Retrieved September 8, 2010 from http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=16108

Teachers College Record
The Voice of Scholarship in Education

Contracts, Choice, and Customer Service: Marketization and Public Engagement in Education

by Maia Bloomfield Cucchiara, Eva Gold & Elaine Simon — 2011

Background/Context: *Market models of school reform are having a major impact on school districts across the country. While scholars have examined many aspects of this process, we know far less about the general effects of marketization on public participation in education and local education politics.*

Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of Study: *This article uses an examination of marketization in Philadelphia over a six-year period (2001-7) to explore its implications for public engagement—or the ability of individuals and groups to work with and influence the school district and hold officials accountable.*

Setting: *The research was conducted in Philadelphia, the sixth largest city in the country. In 2001, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over the School District of Philadelphia, citing on-going fiscal crises and poor student achievement. The resulting reforms included new leadership, new governance structures, and significant privatization.*

Research Design: *This is a qualitative case study of school district change in Philadelphia, focusing on the implications for public engagement.*

Data Collection and Analysis: *Data included over 50 interviews with education administrators, civic and political elites, and representatives of grassroots and community groups. Data also included six years of participant observation at public meetings and in reform coalitions. Analysis followed a grounded theory approach designed to identify district policies and practices related to public participation and to document how these practices shaped the ability of individuals and groups to engage productively with the district.*

Findings/Results: *We find that the marketization of education in Philadelphia had a major impact on the district's institutional structure and practices for interacting with local stakeholders. Our data point to several changes that were particularly consequential in shaping the opportunities for engagement and the direction such engagement took. These are: a corporate governance structure, an emphasis on communication, widespread contracting out for* *services, an increase in school choice, and a focus on customer service.*

Conclusions/Recommendations: *These changes have resulted in channeling of public participation along individual lines at the expense of collective forms of action and, more broadly, undercutting of the understanding of education as a public good. Given the continued influence of market models of education reform at the local and national levels, it will be important for policymakers to pay close attention to the ways by which marketization can limit engagement and to develop strategies, such as increased transparency and new vehicles for public input, to address this tendency.*

When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over the School District of Philadelphia in 2001, students, parents, and community members took to the streets, protesting the state's plan for the privatization of many low-performing schools.[1] Nevertheless, the state takeover did more than outsource school management. It also—and with far less fanfare—ushered in a paradigm shift, as leaders appointed by the state elevated market-oriented rhetoric and principles to an unprecedented degree, moving the district away from its historically professional orientation. This shift is captured by the term "marketization," which refers both to privatization and to broader political and discursive processes through which public entities become increasingly "businesslike" (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo 2002). Market-oriented reforms have had a major influence on Philadelphia—as on school districts across the country. Some of the resulting changes are apparent, such as an increase in the number of charter schools or a proclivity toward outsourcing school management and other services. Other changes are subtler and more difficult to identify. This article uses an examination of marketization in Philadelphia over a six-year period (2001-7) to explore its implications for public engagement, or the ability of individuals and groups to work with and to influence the school district and to hold officials accountable.

In cities across the country—from New York to New Orleans to Los Angeles—the boundaries between school districts and the private sector are being redrawn, blurred, or fundamentally altered at the same time that education reform agendas are increasingly influenced by principles and priorities drawn from the business world. As McDonnell (2009) noted, however, we currently know little about how entrepreneurial or marketizing policies affect education politics, including the "extent to which different types of entrepreneurial policies have changed rules and norms for participation, decision making, and resource allocation" (pp. 424-5). We have chosen to examine the relationship between marketization and public engagement for three reasons. First, a host of research has shown that public participation is important for assuring that schools address the needs of diverse communities and provide equitable services and outcomes—a perennial challenge in urban areas (Fruchter, 2007; McAdams, 2000; Puriefoy, 2006; Shirley, 1997; Stone et al., 2001). Second, the ways in which a district engages with the public is a critical component of its mission as a public organization responsible for both individual opportunity and ensuring that local and national needs for an informed, capable citizenry are met. At the same time, the literature on privatization is replete with assumptions about the ways in which market models *could* impede democratic processes, but there has been little empirical research showing *how* this actually happens.

Philadelphia's early adoption of educational privatization offers a unique lens through which to examine the profound implications that market models of reform have for school districts. This study uses ethnographic methods to investigate the complex inter-relationships between public discourse, local context, and district policy. Over fifty interviews, several years of participant-observation, case studies of four organizations working on education issues, and a deep historical knowledge of reform in Philadelphia allow us to track changes in district practices following the state takeover and the corresponding shift in the positioning of the public. We argue that the marketization of education in Philadelphia has had a significant impact on the district's institutional structure and practices for interacting with local stakeholders. We further contend that the consequences have been to channel public participation along *individual* lines at the expense of *collective* forms of action and, more broadly, to undercut the understanding of education as a public good. Though the specifics of Philadelphia's takeover and ensuing privatization are unique in many respects, the case study presented here illuminates patterns that may well exist in other cities affected by marketization and helps attune reformers and researchers to some of the limitations of market-driven reforms.

As Henig and Stone (2008) observe, however, decision-making at the local level is never as ideologically driven as national debates over education reform imply. In contrast to the often-dogmatic conflicts between different visions for reform that rage at the national level (e.g., markets versus professionalism versus community organizing), an individual district's policies are heavily informed by the realities and constraints of that particular context: "At the street level, where parents and practitioners wrestle on a day to day basis with questions of what is needed and what to do, the terms of discussion more typically are concrete and rooted in local history, material interests, and influential personalities" (p. 193). No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a state takeover, local education politics, and other reform theories implemented by district leadership certainly played a role in shaping the School District of Philadelphia. Nevertheless, this was a period when the district's top leadership (particularly the School Reform Commission, which was dominated by state appointees) expressed a strong allegiance to market models of school reform and interest in remaking the district along those lines. Thus, while marketization was not the whole story in Philadelphia during this period, it certainly was the dominant plotline. As a result, our argument here focuses on the influence of market models at the same time that our analysis of the data acknowledges the ways in which other factors—including different models of reform and local historical and political issues—shape district policy and practice.

MARKETIZATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

Public education and the private sector have always been intertwined in the United States. Throughout the 20th century, educators have drawn on the world of business for reform and governance strategies, business leaders themselves have led or supported various reform movements, private companies have provided educational products and services, and schools have served as targets for advertising and other commercial endeavors (Anderson & Pini, 2005; Levin 2001; Mickelson, 1999; Molnar, 1996; Richards, Shore, & Sawicky, 1996; Shipps, 2006;). These relationships, though lasting and powerful, have also been complicated, with education and business operating in greater concert during some periods than others. In the last thirty years, they have been "reinvigorated," as corporations became more involved in education and educators and policy makers turned increasingly to the private sector for reform strategies (Mickelson, 1999, p. 476). Education is not alone in this respect. In the last decades of the 20th century, a faith in market principles as the solution to a wide range of social and economic problems came to dominate American policy and public discourse (Katz, 2001; Kuttner, 1999; Richards et al., 1996). As Gewirtz observes in her study of a “managerial school” in post-welfarism Great Britain, the “market revolution is not just a change in structure and incentives.” She continues: “It is a transformational process that brings into play a new set of values and a new moral environment” (2002, p 47).

Scholars interested in this phenomenon have used a number of terms—from privatization to marketization to commercialization—to describe the various ways that schools are shaped by the private sector. As Anderson and Pini (2005) note, the terminology is complex and overlapping. According to Bartlett et al., marketization—the term we are using here—is “the intensified injection of market principles such as deregulation, competition, and stratification into the public schools” (2002, p. 5). They note that marketization is both a discursive and structural process that embraces choice, outsourcing, and standardized testing at the same time that it leads to an elevation of individual goals for education and an increase in business involvement in schools (p. 6). In other words, marketization involves both new policies (such as an increase in outsourcing) *and* changes in the ways educational issues are discussed and understood. For example, as in the Progressive era, one result of the recent elevation of business principles is that economic goals—such as local growth or job training—come to take precedence over such other purposes as educating future citizens, promoting social justice, or developing individual interests and talents. Marketization similarly leads to the positioning of specific values, like efficiency and choice, as obvious (and unquestioned) goods.

Because marketization is a global phenomenon, much of the literature on the marketization of education is international in provenance and scope (Kwong, 2000; Mok, 2000; Munene, 2008; Whitty & Power, 2000). While marketization is informed by a critique of traditional public systems as bureaucratic and inefficient, Kwong (2000) notes that the embrace of market principles by individual school systems is often less about ideology than it is about practicality, with officials turning to business practices and emphasizing efficiency in response to dwindling public resources. Despite the differences in local context, the movement towards marketization looks quite similar across multiple settings (Whitty & Power, 2000).[2]

Marketization is related to the term privatization (which is used more frequently in the U.S. literature), but actually references a broader phenomenon. “Privatization” generally refers to policies and practices designed to bring the power of the private sector to bear upon the operations of public institutions, such as the management of public schools by private companies and the increase in school choice (Levin, 2001; Richards, et al., 1996). In contrast, marketization indexes a more general shift to the embrace of business-oriented principles and highlights the fact that this shift occurs both in policy and in the larger discourse around the operation of schools and the purpose of education. Following Bartlett et al. (2002), we use marketization here as a term that encompasses privatization but one that also speaks to the ways in which policy makers and leaders promote market principles as the solution to a variety of educational problems at the same time that they emphasize schools’ economic purposes (e.g., the role schools play in ensuring that individuals and the city or region can compete economically). The focus of our article is Philadelphia, but scholars have documented similar processes in a number of cities (Anderson & Pini, 2005; Scott & DiMartino, 2009; Shipps, 1997, 2006; Shipps & Kafka, 2009).

In our analysis, we use the terms public engagement and public participation interchangeably to refer to the ways in which individuals and groups influence and collaborate with an educational system in setting priorities, developing policy, holding educators accountable, and serving the children and communities. Such activities appear to be particularly important in urban areas. In the 1990s, Clarence Stone and his colleagues studied eleven cities engaged in school reform efforts and found that reform was more successful and sustainable in cities with higher levels of "civic capacity"—in which representatives of a range of sectors in the community came together around a shared vision and plan for action for school improvement (Stone et al., 2001). Studies of community organizing for school reform have also found that parent and community activism can be a powerful tool for addressing the problems of urban education, namely inequitable resources and programming and diminished expectations for student and educator performance—as well as a means of challenging deficit notions of urban parents (Fruchter, 2007; Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, &McAlister, 2009). More broadly, Americans have a long history of valuing public participation in education, viewing such participation as necessary to the schools' ability to serve the public interest and to the maintenance of a vibrant democracy (Covaleskie, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Katz, 1987; Labaree, 2000). Accordingly, the belief that education is a public good subject to democratic processes has shaped the ways that Americans govern their schools—manifested most notably in publicly elected school boards, but also evident in plans for parents to play a role in local school governance and in the continued existence of complex education politics in many cities, including Philadelphia (Bryk, Bebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1999; Stone et al, 2001; Viteritti, 2009).

The embrace of market solutions to educational problems is controversial, in large part because of concerns that it will interfere with the democratic or public nature of schools. The theoretical work on privatization tends to be polarized (Burch, 2006), and much of the literature that has addressed issues of public engagement and the democratic purposes of education is critical. For example, in a review of several books on democracy and education, Abowitz places these works within the context of an increasingly market-oriented world. She contends: "Neoliberal economic policies, one of the trademarks of globalization in our current age, hold a keen distaste for all things public and prefer the speed, efficiency, and individualization of the market for guiding state policies, economic or educational" (2008, p. 357). Similarly, Covaleskie argues that "privateers" (or proponents of privatization) are hostile to the very notion of a public. He describes the movement towards privatization as a discursive effort designed largely to replace "the very idea of a public, however vestigial that idea currently is, with a market in which choices about schooling will always be made on the basis of what is good for the individual, not what is good for everyone" (2007, p. 32; Anderson & Pini, 2005). In an analysis of the turn towards contracting, Minow raises related questions about the potential of outsourcing to "jeopardize public purposes by pressing for market-style competition, by sidestepping norms that apply to public programs, and by eradicating the public identity of social efforts to meet human needs" (2003, p. 2).

On the other hand, a number of analysts argue that the market provides different, and in some ways more powerful, forms of accountability to citizens. In the classic statement on school choice, Chubb and Moe (1990) ascribe the failure of public school reform to the democratic governance of schools and claim that marketplace competition would allow schools to be more innovative and responsive to student and family needs. Examining the impact of charter schools on district schools, Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2001) found that district schools concerned about the possibility of losing enrollment to charters made changes to curriculum and personnel in order to maintain parental satisfaction. Mintrom further raises the possibility that, given adequate transparency, contracting could enable citizens and decision makers to "engage in well-informed, focused discussions about how effectively a company is meeting its obligations within a given school district" (2009, p. 344). Similarly, in a discussion of the consequences of growing private sector involvement for public engagement in education, Henig suggests that contracting—because it allows for the clear stipulation of costs and outcomes—could provide citizens with the information they need to hold organizations and officials accountable and to mobilize for public action. (Henig, forthcoming).

A smaller body of work has looked empirically at how privatization and/or marketization affect public engagement in education. In an historical study of privatization, Ascher et al. (1996) argue that the private management of schools did little to increase accountability or parental involvement. In a wide-ranging review of educational privatization, Richards et al. (1996) found that contracting can make it more difficult for the public to hold educators and public officials accountable for school performance, because the chain of contractors and subcontractors obscures clear lines of responsibility. Focusing on the marketization of education in North Carolina, Bartlett et al. (2002), argue that it empowered business elites at the expense of other groups and reshaped local discourse around education, elevating economic goals (such as using schools to promote economic growth) over other goals (such as ensuring equity). In an examination of privatization in New York City, Scott and DiMartino (2009) argue that privatization involves social and political, as well as fiscal and managerial, shifts. They note that under the leadership of Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein "all public forums for citizen input into school system decisions" in New York have been abolished and that market-oriented reforms have come under fire because of the paucity of parent or community participation (2009, p. 446). Thus, the literature raises important questions about the impact of marketization on public engagement, but the process of teasing out the mechanisms through which this happens has only just begun.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws from a larger qualitative study, conducted over a six-year period (2001-2007), of civic engagement in Philadelphia following the state takeover of the schools. Informed by the literature on civic engagement and civic capacity (discussed above), this study was designed to provide a longitudinal perspective on the ways in which the state takeover and ensuing reforms affected engagement and capacity around education in Philadelphia.[3] Qualitative analyses allowed us first to situate district policies and practices within their broader social, political, and economic contexts—namely, a *city* simultaneously in the midst of a downtown revitalization and its continued struggle with the legacies of deindustrialization, a *state* political field dominated by conservative ideologies, and a *national* turn towards the market as the solution to social problems. Second, interviews and observations enabled us to understand the mechanisms through which new policies and practices emerged and how they, in turn, shaped the activities of external organizations. Third, we were able to pay close attention to the meanings that differently situated local actors attributed to their actions and experiences and to document these multiple perspectives. Finally, our design provided a "long-term view," enabling us to track the ways in which public engagement in education changed over time and to identify those dynamics or policy shifts that had the greatest consequence for participation (Simon, Gold, & Christman, 2008).

The civic engagement study was also part of an even larger study of privatization in Philadelphia following the state takeover (Boyd, Christman, & Useem, 2008; Bulkley, 2007; Christman, Gold, & Herold, 2006; Gold, Christman & Herold, 2007; Gill, Zimmer, Christman, & Blanc, 2007; Useem, 2008). In addition to civic engagement, this research tracked district governance and student outcomes under the new administration. While this article is a product of the civic engagement strand, it also draws on the ongoing data collection and analysis of the other research strands, particularly research on the transformation of district governance under state takeover.

Our initial research design called for two rounds of data collection, once early in the reform, and then later on in the reform. We were interested in understanding not only whether or not engagement had changed over time but also the processes through which these changes happened and the ways in which they were understood by participants. After our first round of data collection, we refined our research questions and design so that we could focus in the second round on issues and processes that our early analysis identified as particularly important. In particular, we decided that we needed to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which actors' views of civic engagement varied. Thus, our final research design involved three areas of investigation: "multiple perspectives on reform," the "district storyline," and the "case studies." These will all be discussed at greater length below.

The research described here benefitted from the involvement of many researchers with a deep knowledge of the history and current state of Philadelphia's schools; from five-years of monthly and sometimes weekly team meetings, in which researchers debriefed, designed and refined research instruments (such as interview protocols and coding schemes), developed and tested emerging theories, and drafted and revised reports; and from multiple and on-going conversations among and across research teams and between researchers and educators, civic leaders, activists, and district administrators. Erickson and Stull note in their discussion of "team ethnography" that working in a team is often time consuming, but it can also lead to a richer, more complex analysis, as researchers challenge and question one another's conclusions (1998). The team approach certainly shaped our process, as our research questions changed over time (see Appendix A), multiple protocols were used (see Appendix B), and different coding strategies were developed for different strands of the research (see Appendix C).

DATA COLLECTION

For our first round of research, we identified 19 local civic actors, selected because of their involvement in education issues, knowledge of civic activity in Philadelphia, or general importance in Philadelphia's business, political, educational, or civic life. Because we were interested in civic capacity, we adapted the methodology of the 11-city study of civic engagement in education to Philadelphia of Stone et al (2001) and chose a sample that reflected the categories used by Stone and his colleagues (General Influentials, Education Program

Specialists, Community-Based Representatives, and Media). In addition, we were participant/observers of the newly formed Education Advocates United (EAU), an organization established to ensure that public education was a priority among a broadly defined civic community, and a member of the larger research team attended the bi-monthly public meetings of the School Reform Commission and circulated field notes following each meeting. Our purpose in conducting the interviews and documenting the EAU and SRC meetings was to track evolving ideas about the role of public participation during the period of state takeover.

Meanwhile, the governance strand of the research, which explored both the district leadership structure and the privatization of school management in detail found that the new leadership structure enabled fast-paced reform by including a small number of decision makers operating as a top-down, closed-door entity with minimal public participation (Boyd et al., 2008). That team's examination of the diverse provider model of school management, the form of privatization the state takeover introduced, uncovered a platform for more extensive outsourcing of core educational functions. In fact, the district was fast becoming a public/private hybrid system (Gold et al., 2007).

In 2005, we published a research brief positing that "participation through contracting" had become the district's preferred approach for involving the public in reform (Gold, Cucchiara, Simon, & Riffer, 2005). We suggested that the contractual relationship between the district and external groups and individuals, while increasing the number of organizations working with the schools, served to narrow participation to the terms of contracts, constraining critique of the district. We noted that this was particularly the case for some small grassroots and community groups, which, because of their financial ties to the district, had difficulties fulfilling their traditional role as voices for equity. In that piece, we further noted that, in response to the sense of crisis generated by NCLB and the takeover, the new district leadership had moved quickly to implement an ambitious reform plan. We described this as a "trade-off," observing that the district's rapid reform pace, while applauded by many in Philadelphia, had come at the cost of substantive public input. Our first round of analysis informed the second stage of the research process, on which this article is based. Because of the earlier research, our research questions, interview questions, and analysis became more pointed, coming to focus increasingly on the ways in which the district's new structures and practices affected public engagement and how people in different locations within Philadelphia's civic and educational fields experienced these changes. In order to gain both a broad perspective of the state of the civic environment, and to be able to provide a fine-grained description of civic engagement, we developed the three data sets analyzed for this article.

First, we conducted a series of twenty interviews in 2005-6, returning to a subset (6) of the original civic, political and community leaders, and expanding the sample to include additional Education Program Specialists (6), General Influentials (4), and Community-Based Representatives (4). These "multiple perspectives" interviews focused on informants' perceptions of the takeover and resulting reforms; their views of civic and political activity in the city, particularly around education; their own efforts, relationships, and networks with respect to education issues; and their views of, and relationships with, the four case study groups, discussed below. Second, as part of the "district storyline," we conducted 11 interviews with district leadership and central office staff in order to see how they understood civic engagement and its role in reform. Of these administrators, 8 were at or near the top-level of the district's administrative structure, and 3 were "middle management." In selecting this sample, we chose both administrators representing offices responsible for working with external organizations and administrators whose position allowed for a view of the district's overall policy direction.

Third, we selected three organizations (in addition to the previously mentioned EAU) as case studies, which would provide an in-depth view of how groups that were differently positioned within the city engaged with the district (see Appendix D for a description of the selection criteria for the case study groups). Our data collection and analysis for each group focused on four major issues: the group's strategy for achieving its agenda, its relationship with the district, how accountability between the group and the district was structured and understood, the group's impact on civic space, and the group's ability to achieve its education-related goals. Data collection strategies varied by group, but all involved at least five interviews with staff and program participants (parents, community members, etc.) and participant observation in key activities. In addition, observations at public school district meetings, in particular the monthly SRC meetings, continued throughout this period.

The total number of interviews analyzed for this project was 51. All interviews were semi-structured, lasted between one and two hours, and were transcribed and then analyzed by several members of the research team. The majority of the interviews were conducted by pairs of researchers, which allowed one researcher to focus on the interview questions and the other to reflect upon the respondent's remarks and pose follow-up questions.

DATA ANALYSIS

While this paper draws from all the data collected in the second round of research, the driving force behind the arguments made here are the interviews with district administrators and the case study data. All data were coded: the multiple perspective interviews and case study data were coded using the Atlas ti qualitative software program, and the district storyline interviews were hand coded.[4] Analytic memos were written after each stage in the analysis process, identifying key themes and variation across data sources. We also used regular debriefing sessions to "institutionalize the ongoing preliminary analysis that characterizes all ethnography—or should" (Erickson & Stull, 1998, p. 21).

For the district interviews, the first round of coding was inductive, examining the ways in which administrators spoke of any sort of relationship with the public, parents, community members, and for- and non-profit organizations, and how the district had changed in this respect (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). After this, a coding scheme was developed that included issues that had emerged in the first, inductive round and concepts identified as particularly relevant by our earlier research. Next, a document was created for each interview that excerpted the participant's comments related to each of the five codes: public participation in policy-making, working with community groups, working with parents and individual schools, the contracting process, and an "other" code, for comments related to engagement but that did not fit into any of these categories. A memo written at this point identifying a number of themes[5] was circulated among the team members and discussed at successive team meetings, in which researchers interrogated each theme in light of other data collected by the civic engagement and governance teams. For example, in an analysis of interviews with two top district administrators conducted for the governance strand of the research, members of the research team noted that the administrators' comments, particularly their emphasis on the importance of public relations and improving the district's image, echoed findings from the district storyline interviews.

At that point, we moved from our preliminary themes to the development of a typology of strategies characterizing the district's approach to working with parents, community groups, and other organizations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). To do this, we noted all references to particular approaches or strategies and grouped them into larger categories based upon underlying similarities. For example, we combined references to the parent call center with comments from our interviewees about top-level administrators' interest in redefining parents as customers under the category *customer service*, because they all referenced the district's intention to improve the day-to-day service parents received. Because one of our goals with this study was to test the theory that groups with contracts with the district found their engagement constrained, "contracting" was included in the original coding scheme. As much of our data in this round of research was double-coded with "contracting" and "working with community groups," it was clear that contracts were central to how district administrators conceptualized their relationships with community and grassroots organizations. Thus, we also included it in our typology. The resulting typology was comprised of four categories: *contracting, customer service, choice, and communication*, which quickly became known within the research team as the "four C's." Meanwhile, members of the larger research team tracking changes to district governance following the state takeover had noted its increasingly centralized, corporate decision-making structure and the fact that this structure appeared to limit both transparency and opportunities for public participation (Christman et al., 2006; Boyd et al., 2008). Because our own data resonated with this finding—for example, district administrators' comments about the ways participation can interfere with the goal of making rapid change— we added *corporate governance structure* to our typology.

This analysis offered insight into the ways in which the district's approach actually affected public participation. As a result, we developed tentative theories—including that groups with powerful constituencies or connections had an easier time navigating the district's corporate governance structure than groups with more grassroots orientations—that we could test using the multiple perspectives and case study data.[6]

Our location within Philadelphia's civic field also facilitated a unique form of member checking. Multiple informal conversations with district administrators and civic leaders allowed us to check our emerging theories and conclusions. The publication of our 2005 report represents a particularly striking example of this process. In that report, we speculated, based on our early interviews, that community organizations that had contracts with the district could find their ability to critique the district compromised. The report was widely circulated and discussed among local education and non-profit groups. A number of leaders—who had not been interviewed for the study—noted that the report accurately described their own experiences since their organizations had entered into contract with the school district. This sort of member-checking gave us increased confidence in the validity of the arguments we make here.

MARKETIZATION IN PHILADELPHIA

The state takeover of Philadelphia's schools attracted national attention to a district that had long struggled with inadequate funding and low student achievement. Initiated by a conservative governor and legislature, which had earlier tried but failed to pass voucher legislation, the new arrangement resulted in a complex scheme that included outsourcing of school management and other core district functions to private providers and an expansion of school choice (Gold et al., 2007). The state's plan focused particularly on the lowest-performing schools in the district, with state officials and some city civic leaders arguing that dramatic interventions were required in the face of longstanding failure. At the same time, the city of Philadelphia, like other industrialized cities in the Northeast and Midwest, continued to face major economic challenges related to deindustrialization, including high levels of poverty and crime and job and population losses (Whiting & Proscio, 2007). City and district officials, as well as local civic leaders, emphasized the schools' economic purposes, arguing that Philadelphia's schools needed to be reformed in large part because that would make them more appealing to the exiting middle class.

The state began by replacing the mayoral-appointed school board with a five-member School Reform Commission (SRC). The chair of the newly formed SRC, James Nevels, was an African-American businessman who was the chairman of an investment and financial advisory firm in a nearby suburb. The state's other two appointees similarly came with extensive business and management experience.[7] The state's plan also included turning sixty low-performing schools and many central office functions over to Edison Schools, Inc., a for-profit educational management organization. A number of local organizations supported the takeover and hoped to play a role in managing the privatized schools, at the same time that other student, advocacy and community groups, all of whom had gained legitimacy as partners in the previous reform era, led opposition to the state's initial takeover plan. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and other Philadelphia unions, as well as city hall, joined in protesting such a large role for private providers. Local protest, which focused both on Edison's involvement and, more generally, on the state's heavy-handedness, resulted in a set of compromises, including giving the mayor power to appoint two out of five SRC members and scaling back privatization somewhat.

Immediately following the takeover, the SRC began to implement—with some modifications because of local contention—the state's pre-takeover plan to turn the management of dozens of low-performing elementary and middle schools over to private corporations. Though the "diverse provider model" that emerged (in which 46 schools were managed by seven for-profit and non-profit organizations, as well as the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University) represented a trimmed down version of the state's original plan to turn up to 60 low-performing schools over to Edison Schools, Inc., it was nevertheless the largest experiment in educational privatization of an urban district. At the same time, the SRC hired as the new CEO, Paul Vallas, the former head of Chicago's public schools, a leader whose top-down managerial style resonated with the SRC's own approach.

Vallas scaled back the district's privatization even further, rejecting the plan to have Edison run the central office. Despite this move, Vallas was no enemy of educational marketization. During his six-year tenure, he and the SRC adopted a host of practices specific to the business world. In the words of SRC chair Nevels, the new leadership team "defined the district's 'customers' exclusively as the 200,000 children we serve," "instituted businesslike systems," and promoted a “new culture of accountability” (Nevels, 2005). These innovations included centralizing decision-making to enhance efficiency, standardizing the curriculum and aligning it with frequent benchmark testing, outsourcing a range of services and core educational functions (in addition to the private management of schools), and emphasizing performance-based accountability measures for schools and teachers (Boyd, Christman & Useem, 2008; Christman et al., 2006; Nevels, 2005). While this list of reforms demonstrates the elevation of market principles, it also reflects Vallas and Nevels’ assertion of centralized control and their response to the high-stakes environment created by NCLB.

Vallas and Nevels were able to move ahead with these changes so quickly because the state takeover and NCLB signaled a crisis of sorts that called for—and legitimized—dramatic action. In a description of district leadership following the state takeover, Boyd et al. describe the “shock to Philadelphia’s school system delivered by the state takeover (and arguably NCLB),” that created new possibilities for radical change (2008, p. 40). They go on to argue that Vallas and Nevels, “themselves enthused about new solutions, took advantage of the opportunity created by the complexity and uncertainty in the public education environment to frame solutions and allocate resources to meet their goals, and to consolidate innovations into quasi-permanent changes” (2008, p. 41).

Contrary to the predictions of both supporters and critics, however, the marketization of education in Philadelphia and other cities did not result in thoroughly privatized systems. Instead of simply replacing the existing bureaucracy, policies and practices derived from the business world have merged with complex extant systems to create “hybrid models” (Gold et al., 2007; Henig, Holyoke, Lacerino-Paquet & Moser, 2003; Sclar, 2000;). Describing these processes in Philadelphia, Gold et al. argue that while the scholars behind approaches like the SRC’s diverse provider model “aimed to instigate a radical turn away from powerful professional bureaucracies in public education, providers have ultimately become ‘part of the fabric’ rather than an alternative to it” (2007, p. 183). In the years following the state takeover, the central office assumed increased regulatory power, developed new offices and procedures for working with providers, and implemented such centralizing policies as a core curriculum, which was adopted by many privately managed schools. As Burch (2006) notes, privatization is not a “zero-sum” relationship, such that “power gained by the private sector [is] power lost by the public sector” (p. 2584). The story is inevitably a complicated one and one that can be understood only by a close examination of both official discourse and the actual changes to the institutions involved.

Vallas resigned shortly after the completion of this research, and all of the original members of the SRC have now completed their terms. Research on student achievement under the diverse provider model has since shown that, despite the additional funds allocated under the terms of the contracts, student achievement gains in the privately managed schools did not outpace gains in district-run schools (Gill et al., 2007). On the one hand, the new district leadership has not embraced market discourse to the extent that the leaders originally appointed by the state did and, instead, appears to be more oriented towards professional control and more invested in increasing parent engagement. On the other hand, the district recently unveiled a plan to contract with charter school managers and a university to “turn around” low-performing schools. Thus, while our research was completed before the new leadership was in place and our analysis is limited to the period of the research, it appears that market models of school reform will continue to affect education policy and practice in Philadelphia (see Bulkley, Christman, & Gold, forthcoming).

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN A MARKETIZING SYSTEM

The embrace of market discourse and principles by district leadership resulted in a number of changes to the district's institutional structure and practices. These changes had implications for the ways Philadelphians could engage in their schools, especially their interactions with district officials, their ability to influence district policy and provide input, and their ability to work collectively around issues of concern to them. Our data point to several changes that were particularly consequential in shaping the opportunities for engagement and the direction such engagement took. These are: a corporate governance structure, an emphasis on communication, widespread contracting out for services, an increase in school choice, and a focus on customer service.

None of these "five C's" was entirely new to the district. They all existed as concerns and/or practices to some degree before the takeover. What was new, however, was the heightened emphasis on each of these and the accompanying alterations to the district's institutional structure. For example, the district had long maintained contracts with some external organizations for various services. After the takeover, contracting as a practice was elevated to become a core feature of the district's reform strategy. In this section, we will discuss each of these "five C's" and make some suggestions about their individual implications for public participation. Then we will turn to a discussion of the four case study groups, using their experiences to show how these changes actually affected the ability of organizations to engage with school reform in Philadelphia.

Corporate Governance Structure

Following the state takeover, the new district leadership relied upon a behind-closed-doors approach to setting policy. For example, in April 2002, after only a few months in power, the SRC unveiled the diverse provider model, which assigned private sector providers to low-performing neighborhood elementary, middle, and K-8 schools. It did so with virtually no public discussion about the criteria for matching providers with specific schools and in the face of significant local opposition. Throughout its first five years, the SRC maintained this approach, discussing issues and policies in private and sharing with the public only after decisions had been made. According to SRC chair James Nevels, this approach was necessary in order to avoid the appearance of fractious politics. Rather than the city and state appointees' openly airing their differences, the commission worked hard to iron out disagreements in private, thus minimizing the number of split votes on decisions (Useem, Christman, and Boyd, 2006; see also Bulkley, 2007).

For similar reasons, the SRC also limited opportunities for public debate or oversight. A top district official responsible for setting the course of the reform acknowledged this tendency, observing that "civic engagement and community involvement" were generally regarded as "softer, might be nice, but not essential." The SRC's resistance to open dialogue, this official believed, reflected an aversion to the inevitable conflict that comes with public involvement:

We're afraid to engage the public because … it is painful sometimes to hear people dissatisfied with what you're doing. So [commissioners] don't always want to do that, it is not always at the top of the agenda to go out and be hollered at…. [Also] it is messier… outside of our control (Interview, November 2006).

The SRC's aversion to open debate was particularly clear at SRC meetings, where the only opportunity for public discussion—the "public comment" section at the end of each meeting—was strictly regulated. Speakers were required to submit written copies of comments 24 hours in advance and their remarks were limited to two minutes.[8] For the first few months following the takeover, the SRC chair simply thanked each speaker for his or her comments and refused to engage in any dialogue whatsoever.

As discussed above, when Vallas entered the scene, he immediately established his authority, using a centralized decision-making structure to issue a blizzard of reforms. Vallas left little room for public input into his decision-making processes and formulated sweeping new policies on discipline, retention, and promotion without any public involvement (Useem et al., 2006). When Vallas joined the team, however, he did answer speakers' questions at SRC meetings. This was such a divergence from the SRC's usual approach that the audience murmured in approval—and even cheered—at his first several meetings. Vallas then typically directed the speaker to meet with a member of his staff to resolve his or her issues. This strategy generally satisfied the individual concerned (and fit nicely with the emphasis on customer service, discussed below) but did little to address systemic issues.

The sense of crisis that enabled Vallas and the SRC to move ahead quickly with a multitude of initiatives also served to foster—and legitimate—the district's corporate approach to decision making and to discourage engagement with the public. The district was under a mandate to make change quickly, and its newly corporate orientation made a rapid rollout of reforms possible. Dialogue and collaboration take time, a resource in short supply in a culture of crisis. One high-level district staffer described the choice between centralized and decentralized decisions as a matter of pragmatism in a time of urgency:

You can't let a thousand flowers bloom, I mean, and have every decision made at the community level when you're in charge of moving an institution, because you have to balance the resources of that institution (Interview, August 2006).

Pressured by NCLB, the state takeover, and a strained budget, School District leadership appears to have chosen the efficiency of centralization over more inclusive—but often time-consuming—decision-making processes.

At the same time, the district did not fulfill promises it had made for more substantive public participation. For example, during the months before and after the takeover, leaders at the state and local level spoke frequently of the plan to assign a "community partner" to each EMO-run school. These groups, which were local organizations with close ties to the surrounding community, would work with the EMO to make sure it remained responsive to community concerns. Similarly, the SRC touted proposals for "regional parent advisory groups" and quarterly public meetings. Though such proposals were generally met with approval—one newspaper article called them “good news” for the “parents, students and other residents who have complained that they are excluded from decisions made” by the SRC—they failed to materialize (Cucchiara, 2003; Woodall, 2002).

While many observers of education reform focused on Vallas’ sense of energy and urgency, others were more critical of this lack of public input. The head of an education non-profit, whose group worked closely with the district, said her “biggest concern” about the reforms that had followed the takeover was “really about the way the schools and community haven’t been engaged in the process” (Interview, November 2005). She further noted that Vallas and the SRC had helped to restore credibility to the district, but that there was no road map for holding the SRC accountable for achieving its goals.

In the absence of new vehicles for participation, this corporate governance system served to severely inhibit public involvement in education in Philadelphia. Despite promises of greater responsiveness, decision making within the district became the domain of a select few and public oversight was compromised (Useem et al., 2006). Further, because the leadership body met behind closed doors and was averse to public dialogue, and because it had developed a system of contracts negotiated with minimal transparency, the public was left in the dark, deprived of the information it would have needed to engage productively with the district. Of course, all of this occurred within the context of a district that—very visibly and dramatically— had been removed from local control, leaving Philadelphians with little recourse if they were unhappy with the new leadership’s decisions.

Contracting

Under Vallas and the SRC, the district rearranged its administrative structure to facilitate the development of external relationships, particularly with the private sector (Gold et al., 2007, Mezzacappa, 2006; Useem & Rinko, 2006). During the years following the takeover, the district established contractual relationships with a host of individuals and groups, including consultants, small and large businesses, community groups, universities, and educational non-profits. Contracts covered services ranging from managing disciplinary schools to developing curricula to recruiting teachers. This represented a dramatic increase in the number of contracts—from 80 in 2002 to 183 in three years later—and by 2005 the $500 million the district spent on contracts comprised a quarter of its operating budget (Useem & Rinko, 2006).[9]

The district’s approach to contracting was complicated, however, by its closed-door decision-making practices. Under the SRC, key information about contracts—such as the terms of the agreements and the standards to which contractors were held accountable—was generally not available. The district’s lack of transparency carried over into the process of choosing and assigning contractors. When a local school reform newspaper attempted to understand the extent of district contracting, it uncovered large numbers of “no-bid” contracts (Collins, 2006). In fact, even for competitive contracts, information about vendors and the terms of their agreements was not readily available, with one journalist involved in the story calling his efforts to attain information about contracts a “summer-long ordeal” (Socolar, 2006).

In addition to outsourcing, the district increasingly looked for private sector "partners" to assist in its reform efforts (Interviews, September 2004, August 2006). Partners were organizations that worked with the district in a formalized capacity but, unlike contractors or vendors, did not receive funds. They included some of the city's largest cultural organizations, area universities, and many churches and faith-based groups, as well a national corporate partner, Microsoft, Inc.

Though the district had always worked with local non-profits and universities, its network of relationships became larger than in the past and was organized around contracts rather than informal agreements. In the newly formed Office of Development, charged with creating and facilitating external relationships, administrators spoke of shepherding these organizations through a lengthy process, including the development of a "memorandum of understanding," officially approval by the SRC, and, finally, a formal evaluation and assessment of the impact on student achievement.[10] District officials noted that the new partnership process represented a major break from previous practice. As one administrator responsible for developing these partnerships explained, in the past such relationships had been "small smatterings," established informally between individuals or groups and specific schools, and difficult to evaluate or assess (Interview, September 2004). As a result of the new system, these contracts became the primary mechanism through which organizations, including local community groups, could engage with the district. In fact, when one mid-level administrator responsible for working with external groups was interviewed, her response to our questions about engagement or participation involved naming contracts the district had established with various community organizations. This suggests that she saw contractual relationships as the main vehicle through which such groups could work with the district (Interview, July 2006).

While the district's new approach to contracting and partnerships increased the number of groups and institutions involved with Philadelphia's schools, it also structured relationships in ways that interfered with a community group's ability to act independently, voice criticism and hold the district accountable. One top official observed that the district expected organizations with contracts to refrain from public criticism:

I know we have been guilty of trying to be heavy-handed with groups, because now we give you a contract and …we expect… you're not going to be critical of us anymore; you're going to do this or else you won't get this contract. And that's wrong." (Interview, November 2006).

Another way contracting stifled genuine conflict or criticism, this same official noted, is that the district was much more likely to give contracts to groups that had been supportive of district policies, while "groups that have been very critical of the district find it very difficult to do business here." Indeed, as will be explored at greater length in the discussion of the case study organizations, many groups that had become, through contracting, financially dependent on the district were reluctant to voice criticism of district policies, even those that were opposed to their constituents' interests. For example, describing a partnership between local businesses and the downtown schools (also discussed below), which raised some questions about the shifting of resources towards an already advantaged part of the city, a former principal turned central office administrator mused, "I don't know how it has gotten this far. But, like I told you, now everybody works for the district, so there is no outcry" (Interview, June 2005).

Choice

In addition to contracting, Vallas and the SRC embraced charters and school choice as part of their reform strategy. During this period, the number of charter schools rose from 40 (2001-2) to 61 (2007-8). At the same time, the district developed a number of smaller, themed high schools, expanding options within the district-run system. The new leadership also proposed a system of high school choice within each region of the city—including magnet schools, schools offering specialized areas of study and/or alternative schools, and charter schools as options alongside the traditional neighborhood high school. In public meetings, Vallas consistently emphasized his goal of adding to the existing pool of magnet schools by creating a variety of options across the city.

Though the expansion of choice and charters did provide parents with a new opportunity for involvement in their children's education—as consumers in the educational marketplace—the focus on choice and charters had other consequences for public participation. An incident from 2007 is telling here. In the spring of that year, a group of involved parents from a high-performing elementary school met with a member of the SRC to express their concerns about the on-going budget crisis that was affecting schools across the city. During this meeting, the commissioner surprised them by suggesting that the school simply become a charter as a way of avoiding the district's budget problems. In other words, rather than encouraging this group of activist, well-resourced parents to use their resources and energies to the benefit of all schools, the commissioner suggested that, by converting the school to a charter, they could focus exclusively on their own children's school. Many have argued that school choice channels parental *involvement* along individual lines, as parents focus on choosing a school that best fits their child's individual needs (Apple, 2001; Covaleskie, 2007; Lubienski, 1998). What this incident suggests, however, is that in a market-oriented context *activism* can similarly be channeled along individual lines, with parents who might have been voices for equity and accountability across the district, or who might have pressured the district to consider other, larger issues, finding their energies directed solely at one school.

Communications As Public Relations

The state takeover of Philadelphia's schools followed years of negative publicity around inadequate funding, poor student performance, and violence and chaos at particular schools. As the drama of the takeover did little to bolster the district's tarnished public image, Vallas and the SRC were faced with the immediate task of restoring confidence and legitimacy to a discredited system. To address this problem, the district's new leadership placed a great deal of emphasis on public relations—much more so than previous administrations, according to one long-time district insider involved in community affairs (Interview, July 2006). Paul Vallas was a frequent media presence, and one of the district's many contracts during this period was with a public relations firm which, in addition to the internal communications office, strove to manage the district's image.

This approach was manifest throughout the district. District administrators announced to principals that marketing their schools—by spreading good news about them and attracting more students—was now a part of their responsibilities (Interview, September 2005). One long-time district official remarked on her own prior experience (including under other superintendents) with public relations: “I learned as a principal, I started to talk about how amazing my school was and unconsciously I started to market the school and people began to discover it” (Interview, September 2004). As a central office administrator under Vallas, she tried to do the same thing for other district schools, working with principals to identify positive events occurring at their schools that could be highlighted at SRC meetings. She argued that this emphasis on spreading good news about Philadelphia’s schools increased interest in the district and made funders and other potential partners more likely to invest in it.

While the district’s concerted public relations effort created the perception of openness and accessibility and did disseminate information about reforms, communication through media channels actually precluded open and direct public dialogue. The mode of communication favored by the School District positioned Philadelphians as “audience” rather than as participants in reform; communication became a way of marketing the district and managing public opinion rather than making decisions transparent or working openly with the public. Within this paradigm, district problems or failures were public relations challenges to be held in check, rather than opportunities for a broader public dialogue that could lead to genuine solutions. Meanwhile, shrinking revenues and budget crises led to a reduction in overall news coverage at both major local newspapers. As a result, education reporting, particularly the sort of investigative reporting that had occurred in previous eras, was severely compromised, and the local mainstream media was both ill-equipped and ill-inclined to challenge or question the district’s messages.

Customer Service

The marketization of the school district extended to its interactions with parents, recasting them largely as matters of “customer service.” The new leadership argued that the district’s primary mission should be providing quality service to individual students and their families. One administrator in the communications office described this as something of a paradigm shift. In response to a question about outreach and engagement, she explained:

I think that people within the district are beginning [to see] that Paul [Vallas] is really serious about [reaching out to parents]. …There was a mentality that was so deeply entrenched….I think it was very much this kind of historic, venerable, stylized, rigid environment that says, “We are the district.” [Vallas and Nevels say], “No, you’re not. You’re not. Those kids are the district. Their parents are the district.” Mr. Nevels constantly has [said this] because he is in the private sector. He’s like, “They’re the customer.” He always says, “It takes this amount of money and time to get a customer, but you can lose them in one second.”(Interview, August 2006)

This attitude was communicated throughout the district, such that, for many administrators, the customer service paradigm reshaped their approach to working with the public (Personal Communication, March 2007). It also extended to institutional changes, with the district developing a set of programs—including a call center, bully hotline, and parent support hotline—to enable staff to respond quickly to individual needs and concerns.

With a strong customer service orientation, the system could respond more effectively to parents’ specific needs and questions concerning their individual children—as Vallas' approach to handling concerns voiced by speakers at SRC meetings made clear. But the market metaphor also rendered uni-dimensional what in reality is a complex, multi-dimensional relationship. Resolving the concerns of individual parents who approached the district may have kept some "squeaky wheels" happy, but it did little to promote more sustained problem solving or a sense of public interest.

The focus on customer service was particularly inadequate when it came to dealing with parents whose concerns reached beyond their own individual interests to address broader issues. For example, a long-time leader with the citywide parent-teacher organization felt marginalized and frustrated, complaining, "I don't think we have as powerful a voice as we could," noting that the group had worked in greater concert with district leaders under the previous administration. Indeed, the district had no vehicle in place for dealing with groups of parents or organizations hoping to engage collectively with the schools to solve various problems. Several district officials spoke of responding "reactively" to these groups rather than having a plan in place for "a proactive on-going systemic way" of ensuring that Philadelphians are involved in the schools (e.g., interviews, July 2006, November 2006).

"ON THE GROUND" CONSEQUENCES

In the previous sections, we suggested that the marketization of the district changed the landscape for public engagement in education in Philadelphia. We now turn to four case studies of organizations working on education issues to more closely examine the implications of this new landscape—to see how the district's new orientation actually shaped external relationships. Our four case study groups are: the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), African Americans for School Choice (AASC), Youth Empowered, and Education Advocates United (EAU).[11] While the stories of these organizations are inevitably complicated, their various successes or failures can be tied, to a large degree, to the "goodness of fit" between their goals and methods for engaging with the district and the "five C's" we have described.

We will begin with the Downtown BID, a business improvement district that has spent the past two decades promoting and catalyzing downtown revitalization. In 2004, it launched the Downtown Schools Initiative (DSI), an effort to further revitalization by convincing middle-class parents living in the area to consider local public schools rather than moving to the suburbs when their children reach school age. The Downtown BID argued the initiative, which included giving downtown parents priority in admissions to highly regarded area public schools, was justified because retaining "knowledge workers" downtown would benefit the city as a whole (Downtown BID, 2004).

Despite some concerns about equity from local leaders and activists, the Downtown BID was quite successful in achieving its goals, particularly the policy changes it sought from the school district. This success can be attributed in large part to the organization's ability to operate within the district's corporate governance structure. Downtown BID leaders, who were highly regarded in Philadelphia and had extensive connections to local political and business elites, went right to the top—to Paul Vallas and James Nevels. In describing an early meeting, an administrator with the Downtown BID exclaimed, "When we first sat down with Vallas, it was 'yes" to everything, and we're going, you know, 'this can't be real!'" (Interview, August 2005). Though one high-level district administrator noted that few in the district's central office supported the initiative (they were concerned that it would result in fewer opportunities for students outside of the downtown), she further observed that once the decision to partner with the Downtown BID had been made, there were no further protests (Interview, October 2005).

The governance structure, with its lack of vehicles for public input, also allowed the partnership to move ahead with minimal public conversation or oversight. For example, in response to the Downtown BID's request, the district created a new administrative unit bringing together the schools in the downtown area and assigned a talented administrator to head up the new unit, moving her away from a high-poverty part of the city. When this happened, neither the district nor the Downtown BID made a public announcement, because, in the words of one DSI administrator, they wanted to "put off the conversation" about comparisons to other parts of Philadelphia (July, 2005). DSI was thus able to avoid (or at least minimize) public controversy about an initiative that favored one region of the city and the already relatively advantaged population living there.

In addition, DSI's immediate goals—around enhancing school choice and creating more of a "customer service" orientation within the district—fit nicely with top leaders' own priorities and the individualized approach to working with parents they were promoting. DSI's larger goal, to retain middle-class families in the city, also resonated with city and district leaders concerned about on-going middle-class flight. Thus, because of the consonance between the Downtown BID's goals and strategies and the district's practices and priorities, the Downtown BID's experience during this period was essentially a success story.

As an organization, AASC is different in many ways from the Downtown BID, yet its experience in working with the district during this period was quite similar. AASC operates at the national level and through its local affiliates to promote school choice for African American students and families. Philadelphia AASC is one of the most active local chapters. It has focused on expanding the number of charter schools in the city, creating funds for low-income students to attend private and parochial schools, and helping Black parents become informed advocates for their children, within and outside the public system.

AASC has powerful supporters at both the city and state level, most notably the backing of several influential state representatives, and these connections have been critical to its ability to advance its agenda, particularly around the creation of state charter legislation and district-level policies friendly to charters. While it is impossible to attribute the rise in charters in Philadelphia (from 40 to 61 in six years) entirely to AASC, there is no doubt that the organization and its leaders played a central role. Describing AASC's ability to go right to the top of the district's organizational structure, a board member noted, "They were the guys who were really behind the whole charter school movement…Paul Vallas knows he better listen to AASC." In other words, the status of AASC's backers as key figures in state education policy gave the organization leverage with district leadership. Thus, as in the Downtown BID's case, the district's corporate governance structure worked nicely for a group with powerful political connections and an agenda focused on specific policy changes rather than increased public conversation and input. And, of course, AASC's mission around increasing charters fit the district's focus on school choice.

The use of contracting and emphasis on customer service also worked to AASC's advantage when the district contracted with AASC to find and train parent volunteers to staff school-based Parent Welcome Desks. These desks were intended to serve as a first line of contact for parents to teachers and administrators. This contract enabled AASC to have an on-going relationship with the district and to gain access to low-income parents, a population it was having difficulty reaching otherwise.

The other two case study organizations had a more difficult road. Youth Empowered is a coalition of student organizing groups that work in primarily low-income and African American and Latino areas of the city to create change in their schools and communities. During the period under study, it was involved in a campaign to bring small, more personalized high schools to economically depressed neighborhoods in a way that both served and empowered the surrounding communities.

Youth Empowered used community-organizing strategies to push the district to commit to the creation of small schools and to involve the community in a broad-based effort to plan the new schools. This strategy was a difficult one in this context because the district's corporate governance structure did not prioritize community participation, and because the district's approach to working with external groups tended to be reactive, rather than proactive. Thus, while Youth Empowered staged many public events and rallied community support for its efforts, it faced an uphill battle. In addition, its web of connections and allies, though extensive within the reform community, did not include the sort of elites that would enable them to earn the sustained attention of district leaders. As one community leader, frustrated by the district's unresponsiveness, observed, "Dealing with the district is a little bit like throwing small stones at an elephant. Why bother to do that? You're only going to aggravate him, and he'll whack you, but it won't change it." The contrast between that image of the aggravated elephant and the Downtown BID's experience of "yes to everything" is striking.

Youth Empowered, however, did experience success in calling attention, nationally and locally, to its efforts. In collaboration with a local foundation and an architectural design and planning firm, it was eventually able to transform the district's narrow process into one that was more inclusive. In addition, it won promises from the district for new small schools. However, these schools received far less resources (in the form of materials and time for planning) than did new schools in more affluent parts of the city. Thus, whereas the district opened two themed high schools in the downtown, each with newly renovated spaces and key staff in place a year in advance, it created a "small school" at one of Youth Empowered's schools by building a wall in the middle of the hallway. Though ground was later broken for two new schools, the process has been long and any successes were the result of constant pressure on the part of the students.

To some extent, the modest nature of Youth Empowered's accomplishments, compared to Downtown BID's, had to do with the fact that they targeted de-prioritized parts of the city and with the political reality that groups representing powerful constituencies or with influential connections tend to have an easier time accessing top-level officials than do representatives of disenfranchised populations. However, the difficulty that the youth groups had in holding district officials accountable for hearing their concerns or for following through on promises for resource allocation and public participation also shows the mismatch between a community organizing strategy and a district organized around the "five C's." In other words, it was much easier for the district to respond to calls for increased school choice, particularly for already enfranchised groups, or to develop a contract to provide services to parents, than it was to work with an organization around a collective effort to improve schools in underserved neighborhoods.

The EAU was established in 2002 by the local education fund to bring together civic and community leaders with advocates and representatives of grassroots organizations around education issues and to build capacity for increased public involvement in education. During the study period, between 25 and 40 individuals attended the monthly meetings on a regular basis. The EAU's mission, and particularly its relationship to the district, had never been completely clear, with some seeing it as a way to "build a collective voice to influence policy" (Interview, March 2007) and others viewing it as a means of sharing and disseminating information. During its early years, when the EAU had more of an activist role, the group did mobilize around certain issues, particularly those related to teacher quality. Toward the end of the study period, however, the EAU's role, and especially its relationship with the district, had changed.

The district's use of contracting was critical here, as many of the groups involved in the EAU also held contracts to provide services, such as curriculum development, evaluation, and after-school programming. These groups were, to varying degrees, financially dependent upon the district and were often reluctant to express open criticism, for fear of losing their contracts or disrupting their working relationships. In the words of one top-level district administrator: "So many of these people live off the school district, they're fueled, funded off the district. It would be great to get a group of folks who can make decisions about what's best for kids instead of the sustainability of the EAU or of their individual organizations" (February 2007). In order to accommodate these complicated contractual relationships, the EAU ended up compromising its efficacy as a vehicle for public input.

Also, during this period, the district increasingly turned to the EAU as a part of its broader communications strategy, coming to meetings to report on policies already decided upon rather than to seek input. These meetings thus served as means of rallying support or avoiding controversy, largely by alerting the district to issues that could generate controversy (particularly around equity concerns). Though some EAU members expressed frustration at this shift, the reality was that meetings came to be dominated by district presentations, leaving little time for cross-group conversation, let alone the generation of consensus for action plans.

At the outset, the EAU embodied the notion that the broader community should have input into education—that education was a citywide, rather than an individual, concern. Like the youth organizing groups, however, the EAU was ill-equipped, both in strategy and mission, to operate within the marketized landscape. Its difficulties can be traced to the contracts so many of its members held with the district *and* to the fact that the district's corporate governance structure and emphasis on public relations left little room for the EAU's input, positioning it as audience rather than collaborator. As a result, the EAU relinquished its more collective, activist role and came to serve largely as a conduit for information from the district.

DISCUSSION: CONSEQUENCES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Each of the “five C’s” discussed above represents an example of the ways the marketization of the School District of Philadelphia reshaped district structure and practices. As stated earlier, none of these 5 Cs was entirely new: business ideas had certainly been a part of previous administrations. In addition, market-oriented theories of change were not the only factors influencing decision-making at the district. However, the new layers that were added to the existing system pushed the district past the tipping point, resulting in an institution organized around market principles to an unprecedented degree, with very real consequences for public participation

In discussing these changes, district officials repeatedly emphasized their positive consequences, noting, for example, that increased school choice allowed children to select schools more aligned with their interests or that better communication helped the public be more aware of the successes of district teachers and students. Other consequences received far less attention.

As we have shown, however, the district’s new approach to external relationships did have profound implications for public participation in schooling in Philadelphia. First, the district’s corporate structure—characterized as it was by a lack of transparency—essentially kept the public at arm’s reach, without the information and opportunity it would need to have meaningful input. This structure also advantaged well-connected groups at the same time that it disadvantaged groups representing low-income communities. The district’s lack of transparency around contracting further hindered involvement. Whereas Minow (2003) argues that outsourcing can be an effective reform *if* the public can hold officials and private organizations accountable, our data show that this has not been the case in Philadelphia. Thus, Minow’s prediction that without adequate transparency about how contractors are chosen and the terms of their agreements, “public control and review…diminish as previously public activities fall under private management and control” resonates with our findings (2003, p. 7).

The marketization of the district further served to channel the involvement of parents, organizations, and citizens along narrow, individualistic lines, interfering with more collective identities or strategies. Contracting sets up a client-contractor relationship that can preclude other types of interactions, particularly criticism of the district. Choice and customer service both position parents as consumers, acting on behalf of their own interests and concerns, rather than as citizens with collective interests and responsibilities. By elevating customer service without providing other means of engagement (such as the participation in public dialogue or decision-making), the district left few ways for people to engage productively as citizens concerned with a larger good or to focus on systemic issues. Finally, the emphasis on communications rendered Philadelphians members of an audience passively receiving the district’s message instead of citizens working with the district to improve schools.

This is not to imply that prior to the takeover there existed a golden age of public participation in Philadelphia—and it is also not to imply that engaging the public productively is a simple or painless task. While one earlier superintendent (David Hornbeck) made increasing public engagement a pillar of his reform model, it has been less central in other administrations (Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, & Waff, 2001). What we show here is that marketization, as it has been manifest in Philadelphia, is not just about a lack of concern for participation (although that is certainly the case). It is also about the development of new mechanisms that, while allowing for increased expediency and responsiveness to individuals, channel participation and information along narrow, district-directed lines in ways that had implications both for engagement and for educational equity.

In other words, marketization worked discursively and institutionally to remove education from the public realm. Not only were Philadelphians excluded from important conversations about education, the notion that they would have an interest in—and right to—participate in such conversations appeared antiquated and irrelevant in this context. The new structures for interacting with the district discouraged collective action and diminished the ability of external actors to hold the district and its providers accountable and to ensure equity. In fact, those groups that had traditionally served as voices for equity—such as community organizations and advocacy groups—found their voices weakened as they operated in an increasingly fragmented public sphere and a landscape unfriendly to their approach to engagement.

CONCLUSION

The research discussed here aims to show empirically how a system organizes itself when the market is the guiding principle and, in turn, how the processes and structures involved shape public engagement in education. Americans have historically expected that, because they are public institutions with crucial social, economic and political functions, school systems should involve some measure of democratic governance. We also expect schools to take responsibility for ensuring opportunity and promoting the collective good. Our research shows that marketization has the potential to interfere with both of these processes. It makes it more difficult for the public to engage meaningfully in public education, and, while it may allow school systems to respond more readily to individual issues, it can disrupt the development of collective identities and collective action.

In recent decades, public discourse about education has tended to sideline concerns about the democratic purposes of education in favor of a more managerial model, in which education is a private good and the job of education systems is to provide that good as efficiently as possible. It is likely that there will always be a tension between managerial and democratic purposes for education—between the goal of efficiency and that of involving citizens in the messy work of setting and balancing priorities. However, if education moves more firmly into the private realm—and to the extent that this shift becomes naturalized through discourse and practice—citizens' capacity to ensure equity, hold educators accountable, work collectively, and promote the sustainability of reform efforts could be severely compromised.

Because our research has focused on the mechanisms through which such a shift occurs, it also helps illuminate some strategies policymakers can use to address the challenges described here. First, as a number of scholars have noted, contracts between public entities and private organizations that include clear delineations of costs, expectations, and outcomes can provide a new and powerful form of accountability *if* there is transparency at every stage in the process (Henig, forthcoming; Minow, 2003). The fact that this sort of accountability did not exist in

Philadelphia, because of the combination of a reliance on contracting and closed-door decision-making practices we have described here, does not mean that it cannot emerge in other contexts, if deliberately fostered.

Second, our findings suggest that in a marketizing context it is essential to institutionalize vehicles for public participation and shared goal setting. Policymakers interested in countering the individualizing, atomizing tendencies we have described here would do well to establish both formal and informal opportunities for engagement. While this suggestion may seem unrealistic given our findings about the extent to which marketization discourages such forms of participation, we are reminded of the observation by Henig and Stone (2008) that, at the "street level," educational decisions are driven less often by ideological purity than by immediate needs and concerns. This implies that new vehicles for public input could exist—again, if carefully fostered—within a district otherwise heavily influenced by market principles.

Finally, our research suggests an important role for the local media. When the school district is heavily focused on communications and many grassroots and community groups have found their ability to criticize the district compromised, it is especially important that the media does more than simply report the district's accomplishments or pass along its pronouncements. Rather, it must provide the vital public service of tracking policy issues, interrogating key decisions, and exploring negative and positive consequences of district policies. In addition, local media coverage could usefully reinforce the fact that all city residents have a shared interest in effective schools.

Additional research on this topic could further explore the processes through which opportunities for engagement are opened or closed by marketization, and how this could then shape education policy and practices. In particular, it will be important to examine the ways in which other districts, when influenced by privatization, deal with issues of public engagement—whether or not their strategies resemble the ones described here, and the extent to which policymakers in other contexts have been able to incorporate increased input and accountability into market-oriented policies. As well, our research suggests that the individualizing function of marketization can exacerbate racial and economic divides, as citizens find little opportunity—or even reason—to come together around a broader public good. Future research could usefully examine how privatization affects race and class dynamics and the extent to which it contributes to, or ameliorates, on-going tensions between different groups.

Although the leadership in Philadelphia has changed since the close of our research, market solutions to educational problems continue to have relevance locally and nationally. Indeed, President Obama's Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, is known for his interest in applying market principles to public education (Pick, 2003; Rotella, 2010). As educators and policy-makers navigate the new political and economic environment, an understanding of the myriad institutional consequences of marketization—particularly around issues of the public's role in education—is critical to the ability to make good policy decisions.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Cecily Mitchell, Morgan Riffer and other members of the

Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform research team for all of their work on this project and their invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this manuscript. The authors would also like to thank Lyn Corno and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Finally, the authors are grateful to the staff at Research for Action, without whose assistance and support this paper would have been impossible.
2. For example, in a study of marketization in the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, Whitty and Power (2000) argue that although related reforms varied due to local differences, "they all display common tendencies towards limited privatization alongside more extensive marketizing policies that promote institutional autonomy and devolve decision-making down to the institution and the individual, so that the boundary between what is public and what is private becomes less clear" (2000, p. 99).
3. The study did not set out to understand marketization per se—during the course of our data collection and analysis, we have used a number of terms, including corporatization, privatization, market orientations, market models, etc., to describe the increasing influence of private sector actors and principles following the state takeover. We use the term marketization now because, as discussed earlier, it most accurately describes the processes we documented.
4. Because the district storyline interviews were conducted after three years of research into both civic engagement and governance, the protocols themselves were quite pointed, and the coding scheme was simpler than for the other two datasets.
5. The themes were: a belief that while the district claimed to be more open to working with external individuals or groups, it structured these relationships around the district's agenda or as a way of responding to individual parents' issues or concerns; an increased focus on public relations; the engagement of community groups primarily through contracts; the role of contracting in muting dissent; and the lack of structures and funding for increased engagement and input.
6. For the case study data, team members constructed a narrative for each organization that described its approach and activities on the issues of interest: agenda, strategy, relationship with district, accountability, impact on civic space, and success in achieving its goals.
7. The mayor's appointments were drawn from the public sector.
8. This practice continues under the current chair.
9. This number does not account for contracts related to special education services or for the educational management organizations running a subset of the district's schools under the diverse provider model. The number and amount of contracts decreased in 2007 in response to the district's budget crisis.
10. While the goal was to conduct an extensive evaluation of each program, the actual implementation was uneven, largely due to a lack of capacity at the district. This is consistent with Sclar's (2000) argument about the difficulties of measuring the consequences of contracts in realms as complex as education.
11. These are all pseudonyms.

References

Abowitz, K. K. (2005). On the public and civic purposes of education. *Educational Theory, 58* (3), 357-376.

Anderson, G., & Pini, M. (2005). Educational leadership and the new economy: Keeping the "public" in public schools. In F. W. English (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of educational leadershiop: Advances in theory, research, and practice.* (pp. 216-236). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Apple, M. (2001). *Educating the 'Right' way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality.* New York: Routledge.

Asher, C., Fruchter, N., & Berne, R. (1996). *Hard lessons: Public schools and privatization*. New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press.

Bartlett, L., Frederick, M., Gulbrandsen, T., & Murillo, E. (2002). The marketization of education: Public schools for private ends. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 33* (1), 5-29.

Boyd, W.L., Christman, J.B., & Useem, E. (2008). Radical Privatization in Philadelphia: The Role of School District Leaders as Policy Entrepreneurs. In W.L. Boyd, C.T. Kerchner & M. Blyth (Eds.), *The transformation of great American school districts: How big cities are reshaping public education*. (pp. 33-60). Cambridge, MA : Harvard Education Press.

Bryk, A., Bebring, P., Kerbow, D., Rollow, S., & Easton, J. (1999). *Charting Chicago school reform: Democratic localism as a lever for change.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Bulkley, K. E. (2007, Feb). Bringing the Private into the Public: Changing the Rules of the Game and New Regime Politics in Philadelphia Public Education. *Educational Policy,* 21 (1), 155-184.

Bulkley, K.E., Christman, J.B., & Gold, E. (2010). Learning from Philadelphia's experience with diverse providers. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Denver, CO.

Burch, P. (2006). The new educational privatization: Educational contracting and high stakes accountability. *Teachers College Record, 108* (12), 2582-2610.

Chubb, J.E., & Moe, T.M. (1990). *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. Washington, DC: Brookings.

Christman, J., Gold, E., & Herold, B. (2006). *Privatization "Philly Style:" What Can Be Learned from Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model of School Management.* Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action.

Collins, T. (2006, Fall). Informal Bidding Process: Cause for Concern? *Philadelphia Public School Notebook, 19*, 23.

Covaleskie, J.F. (2007). What public, whose schools? *Educational Studies, 42*(1), 28-43.

Cucchiara, M. (2003). The evolution of reform: Studying "community partnerships" in Philadelphia. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education, 2.*

Fruchter, N. (2007). *Urban schools, public will: Making education work for all children*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gill, B. P., Zimmer, R., Christman, J. B., & Blanc, S. (2007, Jan). *Student achievement in privately managed and district-managed schools in Philadelphia since the state takeover*. Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine.
Gold, E., Christman, J., & Herold, B. (2007). Blurring the boundaries: A case study of private sector involvement in Philadelphia public schools. *American Journal of Education, 113* (2), 181-212.

Gold, E., Cucchiara, M., Simon, E., & Riffer, M. (2005). *Time to engage? Civic participation in Philadelphia's school reform.* Philadelphia, PA: Research for Action.

Gold, E., Rhodes, A., Brown, S., Lytle, S., & Waff, D. (2001). Clients, consumers or collaborators? Parents and their roles in school reform during Children Achieving, 1995-2000.

Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, D. (2002). *Strong neighborhoods, strong schools: Successful community organizing for school reform.* Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.

Gutman, A. (1999). *Democratic education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Henig, J. (forthcoming). The contemporary context of public engagement: The new political grid. In M. Orr and J. Rogers (Eds.), *Public engagement for public education.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Henig, J. R., Holyoke, T. T., Lacireno-Paquet, N., & Moser, M. 2003. "Privatization, Politics, and Urban Services: The Political Advocacy Behavior of Charter Schools." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 25 (February), 37 – 54

Henig, J., & Stone, C. (2008). Rethinking school reform: The distractions of dogma and the potential for a new politics of progressive pragmatism. *American Journal of Education, 114* (3), 191-218.

Hess, F., Maranto, R., & Milliman, S. (2001). Small districts in big trouble: How four Arizona school systems responded to charter competition. *Teachers College Record, 103* (6), 1102-24.

Katz, M. (1987). *Reconstructing American education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Katz, M. (2001). *The price of citizenship: Redefining the American welfare state.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

Kuttner, R. (1999). *Everything for sale: The virtues and limits of markets.* Chicago, IL:

University of Chicago Press.

Kwong, J. (2000). Introduction: Marketization and privatization in education. *International Journal of Educational Development, 20,* 87-92.

Labaree, D. 2000. No Exit. Education as an Inescapably Public good. In D. Shipps and L. Cuban (Eds.). *Reconstructing the common good in education. Coping with Intractable American Dilemmas*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Levin, H. (2001). *Privatizing education: Can the school marketplace deliver freedom of choice, efficiency, equity, and social cohesion?* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lubienski, C. (1998). Market challenges to public education in the U.S.: Michigan's charter schools and enclosures of the common good. Paper presented at the 1998 annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

McAdams, D. (2000). *Fighting to save our urban schools… and winning!* New York: Teachers College Press.

McDonnell, L. (2009). Repositioning Education Politics in Education's Circle of Knowledge. *Educational Researcher*, *38* (6), 417-27.

Mediratta, K., Shah, S., & McAlister, S. (2009). *Community Organizing for Stronger Schools: Strategies and Successes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education.* Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute on School Reform.

Mickelson, R.A. (1999). International business machinations: A case study of corporate involvement in local educational reform. *Teachers College Record, 100* (3), 476-513.
Minow, M. (2003). Public and private partnerships: Accounting for the new religion. *Harvard Law Review, 116*, 1-41.

Mintrom, M. (2008). Promoting local democracy in education: Challenges and prospects. *Educational Policy, 23*, 329-354.

Molnar, A. (2005). *School commercialism: From democratic ideal to market commodity.* New York: Routledge.

Mok, K.H. (2000). Marketizing higher education in post-Mao China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *20*, 109-126.

Munene, I. (2008). Privatising the public: Marketisation as a strategy in public university transformation. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 13* (1), 1-17.

Nevels, J. (2005, March 14). Reading, writing, ROI. *Forbes.*

Pick, G. (June, 2003) Duncan puts new emphasis on the business of education. *Catalyst*.

Puriefoy, W. (2006). The education of democratic citizens: Citizen mobilization and public education. In S. Furhman & M. Lazerson (Eds.), *The Public schools*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richards, C., Shore, R., & Sawicky, M. (1996). *Risky business: Private management of public schools*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Rotella, C. (2/1/10). Class Warrior: Arne Duncan's bid to shake up schools. *New Yorker*.

Sclar, E. (2000). *You don't always get what you pay for: The economics of privatization*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Scott, J., & DiMartino, C. (2009). Public education under new management: A typology of educational privatization applied to New York City's restructuring. *Peabody Journal of Education, 84*, 432-452.

Shipps, D. (1997). The invisible hand: Big business and Chicago school reform. *Teachers College Record, 99* (1), 73-116.

Shipps, D. (2006). *School reform, corporate style: Chicago, 1880-2000.* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Shipps, D., & Kafka, J. (2009). Introduction to the special issue on the new politics of educational leadership. *Peabody Journal of Education, 84*, 279-282

Shirley, D. (1997). *Community organizing for urban school reform.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Simon, E., Gold, E., & Christman, J. (2008). The ascent of privatization policies in public education: The case of Philadelphia. *Anthropology News*, *49* (5), 36.

Socolar, P. (2006, Fall). Quest for Contract Documents Became Summer-Long Ordeal. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, 26.

Stone, C.N., Henig, J.R., Jones, B.D., & Pierannunzi, C. (2001). *Building civic capacity: The politics of reforming urban schools*. Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press.

Useem, E. (2008). Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform: The Impact of NCLB and related state legislation. In A. R. Sadovnik, J. O'Day, G. W. Bohrnstedt, and K. Bowman (Eds.). *No Child Left Behind and the Reduction of the Achievement Gap*, pp. 297-321. New York: Routledge.

Useem, E., & Rinko, K. (2006, Fall). Turning to Outside Organizations to do More Jobs. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, 18, 20

Viteritti, J. P. (2009). *When mayors take charge: School governance in the city*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2000). Marketization and privatization in mass education systems. *International Journal of Economic Development, 20* (2), 93-107.

Woodall, M. (3.28.02). Local advisors will play role in Philadelphia school reform. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

APPENDIX A: EVOLVING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2003: Original Research Questions

What is the state of civic capacity for educational reform in Philadelphia and what factors contribute to, or impede, its development?

How do the context of state takeover, the multiple-provider model, and Vallas' centralized approach influence civic capacity?

What other contextual factors arise that influence civic capacity for education?
2005: Working/Emerging Research Questions

What is the range of perspectives on how the state takeover and resulting reforms intersect with (affected by/trying to shape) the political/economic/organizational/structural context of Philadelphia?

What are the different visions circulating among groups as represented in selected case studies, and what are the strategies (theories of change) for pursuing them?

How have the case study groups intersected (nature of the working relationship) with the district/schools?

How do these case study stories relate to the storyline of the district's evolving formal and informal approaches to civic engagement?
2007: Final Research Questions

During the period 2002-07, what was the social, political and economic context for school reform in Philadelphia? How did local civic actors approach issues of urban development and what were the implications for civic engagement and civic capacity?

In that same period, which include state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia and accelerated privatization, what were the School District's organizational structures and practices around engagement with external individuals and organizations? What were the implications for civic engagement?

How did differently positioned groups interested in education work to achieve their goals within the new city and district contexts?

Overall, what were the opportunities and obstacles for civic engagement and capacity for school reform?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol #1: Multiple Perspectives on Reform

(Note: Not all of the questions in this protocol relate directly to the discussion in this article. We are including here only the questions used for this analysis.)

1. What is the "reform"?
2. If they list specific reforms (core curriculum, after school programs, etc., also probe for connections with: contracting, outsourcing, privatization, etc.)

Whom do you see as the champions (people/ groups) of these parts of the reform?
(Probe for breadth of support—local, state and national. Probe for breadth of impact; i.e., which constituencies benefit most/ which seem to be left out or deemphasized?)
4. The activity of this group: Assessment of civic and political engagement

Is your group contributing to change in education? If so, how?
Probe for whether they are helping to set agendas, whether they see themselves as helping to sustain reform and how, and whether they see the district as accountability to them and/or their constituency?
Probe—if not active, why not?

With what other groups/individuals are you working?

Are there groups that you would like to be working but aren't? (IF not answered earlier)

How would you describe the nature of your relationship/interaction with the district?
Probe— volunteer? Contract? Informal understanding? Partnership?
Probe—if contract, for how long, how much and how is it monitored? With whom do they deal at the district?

Has the relationship changed over the last several years?

Has the nature of the relationship affected/changed your education agenda?
5. Do you believe your influence over educational agenda has changed?
6. Who is it that you see as the key players in education in the city? (can be groups or individuals)
5. Case Study Groups: In our research, we are tracking different forms of civic engagement in schools.

Youth Empowered. Are you aware of the activities of student groups around creating small schools in the district? Do you agree with their goals? What do you think of their strategies and effectiveness?

Downtown BID/Downtown Schools Initiative. What do you think of this campaign? In what ways would you be supportive? Do you have any concerns? Do you have a sense of the response within the Philadelphia civic community to this initiative? Do you agree that keeping professional families in Center City is an important policy goal? How do you think your vision of what needs to happen in Philadelphia is similar to or different from the Downtown BID's? Do you think the investment in the schools will result in success in retaining middle class families?

Education Advocates United. How strong do you think it is? How broad? What do you think is the purpose of this coalition? How effective do you think it has been/will be in achieving its goals?

African Americans for School Choice. What do you know about the work of AASC to increase parent engagement in education in the city? (across all types of schools) What do you think about the increase in charter schools in the city?

Before ending, is there anything you would like to add that I did not ask you about?

Interview Protocol #2: District Storyline

1. Background of interviewee
    1. What is your position?
2. How long have you been working at the school district?
2. Description of district activities
1. Can you describe the range of ways the district is engaging with individuals and groups on education issues? (probe for what issues these different programs focus on)
2. Of all of these, could you identify the ones that you see as a real priority for the district right now? Why do you think these are a priority? When were these programs/initiatives put into effect?
3. Engagement around policy
1. School districts can work with individuals and groups in lots of areas—such as, providing information about school programs, providing special services, organizing volunteers, etc. We're particularly interested in the ways the district engages with people or groups around policy issues—such as, creating policy, providing feedback on policy or refining policy. Can you give us examples of this sort of engagement?
2. Can you name some key individuals or groups involved in working with the district on policy?
3. How effective do you think the current approaches towards engagement around policy are?
4. Engagement with community groups
1. Now let's focus specifically on community and faith-based groups. How does the district work with these organizations? In what ways does the district engage with these organizations around policy issues?
5. Engagement at school level
1. We are also interested in the ways the district engages with parents and groups at the school level. How does the district works with people at local schools? (Probes: How important is the Home and School in this process? In what other ways, besides HS, does the district engage with parents?)
6. Reflections

1. In what ways has the district's approach to outreach and engagement changed during the time you've worked here? Why do you think these changes have happened?
2. As we have tracked civic engagement under the current administration, it seems to us that the focus is more on individual parents and schools rather than engaging with groups around setting agendas and policy. Does that seem accurate to you? If yes, why do you think that is the case?
7. Wrap-up

Is there anything you would like to add that we haven't asked you about?

APPENDIX C: CODING SCHEMES

District Storyline

Content Codes:

Policy (involvement of individuals and groups in setting policy, providing feedback or holding district accountable)

Community groups (district structures and practices around involvement/relationships with community groups)

Parents/Individual schools (district structures and practices around involvement/relationships with parents and at the local school level)

Contracting (district structures and practices around contracts with external groups)

Other (other types of involvement, other mentions of issues around engagement, general reflections on changes over time or district's approach)

Multiple Perspectives—Relevant codes only

Content Codes:

Relationship to district (formal and informal relationships, types of input/involvement, or lack thereof

Attitudes/beliefs (views of reform and impact on civic engagement)

Descriptions (understanding of reform and changes to district)

Charters (including support for/opposition to charters and impact of charter schools and charter policy)

Civic Space (overall levels of public involvement, opportunities for engagement, input, and dialogue)

AASC

Youth Empowered

Downtown BID

EAU

APPENDIX D: CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA

We were guided in our selection research on the case studies by the data we had collected on the ways that individuals and groups, from within and outside the school district, experienced and understood civic participation in Philadelphia's schools. In choosing our case studies, we thus looked for variation along several dimensions: relationship with School District, constituencies, geographic orientation, and theory of change.

Organization	**Relationship with District**	**Constituency**	**Geographic Orientation**	**Theory of Change**
Youth Empowered	No contracts—Advocacy	Students, low-income communities	Specific neighborhoods	Redistributive
EAU	Member groups had contracts	Community and education groups, ostensibly all students	Citywide	Redistributive
Downtown BID	Partner	Business groups, middle-class families	Downtown	Market oriented
AASC	Contract	Middle- and working-class African American families	Ostensibly citywide, really specific neighborhoods	Market oriented

Cite This Article as: *Teachers College Record* Volume 113 Number 11, 2011, p. -
http://www.tcrecord.org ID Number: 16108, Date Accessed: 9/8/2010 4:25:33 PM

Purchase Reprint Rights for this article or review