies of parents in Greenville.

As described by the CDC, ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder where children have a hard time with paying attention, impulse control, and being overly active (CDC, 2021). The diagnosis of ADHD is rather subjective, making it an interesting subject for this study. As a result of the subjectivity of the diagnosis many prejudices and discrimination can feed into the labeling of ADHD. This is why ADHD is important to study; it is not so cut and dried. The diagnosis of ADHD can be considered a stigma or a label. ​​With application to ADHD, labeling theory claims that the diagnosis of a child with ADD or ADHD is a label that creates stigma. Labeling theory additionally predicts that those assigned a label will act following others’ expectations of them (Shifrer, 2013). Therefore people would live up to the negative expectations that others and society have for them. Considering this along with the subjectivity of ADHD diagnosis, there is a weight to diagnosing students with this disability. It is additionally important to consider how race plays into the diagnosis of ADHD. Black students are often over labeled with ADHD as a result of internalized racism against specifically Black boys (Dever, et. al, 2016). This is another interesting way that subjectivity plays into ADHD and advocacy in education.

There are a multitude of studies that evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions in schools for children with ADHD (Evans, et.al 2014, Datchuk, et. al 2020, Denton, et. al 2020). However, the goal of this study is not to evaluate the effectiveness of ADHD interventions in Greenville Public Schools. Instead, the goal of this study is to better understand how parents see themselves as advocates for their children with learning disabilities such as ADD and ADHD, and how race and class play a role in this advocacy. It is important to consider how different forms of privilege impact a parents ability to advocate and gain opportunities for their children as these privileges may exacerbate inequalities within schools.

Within the fields of sociology and disability studies, research often looks at disability through the lens of the social model of disability, in contrast to the more widely used medical model. The social model of disability views society as the problem rather than the individual with the impairment. Under this lens disability is viewed as the ways in which society and societal structures fail to accommodate individuals with impairment (Shakespeare, 2010). Rather than treating individual impairments, the social model aims to view the ways in which society can change in order to accommodate impairments. Under the medical model, ADHD is viewed as an individual problem that can be fixed through medication and interventions. For the purposes of this study, I will be taking a theoretical perspective of the social model of disability in my analysis as it looks into ways in which society can better suit those with disabilities rather than putting the burden on the disabled as the medical model does.

From this study, it is apparent that not only economic capital, but also possession of social and cultural capital were crucial in parents' advocacy for their children with ADHD. Parents used their economic capital as a way to supplement support for their children in areas where the school was lacking. All parents in this study had economic capital, but not all parents utilized social or cultural capital. Parents who did not possess social and cultural capital had a much more difficult time successfully advocating for their children. Additionally, parents not only had to possess social and cultural capital, but also had to know how to activate and utilize this capital. Some parents possessed capital, however, did not understand the best ways to activate and utilize this capital, and as a result were not as successful in their advocacy. Possession and activation of social and cultural capital are essential for Greenville parents to successfully advocate for their children with ADHD.

**Literature Review**

*Introduction*

Much work has been done looking at parental advocacy for students with disabilities such as ADHD. There has additionally been a great amount of literature on how possession of differing forms of capital impact how parents interact with schools and advocate for their children. However, there has not been as much research regarding how capital impacts parents' advocacy for their children with disabilities in order to get them resources. As an upper-middle-class majority white suburb, Greenville is a good location to view the intersection of possession of capital, race, and class privilege along with the impact this has on advocacy for children with learning disabilities such as ADHD and ADD. This understanding of privilege and resources for children with learning disabilities is important to create equality within disability policy.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that ensures students a “free and appropriate” public education in the United States (ed.gov, 2021). This includes providing accommodations such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504s to students with disabilities. 504 plans are dictated by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The purpose of these plans is to provide a blueprint for how schools are going to accommodate and provide support for students with disabilities such as ADHD (Understood, 2021). 504 plans are less structured than IEPs and are not written documents; they are more of a general plan of how the school is going to accommodate a disability. IEPs on the other hand are incredibly structured and usually follow a standard for that disability (Understood, 2021). Although both 504s and IEPs are helpful for students with ADHD, IEPs tend to be more comprehensive and strict, which may allow for better accommodations for students. Under IDEA students diagnosed with ADHD must be given either 504 or IEP accommodations so that they can have a free and fair public education. When those with more privilege have an easier time gaining accommodations for their children, IDEA is not doing it’s job in providing equal education to all students.

*Social Constructions of Learning Disability*

The social model of disability is a framework that is commonly used for research within disability studies and sociology. This theory posits that an individual’s impairment is not what causes disability (as the medical model asserts); rather it is how society does not accommodate impairment that causes disability (Shakespeare, 2010). Instead of curing or treating disabilities through medicine, the proponents of the social model argue that society should be changed to keep impairments from disabling people. The social model looks at aspects of society that keep people with impairments from living the same way as people without impairments as “Disabling Barriers” (Tugli, et. al., 2014). These disabling barriers rather than physical or mental impairments are what are to blame for disability. It is important to consider what these disabling factors may be for students with ADHD within public schools in the United States, and how accommodations through IEPs and 504 plans aim to combat these disabling barriers.

In opposition to the social model, the medical model views disability as an individual problem that people must deal with (Shakespeare, 2010). The medical model is the view that people commonly have of disability. Rather than finding ways that society can accommodate the disabled, the medical model aims to find medical “fixes” to disabilities. This view of disability is troubling because it puts the burden of disability on the impaired. Additionally, not all disabilities can be cured, so this is not always an effective way to approach disability.

Using a social constructivist lens to view learning disability illuminates how school structures often create learning disability. Dudley-Marling argues that learning disabilities are created through the individualistic perspective of American society (2004). Social constructivism views all knowledge as constructed through social interactions and believes that social practices reflect and reinforce constructed social categories (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Individualism is an example of a socially constructed category. Since American society is rather individualistic it does not believe that group affiliations have an impact on an individual’s personality or life, learning disabilities are believed to be caused by individual impairments, as seen in the medical model of disability (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Dudley-Marling continues to argue that schools create learning disabilities through their structure and that learning disabilities cannot exist without schools. Through this perspective, the solution to learning disabilities would be to structure schools in a way that makes it so students’ impairments do not become disabling. To fully understand what is happening in these schools in suburban Detroit, it is key to have an understanding of how the schools may create or exacerbate the experiences of ADHD in students. Using this perspective additionally gives a more accepting and inclusive view of disability.

The social model of disability is not only a theory used to shape research and academia, it additionally has real-world implications and the ability to improve the lives of those living with impairments by altering the ways that society constructs disability. Researchers have discovered that people tend to ignore interpersonal discrimination as it is easy for one to distance oneself from this form of discrimination. However, they also discovered that once people learn about systemic inequalities and discrimination, they tend to be much more likely to be empathetic towards those being marginalized (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). By learning about the ways that marginalized groups are systematically denied access to rights, people have a harder time ignoring these inequalities. Dirth and Branscome apply this theory to the social model of disability. Through three rounds of an experiment they discover that when non-impaired individuals are taught about the social model of disability and the systemic inequalities that people with impairments face, they are more likely to be sensitive to the experiences of those with impairments and will be more likely to vote for legislation that benefits those who are impaired (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). Learning about the social model of disability greatly impacts how people feel about discrimination against the impaired.

*Parents as Advocates*

Parents of children with disabilities have commonly acted as advocates for their children to provide them with a better quality of life. In the book *Allies and Obstacles*, Carey, Block, and Scotch explore the history of parental advocacy in the disability rights movement. Specifically looking at intellectual disability, they explore how parents of children diagnosed with intellectual disabilities in the ’50s played a large part in jumpstarting the disability rights movement (Carey et. al, 2020). In the 1940s and 1950s, parents were usually told to institutionalize their intellectually disabled children (Carey et. al, 2020). Eventually, these parents started to fight against institutionalization and attempted to get more rights for their children. Parental advocacy has a long history in the disability rights movement and parents today are still advocating for their children. Although ADHD is different from intellectual disability, looking at how parents of intellectually disabled children have advocated for their kids can provide a framework for how parents of children with ADHD advocate for their kids. Knowing the history of parental advocacy and disability rights gives a deeper understanding of how the role of parental advocacy in disability has changed and as a result how parents advocate for their children today.

Present-day, parents of children with learning disabilities often spend a great deal of time advocating for their children, especially within schools. Duquette, et. al, defines this type of advocacy in schools within four stages: awareness, seeking information, presenting, and monitoring (Duquette, et. al, 2011). Awareness is the first step where parents become conscious of the fact that their child might have a learning disability. Next, during the seeking information stage parents start to research the disability. The third stage is presenting where parents present arguments for accommodations to schools to get Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and other supports. The final dimension is monitoring where parents stay on top of the schools to make sure that IEPs are being implemented properly and that their child is getting the accommodations that they need (Duquette, et. al, 2011). These four dimensions show how parents go through different stages of advocacy within schools to ensure that their children are getting the best education possible. It is important to consider how different forms of privilege would impact a parents ability to move through these four dimensions of advocacy. These forms of advocacy are rather time intensive meaning they are not accessible to all parents. Families in which both parents work may have a more difficult time going through these dimensions of advocacy and being available to constantly advocate for their children.

Duquette uses a lens of the social model of disability to frame the advocacy of these parents. She argues that parents see accommodations as a way for the school to conform to their children (Duquette, et. al, 2011). These parents advocate for their kids to create a school environment that fits the social model of disability, rather than the medical model where it is on the children as individuals to conform to the school. In my own study, by interviewing parents I was able to see which stage of advocacy each of them were in when advocating for their children. Since I interviewed parents of high school-aged children, most of them were in the final dimension, the monitoring stage. Through my interviews I observed how they enacted this monitoring, and how compliant the school was with their monitoring.

Similarly to Duquette, Honkasilta, et. al discuss the different ways in which parents advocate for their children with ADHD in schools. They argue that parental advocacy can fall into three categories; “forced strong agency” which is a power struggle, “volitional strong agency” which is defined as cooperation, and “weak agency” which is defined as submission (Honkasilta, et. al, 2015). These three categories define how parents work with the schools to advocate for their children. Although these advocacy styles give us insight into how parents advocate for children with disabilities in schools, it is important to consider the shortcomings of them. These categories fail to consider larger implications such as race and social class, and how these social positions may impact advocacy style. As Calarco and Lareau discuss, race and class have an impact on how parents navigate advocacy in schools. Honkasilta et. al’s study has no discussion of how race or class differences result in parents fitting into one category or another. The systemic barriers working against those who are not white and wealthy have large impacts on the ways they interact with institutions such as schools.This lack of discussion leaves a large gap in this literature. This paper aims to help fill this gap by providing insight into how race and class make an impact on the ways in which parents advocate for their children with disabilities. Honkasilta does not situate these advocacy styles within intersecting identities of race and class, and as a result must be taken with a grain of salt. These identities are important to consider, however, they must be discussed critically with the ways that different privileges will impact them.

*Race and Class in Advocacy*

It is key to understand how race and class affect how parents can advocate for their children. A large aspect of this is possession of capital. Parents who use capital are better able to advocate for their children. As DeRoche discusses in her study, possession of economic, social, and cultural capital have an impact on the resources parents can obtain for their children who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities (2015). The concepts of social and cultural capital were first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu defines economic capital as capital that can be “immediately and directly” converted into money (Bourdieu, 2002). He defines cultural capital as “educational qualifications” that could at times be converted into money, and social capital as connections that people have; essentially who you know (Bourdieu, 2002). However, possessing capital alone is not enough. In terms of parents advocacy for children with ADHD, it is not enough for them to possess social connections, money, or cultural knowledge, they additionally must understand how to activate these resources in order for their advocacy to be effective. A parent could have plenty of capital, however, without understanding how to activate this capital they will not be able to advocate successfully. In order to activate capital, parents must understand the “rules of the game”. These rules are created by institutions and determine what actions are deemed as “valuable” within that institution (Lareau et. al, 2016). Understanding these rules are additionally a form of cultural capital because this knowledge is incredibly valuable in advocacy. When parents are advocating for their children at Greenville Schools, if they understand the expectations or “rules” of the school, they will be able to activate their capital in order to successfully advocate for their children.

DeRoche additionally uses this idea of varieties of capital from Bourdieu. She found that parents with more economic resources were better able to provide treatments and activities for their children (DeRoche, 2015). DeRoche also found that parents with more cultural capital had more knowledge to understand their child’s diagnosis and the treatments being used (DeRoche, 2015). Parents with more resources were able to better advocate for their children in comparison to parents with fewer resources. Looking back at Honkasilta’s forms of agency, it is interesting how class may have an impact on what type of advocacy parents use. Parents with more capital as DeRoche discusses may feel as though they can have an impact on their child’s education. This may result in them using either forced strong agency, or volitional strong agency. This is crucial looking at the parents of Greenville. Parents in this town are generally upper-middle to upper-class and highly educated. Because of their socioeconomic standing, they may be able to better advocate for their children, similar to the parents in DeRoches’s study.

Jessica Calarco additionally investigates how social class can impact parents’ interactions with schools, however, she does not look directly at disability and mainly focuses on socioeconomic status and advocacy in general. In her study, Calarco discovered that middle-class parents used a “by any means” method of advocating for their children and taught their children to advocate for themselves in the same way (2014). These parents would often intervene in their children's education to ensure the outcome they wanted. Additionally, these middle-class parents expected to get the outcomes they desired from their advocacy, and most of the time they were successful (Calarco, 2014). Working class parents on the other hand were less likely to intervene at school. Middle-class parents believed that their children should use the resources they were given at school and taught their children a “no-excuses'' approach when it came to solving problems (Calarco, 2014). As the majority of parents in Greenville are wealthy and have this class privilege, it is important to consider how this may impact their advocacy style. Does their social class cause them to be more vocal advocates?

Posey-Maddox similarly exemplifies how middle-class entitlement has a large impact on how parents advocate for their children. This study looks at how parents work together to create a “critical mass” in urban public schools, and how these parents band together with their advocacy in order to enact change within their schools. A key aspect of this study is looking at how social class strongly influences this ability to create change within these schools. Middle-class parents feel entitled to request changes and improvements within their schools, whereas working class and poor parents are less likely to feel this entitlement (Posey-Maddox, et. al, 2016). This middle-class entitlement is key when looking at Greenville parents and their schools. Greenville parents often felt as though their children deserved and needed IEP and 504 accommodations, and as a result used the by any means approach that Calarco discusses to get these accommodations. Working class and poor parents on the other hand may not feel the need to, or even have the time to advocate for their children with ADHD in the same ways, creating inequalities in who is gaining resources such as IEPs and 504s. It is also critical to consider how this impacts which students are having their IEPs and 504s upheld. The middle-class entitlement of Greenville parents makes them more likely to try and get resources for their children.

Race is another crucial aspect to consider when looking at parents’ ability to advocate for their children. Although Lareau and Horvat do not look specifically at learning disabilities, they do investigate how race impacts parents’ ability to advocate for their children within schools. In their study, Lareau and Horvat find that both race and class had impacts on how parents’ advocacy was perceived by teachers and administrators. White parents were perceived in the best light by school administrators and their advocacy was often viewed as the actions of involved and concerned parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This connects back to Honkasilta’s “educational partner” identity: a parent who is involved in the school, viewed positively by the school and has positive feelings about the school. Middle-class Black parents similarly had their advocacy viewed as involvement; however, they had to work much harder than white parents to be perceived this way (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Although middle-class Black parents often had concerns about racism at the school, they knew that if they brought these concerns to the administration they would not be perceived well (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Instead, middle-class Black parents had to monitor their children’s progress in more covert ways to ensure that they were perceived well by teachers and administrators. According to Lareau, lower-income Black families often explicitly stated their concerns about racism at the school unlike middle-class Black parents. As a result, this outright discussion of racism made the school interpret this form of parental advocacy very negatively, making it less effective. Both race and class combine to create differing degrees of effectiveness of parents’ advocacy. It can even be seen how race and class have an impact on the forms of agency that parents embody. Concerning the parents in Greenview, most of these parents are white and wealthy. This gives them some capital when it comes to their advocacy. Their advocacy is more likely to be seen as involvement in a positive way because of their race and socioeconomic status.

*Inequality in the Promised Land* by Lewis-McCoy similarly explores how race impacts access to opportunity within a wealthy suburban school district he calls Rolling Acres. At Rolling Acres public schools there is vast racial and socioeconomic inequality, despite the numerous resources in the district. Wealthy white families in Rolling Acres were better able to gain access to the resources in the public schools creating inequalities within the district (Lewis-McCoy, 2014). This caused Black parents to have to fight harder for their children to gain an equal education despite the numerous resources available. Although this study mainly looks at race, it is a good outline for the opportunity hoarding that parents with cultural knowledge do. The parents in Rolling Acres that have the knowledge and connections with resources are the ones who are able to utilize these resources. This is similar to Greenville parents and how parents who have more social and cultural capital, along with the ability to activate this capital, are able to get better resources and outcomes for their children.

*Conclusion*

Due to a gap in the literature regarding how race and class impact parental advocacy for students with learning disabilities, this study aims to see how wealthy parents use their capital in order to gain resources for their children who have been diagnosed with ADHD and ADD. I choose to focus on ADHD as it is a disability that is rather subjective in diagnosis. Often in order for ADHD to be diagnosed, there needs to be some sort of qualitative evidence such as diagnostic screening surveys (Zelnik, et. al, 2012). As a result there is no simple way to diagnose someone with ADHD. This creates a gray area in the diagnosis of ADHD. It is likely that parents who have a large amount of economic, cultural, and social capital will be able to use this in their advocacy to gain additional resources for their children with learning disabilities through in-school resources, along with outside-of-school resources. This is seen in parents having differing results when the school district evaluates their children for ADHD, vs when they use economic capital to pay for private evaluations. In my study, Greenville parents were more likely to get accommodations for their children when they paid for a private ADHD evaluation. Since these parents have capital they are able to pay privately for outside evaluations that are more likely to gain their children IEPs or 504 accommodations. Along these lines, this paper aims to advance knowledge of how parents use capital in schools and uses ADHD as a way to do this. By looking at disability, this paper investigates how capital is utilized in advocacy for students with disabilities.

**Methods**

For this study I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews; 8 with mothers of students with ADD or ADHD in Greenville Public Schools, and two with professional advocates that worked in the area to help students with ADHD or ADD get IEPs. I conducted interviews in order to get an in-depth look into their experiences and advocacy styles. Using a survey methodology would only give me surface level data. Interviews allowed me to dive deeper into the experiences of each parent. I chose to only interview parents of high school aged kids as these parents were more likely to have spent a significant amount of time in the school system advocating for their children. Additionally, high school students are at an age where they generally start to advocate for themselves, it was interesting to see how ADHD impacted this self advocacy. I recruited participants through a number of sources. The first were parents who I already had contact with from a past study. The next was through a parents support group I call Learning Special that was specific to this town. The final way in which I recruited parents was through snowball sampling, asking each interview participant if they could see if any friends they had would also be willing to participate in the study. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. Interviews took place remotely over zoom and phone. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed into MAXQDA to be coded. During the transcription process all names, locations, and identifying information were changed to keep the confidentiality of participants.

After interviews were transcribed, I conducted three rounds of thematic coding in MAXQDA (Saldana, 2015). For my first round of coding, I used in-vivo coding to pull out important quotes and get an understanding of what themes were emerging from the data. I used these quotes and themes to create a tentative categories list for my second round of coding. Next, I completed a round of thematic coding where I applied themes I had come up with during the first round of coding to all transcripts. I additionally added themes to my code list where it felt necessary. For a third and final round of coding I collected excerpts from each interview based on themes and did a layer of hand coding to these already coded portions. This allowed me to get a closer analysis of each transcript and see where themes overlapped. This was the final step in my data analysis.

**Findings**

*Finding One: The Benefits of Economic Capital*

Greenville is an upper-middle-class suburb, meaning that the majority of parents here are rather wealthy. As a result, almost every parent showed the benefits of possessing economic capital in terms of improving the academic performance and experience of their children with ADD and ADHD. One of the most obvious places this was seen was in ADHD evaluations and diagnosis. Of the eight parents interviewed, only one had their child only evaluated using the district’s free evaluations. Seven of the eight parents paid out of pocket for private evaluations for their children. Jessica, who had a daughter at Greenleaf with ADHD, described not using the free district evaluation and diagnosis because of a desire for control:

I don't think I asked the school for, uh, assistance on that just cause I think I wanted to do it on our own. Um, uh, I think I wanted to have control of that. I didn't want to go through the school and their process, so we, we chose to do that on our own, I would say, but I don't even know if they had a program to my knowledge. (Jessica: 45)

Jessica wanted to feel as though they had complete control over her daughter's evaluation, and since she had the economic capital to pay for it out of pocket, she did. Of those seven who paid out of pocket, 3 parents initially used free district evaluations, however, these evaluations were not extensive enough and were not going to grant their children IEPs or 504s. If their children were not given accommodations, they would not be able to be as successful in school. Julia, who had a son at Greenleaf with ADHD, describes this experience of not getting a complete or accurate evaluation from the school testing:

ummm well I ended up going outside of the school to have some further testing done because the school testing ummm was telling me that everything was fine and that he didn't need extra help so the process through the school was disappointing. ummm as far as needing extra help in school, but- so I ended up eventually going outside of the school to have testing done. (Julia: 88)

Since district testing was not extensive enough, parents like Julia decided that they would pay for more extensive testing, and then bring these results to Greenville public schools in order to get accommodations for their children. This is a great example of parents using a “by any means” approach to their children's education (Calarco, 2014). When evaluations showed that their child did not need accommodations, parents paid out of pocket for a more thorough evaluation so that their child could get accommodations that they needed. It is additionally similar to parents who asked for their children to be evaluated for gifted programs even though teachers did not identify them in the Lareau and Horvat study (1999). These parents feel entitled to their children receiving IEPs, and as a result use a by any means approach to getting their children these accommodations.

Another area where the use of economic capital was seen was in tutoring. Many parents paid out of pocket to provide private tutoring to help their children academically. Six out of the eight parents interviewed stated that they used private tutoring to help their children succeed in school. About the costs of tutoring for her two daughters, one of whom has ADHD, Mary said this:

And just with tutoring you know just people helping you know the process and what- there was this lady I swore that I- we paid for her kitchen when she had it re-done because both of my kids used to go there and she was not cheap (laughs) and it was like twice a week you know math and ummm they figured it out because both of my kids are great in stats (Mary: 163)

Mary shows just how much economic capital her family has spent on tutoring for their daughters so that they could be successful. She says she spent enough money on this specific tutor to pay to re-do her kitchen, however, it was worth it because it helped her daughters succeed. This is a great example of how parents in Greenville will use economic capital so that their children can get ahead academically. Kaitlin is a mother who has three children, two sons with ADHD and a daughter with no learning disabilities. All of her children have attended or currently attend Greenleaf High School. Kaitlin made a similar comment about spending money on tutoring for her children:

Oh, and we've done lots of tutoring. Oh my gosh. I've spent so much money on tutoring. They could have gone to university, you know, on tutoring money alone. But, but I'm lucky that I'm able to support them that way. Not every parent can, (Kaitlin Part 2: 25)

Both Mary and Kaitlin express sentiments that they have spent exorbitant amounts of money just on tutoring. Although they have children with ADHD who struggle in school, they are able to pay out of pocket for private resources such as tutoring in order to help them. If in-school resources are not enough, Greenville parents have the economic capital to seek help outside of the school district in order to help their children be academically successful. Parents with less economic capital do not have this opportunity. Most people do not have money equivalent to college tuition just to spend on afterschool tutoring. Theresa, whose son Dave has ADHD and struggles academically and socially at Greenleaf High School, decided not to get tutoring for her son. She discusses how Greenville parents constantly sending their kids to tutoring creates inequalities in school:

Um, but those families can easily go and get tutoring, go and get private, um, private enrichment work where perhaps the student like Dave, that's not an option for him. He's not going to be able to go to like math academy and be able to compete because he has different learning skills. (Theresa: 66)

Theresa feels that tutoring will not necessarily be the most effective for her son Dave because of his learning disabilities. As a result, she has chosen not to spend the money on private tutoring for him. However, this makes things difficult for her when she is attempting to advocate for her son to get the integrated math program changed. She talks to the school about how the program may not be working, however, they say that it is working because math scores within the district have been high since they implemented it. Theresa expresses that this may actually be a result of the fact that most students are getting private math tutoring to help their math scores. Because of this it takes longer for her to get help for her son in math. Theresa was of a slightly lower socioeconomic status from the other parents and could not spend thousands of dollars on tutoring. This shows how additionally if there are families who cannot afford to pay out of pocket for tutoring their children will get a lower quality education.

The use of professional advocates in order to get accommodations for students was another area where parents took advantage of their economic capital. A few parents in this study hired professional advocates in order to ensure that they could get accommodations for their children. Julia was a parent who had a hard time getting accommodations for her son who has ADHD when he was in elementary school. She ended up hiring an advocate when he started middle school:

I actually had to hire an advocate and pay quite a bit of money, and I brought her with me when I walked into Daniels [middle school] (Julia: 96)

Julia had to pay out of pocket for this advocate so that her son could get the accommodations that he needed. This advocate was also effective; she was able to get him an IEP that he used all throughout middle school and high school:

Now I don't know if they would have given it to him without her or not, but I didn't want to find out so (laughs) that was my experience moving because they did not give him one at Canterberry when I was requesting it and i knew he needed it (Julia: 96)

Julia is fairly certain that her advocacy for her son would not have gone over as well if she had not hired the advocate. By using her economic capital to hire this advocate, Julia was able to improve outcomes for her son. Without using her capital in this way, she may not have been as successful in advocating for her son. As a result he may not have been able to get an IEP or as helpful of an IEP and would have struggled more in school. Because Julia had the money to hire an advocate, she did not have to worry about this and he was able to use this IEP in middle school and high school.

Madeline, a woman in the area who works as a professional advocate for parents at Greenville Public Schools and other schools nearby, discusses the importance of professional advocacy. When asked whether she thought that it was necessary for parents to hire professional advocates to get accommodations for their children she said this:

A hundred percent. And I hate saying this to parents because you don't want to think you're selling yourself, but I know they can't do it alone. I've been to too many meetings. I couldn't do it when I was a parent with a teaching degree. Right? Yeah. They don't know the law. They don't know all the possible accommodations. They don't even always completely understand their child and why they're doing what they're doing (Madeline: 33)

She states that it is difficult for parents to get proper accommodations for their children on their own. Luckily parents in Greenville often have the economic resources to hire these advocates; however, not every parent does, and parents in other districts may not be as lucky. This creates some vast inequalities when it comes to accommodations for students with learning disabilities like ADHD. Melanie, another professional advocate in the area, echoed what Madeline described in terms of the difficulty to get accommodations without advocates:

No district listens to parents without an advocate and there's a shortage of advocates. There's- there are no solid volunteer advocates in the state because they're very, very limited. (Melanie: 48)

Melanie states that it is not just Greenville schools that do not listen to parents in terms of their advocacy for their children, most districts in the area are like this. This shows just how much of an advantage wealthy Greenville parents have when it comes to their children's accommodations; they have the economic capital to hire these advocates so that they can get IEPs for their children and help them succeed in school.

*Finding Two: Use of Social Capital in Advocacy*

Parents frequently used social capital in order to advocate for their children at school. Parents who had more connections within the Greenville school district had an easier time advocating for their children as the schools were more likely to listen to them. Kaitlin is an especially good example of a parent who has vast amounts of social capital, and is able to advocate for her children. Kaitlin is the registrar at Greenleaf High School and as a result, has many connections within the district and the school. She works with district leaders and teachers regularly creating vast social networks within Greenville schools. Her position within the school helps her accumulate social capital. Kaitlin is additionally a prominent member of the local advocacy group Learning Special. Through this group, she has connections to important members of the Greenville school district and other parents. Kaitlin talks about how her experiences in Learning Special and working at Greenleaf have benefitted her children:

but being an advocate really helped my kids more so than working here. The only advantage I have here is if I want to talk to a teacher, I can stop in the hall and say, Hey, you got a few minutes at lunch. Whereas another parent wouldn't have that. That's probably a pretty big advantage, but, um, yeah, but I mean, some parents won't even reach out. (Kaitlin Part 1: 143)

Here Kaitlin acknowledges how working as an advocate with Learning Special has benefitted her children and her advocacy, while also showing how working at Greenleaf gives her an advantage. Although she says that working at the school has not benefited her that much, she then gives an example of a large advantage that it gives her. By working as the school registrar, Kaitlin has both access and connections with teachers. This makes it much easier for her to communicate with them directly to advocate for her children. It is also important to note that because of her involvement both with Greenleaf High School and Learning special, Kaitlin is very familiar with the rules of the game of Greenville schools, making it easier for her to activate her capital and effectively advocate for her children. As Lareau and Horvat discuss, understanding the rules of the game is key in activation of capital. Because Kaitlin is involved in Greenville public schools, she has a front row seat to the rules of the game. This allows her to activate her capital with ease when advocating for her children.

Kaitlin states that her involvement in Learning Special gives her the most benefit when it comes to advocating for her children. Learning Special is a local support and advocacy group for parents of neurodivergent children (children with neurological differences such as ADHD or Autism) similar to the advocacy groups that Carey et. al discuss. This group has a strong Facebook and physical presence in the area, and often puts on events at the Greenville schools for parents. This group helps parents learn the rules of the game when it comes to advocating for neurodivergent children in Greenville public schools. Parents in this study who participated in Learning Special not only possessed more social and cultural capital, but also were more successful in activating these forms of capital. Over the years Kaitlin has put a lot of time into volunteering for Learning Special and has even become the president of the group. Here Kaitlin discusses how involvement with Learning Special has impacted her advocacy:

But what had a big impact was when I became the president of Learning Special, suddenly everybody was willing to listen to me. Everyone was willing to help my kid, everyone- because it kind of- it's like, Oh, you know, you could, you have a door to the superintendent, an open door to the superintendent, you could make my life a little more challenging. (Kaitlin Part 1: 143)

As a result of the social capital that Kaitlin holds because of her position in Learning Special, she is able to be more successful in her advocacy for her children with ADHD. Learning Special has given Kaitlin a connection to the superintendent and other district leaders. People are more likely to listen to Kaitlin when she advocates for her children because they knew she had these connections. As a result of this Kaitlin generally felt that her concerns were listened to by Greenleaf High School:

but Greenleaf- or high school, they're just so much more accommodating with, or without- as long as you, as long as you have an open dialogue and a relationship with the teacher, they're just so much more willing to support kids than at a lower level. (Kaitlin Part 2: 8)

Kaitlin expresses how Greenleaf is willing to support both of her sons with ADHD and that they are very accommodating as long as you can have a relationship with teachers and administrators. Kaitlin, however, has an easier time with this because of her connections along with the social class similarity she has with teachers. Since she works in the school and is president of Learning Special, it is easier for her to make those connections that increase the success of her advocacy.

Anne is another mother who activates a large amount of social capital in her advocacy. Anne is an upper-middle class Black mother who is highly educated. Anne works within the education field and as a result has advanced knowledge on how the school system works. Like Kaitlin, Anne was well known within the school. When she was having trouble with one of her son’s teachers, she went to the school. She talked with her son’s case manager at Bluesky High School and then had the case manager talk to the specific teacher:

The case manager went in and had a talk with him, and said "you don't do this to Anne, She is not going to make your life happy. She was kind and came to me so that this could be teacher to teacher. Next step, your boss is going to talk to you and then your boss's boss is gonna talk to you." (Anne: 106)

Anne had a relationship with her son’s case manager at Bluesky. This relationship was strong enough for her to go to him with her concerns about a specific teacher who did not want to meet her son’s accommodations. Anne was able to leverage her connection to the caseworker, along with higher ups within the district to get this teacher to be more accommodating to her son. Because of her social connections, Anne was able to advocate for her son and get this specific teacher to work with her son’s IEP. If she had not had this connection with the case manager or administrators in the district. she might not have been as successful in advocating for her son. Her social capital was a key aspect of her successfully advocating for her child.

Like Kaitlin, Anne was very involved in the Learning Special organization. Anne also gained a large amount of social capital and better understood the rules of the game through her involvement in Learning Special. Learning Special caused her to be viewed by the schools and by other parents as an advocate. About this Anne says:

so I was well-known and I was an advocate for, um, for Learning Special. Not just my son. So I was an advocate for other people. (Anne: 124)

Because of the social connections she accumulated through Learning Special, others viewed Anne as an advocate. This made her advocacy for her own son, and the children of others, more successful.

Theresa was another parent who was able to utilize social capital in order to improve her son's school experience. To help Dave socially, Theresa advocated to the school and set up for Dave to go to the special education classrooms and help out with students who had more severe disabilities than him. She was able to make this happen because of a connection she had:

And because the director also goes to our church and Dave had, you know, a minimal relationship with him through Sunday school. And he was the special ed teacher at Prince [Elementary] when Dave was in first grade, not that he needed special ed at that time, but he at least knew of him. And then, you know, he got to know him a little bit more. (Theresa: 100)

Theresa was able to utilize this connection to create a positive extracurricular experience for her son at Greenleaf. Working with students who had more severe disabilities than he did allowed him to feel like he was helpful and gave him confidence. If Theresa had not known the director of special education this may not have been able to happen. Theresa using her social capital is part of what helped make her son successful.

Beth is a parent who possessed a small amount of social capital, but did not have as much knowledge of the rules of the game, and as a result was not as effective in her advocacy. Beth mainly used social capital by making friends with other parents who had children with ADHD:

but luckily I made friends that also did have the problems that John had, ummm... so talking with them helped a lot. Just like especially with the ADD and ADHD cause I was very unfamiliar with all of it. (Beth: 112)

For the most part Beth used these connections for resources rather than directly for advocacy, but having these resources could help her better advocate for John. By having friends going through something similar to her, she was able to rely on her social networks when she needed advice or help with her son's ADHD. Beth was one of the few parents who was not part of the Learning Special group. This showed in how she used and activated her social capital. Beth had made connections with other parents and teachers at Greenleaf, but did not utilize this capital to advocate for her son within the school the same way other parents did. Since Beth was not part of Learning Special she did not have the knowledge of how to properly activate her social capital, which left her less than satisfied with the school.

*Finding Three: Cultural Capital and Advocacy*

Cultural capital is another useful resource for these parents when it comes to advocacy. Cultural capital was shown to be more useful and more commonly used among these parents than social capital was. Most of these parents possessed deep cultural knowledge on their children’s ADHD and IEPs, how to advocate for them, and the best ways to communicate with Greenville Public Schools. Knowing the rules of the game at Greenville schools and having knowledge of how best to talk to teachers and administrators at both Greenleaf and Bluesky was a major factor in parents’ ability to successfully advocate for their children.

Seven of the eight mothers interviewed showed at least some degree of activating cultural capital in their advocacy for their children. Most parents knew who to talk to to be successful in their advocacy for their kids. Theresa is one example of a parent who uses cultural capital regularly in order to advocate for her son Dave. Theresa has a deep enough understanding of the dynamics of Greenleaf High School in order to know who she should talk to when she has an issue. By knowing where she should be directing her advocacy, Theresa utilized her cultural capital in order to get the best outcomes for her son. Here is an example of Theresa utilizing this cultural knowledge:

We only had a couple of issues where I had, you know, he worked with the school social worker at that time. And there were only a few incidents where I had major issues with teachers where I had to go to the social worker or go to the principal and say, Dave has an IEP. He has special needs. The teacher needs to put the math test review in his hands to take home every night or before the test. (Theresa: 112)

Theresa understands that her best bet in getting Dave’s teachers to listen to her is by going to a social worker or the principal. She knows that by utilizing these authorities she will be able to obtain better results in enforcing Dave’s IEP. Theresa used this knowledge in a specific example where the math program at Greenleaf was not working for her son because of his ADHD. The non-traditional structure of the integrated math program that Greenleaf had recently adopted made it difficult for Dave to be successful. The integrated math program eschewed the traditional focus on direct instruction and individual practice and was more focused on collaborative learning in groups. Dave had a hard time with this group work because of his lack of executive functioning (the ability to plan and execute goals) caused by his ADHD. As a result of this Theresa was able to get the school to put together an IEP class for integrated math so that students who were struggling were able to be together and get instruction at their own pace. Although this took a while, Theresa was successful because she understood the rules of Greenleaf and knew which avenues she should take to pursue change. By going to board meetings and talking to the principal, Theresa successfully got her son into an IEP math class where his scores went up. This was a huge accomplishment not only for Theresa, but also for Dave. Through her advocacy, Theresa was able to make lasting and impactful changes for her son and other students who were having the same struggles.

Kaitlin shows large amounts of cultural knowledge similar to her use of social capital. Because of her position within the school and her involvement in Learning Special, Kaitlin has gained vast amounts of cultural capital when it comes to understanding how to work with the school. When discussing how she advocates for her sons Kaitlin says this:

So just, just from going to all the parent-teacher conferences explaining before school starts, you write a letter, whether they ask for it, in elementary the teacher will often say, could you write a letter about your kid or have your kid right now? And our before school starts at every level, just so you know, this is my kid. This is what you need to know about my kid. This, we should expect my kid. These are, you know, don't forget he has an IEP. Don't forget. He has a 504. Don't forget. You know, he needs extra time. (Kaitlin Part 1: 140)

Kaitlin shows her middle class entitlement here as she expresses what she believes to be best for her children, and cultural capital with her knowledge of the best ways to express this to teachers. Kaitlin worries about teachers forgetting or not paying attention to her son's IEP because the school system is not made with neurodivergent kids in mind. To help with this she stays on top of teachers constantly reminding them of her son's needs. Additionally, she writes letters at the beginning of every year to each teacher, even in high school, in order to help them understand from the beginning of the year what her sons are going to need throughout the year. Kaitlin understands that this is a good strategy to get the best results from the beginning. Direct and friendly communication with teachers is crucial.

Kaitlin also expresses that she feels the most effective way to advocate for her sons is to work and collaborate with the school rather than being hostile. Kaitlin says this about her advocacy style:

And if you're, if you're trying to help the situation, you know, and you're not, you know, some parents here will lawyer up really quickly. I don't know if that really helps. (Kaitlin Part 1: 143)

Kaitlin finds the strategy of bringing a lawyer to IEP meetings and to the school to advocate is too aggressive. Parents will sometimes bring lawyers along to IEP meetings to help uphold and maintain their children's IEP. They do this because if schools are not correctly granting and implementing IEPs and 504s for students with disabilities they are breaking IDEA. It is important to note that this is the strategy that Anne has taken when advocating for her son, bringing her brother who is a lawyer to all of her son’s IEP meetings and being more forceful with her advocacy. Race has a large part in this. As Lareau and Horvat discuss, middle class Black parents often have to work much harder than middle class white parents to have their advocacy be seen as involvement rather than aggression (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Anne may need to use more resources such as lawyers and direct interventions because of the way her advocacy is perceived. Since Kaitlin is white she may not need the added support of a lawyer like Anne does.

Anne once again shows a large amount of cultural knowledge when it comes to the educational system and her son’s IEP supports. Anne has a Ph.D. and works in education, giving her an upper hand compared with parents who do not have these qualifications. Like Kaitlin, Anne sent emails to all her son’s teachers at the beginning of the year in order to explain his accommodations and what he was going to need throughout the year. Anne shows a deep understanding of her sons IEP accommodations when she talks about having to explain them to some teachers:

Bluesky High School, I had to send an email to them, I had to go talk to them, Like, you know, this is not a big deal, give him half the items. and have him finish half of the items in the same- It says 50% of it, it even has a number on the IEP, how hard is this? it's not that hard. It's not rocket science, But if you have not been encouraged to do the right thing by being, by having it out where you, then you're just going to do what you do. And you're going to think that that's okay and it's not ok. (Anne: 44)

Anne has a better understanding of her son’s IEP than even his teachers do, and as a result at times has to explain what they should be doing for him. Additionally, if she did not have this understanding or this ability to advocate, his teachers would not be implementing the IEP correctly, lowering the quality of education he would be receiving.

Cathy was another parent who had two sons with ADHD. She had a deep understanding of the disorder from her first hand experience having two children with ADHD. Cathy used this cultural knowledge to advocate for her sons. She describes how she interacted with teachers when they were younger to try and keep on top of their academics:

you know, every day I'd ask, how's my son doing. And this is like, uh, elementary school. Oh, he's doing great. He's doing great. He's doing great. And then you get the report card and like this isn't great. (Cathy: 201)

While her children were in elementary school, Cathy was constantly monitoring their academic performance to stay on top of their grades. This monitoring however, seems unproductive as the teacher did not give accurate information. This is a good example of a parent possessing capital without effectively activating it. Although Cathy understood she should be checking in with teachers about her children's progress, she was unable to activate her capital properly like Kaitlin could, making her advocacy ineffective. This monitoring was her way of ensuring that they were able to be successful, however, the regular check-ins she conducted were not as effective as the letters at the beginning of the year that Anne and Kaitlin used. Jessica similarly would communicate frequently with her daughters teachers to work out 504 accommodations and make sure that they knew what was going on with her:

Uh, well, I would have to email the teachers and stuff like that about what was going on at home and what I needed help from them on (Jessica: 134)

Jessica had the cultural knowledge to understand that she needed to talk to her daughter's teachers and make sure that they knew what was going on with her daughter at home. Jessica additionally was able to activate her capital better than Cathy could, and as a result, was more successful in her advocacy than Cathy. Jessica gave explicit updates to her daughter's teachers, rather than just broadly asking how they were doing. By communicating with teachers, Jessica could ensure that they would be understanding while Jessica sorted out her daughter's ADHD and got adjusted to a new schedule. She understood that in order for her daughter to be successful, she needed to keep teachers up to date with what was going on.

*Finding Four: Parents Without Social and Cultural Capital*

There were a variety of opinions on Greenville public schools and how they handled parental advocacy. Parents who were happy and felt the most heard by Greenleaf and Bluesky high schools tended to be parents who activated a large amount of social and cultural capital. Parents who felt less heard by Greenville schools, tended to be parents who did not utilize as much social and cultural capital. Kaitlin is the parent who expressed the most satisfaction with Greenville Public Schools. She acknowledged that the schools were not perfect, but that for the most part they listened to her and tried to help her children. Kaitlin also utilized the most social/cultural capital and understood how to properly activate it. She had vast amounts of social and cultural capital due to her role in Learning Special and her working at Greenleaf High School. Because she had this cultural knowledge and her social connections, she was able to advocate more effectively, leading her to be more satisfied with the schools. Jessica was another parent who felt heard and seen by Greenville public schools. She had shown a good amount of cultural knowledge when it came to talking to her daughters' teachers and the school in general about her daughter's ADHD. With these parents we can also see a “cooperative” advocacy style as described by Honkasilta (Honkasilta, et. al, 2015). These parents have a positive relationship with the school working in tandem with teachers and administrators to get the best accommodations possible for their children. This form of advocacy was shown to be the most effective, so it makes sense that these parents are the happiest with Greenville public schools.

Anne is a unique case when discussing how parents feel about Greenleaf and Bluesky high schools. Along with Kaitlin, Anne shows the most activation of cultural and social capital. She has a vast amount of capital and uses it frequently. Anne however, has very negative views of Bluesky high school. Her negative views stem from racial issues. When it comes to whether Greenville schools listen to her, Anne expresses that she does not have issues when it comes to her advocacy:

The special education department 100%. Ummm (unintelligible) his teachers. So yeah I do feel like I was heard when I would voice concerns. (Anne: 120)

Despite her negative views of Bluesky, Anne does feel as though the schools listen to her. Her use of social and cultural capital in advocacy is effective just like Kaitlin. The difference, however, is that Kaitlin is white while Anne is Black. Anne is a good example Black parents needing to advocate harder than white parents as Lewis-McCoy explores in *Inequality in the Promised Land*. Despite Anne having similar resources to Kaitlin, she still has to fight harder for her son, because of her race (2014). Anne expresses how she feels that her son has been discriminated against based on his race at Bluesky. In one part of the interview Anne describes how racism at Bluesky has impacted her son:

he began by- by getting into trouble in English because the only representation, especially in Europe, the African Americans was facing the (unintelligible), which is a very derogative portrayal of black men. And he resented that as a Black man. And he told the teacher, “I resent this, I resent how you have marginalized me in this curriculum . Why can't we have a book that has a positive portrayal?” (Anne: 11)

Anne’s son gets in trouble because he points out the racism that occurs at Bluesky. Anne also explains a few situations where teachers did not believe her son had ADHD and that he was just lazy. None of the other parents expressed any concerns like this, and Anne believes that racism played a role in these scenarios. Through strong advocacy, Anne has been able to get accommodations and help her son, however, her experience has definitely been different being the only non-white respondent. Looking at Anne’s advocacy, she uses more of what Honkasilta calls a forced strong agency model. She has a great amount of knowledge about her child's disability and what should be happening in the schools, but does not have positive feelings towards the school. She is effective in her advocacy because she is so knowledgeable and holds so much capital; however, she does not feel as positive about Bluesky as cooperative advocates would.

Parents who showed some use of social, cultural, and economic capital had moderate views of how the schools listened to parental advocacy. Theresa, who activated lots of cultural capital, but not as much social capital said she believed the school listened, but that it took a while for them to act on requests. She did not feel completely ignored by Greenleaf, but she did not feel entirely heard either. Similarly, Julia who utilized a moderate amount of capital felt that the schools did not listen to her concerns when her son was in elementary school, but by the time he was in high school she did not struggle in getting Greenleaf High to listen to her. Similar to Theresa, she did not feel completely ignored by Greenville schools, however, she was also not completely satisfied.

One parent who did not show much activation of capital in her advocacy for her son was Beth. Specifically, Beth did not use much cultural capital. Beth additionally had the hardest time getting Greenleaf to listen to her requests and ideas. One aspect that Beth was rather unsatisfied with was the exclusive nature of Greenleaf’s social life. In order to try and fix this Beth came up with her own mentorship program:

I even created a program and named it and like wrote them about it and what I would do and it was called CRU like you would have your crew and it stood for like caring, respect, and understanding it was like C-R-U. I just think- it's like a program like this would be so great and you know same at like the colleges (Beth: 34)

Beth created this program to solve a problem that she saw with her son being teased and excluded at school. Beth however did not have much success in getting the school to listen to her about the social difficulties that existed at Greenleaf and work to implement the program that she created. This may have been in part because she did not understand the rules of the game or know who she should propose the program to. Beth wrote a letter and offered to help start up this program, however, she did not get much of a response:

They were like "thank you" (laughs). And I offered to volunteer, I offered to help... ummm I think most clubs at Greenleaf High School they get a- you know they have to be assigned a staff member ummm and someone gave me a couple staff members that had something and I forget now the name, what it was, and so I reached out to them, and they were like "thanks but no thanks, we're all set" like (unintelligible) its like they didn't want to do anything more than they had to, that's my impression or feeling I got (Beth: 36)

Unlike other parents who had vast amounts of social and cultural capital, Beth did not know the best way to propose this program she created to help kids like her son John. As a result nothing happened with the program, and she was left feeling unsupported by Greenleaf High School.

Another parent who did not use much social or cultural capital and had rather negative perceptions of the school was Mary. Mary had a very hard time getting her daughter accommodations, and was actually never able to get her daughter an IEP or 504 despite her ADHD diagnosis from an outside evaluation. Mary seemed to lack cultural capital, not knowing that the district did evaluations themselves, or that it was actually against the law for the school to deny her daughter accommodations for her ADHD. Additionally, Mary did not possess much social capital, she did not talk to any other parents of students with ADHD to get help or resources and did not seem to talk to teachers that much, leaving most of the advocacy to her daughter. When discussing her feelings about Greenleaf Mary said this:

They already had a preconceived conception and opinion and weren't going to change. So the preconceived notion that the issue was THIS when I say it's THAT ummm pretty ummm frustrating (Mary: 139)

Later on in the interview, Mary went on to say that she had never felt supported by Greenleaf, and overall had a pretty negative view of them when it came to her daughter’s ADHD. She believed that Greenleaf had some really good teachers, but that overall administration was pretty weak. This is another example of a parent who does not utilize much social or cultural capital being rather unhappy with the Greenville Public Schools. Although Mary was able to utilize economic capital to get additional support for her daughter outside of school, since she did not utilize social or cultural capital, she was unable to get accommodations for her daughter. These parents show more of a weak agency style as Honkasilta describes. Their advocacy is not the most effective because they do not know the best ways to advocate for their children (Honkasilta, et. al, 2015). This weak advocacy may be the result of their lack of social and/or cultural capital. Capital has shown to be the most effective way for parents to communicate with the school, but these parents that show a weak agency style do not utilize or possess it.

**Conclusion**

Activation of capital plays an extensive role in how parents in this suburban school district advocate for their children. Since this is a majority white upper-middle-class town, most parents possess all forms of capital. This works for these parents because capital is necessary for them to get accommodations for their children. Cultural and Social capital are crucial for parents to get proper accommodations for their children and for these accommodations to be properly implemented. Parents are much more likely to be heard by the schools if they implement social and cultural capital. Parents who did not utilize these forms of capital were much less likely to be satisfied with the schools and felt as though the schools did not really listen to them. Additionally, parents who were involved in groups such as Learning Special were better able to learn the rules of the game which allowed them to more successfully activate their capital. These parents not only needed to possess social and cultural capital, but additionally needed to understand how to activate it in order to be successful in their advocacy.

Economic capital was used by these parents to supplement what the school could not provide. Almost every parent paid out of pocket for their ADHD evaluation because they were able to and the district evaluations are not extensive enough. Similarly, most parents paid for additional tutoring in order to help their children succeed in the areas where they struggled. Finally, a few parents used professional advocates who they hired to make the IEP/504 process smoother and easier. The professional advocates who participated in this study claimed that using an advocate makes it significantly easier for parents to get accommodations for their children. Within Greenville Public Schools it is crucial for parents to have social, cultural, and economic capital in order for their children to be fully accommodated and successful in the schools. The less capital a parent had, the less likely it was that their child would have a successful schooling experience.

Additionally, parents who used a “cooperative” advocacy style had the best time getting accommodations for their children, and additionally had the most positive views of the school. By working with the school rather than being hostile, they were able to form relationships with teachers and administrators, growing their social capital and making advocacy easier. These parents tended to be white and wealthy, as the majority of the parents in this study were. Interestingly, the only parent to use a forced strong agency style was the singular Black parent who participated in the study. Because of the racism she experienced within the district, she felt the need to be more firm with the schools.

This study however has numerous limitations and leaves room for an expansion within the literature. First and foremost, this sample was not representative of the Greenville community due to the small sample size and the snowball sampling method. As a result it is difficult to make large conclusions about the findings. Additionally, this study mainly focuses on white middle to upper middle class parents. In order to fully understand how capital and advocacy interact vis a vis the challenge of gaining accommodations for students with disabilities, more research needs to be done looking at lower income families and families of color.

It is crucial to consider how parents needing to use capital in order to successfully advocate for their children creates inequalities within special education. Nearly every parent in this study paid out of pocket for ADHD evaluations, and most of the parents who initially went with a free district evaluation were not able to get accommodations for their children through these initial evaluations. This may create inequalities in the diagnosis of ADHD within Greenville Public Schools, and Michigan Public Schools in general. If it is necessary for parents to pay out of pocket for evaluations for their children, how does this impact the equity of ADHD diagnosis? Additionally, activation of capital was critical for parents to successfully advocate for their children. This creates inequities for parents who do not possess as much capital for racial or socioeconomic reasons making it more difficult for their children to be successful in school. Clearly race and class have a large impact on the quality of special education within the Greenville Public Schools. Further research should be conducted to discover how this difficulty getting accommodations affects lower income students, and students of color.

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