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Individual Adjustments for Many and Structural Change for Some: Teacher and Staff Perceptions of and Adjustments for High School Students' Classed Responsibilities Outside of School

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Abstract

Past research demonstrates the degree to which extracurricular activities, paid work, and major family responsibilities impinge on student academic trajectories. Largely absent from this body of work is consideration of the ways in which schools and teachers mitigate the adverse consequences of out-of-school obligations and choices on academic outcomes. In this paper, we seek to understand when, and for whom, teachers and administrators exercise their power to accommodate students' out-of-school time commitments. Analyzing 61 interviews with teachers and staff at five high schools that serve predominantly low-income students and survey responses from teachers across the state ($N=601$), we assess how teachers describe student responsibilities and accommodate student responsibilities outside of school. We identify the ways teachers portray the classed nature of different student responsibilities and the kinds of solutions they provide to help resolve the tensions between student responsibilities and academic life. We find that school staff describe a range of student responsibilities and identify these responsibilities as connected to students' social-class status. Teacher responses to student responsibilities are largely individual and ad hoc. When administrators report addressing the impacts of student responsibilities through structural change, this change often specifically centers students' paid work (usually intensive paid work that contributes to family finances) while neglecting other types of responsibilities (such as caregiving).

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Although formal education dominates the schedules of most adolescents during the academic year, students accrue multiple major responsibilities outside of school. Scholarship in this area has advanced our understanding of adolescent obligations (and their classed distribution) from the perspectives of students and their families (Burton, 2007; Lloyd, 2013) and has illuminated the positive and negative consequences of these obligations for a variety of outcomes, including academic achievement (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Shaffer, 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Teachers can play a key role translating students' socioeconomic circumstances into diverging academic outcomes (Calarco, 2020), including but not limited to those related to out-of-school family obligations. However, research rarely engages with how teachers and administrators understand and respond to student obligations.

This study draws on interviews, observations, and surveys with teachers and school staff about how they understand student responsibilities, their influence on student academic success, and teachers' role in accommodating those responsibilities. Specifically, we ask:

How do teachers and staff at high schools that primarily serve students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) talk about their students' out-of-school responsibilities?

How do high school teachers and administrators describe assessing and responding to their students' responsibilities?

We pay particular attention to whether these adjustments reflect individual or systemic approaches to students' outside responsibilities. This study reveals important insights about how teachers frame the responsibilities of students and how schools and classrooms do or do not address the major responsibilities of high school students.

The Responsibilities of Adolescents

Literature on adolescence documents the prevalence and impacts of three *types* of adolescent responsibilities beyond formal schooling in the US: extracurricular activities, paid work, and major family responsibilities. Literatures on each dimension of student commitment have evolved in parallel, with scholars understanding how each form works and how it might come to impact students' wellbeing and academic success (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Bourdillon et al., 2010; Meier et al., 2018; Staff et al., 2020). Two major themes across these sets of literature are the unequal distribution of adolescent responsibilities and how these responsibilities intersect with schooling for adolescents.

Adolescent Responsibilities Are Not Distributed Evenly

There are clear and long-lasting inequalities in adolescent responsibilities outside of school. Extracurricular activities include school-organized activities like sports, music groups, and clubs, as well as activities organized outside of schools focused on adolescents' development (e.g., church youth groups, club sports, scouts, etc.) (Marsh, 1993). Extracurricular activities have historically been most accessible to and utilized by middle- and high-income children (Marsh, 1993; McNeal Jr., 1998), and recent research suggests that these inequalities have grown worse over time (Heath et al., 2018; Meier et al., 2018). Scholars have estimated that the gap in extracurricular activity participation between the highest and lowest income families now sits between 20-30%, depending on the type of activity and survey source (Heath et al., 2018). Family scholars have even tied extracurricular activity participation to broader classed differences in parenting (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 2003).

Working in the formal economy has become the norm for high school students in the United States, despite the dropping rate of teen employment at any given time (McLoyd & Hallman, 2020). As of 2018, about 29.2% of teens ages 16-19 were employed in the formal economy (DeSilver, 2019). However, there are growing differences by socioeconomic background regarding student employment. In 1997-1998, 25% of low-income teens and 39% of non-low-income teens were employed (Johnson & Lino, 2000). While middle-income high school students are more likely to have any paid employment than low-income peers, low-income students who do work are more likely to work more hours on average than middle-income students (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013). This form of paid employment, where adolescents work longer hours and for a longer duration is often referred to more "intensive" (Staff et al., 2020). Low-income adolescents who work are also more likely to contribute financially to overall family needs (Johnson & Lino, 2000). About 20% of employed teens contribute to family finances, and both age and family income level significantly predict this contribution (Meeks, 1998).

High school students may also have more family-centered major responsibilities outside of school. Commonly referred to as "adultification," scholars have traced the ways in which low-income families, immigrant families, and families where parents struggle with addiction or mental health often rely on children's work in order to survive (Burton, 2007). Burton, for example, uses an analysis of five ethnographic studies of 549 low-income families to outline the ways in which children may experience knowledge of adult lives (precocious knowledge), the "adult-like" role of children in families (mentored-adultification), peer responsibilities of children to parents (peerification), and children's "parental role" with siblings (parentification). Burton finds these roles and responsibilities of children are prevalent in the low-income families she has access to, with 92% of her sample experiencing precocious knowledge, 62% mentored-adultification, 32% peerification, and 9% parentification (Burton, 2007). Similarly, in their review of seven major studies of low-income families, Dodson and Dickert document the prevalence and necessity of children's (specifically girls') work and responsibilities in low-income families for survival (2004).

The specific responsibilities classified as “adultified” (a term that assumes that certain tasks are “too adult” for children or adolescents) vary by family context. For immigrant families, children’s responsibilities may be focused around language brokering and sibling childcare (Anguiano, 2018; Hafford, 2010). For families where parents have major disability struggles, these responsibilities may be focused around physical and emotional caretaking for themselves, their family members, and their parents (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Becker et al., 2001; Lloyd, 2013). For low-income adolescents, many of the same responsibilities may arise—childcare for siblings or adolescents’ own children, emotional and physical caretaking for a variety of family members, and various household tasks (Crompton, 2006; Romich, 2007). Research on the various major family responsibilities of adolescents also suggests that this work is classed. Low-income children, for example, are more likely to be caretakers for disabled family members than middle-income children (Hunt et al., 2005). Such family-centered responsibilities may also be intimately connected to adolescents’ economic contributions the family needs for survival (Estrada, 2019).

Responsibilities and School

Research largely finds a positive relationship between adolescent participation in extracurricular activities and students’ academic success and future employment (Shaffer, 2019). Extracurricular activity participation has been linked to increased academic achievement, college achievement, social skills, and self-concept (Abruzzo et al., 2016; Marsh, 1993; Shaffer, 2019). Scholars find that this positive relationship is larger for low-income students who participate (Heath et al., 2018; Marchetti et al., 2016), though some have acknowledged that the inequality in participation by social class discussed above may help widen academic inequalities (Meier et al., 2018). While researchers have explored what the culture and middle-class academic success of intensive extracurricular activity participation have meant for the wellbeing of individual students (Demerath, 2009), they also consistently find that extracurricular activities help rather than hurt academic success for those who participate (Meier et al., 2018). In contrast, student family responsibilities and intensive paid work (more common among low-income adolescents) do not always have the same lasting positive relationship to academic life.

Scholars consistently find that students who work more intensively (for longer hours per week than the average employed adolescent) perform worse in school than those who do not, even when taking into account student socioeconomic background (Staff et al., 2020; Staff et al., 2010). It is not clear, however, that the relationship is causal. In one study using nationally-representative data and focusing on the years 1990 and 1992, for example, an initial association between intensive work and lower grades in high school disappears when pre-existing differences (such as socioeconomic status and prior academic achievement) between the students who work intensively and those who do not are taken into account (Warren et al., 2000). Though recent research has suggested that adolescent employment in low-income communities can have positive impacts on non-academic outcomes in the long term (Purtell & McLoyd, 2013), scholars continually find that intensive adolescent employment is associated with negative academic outcomes (Staff et al., 2020). Scholars find, for example, that working more intensively while in high school has consistently predicted high school dropout since the 1960s (Warren & Cataldi,

2006), and that intensive work predicts drop outs even as the proportion of adolescents working intensively has decreased (and controlling for a wide array of background factors such as parental education and family income) (Staff et al., 2020). Rather than necessarily helping student educational success (as research on extracurricular activities suggests), paid work, especially for low-income adolescents who are more likely to perform paid work intensively, is likely to interfere with that success.

The majority of the research on children's and adolescents' family and home responsibilities explores how those responsibilities shape individual socio-emotional outcomes (Hooper et al, 2008; Love & Buriel, 2007; Roy et al., 2014). These studies have mixed results, with scholars finding both positive and negative emotional impacts of youth's expanded family responsibilities. Adolescent family responsibilities have also been linked to academic outcomes with mixed results. Scholars have found that adolescents report family caring responsibilities negatively impact school attendance and lateness (Aldridge & Becker, 1993) as well as educational aspirations and outcomes (Lloyd, 2013). On the other hand, scholars have also found that the language brokering responsibilities experienced by children whose parents do not speak English are significantly linked to higher fifth- and sixth-grade standardized reading tests (Dorner et al., 2007), and that sibling caretaking among adolescents in Mexican-American families can be linked to both higher and lower educational aspirations depending on things like mothers' sex-stereotyped attitudes and students' familistic beliefs (East & Hamill, 2013). In this way, adolescent family responsibilities have been shown to negatively impact academic success, with a few examples of the positive impacts specifically for immigrant children.

This research makes clear that adolescent responsibilities vary by socioeconomic status and relate to schools in distinct ways. While responsibilities predominantly held by middle- and high-income students (like extracurricular activities and non-intensive paid work) are often linked to academic success, responsibilities predominantly held by low-income students (like intensive paid work and unpaid family responsibilities) are linked to academic struggle or at the minimum a riskier path to academic success. This is not to suggest that some forms of adolescent responsibilities are naturally better for adolescents than others, but to emphasize the ways certain forms of adolescent responsibilities come with diverging academic outcomes along class lines. This pattern raises a question about how schools themselves (and how they are built to support or penalize certain forms of adolescent responsibilities) may play a key role in student inequality.

Teachers, Schools, and Adolescent Work

Schools in the United States have a complex history of structuring to accommodate or restrict children's work and responsibilities. In the 19th century, rural school districts scheduled school around children's farming responsibilities, with school held mostly in the winter and summer (Fischel, 2006). As schooling shifted to an age-graded system and urbanization grew, scholars argue that our modern schooling calendars were adopted as a "coordination device" to manage various public and student interests (Fischel, 2006). Child labor laws in the 20th century were especially popular among workers who competed with children in the labor market, and compulsory schooling laws converged with this trend (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2005).

With these changes in structure, schools also adapted to a particular version of childhood free from responsibilities (or even built to prevent children from holding major responsibilities outside of school). Childhood free from responsibility is a relatively new historical phenomenon in the United States, with norms about “carefree” childhood developing only within the last century with the movement of middle-class White families into more urban locales, which allowed mothers in particular to prioritize childrearing (Mintz, 2004). This shifted children’s normative role in families away from work, responsibility, and childcare, and toward more individual development and success (Fass, 2016). In light of this history, it is not surprising that scholars continue to find that schools themselves are not built for marginalized students or their experiences.

Scholars who study children’s work and responsibilities have made few suggestions about how to accommodate those students in school settings aside from increased school and teacher intervention (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Thomas et al., 2003). In their book, *Rights and Wrongs of Children’s Work*, Michael Bourdillon and colleagues conclude by considering the policy implications of children’s paid and unpaid work (Bourdillon et al., 2010). They take a nuanced approach, acknowledging both the need for children’s work, especially among low-income families, and the potential for abuse and exploitation. They imagine a new vision for the relationship between school and responsibilities, writing,

“Rather than focusing on the elimination of work, intervention would better serve children’s interests by ensuring that schools attend to education in its broadest sense. For this, they must accommodate other needs of children, including the need to work, and they must become places in which children want to be and to learn.” (132)

However, despite this sentiment and their ongoing acknowledgement of the importance of children’s paid and unpaid work, they conclude the book giving few concrete directions about this image of schooling. In their policy conclusion considering potential educational changes to accommodate student work, they mainly suggest that paid work become a part of schooling. They cite apprenticeship programs, which they mention run the risk of exploitation, and yet they neglect to mention how the unpaid work children do (and which seems to be most likely for low-income youth to perform) could be incorporated into a new version of education.

In addition to the structures and policies of schooling, teachers play an important role in students’ academic success—in particular the maintenance of inequality. High-quality teachers who facilitate greater gains in student academic achievement have positive impacts on students’ long-term success, including their earnings, socioemotional development, and the quality of the neighborhoods in which they live (Chetty et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2020). Teachers also play a role in translating students’ socioeconomic backgrounds and subsequent cultural capital into achievement inequalities within the classroom.

Scholars demonstrate that students’ classed cultural knowledge (of institutions and how to navigate them) mean different educational experiences and successes (Calarco, 2011; Crosnoe & Muller, 2014; Gansen, 2020; Hardie, 2015; Lareau, 2015). Jessica Calarco’s work points toward the role teachers play in socioeconomic inequality in the classroom, finding that students’ classed

cultural capital often translates to different help-seeking strategies in classrooms. While working-class students wait to receive help, middle-class students actively seek help from teachers in a variety of ways, even breaking policies about when they can ask for help and interrupting teachers to receive assistance (Calarco, 2011). While she focuses her analysis on the different ways students navigate classroom settings, she also provides insights about how teachers' assistance fits within larger inequalities in children's academic achievement. Though teachers in this case are simply answering whatever student questions come up, their willingness to provide help—often specifically to the middle-class students who seek help most—implicitly facilitates classed inequalities. In this way, how teachers and staff navigate and negotiate the classed cultural differences students bring into the classroom can have real implications for the reproduction of class and continuing stratification.

Because teachers can influence academic achievement and can play pivotal roles in translating cultural capital differences into academic inequalities, it becomes important to understand how teachers could matter for accommodating the classed responsibilities of high school students. This study uses multiple methods to examine how high school teachers and staff in schools with a high proportion of students who qualify for FRPL describe student outside responsibilities, report navigating those responsibilities, and what classed meanings these reports come to have.

Methods

This mixed-methods study utilizes qualitative thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) with high school staff at high schools across Wisconsin, supporting and triangulating findings with classroom observations at these schools. Emergent themes from the qualitative analysis guided subsequent question design for a survey of teachers from representative high schools across Wisconsin.

Interviews and Observations at Low-Income Schools

During the 2018-2019 school year, we recruited five high schools based on both the proportion of students who qualify for FRPL (with 50% or more of the student body qualifying) and their location (rural, mid-size cities, suburbs, and large cities). We conducted 61 interviews with staff across these five schools, including interviews with 10 administrators, 17 support staff, and 37 teachers. Open-ended interview questions asked participants to describe their individual and career backgrounds, the school where they work, the student body, students' responsibilities, factors that shape student success, and advice they would want to give to policymakers. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. We triangulated interview data with fieldwork, conducting observations in classrooms, school spaces, and events or activities at each school. Table 1 includes rounded descriptive information about each of the five schools we studied.

Our qualitative analytic approach was grounded in a process of iterative, data-driven, memoing and descriptive coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We wrote memos, shared ideas, and discussed themes throughout the data-collection process, utilizing subsequent interviews to member check our emergent ideas (Maxwell, 2005). After data collection, we

created individual school profiles, which informed our understanding of emergent patterns in the data (Creswell, 2014). Using NVivo software, we developed a codebook and applied descriptive, thematic codes, confirming dependability through processes of constant comparison.

Table 1: Descriptive Information about the Observed Schools

	Pine Falls	Monroe- Unified	Weaver	Gladwyn	Hamilton
Location	Rural	Rural	Mid-Size City	Suburb	Large City
Enrollment	80	500	1100	900	850
Students					
FRPL	55%	65%	65%	50%	80%
Students with Disabilities	20%	25%	15%	15%	25%
English Language Learners	0%	<5%	<5%	10%	40%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>					
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
Asian American	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	10%
Black or African American	0%	<5%	15%	<5%	35%
Hispanic/Latino	5%	5%	30%	20%	45%
Pacific Islander	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%	<5%
White	85%	90%	40%	65%	5%
Multiracial	5%	<5%	10%	5%	<5%
4-Year College Attendance Among FRPL Students	20%	20%	20%	20%	10%

Note: All names are pseudonyms and all numbers are rounded estimates to protect the anonymity of schools.

Statewide Survey of Teachers

The second form of data we collected and analyzed is a state-wide survey of teachers in public schools in Wisconsin during May 2019. Schools were randomly sampled, and a subset of teachers within each school were randomly sampled and asked to complete the survey with the offer of a small monetary incentive. The original sample of all eligible teachers who filled out the survey included 2,210 responses, with a 58.4% response rate. A total of 632 teachers included in the survey teach any grades between 9th and 12th. For our analyses, we included only the teachers who answered all relevant questions about students' major responsibilities ($N=601$). Based on the extant literature and emergent findings from our qualitative analysis, we included survey questions asking teachers about their students' paid work and family responsibilities. After asking teachers about how common they believe such responsibilities are among their students, we asked teachers about how much responsibility they believe teachers and schools *should* assume for accommodating those student responsibilities. Our dataset also included information about the school context of each survey respondent, including the proportion of the student body that qualify for FRPL. Descriptive information about these survey respondents are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Information about the Survey of Teachers

	Mean or %
Teachers	
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	77%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
Asian	1%
Black or African American	1%
Hispanic/Latino	1%
White	98%
<i>Highest Educational Attainment of Mother</i>	
High school or less	42%
Some college	26%
Bachelor's degree or higher	32%
Schools	
<i>School size</i>	430
<i>Percent Black</i>	4%
<i>Percent Limited English Proficient</i>	5%
<i>Percent FRPL</i>	39%

To measure teacher perceptions of student work, teachers were asked, “What proportion of students at your school do you believe work for pay or have substantial family responsibilities outside of school during the academic year?” Respondents then answered whether they thought “less than 10%,” “10% to 25%,” “26 % to 50%,” or “more than 50%” of students had those responsibilities. To measure attitudes about accommodating student responsibilities, respondents answered, “How much responsibility should [teachers/schools] have to accommodate students who have paid employment or substantial family responsibilities outside of school?” Respondents then answered on a Likert scale of “None,” “A little,” “Some,” “Quite a bit,” or “A great deal.” We measure student body economic status based on the proportion of the student body that qualifies for FRPL. We divided the sample into four categories, which roughly reflect quartiles of percentage student FRPL. This means we compare teachers who teach a student body where less than or equal to 25%, 26% to 37%, 38% to 51%, and more than 51% of students qualify for FRPL.

Our analysis of survey data in this study is largely descriptive. Because our research questions focus on what the economic status of the student body might mean for teacher understandings of student responsibilities and teacher attitudes, our analysis is mostly a presentation of descriptive statistics for each of the four categories of student body economic status. We perform chi-squared tests across economic status to determine whether any differences by socioeconomic status are statistically significant (at $p=.05$).

Taken together, these data allow us to examine both how teachers and school staff at high schools that serve predominantly low-income students talk about their students’ responsibilities

and report navigating them, and put these qualitative reports in context with larger state-wide trends in teacher attitudes about student responsibilities outside of school. In this way, we gain knowledge not only about how teachers understand student responsibilities in predominantly low-income schools, but also how these navigations fit into larger state trends.

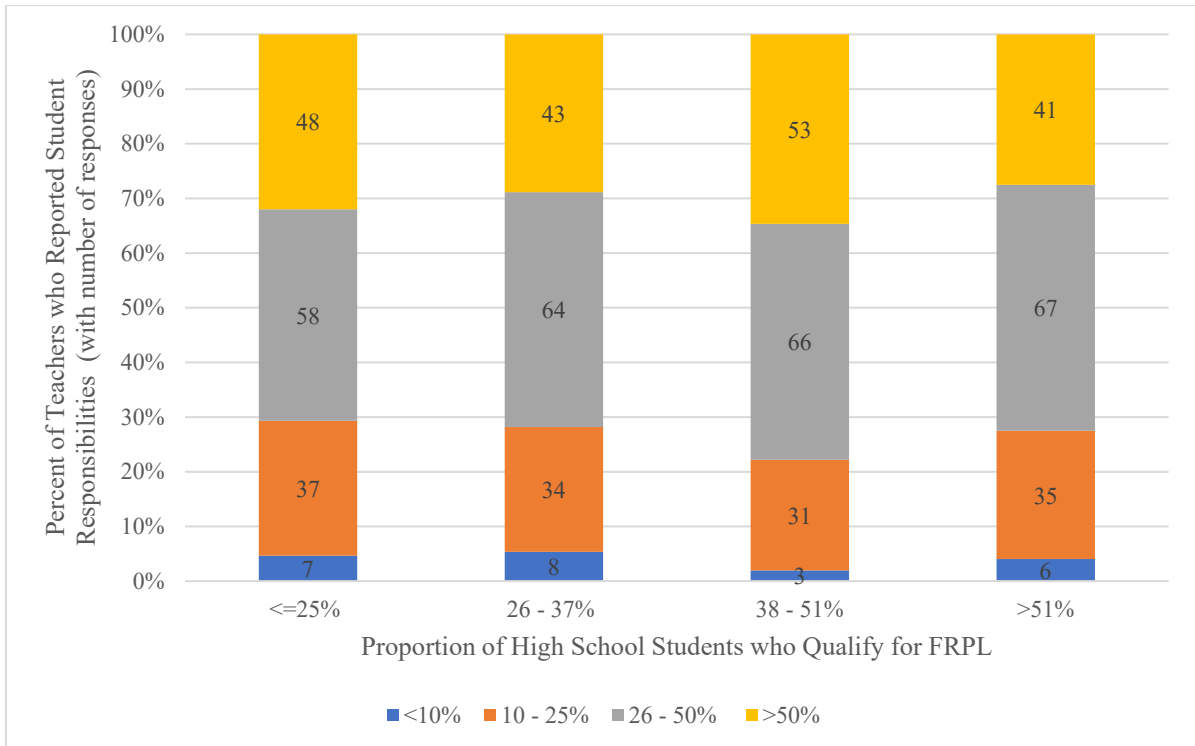
Findings

We focus on two sets of finding. First, we find that teachers often reference classed dynamics of student responsibilities when describing the wide range of responsibilities their students hold. Second, we describe the ways teachers and staff claim to accommodate or adjust around student responsibilities, and interrogate the classed implications the accommodations themselves have for students.

Student Responsibilities

In our survey data, the majority (73%) of teachers across school contexts report that more than one in four of their high school students have major outside responsibilities. Figure 1 shows the proportion of the student body teachers estimate have paid jobs or family responsibilities outside of school. Regardless of the proportion of low-income students at a high school, teachers report that students have major responsibilities. These data make clear just how widespread high school students' responsibilities are.

Figure 1: Teacher Reports on the Proportion of Students with Major Responsibilities by School SES



Notably, teachers' reports of the percentage of students who have major responsibilities outside of school is surprisingly consistent across schools serving different concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. This consistency could accurately reflect consistency in the number of students with outside responsibilities regardless of school context, as well as consistency of teacher perceptions of these responsibilities. Second, it could reflect an equality of student responsibilities overall, where classed divisions in *type* of responsibility end up evening out. For example, if students at low-income schools are more likely to have family responsibilities and work more intensively in paid work, while students at higher-income schools are more likely to work for pay but less likely to do so intensively or to participate more in extracurricular activities (as the literature suggests), these inequalities may even out when reporting on any major responsibilities. This would also assume that teacher perceptions are somewhat accurate and evenly distributed across school contexts. Third, this consistency across school contexts could reflect teachers' unequal awareness of student responsibilities across school types, which therefore tells us very little about students' actual responsibilities.

Analysis of interviews reveal the specific ways teachers, staff, and administrators report and respond to students' responsibilities. When teachers and school administrators at schools with 50% or more low-income students are asked, they report that their students have paid employment and major family responsibilities outside of school. Teachers frequently listed the activities they know their students to be doing outside of school hours, sharing stories about how student responsibilities have interfered with overall classroom functioning or with student academic life. Sometimes in this acknowledgement and description of student responsibilities, teachers also referenced the classed nature of these responsibilities. They describe a class divide between middle-class students, who are more likely to work to earn "spending money" or "extras," and low-income students who are less likely to work but, if working, are more likely to work intensively to contribute to family income or meet their own basic needs. One teacher describes this divide as a division between "appropriate jobs" and those that aren't. They say,

One of my students who always sleeps in class, I found out why, he works third shift because he *needs to help the family* and I'm like, "okay yeah we'll figure it out." A lot of the students try to do other extracurricular activities or jobs after school, *appropriate jobs* after school, some of them well, they don't do the appropriate jobs. [Social science teacher, Hamilton High School, emphasis added.]

This teacher explicitly separates student responsibilities into two categories that align with what past literature suggests about classed adolescent responsibilities. They identify the kinds of responsibilities middle-income students are most likely to have (extracurriculars and paid work) as "appropriate" and separate these from responsibilities low-income students are most likely to have (paid work that contributes to family income and may require longer and more inconvenient hours). They also reflect an important trend in what these differences in responsibilities mean for students' experiences and successes in school. The student who works more intensively specifically to support his family falls asleep in class and is able to figure out adjustments to schooling only when this teacher discovers the student's responsibility, suggesting that some level of student disclosure to teachers might also be necessary.

This description of the classed differences in jobs comes up again when a teacher describes the extent of students' financial contributions to the family. The teacher says,

The little younger sister she's a sophomore, now she got a job last year, she, for clothes, you know, like *they get jobs to help their family*—it is not to buy some—you know, there's so many kids that get jobs to buy clothes, to help buy food, to help their mom, like they give their mom, you know, “I give my mom half of my check, so she can pay, so we can have heat” like some of the things that these kids do, I never even knew what some of that was growing up, and *I lived in poverty*, you know what I mean? [Math teacher, Gladwyn High School, emphasis added.]

This teacher reports a similar awareness of student responsibilities, and that students' paid work can be an integral part of family survival. They also tie this implicitly to poverty and financial struggle. By comparing to their own experience of poverty and by emphasizing students' comments about using the money to pay for essentials like food, heat, and clothing, they imply that these experiences of working to contribute to family finances are because of financial need, not the “extras” about which other teachers speak. When this teacher notes that they didn't know that students worked to contribute financially, even when they grew up in poverty, they also highlight the larger invisibility of adolescents' work and family responsibilities.

Another staff member describes student responsibilities immediately after acknowledging the future first-generation-college-student status of students, stating,

From reading college essays, I've seen students who are *going to be first-generation college students*, and working, you know, and working very hard to make sure that becomes a possibility—they're very conscientious, they're very nervous about, you know, what lies ahead. I see a lot of students who work after school long hours, I hear students talking about taking care of their siblings, now that they're in high school, they might need to be picking them up, they might need to be babysitting them, I hear a lot of students too, who might be working like—because there's a collaboration space out here, kids congregate, and just working like long hours [Staff, Gladwyn High School, emphasis added.]

In the transition from describing first-generation college student essays to students' responsibilities, this staff member implies a link between the students' responsibilities and the educational attainment of their parents. They go on to describe the same responsibilities literature suggests is most common for low-income adolescents: family care work and intensive paid work. In this way, this staff member highlights a classed dimension to responsibilities students seeking to become first generation college students have outside of school.

Another teacher directly ties students' long work hours to their socioeconomic status explaining:

a lot of them have jobs and a lot of them have to work so sometimes, you know, like if I say like, “oh you need to make whatever, you were absent you need to take this test, you want to do it after school.” Sometimes they can't 'cause [they] gotta go to work and it's

not a, you know, an option. And lot of them work a lot of hours like we've had kids 35 hours a week, like they are working, so I think that can [be] tough, I think that that *speaks to the socioeconomic status* [Social science teacher, Gladwyn High School, emphasis added.]

In this instance, a teacher directly explains students' intensive paid work as a product of students' socioeconomic status. In this way, teacher and staff reports reflect the research in a few key ways. First, they report knowledge that students have major responsibilities outside of school. Second, they implicitly or explicitly link these responsibilities to financial struggle, parental education, or socioeconomic status more broadly. They do this by also separating student responsibilities into two categories: those most common among low-income students, and those most common among middle-income students. Third, they report that the responsibilities of low-income students can interfere with school success.

Teachers and staff also regularly provided examples of this school interference. One staff member describes how a student's responsibilities affected his attendance so much that he wasn't permitted to walk at graduation:

We had a senior boy last year that worked in [nearby town], which is 30 miles away, to keep his family going. It was a single parent mom, and he had a brother, so he was working to help take care of the family. But he would work the night shift, and he would work until three in the morning. He would come home and sleep for four hours, come to school all day, and then he had another job and he'd go there, and his grades were affected. And he didn't walk at graduation because he was absent too many times. He graduated, but didn't get to walk because he was absent more than the minimum number and stuff. So yeah, we have kids that are affected a lot. I think here because of absences and jobs and they're tired in the morning from working the night before and stuff like that, which is sad. [Staff, Monroe-Unified High School.]

In this example, a student's responsibility is still implicitly classed. The staff member reports that the student works for pay "to keep his family going," and links his working to his mother's single-parent status (reflecting a long-standing pattern that single-mother families are more likely to be poor than partnered ones) (Livingston, 2018). But the teacher also describes how this intensive paid work that contributes to family finances affected both his grades and attendance. These outside responsibilities affected his academic success so much that he was not permitted to walk at graduation due to his absences. The staff member then reports that instances like this, where students who work intensive jobs have more absences and are affected in school, are not uncommon. In this way, they also point to an apparent contention between student responsibilities and larger school policies.

Another teacher describes how these intensive and financially-contributing jobs affect tardies, which impacts state school accountability ratings:

Yes, even sophomores are finding jobs because they need to help pay the bills with their parents. Like, having to work. Not just a choice because I want to pay my cell phone bill or have money to spend, *but they actually contribute to the household*. There are juniors who you know, have the same thing. They *have to take care of their brothers and sisters*

and school, the brothers and sisters, the little kids' day starts later than ours so they're always late in the morning because they have to get the younger brothers and sisters off to school instead of making sure they're here, they've got to make sure their fourth-grade sister is there before they can leave for school, so, first hour tardies is a huge problem, with sleeping in or getting their siblings to school, that kind of thing. And we just say, we'll tackle it later, we'll tackle it later, when it hurts us on our state report card, I mean, there's just large ramifications for them that we just keep putting off. [English teacher, Weaver High School, emphasis added.]

This excerpt highlights key patterns connecting responsibilities and school experiences. First, the teacher reports a distinction between students who participate in paid work to “have money to spend” versus those who “actually contribute to the household.” They also implicitly link this difference to financial struggle, describing this financial contribution as a necessity to pay the bills. Second, the teacher equates these intensive paid work responsibilities to the responsibilities of students who take care of siblings and have unpaid family responsibilities. Third, they link both of these responsibilities, which both research and this teacher suggest are most common among low-income adolescents to school lateness. Finally, the teacher links the impacts of these classed responsibilities to not only individual academic life, but also to the success of the entire school, citing the state report card. In linking to the success of the school, this teacher also points toward a structural tension between student circumstances, school accountability measures, and the structure of school schedules (with conflicting start times between the elementary and high schools). They report that teachers and staff seem to know that these tardies are a problem but avoid addressing the problem or underlying causes. In this way, this teacher makes clear that not only are student responsibilities classed and interfering with student academic life, but also that this interference can affect the overall school success even when staff identify the problem. While the teacher frames the problem as being about the pattern of tardies in relation to school accountability measures, their description points to the ways that school structures are not built to meet the needs of current students and families.

This reported teacher and staff awareness of students' responsibilities was consistent across communities of various sizes. Educators from rural areas to large cities reported similar information both about their students' responsibilities and about the ways that these responsibilities are linked to the financial status of those students. Because of this seemingly widespread knowledge about student responsibilities, how they might be linked to class, and how they can come to interfere with student academic life, a next important question is how teachers and schools adjust and negotiate around those student responsibilities in the classroom and in larger policies and resources. What does this teacher and staff knowledge about the classed dynamic of student responsibilities mean for accommodations (and systemic change) available to students?

School and Teacher Adjustments for Responsibilities

Using the survey data, Table 3 shows teachers' attitudes about accommodating student responsibilities, separated by the FRPL status of the student populations with whom they work. Results show a consistent stance toward teacher- and school-level accommodations for students'

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outside responsibilities. The small differences in attitudes that do exist based on student FRPL status are not statistically significant, meaning that we cannot reject the possibility that economic variations like these are due to chance. Across the board, the majority of teachers report believing that schools and teachers *should* accommodate student responsibilities “some,” with 52% of total teachers reporting this stance for both school and teacher accommodations. These results reveal something important about how student responsibilities should be addressed within educational settings. Though teachers at all schools report knowing that their students have major responsibilities (as shown in Figure 1), and though teachers at low-income high schools report knowing that the responsibilities interfering with student academic life are linked to students’ financial struggle, teachers do not seem to adjust their beliefs about the school- or teacher-level accommodations for these responsibilities based on the overall financial status of students. In this way, teachers do not see schools or teachers as the major avenue for addressing academic struggles caused by students’ outside responsibilities. They report that teachers and schools should make “some” accommodations for student responsibilities, and about a quarter of teachers report that schools and teachers should accommodate those responsibilities “quite a bit” or “a great deal.” Robustness checks not shown investigate whether these attitudes instead might be stratified by teachers’ own socioeconomic status (measured by parental education). Attitudes toward accommodating student responsibilities were surprisingly consistent.

Table 3: Teacher Attitudes about Student Responsibility Accommodation

		≤25%	26 - 37%	38 - 51%	>51%	Total
Teachers by School SES who Believe...	Schools should accommodate students with responsibilities					
	None	5%	6%	3%	67%	4%
	A little	13%	19%	12%	20%	16%
	Some	56%	47%	51%	54%	52%
	Quite a bit	23%	24%	28%	23%	25%
	A great deal	3%	4%	6%	2%	4%
					χ^2	17.19
					p	0.14
	Teachers should accommodate students with responsibilities					
	None	5%	7%	6%	1%	5%
	A little	23%	22%	21%	27%	23%
	Some	53%	48%	50%	56%	52%
Quite a bit	16%	20%	21%	15%	18%	
A great deal	3%	3%	3%	67%	2%	
				χ^2	11.55	
				p	0.48	
N	150	149	153	149	601	

Note: None of the differences between schools’ student SES are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

In our interviews and fieldwork, we did not see many school-based efforts to change schools to accommodate students' out-of-school responsibilities. Instead, adjustments were most often made on a case-by-case basis. This approach required teacher-student rapport to increase the likelihood that students shared personal information about their challenges and obligations. As one teacher explains,

as you build a relationship with students, they'll tell you, they'll volunteer the information. I can ask a student, "why are you always asleep in class?" and they're like "I'm up all night with my brothers and sisters" ... you know, and it's hard to discipline them for that, you know? *So as a teacher you have to use discretion on, is this real, or you know, not the truth.* But generally it comes out. [Social science teacher, Hamilton High School, emphasis added.]

This teacher describes the strategies they use to encourage students to volunteer information about what responsibilities they have that are interfering with school life. In the example this teacher shares, when a student explains that they have major family caretaking responsibilities, the teacher expresses trepidation in blaming students for that response.

In response to learning of students' responsibilities and their interference with academic achievement, teachers generally pursued three courses of action: (1) offering individual accommodations in response to student requests, (2) referring students to other school staff, or (3) declining to accommodate/adjust as a way to prepare students for post-high-school life. We describe each of these approaches in the following section. We then describe the few systemic recommendations that participants offered in this portion of our research.

Individual Accommodations

Most of the teachers that we interviewed offered ad-hoc solutions to individual students on a case-by-case basis. Their response is captured in the words of the teacher from a large city quoted at the beginning of our findings: "okay, yeah we'll figure something out." Another guidance counselor goes on to describe this individual accommodation, stating:

just trying to give that extra support while they're at school, and stay focused, and if they're working late, or have them take care of their kids, we try to be accommodating to that, if they are tired in the morning, stuff like that. [Hamilton High School, guidance counselor.]

In this example, a guidance counselor emphasizes the individual attitude staff have toward students' outside responsibilities—focusing on being accommodating around certain student circumstances, "if they're working late." These accommodations often included modifying course expectations based on students' particular situations, offering things like assignment extensions and class work time, altered assignments, and make-up work. But as the social science teacher from a larger city above goes on to describe, they also can use this process of building relationships with students—asking why students are struggling and students sharing their situation—as a way to assess for themselves the believability of the student's story. This process is not just a way of accommodating students' needs on an individual basis, but also one

in which teachers have the power to assess whether students' explanations are the truth, and whether they will receive the adjustments to fit their needs. In the absence of teacher-student rapport, teachers are unlikely to perceive and therefore unlikely to respond to students' constraints.

The ad-hoc approach to challenges posed by outside commitments is, by definition, tailored to individual students. It gives teachers discretion to determine whether a student is telling the truth, and therefore the power to decide whether students do or do not deserve accommodations. This process can fundamentally disadvantage students who do not get along well with teachers or against whom teachers may have a range of biases. This dynamic also limits provision of accommodations to students who feel comfortable enough to share that they have outside responsibilities that interfere with academic life. Given the ways even teachers in this study talk about student responsibilities (as not "appropriate" or as "tough"), it is easy to imagine situations where students might not want to reveal their experience with their teacher because of the stigma or pity they might face from the teacher they tell. Even teachers skilled at building relationships with students likely have at least a few students with whom they are not close enough for them to reveal their outside responsibilities.

Referring Students to Other School Staff

A second common strategy teachers employ to address students' responsibility-based constraints is referring students to other school staff. In the words of one teacher in a rural area,

I had a student fall asleep just this week, and it's only Wednesday.... So, I just let him sleep and I emailed student services and said like, "This is what I'm seeing in class, just one of you want to check in on this kid," you know, just cause you never know, you know, what's going on. So they said sure. So when the bell rang I woke him up and I just gave him a pass down to student services, so [Teacher, Monroe-Unified High School.]

In many ways, this system of referring a student to a separate school staff member, who will presumably ask further questions and help students navigate school and outside responsibilities, seems to bypass some of the problematic aspects of a purely teacher-led accommodation system: the student does not need to disclose their experiences to any particular instructor, and influence of variation in instructor response is limited. Referrals do not rely on individual teacher evaluations of students' honesty or on individual teachers forming relationships with individual students. However, from this teacher's description and conversations with other staff at the school, relying on referrals to other staff still requires a triggering event, whether based on teacher observations (students asleep in class), student disclosures to teachers, or even students' or family members' own initiative. Though the existence of an office like "student services" implies a more concerted effort from the school as a whole (as opposed to individual teachers) to address student needs, the strategy is still ad-hoc rather than systemic, and reflects a schooling system that is not built to fit the needs and lives of students.

Declining to Accommodate

Though teachers like those above focus on various forms of individual support given to students who have major responsibilities outside of school, others emphasize that making exceptions does those students a disservice because it does not set them up well for post-high school life. One teacher explains,

If we know of a situation, we try to accommodate. But you know, the kids have to, you know, “welcome to the real world.” You know, we’ll try to help you, but as soon as you graduate, you’re in college and then working like this, you won’t have somebody holding your hand. You’re slipping in and out, you need to go talk to the professor, you know. If you’re whatever, you don’t show up to class because you had to work until 4 in the morning. They don’t care. [Laughs.] So. Trying to provide that guidance, I think, is moreso what we do. Yes, depending on the situation and stuff, we try to make some adaptations, but I don’t know how much of that actually occurs. [Teacher, Monroe-Unified High School.]

In this example, the teacher makes some reference to adjusting individually to students. They also make clear that this system relies on communication and shared knowledge between the student and the teacher, stating, “if we know the situation.” But they also use this moment to emphasize that *not* adjusting to students’ responsibilities outside of school better prepares students for post-high-school-life. In particular, they talk about how a college professor would react to students’ outside responsibilities, suggesting that professors would not care about student work schedules and emphasizing that students would need to initiate communication with professors. They suggest that preparing students for expectations in “the real world” is more likely than providing accommodations. In this way, this teacher allows some space for individual accommodations for students who have major responsibilities, but largely argues that these happen infrequently. Instead, they effectively reject the overall need for any adjustment and place the responsibility to juggle both outside responsibilities and schooling-as-it-exists on students. By making some room for individual adjustment but largely rejecting any onus on teachers or schools to adjust to students’ outside responsibilities, this teacher places the solution to students’ responsibilities on students themselves.

Systemic Change/Recommendations

Though the majority of teachers, administrators, and staff we spoke to focused their adjustments for students’ outside responsibilities on the ad-hoc individual approaches discussed above, two administrators notably referenced more systemic changes or desires to address students’ paid work needs through major overhauls to the schedule of schools. One principal describes the adjustments they made to support students who work intensively:

Some of the other challenges is that students are, they are the financial supporter of their families, and being the financial supporter, my first year here when I arrived. Everyone was leaving and going to work during the school day, like we can’t do that, you know, we do have laws that we’re governed by, that we have to follow, but I also understand that if you have to support the family that that’s important. So, one of the things that I did in my

first year is that I petitioned the Superintendent to change the hours of school, so we were a late school, which means we didn't start till what, almost nine o'clock, and the kids got out at almost at four, where they have to be at work. So now we're an early school, so we start at 7:30 and about 2:45 we're done. In addition, if we can make it possible for those students who have their credits to get you a half-day schedule and make the afternoon your job, an elective, we do that as well, and so that's really support, and even like those, I got kids who are third shift and they come in here and they just sleep, so finding them a first shift job, and making that work, it really works for them. [Principal, Hamilton High School.]

In this example, the principal describes noticing that a substantial number of students who were working intensively and contributing to family finances were leaving school early to work. Rather than pursuing individual solutions to the mismatch between students' intensive work and school policy, this principal describes taking major action (petitioning the superintendent) to change the school schedule to fit the needs of students who needed to work intensively after school. This principal then went on to describe other major structural changes put in place to accommodate the students who needed to work for pay: credit for paid work in the second half of the school day, and assistance finding paid work that will not interfere with sleep schedules. In this way, this principal describes making major structural changes to adjust for students' intensive paid work responsibilities outside of school. Rather than ad-hoc and individual, this solution is a systemic response that does not rely on rapport with teachers or any particular staff member. It doesn't even require that students seek help.

At a suburban school we visited, an assistant principal describes their desire to rewrite the school schedule and policy wholly,

I would love to blow up the schedule. I'd like to have—this is my dream, my dream—I would like to do something with like work component and year-round schooling.... I would just love to do more of, kids go they come to school for ten weeks they do a ten-week, and then they maybe go do a job shadow and they work or something for another four weeks and earn some money, and then come back to school—just something different, something to kind of blow up and look very different—but work component, job shadow component, volunteer component [Assistant principal, Gladwyn High School.]

In this example, the assistant principal describes a desire to redesign the schedule of schooling entirely. They report a focus on making space for student paid work, wanting to build in weeks for students to work for pay or develop their work skills with a job shadow or volunteer. However, they do not address how the scheduling would actually fit with the work and responsibilities of students at the time of the interview. Regardless of how feasible this plan might be, the administrator does describe a more systemic approach to addressing students' outside responsibilities and their tension with academic success.

In this way, administrators, in particular, were more likely to describe addressing or wanting to address students' responsibilities outside of school through structural and policy change.

However, even in these two instances where administrators report making or wanting to make change to fit students' paid work, they do not reference students' unpaid outside responsibilities. This structural change to accommodate only paid work responsibilities in many ways mirrors the recommendations of scholars who study children's paid and unpaid work (Bourdillon et al., 2010). Despite numerous teachers referencing both students' intensive paid work and family responsibilities, the focus of adjustment seems to be around paid work in particular. There are reasons this could be the case. First, perhaps administrators do not know about students' family responsibilities or that these responsibilities do not actually exist. Second, might be the ways that paid work has, in some form, long been built-in to schooling and is easier to incorporate now (Lynch, 2000). Schooling has long been seen as a form of career preparation, and technical education persists in the schools we visited and across the state. Therefore, the processes to transform students' intensive paid work responsibilities to a school-supported program might have generally been easier. There may be more exemplary programs, funding, and established justifications for supporting students' work success.

Discussion

This research makes clear that teachers are aware of the landscape of students' responsibilities. Teachers report knowing that students have major responsibilities, link those responsibilities to students' socioeconomic status, and often consider different forms of responsibilities at once. Teachers draw distinctions between the responsibilities more common among middle-income students and those most common among low-income students. They also link these distinctions to differences in the impact they have on school success. In many ways, teachers and staff report trends that align with existing literature: middle-income students do extracurricular activities and paid work that either supports or does not interfere with schooling, while low-income students work intensively to contribute to family finances and have unpaid family responsibilities that are more likely to interfere with school success.

This study describes how teachers and staff accommodate students' who have major responsibilities. While some administrators describe seeking structural solutions to the academic struggles students with intensive paid work face, the vast majority of teachers and staff describe individual ad-hoc solutions to both intensive paid work and family responsibilities. Teachers describe making individual adjustments to course expectations based on students' disclosures, referring individual students to separate school staff, or consciously refusing course adjustments. Teachers report knowledge that student responsibilities are classed, and consistently frame the solution as making individual adjustments, rather than more broadly changing the structure of the school to fit students' lives. Even in the case where a teacher reports a longstanding school-wide knowledge that students' responsibilities create widespread student lateness and negatively impact the school's state report card, the teacher still does not frame the school schedule or school structures as the problem.

Administrators who have more power to make large-scale structural and policy changes (or petition those with even more power to do so), were more likely to identify systemic solutions to address students' responsibilities. In the two instances where administrators reported making or

wanting to make structural changes to schools, they spoke only of the ways those changes would better support students who work for pay intensively and to contribute to family finances. In this way, though teachers report differences in students' responsibilities by family financial status, and often group together intensive paid work and family responsibilities common to low-income adolescents in describing their impacts on academic life, structural change identified prioritizes only one of these forms of responsibility. This reflects research about the devaluation of family carework (England, 2005). By considering multiple forms of adolescents' responsibilities outside of school at once, we get a fuller picture of how teachers and staff make accommodations for certain forms of responsibilities held by low-income students.

There are limitations to this work. First, though we believe these findings give valuable insights that help to understand how high school teachers and staff in a variety of locales may navigate students' classed responsibilities, our data centers around teachers and staff in Wisconsin. It is very possible that teacher knowledge and adjustments for students with responsibilities look different in different regions of the country, with different norms of interaction or different distributions of student responsibilities. Second, because of the nature of our recruitment (which originally recruited to work with both moderately high- and low-achieving high schools with many low-income students), many of our interviews are with teachers and staff at schools that are not academically high-achieving compared to school achievement across the state. Though school achievement is not at the center of this analysis, this design does mean we might be missing the ways teachers at very high-achieving schools may be supporting the success of their students. However, teacher and staff concerns about students' major outside responsibilities were consistent both at schools that were relatively successful and those that were less so.

This paper reveals the ad-hoc approaches schools take to address students' extramural obligations and analyzes how these approaches may contribute to class inequalities in academic outcomes. While teachers and staff at all schools report knowing their students have major responsibilities outside of school, and those at low-income high school describe how these responsibilities come to interfere with academic success, the solutions they offer to accommodate students' situations often rely on students' disclosure of their circumstances or on an inciting event signaling to teachers that they are struggling. While some students may be successfully navigating these responsibilities and their academic work, these approaches are ad-hoc and focused on helping individual students rather than on systemic changes to support the student bodies with whom they work. In the few cases in which school staff do report more systemic solutions or a desire for systematic solutions, these ideas come from administrators specifically and focus on the needs of students with intensive paid work. This study helps illuminate the processes by which school structures and teacher responses come to facilitate the tensions between low-income students' responsibilities outside of school and academic life. Future research would benefit from long-term observational data about the moments students ask or receive individual accommodations. In many ways, this work makes clear the roles teachers, staff, and schools as a whole may play in adolescents' classed responsibilities outside of school.

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