



RESEARCH for *ACTION*

A PHILADELPHIA STORY:

Building Civic Capacity for School Reform
in a Privatizing System



DECEMBER 2007

**A Philadelphia Story:
Building
Civic Capacity
for School Reform
in a Privatizing System**

Eva Gold

Elaine Simon

Maia Cucchiara

Cecily Mitchell

Morgan Riffer

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Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, nonprofit organization engaged in education research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve the educational opportunities for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference, and ability/disability.

Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform

Research for Action (RFA) is leading *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*, a comprehensive, multi-year study of Philadelphia's complex and radical school reform effort. RFA researchers are working with colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania, Montclair State University, Swarthmore College, and the Consortium on Chicago School Research to examine the impact of state takeover, the efficacy of a diverse provider model, the success of district-level leadership in managing a complex set of reforms, the engagement of civic and community groups with district policy and school improvement, and the key factors influencing student outcomes under various school conditions and school management models.

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***We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,
tied in a single garment of destiny.***

Martin Luther King, Jr.

***Bringing about systemic education reform is like kicking a stone uphill:
A swift swing of a strong leg is enough to get it going,
but keeping it going may call for something else entirely.***

Stone, Henig, Jones & Pierannunzi

¹ Washington, J. M. (1986). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.* San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 210.

² Stone, C. N., Henig, J. R., Jones, B. D., & Pierannunzi, C. (2001). *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools.* Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 142.

Introduction

In May 2007, the School District of Philadelphia was in crisis again. After several years of reform progress and growing public confidence, a major budget shortfall resulted in a slew of proposed cuts in programs and services and an onslaught of negative media coverage.³ Parents, local leaders, youth, and community organizations were outraged—and not just by the cuts. Angry Philadelphians berated district leaders for a six-year history of behind-closed-doors decisions, creeping privatization of a public system, and a lack of accountability to tax-paying citizens. District leaders, meanwhile, struggled to reassure an anxious public and staunch the flow of red ink.⁴

Dramatic as these events were, to focus on the spectacle of civic protests, fractious meetings, and fiery editorials would be to miss the more persistent problem. Earlier protests that had accompanied the 2001 state takeover abated quickly, with the public seemingly willing to grant the district a honeymoon period. Additional money from the state and city, a stream of positive press about the schools, and a rapid unfolding of reform initiatives created a sense of momentum and change. Public assent continued as, over the next few years, the district reported improvement in student achievement in the early grades. In the face of a budget crisis, however, this apparent stability and confidence dissolved. Why was public support for district leadership and the reform agenda so fragile?

³ As early as February 2007, district officials projected a budget deficit of more than \$100 Million (Snyder & Woodall, 2/13/07). By May 2007, the reported deficit had increased to \$182 Million (Snyder, 5/30/07), although other estimates existed and varied slightly. During the months following, the district worked to reduce this number through a series of cuts in programs and personnel; in addition, the district looked towards more revenue from the city and state (Snyder, 8/16/07).

⁴ Dean, M. & Russ, V. (2007, May 30). Under Pressure, Reform Panel Balks. [Electronic Version] *Philadelphia Daily News*; Snyder, S. (2007, May 30). Outcry Grows over Phila. School Cuts. [Electronic Version] *Philadelphia Inquirer*; Snyder, S., Woodall, M., & Mucha, P. (2007, May 31). SRC Passes Phila. School Budget over Objections. [Electronic Version] *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Key Components of Civic Capacity

- Community and civic sectors put aside individual interests to pursue the collective good.
- Elite and low-income constituencies collaborate as equals.
- Actors move beyond talk to mobilize resources and achieve concrete goals.

Under state takeover, the School Reform Commission (SRC) replaced a mayoral-appointed Board of Education. Consisting of three gubernatorial and two mayoral appointments, the SRC was granted unprecedented powers.⁵ Decision making became concentrated in the hands of a few, and there was an absence of mechanisms for broad public consultation. As long as the district was able to maintain the appearance of progress, the public did not balk. The lack of public consultation about the priorities of the district, however, meant that public confidence easily broke down in a time of crisis. Those who should have been the SRC's natural allies in facing its underlying problems, such as chronically insufficient resources, instead began to challenge its spending priorities. Also simmering just beneath the surface of the apparent public peace were deep-seated concerns about the equity and fairness of the system. In essence, the recent eruption of tensions in Philadelphia was an indicator that this reform era had not generated civic capacity—the kind of broad district, civic, and community collaboration needed to forward and support a reform agenda.⁶

⁵ Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L. (2006, July). *The Role of District Leadership in Radical Reform: Philadelphia's Experience under the State Takeover, 2001-2006*. Philadelphia: Research for Action.

⁶ Stone, C. N. et al., 2001; Stone, C. N. (2006). *Thoughts about Civic Capacity*. Unpublished Manuscript.

Understanding Civic Capacity

For the past several decades, large urban districts like Philadelphia have been host to dozens of reform efforts. Yet, all too often, these efforts failed to bring about lasting benefits for students, with one reform simply replacing another, and teachers, parents, and the public becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress and disenchanted with the schools.⁷ Because these districts face such significant challenges—from the entrenched poverty of so many of their students, to perennial budget shortfalls, to unwieldy bureaucratic structures—improvement will happen only when reform efforts go beyond quick fixes to address underlying problems. As Stone and his colleagues explain in their study of the politics of urban school reform:

If change is to occur and reform is to stick, then subsystem relations need to be altered in a lasting way.... This is what makes fundamental reform so difficult. It calls for more than bringing short-term pressure to bear on an existing relationship; instead, it calls for altering relationships.⁸

Districts do not reform by themselves. This sort of ambitious change will only happen with significant involvement on the part of a city's civic sector—its local leaders, community organizations, youth, and parents.

Yet activity alone is not enough. Often, reform efforts founder because individual or group interests take precedence over a collective

agenda. Reforms with such “shallow roots” are easily disrupted and do not create lasting change.⁹ Mistrust and ill will, not meaningful reform, inevitably occur when education is not treated as a “community enterprise,” say scholars who have documented the importance of a broad district, civic, and community collaboration to the success of school improvement efforts across a number of cities.¹⁰

In a comparative study of urban school reform, Stone and his colleagues found that cities with high levels of civic capacity were far more successful in designing, implementing, and sustaining meaningful reform than cities that lacked such a resource.¹¹ While civic capacity may take different forms in different cities, it is generally made up of three key ingredients. First, various sectors of the community must put aside individual interests to come together and pursue the collective good of educational improvement. Second, civic capacity involves broad participation in setting the educational agenda, such that all constituencies—including low-income and minority populations—are represented and collaborate as equals to make key decisions. Finally, individuals and groups must be willing to mobilize the human, financial, and material resources needed to achieve reform goals. When all of these things come together, they help create reform agendas that are equitable, enjoy wide and deep support, and can be sustained over time, even in the face of budget crises and changes in leadership. (For more detail on “Civic Capacity in Action,” see box, Page 3.)

⁷ Hess, F. M. (1999). *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

⁸ Stone, C. N. et al., 2001, 7.

⁹ Cuban, L. & Usdan, M. (2002). *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America's Urban Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

¹⁰ Henig, J. R. & Stone, C. N. (2007). Civic Capacity and Education Reform: The Case for School - Community Realignment. In Rothberg, R. A., *City Schools: How Districts and Communities Can Create Smart Education Systems* (117-136). Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

¹¹ Stone, C. N. et al., 2001.

Civic Capacity in Action

While generating civic capacity is difficult, it is not impossible. In a number of cities, the energies and resources of the civic community have been harnessed to promote and sustain reform. For example:

- In Mobile, Alabama in 2002 more than 48 community conversations focused on community members' goals for Mobile schools and the challenges they faced, which, in conjunction with research by parents and educators about school reform nationally, resulted in a document that set forth reform priorities for Mobile schools. This document became the basis for a strategic plan for the district, and was adopted by the school board in 2003.¹²
 - The El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence is a combined effort of the University of Texas, the El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization (EPISO), local Chambers of Commerce, elected officials and education officials, the Texas Education Agency and the local community college.
- Together, in 1991, these entities, with strong professional leadership, began looking at data from the Texas Education Agency in order to highlight general education problems and their equity dimensions. In determining their focus, the Collaborative connected the changing demographics of the city and the city's future well-being to the need to raise academic performance, thus building bridges between educators and the business sector. Over the next two decades the Collaborative mobilized to ensure that schools in El Paso districts use data and self-examination as a basis for professional development for teachers and for development of school-level teams of educators, parents and administrators who focus on the goal of teaching all students a demanding curriculum.¹³
- Boston benefited from the stability of a strong working relationship between city government and the school superintendent for over a decade, beginning in the mid-1990s. The efforts of the mayor and superintendent have been augmented by the Boston Plan for Excellence, which is made up of both elite and grassroots sectors of the community, and which researched and co-designed key aspects of Boston school reform. This reform era built on earlier as well as current efforts of the Boston Compact, which has procured resources and support from the city's elites for the schools. Grassroots groups have been dedicated to organizing parents and giving voice to those without access to equal educational opportunity, but have had less decision-making power in the reform.¹⁴

¹² Turnbull, B. (2006, May). *Citizen Mobilization and Community Institutions: The Public Education Network's Policy Initiatives*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates.

¹³ Stone, C. N. (2003). *Civic Cooperation in El Paso. Case Studies in Community Partnerships No. 1*. Providence, RI: Annenberg Institute.

¹⁴ Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2006, March). *Results + Equity + Community: Smart Systems*. Annenberg Institute Emerging Knowledge Forum. St. Petersburg, FL.

Civic Capacity in Philadelphia

In this report, Research for Action aims to assess the state of civic capacity for education reform in Philadelphia. Drawing on an extensive literature and a growing consensus within the research and education reform community, our premise is that civic capacity is critical to

improving education, particularly in cities with significant social and economic challenges. While other studies have examined civic capacity in a wide variety of urban contexts, Philadelphia is an important case because of its extensive privatization. In Philadelphia, the application of market principles is widely

Studies on Civic Capacity

This is not Research for Action's first examination of civic capacity as it contributes to school reform. In a study of the 1995-2000 reform era, RFA found that business, non-profit, district, higher education, labor and community leaders in Philadelphia had multiple, often conflicting theories about how best to improve the schools. Without a shared understanding, the coalition in support of the reform—and by extension the reform itself—lacked resilience in the face of political and economic challenges.¹⁵ In 2005, RFA again reported on the status of civic capacity, focusing on issues of “contracting out” in an increasingly privatized education system. There, we found that outsourcing usefully increased the number of organizations involved with Philadelphia's schools through contracts, but, at the same time, channeled the groups' interactions with the district narrowly around contractual agreements. This particularly affected the ability of small community and grassroots groups to play their traditional roles as the voices of equity in the city.¹⁶

¹⁵ Christman, J. B. & Rhodes, A. (2002, June). *Civic Engagement and Urban School Improvement: Hard-to-Learn Lessons from Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

¹⁶ Gold, E., Cucchiara, M., Simon, E., & Riffer, M. (2005, September). *Time to Engage? Civic Participation in Philadelphia's School Reform*. Philadelphia: Research for Action.

seen as the solution to many urban woes, including the persistent problems of limited resources and low student achievement that trouble the School District of Philadelphia. Taken over by the state, implementing extensive outsourcing of education services, and embracing market models of reform, the School District of Philadelphia is at the forefront of the national movement towards increasing the involvement of the private sector in public education.¹⁷

In this report, we see promise in the activities of the city, the district, nonprofit, university, and business players for generating civic capacity in Philadelphia. Others who have looked at the state of civic life in Philadelphia note that a fresh set of leaders appears to be emerging, creating energy and hope where there was defeatism in the past.¹⁸ We point out that a wider variety of individuals, nonprofit groups, and civic institutions are involved with the School District than ever before, through expanded contractual and partnership relationships and the growth of charter schools. The philanthropic community has supported the activities of numerous civic, youth, and community-based groups concerned with education issues, as well as research and its public dissemination. Finally, an array of civic groups is currently involved with the district (and in education reform activity more generally), which also helps lay the groundwork for more comprehensive and coordinated mobilization. At the same time, however, the new city and district environment, in which market ideas prevail as solutions to urban problems, presents unique challenges to the development of civic capacity.

¹⁷ Christman, J. B., Gold, E., & Herold, B. B. (2006, June 2). *Privatization “Philly Style”: What Can Be Learned from Philadelphia's Diverse Provider Model of School Management (Updated edition with important new information and findings)*. Philadelphia: Research for Action; Gold, E., Christman, J. B., & Herold, B. B. (2007, February 1). Blurring the Boundaries: A Case Study of Private Sector Involvement in Philadelphia Public Schools. *American Journal of Education*, 113(2), 181-212.

¹⁸ Whiting, B. J. & Proscio, T. (2007, February). *Philadelphia 2007: Prospects and Challenges*. Brooklyn, NY: The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The chapters that follow identify several inter-related processes that currently impede civic capacity and thus make deep, equitable, and sustainable education reform a considerable challenge:

- 1 The city's struggle to find an economic niche in the global economy has prioritized the development of some neighborhoods at the expense of others. In courting the middle class, perceived as vital to the future of the city, business and other leaders have exacerbated existing tensions between the goals of equity and economic growth. Rather than perceiving a link between equity and growth, policy makers seem to regard the two as zero sum choices. The resulting divisiveness and emphasis on group self-interest make the building of civic capacity extremely difficult.
- 2 The School District of Philadelphia's style of top-down decision making, paired with the SRC's aforementioned closed-door policies, limits the potential for collaboration. Lacking information about district decisions or even basic facts and figures, civic and community groups have difficulty working together, engaging with the district, or developing a shared sense of purpose—all activities that are essential to creating civic capacity. The need for "public accountability"¹⁹ is especially critical in a privatizing system where information, decision making, and performance accountability can become embedded in contractual

agreements (or memoranda of understanding) that form the basis for public-private relationships, and thus hidden from public view.

- 3 While new contracts and partnerships have brought many new outside players into the district, these relationships tend to be structured hierarchically, e.g., district-to-vendor or district-to-partner which discourages the formation of the multi-sectoral, cross-group collaboration important to civic capacity. Similarly, the dominance of market ideas in civic revitalization efforts positions Philadelphians as individual consumers rather than as members of a broader community concerned with the good of all.
- 4 Increased activity around education issues in the city is not sufficient to meet the barriers to civic capacity. Groups tend to work for constituency or group interests; groups and individuals focused on education reform are rarely at the same table as those who think about the future of the city; and groups that offer social capital, or resources, are advantaged in their relations with the district over groups representing low-income constituencies.

These considerable impediments to civic capacity call for explicit and strong interventions. Unless these hurdles are addressed, Philadelphia will not be able to build the civic capacity necessary to create and sustain genuine education change.

The new city and district environment, in which market ideas prevail as solutions to urban problems, presents unique challenges to the development of civic capacity.

¹⁹ Gold, E. & Simon, E. (2004, January 14). Public Accountability. *Education Week*, 23(18).

Questions Guiding this Study

The research presented here is a part of a larger study, *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*, led by Research for Action, which has followed school reform in Philadelphia since the 2001 state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia. Other strands of the study have addressed governance, school-level changes, and student achievement. This report draws primarily from the civic engagement strand of the study, but is also informed by RFA's findings and publications in the other areas. The research for this report began in fall 2003 and was complete by early spring 2007. For a detailed description of the methods used in this study, see the Appendix.

In order to assess the state takeover and its consequences for civic capacity for school reform in Philadelphia, we designed a multi-part research strategy to answer the following broad questions:

- 1 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 capacity?
- 2 In that same period, which included state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia and the acceleration of privatization, to what extent did the School District's organizational structure and practices for interacting with the public promote or impede the development of civic capacity?
- 3 How did differently positioned groups interested in education work to achieve their goals within the city's and the district's organizational structures and practices for public interaction? What does the work of these groups show about the promises and impediments to building civic capacity?
- 4 Overall, what were the opportunities for civic capacity for school reform? What were the challenges to civic capacity?

Organization of the Report

In the chapter that follows this introduction, we show that Philadelphia's civic and business leaders have been greatly influenced by national trends towards market-oriented policies as a solution to urban problems. This analysis of the larger city context serves as a backdrop to Chapter Two of the report, which focuses on the School District of Philadelphia, and shows how the state takeover and the accompanying acceleration of privatization have shaped the district's structures and practices. In Chapter Three, we present case studies of four different civic, business, and community groups and examine their involvement in education reform and the implications for the development of

civic capacity. The conclusion recommends explicit interventions that can build on current activity in Philadelphia to nurture civic capacity and support reform.

We are writing this report at a critical moment: leadership in both the city and the district are in transition, while the School District's current crisis has stimulated public awareness and activism. Moments like these—of crisis and transition—can provide openings for shifts in direction. This is an ideal time to examine the ways Philadelphians are involved in education, evaluate how effectively the schools serve their constituents, and develop and implement strategies that will lead to real and enduring change.

Chapter 1

Markets, Equity, and the City's Future: The Political and Economic Context for School Reform in Philadelphia

Philadelphia today is a city of paradoxes. Named “America’s Next Great City” and touted for its restaurants, nightlife, and colorful neighborhoods in the October 2005 issue of *National Geographic Traveler*,²⁰ Philadelphia also has a dismal 25% poverty rate, the highest among the largest American cities.²¹ According to a 2007 study of the city’s economic and civic prospects commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia is “in better shape” than it was in the 1990s and leaders within the city, departing from past downbeat sentiments, express optimism about the city’s future.²² At the same time, other studies point to a continued decline—in overall population, jobs, corporate headquarters, and wealth²³— while high levels of crime, particularly gun violence, continue to plague Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. So the city teeters between heady promises of revitalization on one side and the tough challenges of poverty, violence, and decline on the other.

Any discussion of school reform in Philadelphia must contend with these paradoxical extremes. In this chapter, we consider the complicated political, social and economic factors that serve as a context for school reform in Philadelphia. In interviews with local civic and community actors, we will show that market

models have come to dominate local thinking about the city’s future, a focus that, we argue, is often at variance with on-going efforts towards equity, both economic and educational. We will examine particularly the impact market approaches have on low-income populations and communities, and, in the chapter’s conclusion, discuss the implication of current trends for creating the civic capacity essential to education reform, a topic we will continue to explore in the chapters that follow.

Market Strategies for Urban Development and School Reform

Philadelphia’s extremes may be startling, but the pattern is hardly unique among contemporary American cities. Like many cities that flourished in the first half of the 20th century, Philadelphia, its once strong manufacturing base eroded, has been struggling to find its place in the new economic landscape.²⁴ Unable to compete with financial centers such as New York, London, or Tokyo, “second tier” cities like Philadelphia must find other economic bases. The latest popular formulae for civic reinvention and revival call for cities to re-create themselves as “markets of choice”²⁵ for high-tech, medical, and financial knowledge-based industries.

In order to grow and retain knowledge-based industries, these market-oriented theories

Cities are being called to re-create themselves as “markets of choice” for high-tech, medical, and financial knowledge-based industries.

²⁰ <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/features/philly0510/philly.html>.

²¹ Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (2007). *A Tale of Two Cities*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board.

²² Whiting, B. J. & Proscio, T., 2007.

²³ Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, 2007; Fox, R. K., Treuhaft, S., & Douglass, R. (2005). *Shared Prosperity, Stronger Regions: An Agenda for Rebuilding America’s Older Core Cities*. Oakland, CA: Policy Link; Brooking Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (2002). *Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

²⁴ Hodos, J. I. (2002). Globalization, Regionalism, and Urban Restructuring: The Case of Philadelphia. *Urban Affairs Review*, 37(3), 358-379; Sassen, S. (1994). *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

²⁵ Brooking Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2002 ; Florida, R. (2005). *The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent*. New York: Harper Business.; Gogan, P. S. & Proscio, T. (2000). *Comeback Cities: A Blueprint for Urban Neighborhood Revival*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.; Vey, J. S. (2007). *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing America’s Older Industrial Cities*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program; Whiting, B. J. & Proscio, T., 2007.

claim cities must attract “knowledge workers” by catering to their preferences for a stimulating urban atmosphere and amenities.²⁶ In order to attract the businesses and amenities these highly educated workers desire, government itself must become more efficient (by downsizing, streamlining services, and minimizing regulations) and more customer-focused in the services it provides. Adherents strive to solve city problems with “break-the-

²⁶ Florida, R., 2005; Pennsylvania Economy League of Greater Philadelphia (2003). No Brain—No Gain: Town/Gown Relations and the Competition for Talent. *Greater Philadelphia Regional Review*.

mold policies in the privatization of city services, education and economic development, as well as public safety.”²⁷

Market approaches to urban revitalization are rooted in distinct assumptions about the roles of government and citizens that, while rarely explicit, are important to understand.

According to this paradigm, government’s role is to assure the unfettered operation of the market. That premise translates into tax and regulatory policies favorable to business and private investment, and targets for investment

²⁷ Gogan, P. S. & Proscio, T., 2000.

Controversy over Privatization

In Philadelphia, privatization is a politically charged issue. The 2001 state takeover of the School District brought Philadelphia privatization on a grand scale.²⁸ Six years later, just as the district announced its budget deficit, private-sector management contracts for 41 low performing Philadelphia schools came up for renewal. Three separate studies²⁹ that examined private management of Philadelphia schools concluded that these schools had not performed on average any better (or worse) than other district schools,³⁰ despite the private providers’ receiving extra per-pupil funding. Nevertheless, neither that evidence, nor the severe budget shortfall, nor the strong objections of one of its members, dissuaded the majority of SRC members from voting to

continue the contracts.³¹ Many parents and others expressed outrage that the SRC continued to invest in these private managers despite evidence to suggest that the “private management experiment” was not working. They also believed that these investments were being made at the expense of district-wide reforms, such as keeping classroom size reduced in the early grades, maintaining music and art programs, and growing the number of counselors in the high schools, that would improve schools for all children.³² In spring 2007, the SRC also approved the continuation of 13 charter schools.³³ Even though two charter schools did not meet established performance standards, their contracts were renewed on the condition that they improve academically and hire more certified teachers.³⁴

²⁸ Christman, J. B., Gold, E., & Herold, B. B. 2006.

²⁹ Gill, B. P., Zimmer, R., Christman, J. B., & Blanc, S. (2007, January). *State Takeover, School Restructuring, Private Management, and Student Achievement in Philadelphia*. Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation; Accountability Review Council (2007, February). *The Status of 2005-2006 Academic Performance in the School District of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Accountability Review Council; School District of Philadelphia (2007). *Draft OAAI Report: Findings and Recommendations on EMO’s*. Philadelphia: School District of Philadelphia, The Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Intervention.

³⁰ There is one dissenting report that contests these findings. See Peterson, P. E. & Chingos, M. M. (2007, October). *Impact of For-Profit and Non-Profit Management on Student Achievement: The Philadelphia Experiment*. Cambridge, MA: Program on Education Policy and Governance.

³¹ The SRC renewed contracts for only 38 of the schools as 3 closed in fall 2007. The contracts were renewed for only 1 year for a flat per pupil expenditure of \$500 (Woodall, 6/27/07).

³² Dean, M. & Russ, V., 2007, May 30; Snyder, S., 2007, May 30.

³³ Despite renewing existing charters, the SRC deferred decisions on any new charters due to budget constraints (Snyder, 10/25/07).

³⁴ Woodall, M. (2007, April 19). 13 Charter Schools Get Extensions. [Electronic Version] *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

those areas most likely to become economic centers and attract additional investment. In a market-oriented environment, a citizen's role is that of consumer, acting for one's own individual well-being, and taking advantage of opportunities afforded by a thriving marketplace.

In education, the market approach favors choice as the instrument for school improvement. According to market theory, when parents, as consumers, choose the schools their children attend, they stimulate a competitive environment that puts pressure on schools to improve their quality. As consumers, parents have the responsibility to make good choices and to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction

Market skeptics promoted the citizens' role in defining standards by which all services, including education, should be provided. Citizens must monitor the delivery of services and ensure that public institutions provide them effectively and equitably.

by staying or leaving a school or district. At first, market-oriented education policy strategists touted vouchers as the ideal instrument for giving parents educational options. But, with only a few exceptions nationally, vouchers proved too difficult to achieve politically, and proponents now advocate privatization as the means to school choice. Charter schools, private management contracts, and special interest schools formed in partnership with private institutions are various paths to increased choice that fall under the broad definition of privatization.

Market Approaches—Philadelphia Style

In talking about the future of the city and how education fits in, most of the business, community, and nonprofit leaders we interviewed believed that revitalization depended on positioning the city as a market of choice and saw schools as an important tool in that effort. Our respondents expressed these ideas in a variety of ways, reflecting differences in how they grappled with issues of equity and the poten-

tial of market solutions. When it comes to confronting the realities of our urban environment, and, in particular, reconciling the extremes of wealth and poverty, we found few who subscribed purely either to a social welfare or to a market approach. Those convinced of the market approach's logic had community benefit in mind. Market skeptics, while they questioned the belief that citizens' consumption in an unfettered market will lead to quality and equity, recognized the need for Philadelphia's economy and population to grow. Despite the diversity in how our interviewees thought about markets and the role of the government, there was near consensus that schools could play an important role in retaining and drawing new businesses and residents to the city. The majority of those we interviewed, particularly business and economic development leaders, expressed confidence in a market approach for revitalizing the city and improving education.

To a large extent, our respondents expressed the belief that cities can position themselves to be competitive by attracting a "desirable" population. Where they differed was in their interpretations of *whom* this desirable population would be. More than half of the people we talked to defined those desirables as residents with economic resources, who will occupy the technical and professional jobs that the city hopes to attract. The city must strive "to retain knowledge workers, retain the vitality of what is the engine for the region's growth, which is Center City, Philadelphia," said a respondent from a leading civic group (General Influential – Business,³⁵ June 2005).

The goal of attracting and retaining these "knowledge workers" has shaped the agenda

³⁵ This category is one of the categories developed by Stone et al. in their 2001 multi-site study of civic capacity. We used the Stone et al. categories to select our interviewees, making sure we had a number of representatives from each of the sectors they identified as critical to civic capacity. These categories are: General Influentials, Education Program Specialists and Community-Based/Advocacy Leaders.

of various business leaders, nonprofit civic groups—such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Center City District,³⁶ The Reinvestment Fund, and the Pennsylvania Economy League—as well as the city itself. Early in his first term, Mayor John Street formed the Knowledge Industry Partnership (with Judith Rodin, the president of the University of Pennsylvania, as its first chair), designed to entice graduates of the city’s many colleges and universities to stay in Philadelphia. Similarly, the mayor’s high-profile initiative to create an open, wireless communication network, while its goals included reducing the digital divide, also aimed at luring young, tech-savvy professionals to a hip, high-tech town.

Other respondents, however, focused on attracting or keeping middle class residents in the city, though not necessarily in Center City. These informants defined “middle class” not specifically as a new class of “knowledge workers” but as “working” or “young” families, and viewed their presence as an important means of creating or restoring economic diversity to Philadelphia neighborhoods in need of revitalization. In the words of one interviewee, who leads an advocacy organization that works for equity causes:

Oh, I don't think there's any doubt that Philadelphia needs to retain middle class people. If [there's] anything [that] the '70s and '80s have shown, [it] is that economic isolation is deadly for any kind of community (Community-Based/Advocacy, July 2005)

Community advocates see middle class families as a source of both economic stability and vitality to the city’s neighborhoods. A city council representative we interviewed, for example, expressed concern about retaining “working families” in her district who would be home owners and, hence, feel a greater

investment in the neighborhood (General Influential – City Government, July 2006).

Many of our respondents, echoing the national discourse, discussed creating “markets of choice”—areas that potential businesses and residents would find attractive and feel confident about investing in—as a way of attracting and retaining middle-class residents. We also heard from those who, while acknowledging the benefits of a lively market and large middle class, worried about losing a sense of shared community purpose. To counter the inequities that might result from relying too much on a market approach to urban renewal, these leaders advocated for stronger involvement of citizens, including those from low-income neighborhoods not targeted as sites for investment, in helping to set city and school agendas.

The Schools and the City’s Future: Market Perspectives

In expressing concern about the role schools play in attracting or discouraging middle-class families from living in the city, Philadelphia civic actors are not alone. As the authors of *Comeback Cities* proclaim, urban public schools should get on board with the market-oriented movement that has caught on in other realms of urban revitalization. They note, “In some ways, the new battle over schools is the final frontier of inner city revitalization. All the other incipient positive trends will fall short of their potential if city schools continue to push huge numbers of working- and middle-class families out of the city...If that dreadful ‘push factor’ can be neutralized in time by some combination of charter schools and privatization—force sufficient to drive genuine reform within public schools as well—the ultimate victory might be in the cities’ grasp.”³⁷

³⁷ Gogan, P.S. & Proscio, P, 2000, 7.

³⁶ Philadelphia’s downtown is referred to locally as Center City.

No matter where our interviewees stood in terms of their beliefs about government and markets, there was general agreement about the relationship between schools and the city's future. Like the authors of *Comeback Cities*, most of our informants wanted schools to slow the drain of middle class, educated residents and, ideally, make the city more attractive to middle-class families. Examples from our interviews abound:

I think that the city is dying off as an economic center. And I think a lot of the reason it is dying off is that people won't live here, and they won't live here because they don't like the public school system. So we don't have very many families with young children (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, Sept. 2004).

I see the development of the city and schools as being interrelated...in that, if people are to remain in the city, if we are to attract young people and that they're going to contribute to our city economy, then we have to upgrade and improve our educational institutions, elementary, secondary, post secondary (Education Program Specialist – General, June 2006).

...key to this whole [revitalization process] is offering people that are moving back into the community choice in education. And that comes in the form of schools under private management, some of the public schools, private schools, or charter schools (Community-Based Advocacy, July 2006).

Thus, Philadelphians from different sectors viewed schools as a critical factor in the city's ability to compete for more affluent residents. Proponents argue that the middle class expects to have choices and will continue its exodus to

“I see the development of the city and schools as being interrelated...if people are to remain in the city, if we are to attract young people who will contribute to our city economy, then we have to upgrade and improve our educational institutions...”

—Education Program Specialist June 2006

the suburbs in the absence of a host of appealing educational options. Indeed, as we will discuss in chapter three, a powerful local organization has put this reasoning into action, partnering with the School District on an initiative designed to reverse middle-class flight by providing enhanced school choice for Center City families.

Alternatives to the Market: Aren't We in this Boat Together?

Even though market thinking is widespread among those we interviewed, there was a small group of Philadelphia civic and community leaders whose vision for the city and its schools is based on a different set of assumptions. Those who articulated this alternative vision believe that government—no matter how it is configured—has a key role to play in assuring equity, and that citizen participation (which should mean more than acting as a consumer in the educational marketplace) is necessary to school improvement. Such individuals were most likely to be affiliated with nonprofit advocacy, community-based and organizing groups who represent low-income, minority, and immigrant constituencies.

Their perspective, which could be termed a “social welfare” approach, contrasts with the market thinking described earlier. The social welfare point of view regards parents and citizens not as individual consumers but as part of a broad collective with shared interests and a sense of mutual responsibility. As an informant from a nonprofit advocacy group said:

... if we were all in this boat together, we'll all have to invest more in it, and it won't be abandoned by those people who have power...It is good that they are trying to think of ways to spruce up and strengthen whatever educational opportunities are available. We need to do that every place... [but] saying, "Hey, I want to make sure that my kid gets into the right place," that's not my vision of how people come to recognize we're all in the same boat together (Community Based/Advocacy, July 2005).

While encouraged that more people are getting involved in the school system and demanding more from the district as a result of more educational options, this respondent was critical of the ways the market model of education promotes individualistic behavior. Instead, he would like to see parents' energies and activities channeled to benefit all students, not just their own.

Those with a social welfare perspective also put a priority on equity as the driver of both school and city improvement efforts. While they acknowledge the "buzz" that Philadelphia's Center City boom has created, they are skeptical about whether the benefits of downtown development will eventually reach Philadelphia's low-income neighborhoods. They argue that residents of the "neighborhoods" (as opposed to the affluent Center City area) need to be involved in helping craft an urban agenda that would distribute resources more equitably citywide. Rather than focusing on attracting the middle class or knowledge workers to revitalize Philadelphia, these advocates stressed neighborhood-based economic development and job creation along with human capital development as the most important elements in a strategy for Philadelphia's future.

Proponents of the social welfare approach believe their voices—and that of low-income communities in general—are not being heard

by the more powerful decision makers committed to market-based theories. One nonprofit leader argued that because low-income residents were not making decisions about the direction of the city, they were not benefiting from city development policy. When asked to characterize the disagreements about how to improve the city, he asserted that the problems come down to:

... racial politics, the class divide, who's making the decisions, and upper middle-class mentality in government. ...And if anything, it's going to obviously keep pushing poor people to the edges.... So it's either a strategy to rid the city of poor people, and that supports bringing in a middle-class, but then you also have to create a system that is accommodating to that middle-class mentality, and that middle-class lifestyle. So who gets sacrificed? Poor people. The working class. (Community Based/ Advocacy, May 2006).

This respondent was one of the few to express direct criticism of the prevailing focus on attracting the middle class. In contrast to other interviewees, who believed the city as a whole would benefit from an increased middle-class presence, he argued that the poor would be marginalized, literally "pushed out."

Schools and the City's Future: Social Welfare Perspectives

Whereas proponents of market-oriented development emphasized the "trickle down" benefits of revitalization, adherents to the social

Advocates for low-income communities stressed neighborhood-based economic development and job creation and training as the most important elements in a strategy for Philadelphia's future.

welfare discourse present “bottom up” strategies as more equitable and sustainable. As a result, they had a different vision of the role schools should play in the city’s trajectory. The director of a nonprofit advocacy organization made clear this point of view through his focus on the importance of neighborhood development, with good schools a key factor in strengthening neighborhoods. School reform, in the minds of community leaders like this one, is crucial: education is the best means for developing “human capital,” while good local schools bring strength and stability to their neighborhoods. He called for more integration between city and School District efforts regarding neighborhood improvement, suggesting that groups interested in improving education should ask,

What would make it a good school for the people in this neighborhood and what would tie into other things that are happening in this neighborhood? I don't think that's happened at the city level. I don't think that's happened at the district level ... I think they [the city and the School District] should be about neighborhood building ... and I think they ought to be able to talk to each other. And I don't get the feeling that's happened at all. (Community Based/Advocacy, March 2006)

This respondent believed schools have a critical role to play in Philadelphia’s future, as do the proponents of market models. His focus was much more on using schools to build assets in neighborhoods that had not been targeted by other revitalization efforts.

Those calling for more bottom-up approaches did not necessarily think that the pre-takeover public school system had been significantly more open to community participation. But they also did not feel that the School District’s current market orientation was providing opportunities for the sort of broad and comprehensive citizen participation they deemed

important. To these respondents, market models were useful in some ways because they offered strategies for retaining middle income families and therefore the potential for greater economic integration in many neighborhoods. Indeed, many interviewees drew upon both market and social welfare discourses, but they were also convinced that a market approach alone could not guarantee an equitable distribution of education resources. Instead, only public entities (such as the School District) guided by and responsive to all community members, could provide that sort of guarantee.

Conclusion

In this section of the report, we have argued that Philadelphia’s leaders have been greatly influenced by market-oriented national trends and policy designed to address urban problems. The solutions proposed for improving Philadelphia schools parallel the solutions that business and other leaders in the city support for assuring the city’s future: The idea of creating markets in areas of the city with potential to attract people and businesses is echoed in a call for choice as the basic principle behind school reform. As we show here, proponents of school choice in Philadelphia often speak of it as a means of making the city more attractive to middle-class families. Others, less focused on urban revitalization, see school choice as a means for individual upward mobility. At the same time, though, the market approach to education has its detractors; a number of our respondents expressed serious concern about the ways that choice, market models, and efforts to attract the middle class to the city and its schools will affect low-income communities.

As stated in our introduction, this report is concerned above all with civic capacity. Recognizing that “fundamental reform in education also requires a depth of community engagement far greater than is the case with most policy areas,”³⁸ we consider how the

³⁸ Stone et al., 2001, 163.

current trend towards market-oriented thinking and the resulting tensions that have emerged affect the development of civic capacity for school reform in the city.

Certainly, Philadelphia’s resurgence provides reason for optimism. Indeed, there is a new sense of energy in the city, and the influx of affluent residents bolsters the local economy and tax base. There is a new group of young leaders in Philadelphia who may be able to work with, rather than parallel to, the next mayoral administration, and capitalize on the opportunities a revitalized city creates.

However, as we have noted, the civic capacity that will engender meaningful reform to the city’s schools requires solutions devised by a broad coalition of groups, including both elites and non-elites. Though our research documents general agreement about market solutions among the city’s leadership, we also found that among key constituencies, particularly groups representing low-income communities, skepticism about market solutions remains (although the Philadelphia Black Alliance for Educational Options [BAEO] which we will discuss in Chapter Three, serves as an important exception). The leaders of these groups feel that they and their constituents have been excluded from both the city’s and the School District’s decision-making processes, and they expressed significant distrust of city and School District policy and priorities as a result. Until decision-making processes and feelings of exclusion are addressed, they will present barriers to the effectiveness of the School District—they perpetuate a divisive city culture that lacks the breadth and depth of relationships across race and class necessary to move forward a school reform agenda.

As Philadelphia’s “resurgence” continues, the contrast between the more affluent areas, particularly in and around Center City, and the struggling “neighborhoods” could become even starker. Those charged with leading

the city, the School District, and the city’s civic and community groups, are all struggling with how to balance two equally important goals: economic growth and equity. At the moment, it appears that national trends, Philadelphia’s economic circumstances, and the near disappearance of social welfare discourse as the means to solve the problems of the city and the schools have led to the dominance of a market approach, with investment focused on already “revitalizing” areas. Thus, the tension in the city between growth and equity maps onto the city’s geography, with different neighborhoods competing for resources. This divisive dynamic represents a further obstacle to civic capacity because it prevents groups and communities from working together around a shared vision for the greater good of all.

At the moment, it appears that national trends, Philadelphia’s economic circumstances, and the near disappearance of social welfare discourse have led to the dominance of a market approach, with investment focused on already “revitalizing” areas.

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Chapter 2

Civic Capacity and a Market-Oriented Public School System

The previous chapter describes the ways in which market approaches to urban development and to education have become pervasive in Philadelphia. In education, the turn towards market thinking among local civic and business leaders can be traced to the 1990s, when, frustrated with the pace of district-led reforms, they began to embrace charter schools and vouchers as school-reform solutions. This shift on the part of the business community helped smooth the way for the state's 2001 state takeover and the establishment of a new, business-oriented School District administration.³⁹ In turn, the state takeover of the School

The state takeover and the subsequent market-based reforms brought the city's school system in line with the shift towards market approaches to solving urban problems.

District of Philadelphia and the subsequent market-based reforms brought the city's school system in line with the now general shift towards market approaches as the remedy to urban problems.

Implemented during the same period, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation—which offered various forms of privatization as solutions for persistent school failure—lent further credibility to this shift. NCLB's strict accountability requirements also boosted the new district leadership's authority and gave additional urgency to its focus on performance-based accountability measures.

With the state takeover, the district restructured itself around a business management model, privatizing core educational functions and defining interactions with the public in the language of the marketplace, with constituents becoming “consumers,” “vendors,” and/or “audiences.” In this chapter, we describe the ways in which the adoption of business prac-

tices and privatization have shaped the district's approaches and the impediments this creates for civic capacity. Specifically, we argue that the managerial, top-down style of leadership, opaque decision-making processes, and increased centralization have constrained the public's role in contributing to key decisions. In addition, the district has defined its engagement with the public in narrow terms, further inhibiting opportunities for interaction, debate, and co-construction of policy, all essential to the development of civic capacity.⁴⁰

Interviews with SRC members and central office staff, as well as our own observations of SRC meetings, reveal the extent to which market-oriented practices have come to characterize the district during this reform period. (See the Appendix, Chart B for a description of interviewees and observations.) Although arguably these practices have resulted in increased district attention to the needs of individual families, and opened the district to deeper and greater involvement with both the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors, we argue that, overall, these market practices have also led to new and unique obstacles to civic capacity and, thus, to comprehensive and lasting reform.

First, we show that decision making has become the domain of a few, as well as a private, not public affair. The resulting lack of district transparency has meant a loss of public accountability for the policies and practices of the district. And in a privatized environment, such as we have in Philadelphia, such public accountability is crucial; the public acts as an important check to ensure that contractual relationships between the district and vendors are meeting standards of efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.⁴¹ As we noted in the

³⁹ Boyd, W. L. & Christman, J. B. (2002). A Tall Order for Philadelphia's New Approach to School Governance: Heal the Political Rifts, Close the Budget Gap, AND Improve the Schools. In L. Cuban & M. Usdan (Eds.), *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America's Urban Schools* (96-124). New York: Teachers College Press; Christman, J. B. & Rhodes, A., 2002.

⁴⁰ Ostrum, E. (1996) Crossing the Great Divide: Coproduction, Synergy, and Development. *World Development*, 24(6), 1073-1087.

⁴¹ Minow, M. (2003, January 30). Public and Private Partnerships: Accounting for the New Religion. *Harvard Law Review*, 116(1), 1229-1273.

introduction to this report, both transparency and public accountability are essential to creating a climate in which civic capacity can thrive. Second, we show that the district's modes of interaction with the public have been constructed around a hierarchical model—district-to-consumer, district-to-vendor, and district-to-audience—that impedes the development of a collective awareness. Such hierarchies tend to isolate individuals and groups according to special interests and categories, inhibiting the kind of cross-group collaboration that leads to, and supports, ongoing reform.

Restructuring the District around a Business Model and Privatization

The architects of the takeover (namely, Governor Tom Ridge and later Governor Mark Schweiker along with other key state officials) were strong supporters of market-oriented reforms, and their choices for the district's new leadership reflected this orientation. The governor selected a businessman from the suburbs to chair the new Commission, and his other two appointees came with extensive management experience in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. Under this leadership the district adopted a number of practices specific to the business world: centralizing decision making to enhance efficiency, replacing the superintendent with a CEO, outsourcing a range of services and core educational functions to private providers,⁴² and emphasizing performance accountability measures for schools and teachers.

The School District of Philadelphia is not alone in turning to business for leadership, rhetoric, and practices.⁴³ New York, Chicago, and a number of other large urban districts

⁴² Examples of these services and core educational functions include after-school programs and curriculum development, respectively.

⁴³ Hancock, L. (2007, July 9). School's Out. *The Nation*, 285(2), 16-22; Shipps, D. (1997). The Invisible Hand: Big Business and Chicago School Reform. *Teachers College Record*, 99(1), 73-116.

have also been heavily influenced by corporate management styles and market-based theories. Philadelphia, however, has become the nation's largest experiment in educational privatization. Though the SRC did not adopt the state's original proposal for privatization lock, stock, and barrel (which would have contracted out 60 low-performing schools and many central office functions to one vendor, Edison Schools, Inc.), it did adopt an extensive privatization scheme, known as the "diverse-provider model" of school management. As we explained in Chapter One, 45 low-performing schools were turned over to seven for-profit and nonprofit managers.⁴⁴ The SRC also made clear that it was open to charter schools, a topic we will discuss below.

The new regime used the district's ongoing funding shortages as further justification of the business paradigm they were adopting. District administrators, pushed to think "outside the box" to address the district's 2001 fiscal crisis sought new, untapped sources of human and financial capital.⁴⁵ By creating new kinds of relations with non-public actors, district officials hoped to appease state legislators critical of the district (and supportive of privatization), thereby repairing the historically fractious relationship with the state, and securing additional state funding.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For a full description of the diverse-provider model, see, Christman, J. B., Gold, E., & Herold, B., 2006.

⁴⁵ Bulkley, K. E. (2007, February). Bringing the Private into the Public: Changing the Rules of the Game and New Regime Politics in Philadelphia Public Education. *Educational Policy*, 21(1), 161.

⁴⁶ In fact, with the appointment of the SRC and the establishment of the diverse provider model, both the city and state released additional funding for the system. However, there was a structural deficit which was not alleviated by the short term infusion of funds (which also included the sale of district property and a bond issue). District budgeting processes gave the appearance that the problems had been resolved, but in 2007 the district's serious fiscal problems became a visible crisis.

The adoption of business practices has shaped how the district interacts with individuals and groups, creating a new landscape for civic and community involvement in education.

Obstacles to Civic Capacity

The adoption of business practices has shaped how the district interacts with individuals and groups in a variety of ways, essentially creating a new landscape for civic and community involvement in education in Philadelphia. In some respects this new landscape allows the district to be more responsive to individuals and organizations interested in working with the schools or needing to resolve particular issues. At the same time, however, key aspects of this landscape make the sorts of activities that help build civic capacity—such as dialogue and collaboration in setting policy—significantly more difficult.

Behind Closed Doors

The SRC unveiled the diverse provider model of school management in April 2002, assigning private sector providers to low-performing neighborhood elementary, middle, and K-8 schools with virtually no public discussion about the criteria for matching providers with specific schools. Similarly, when the contracts with the providers were finally signed in August 2002 there was no public scrutiny of the standards to which the providers would be held accountable.⁴⁷ This scenario presaged a style that was to characterize the SRC during its first five years. Time and again, the SRC commissioners would discuss issues among themselves behind closed doors, coming forward only with their decisions. 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 and the appearance of fractious politics.⁴⁸

For similar reasons, the SRC also eschewed public debate or oversight, strictly regulating

⁴⁷ Christman, J. B., Gold, E., & Herold, B., 2006; Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L., 2006.

⁴⁸ Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L., 2006.

public speaking at its meetings.⁴⁹ A top district official 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 (Education Program Specialist – School District of Phila., Nov. 2006).

With information scarce about how and why decisions were made, the public was left in the dark, and decision making within the district became the domain of a select few.⁵⁰

Centralized Decision Making

In line with a new business-influenced model, the SRC hired Paul Vallas to be the district’s Chief Executive Officer. As the head of the Chicago public schools, Vallas had developed a reputation for a top-down managerial style that resonated with the SRC’s approach. With a mandate to make dramatic change quickly, Vallas immediately established his authority, issuing a blizzard of reforms to be executed right away and across the board. Like the SRC, 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.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gold, E. et al., 2005; Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L., 2006.

⁵⁰ Gold, E. et al., 2005; Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L., 2006.

⁵¹ Useem, E., Christman, J. B., & Boyd, W. L., 2006.

Shortly after the School District of Philadelphia's new administration took power, the federal government instituted NCLB, which mandated that student achievement gains be significant and rapid. NCLB brought a heightened sense of urgency to the already intense situation generated by the district's fiscal predicament and the state takeover, and further justified centralized decision making. For example, even though the diverse provider model had decentralizing potential, NCLB gave Vallas license to declare that all schools, regardless of management model, were district schools and would be held to the same performance standards.⁵² The pervasive sense of crisis, exacerbated by NCLB, may also have served to discourage a more open approach to public engagement. Dialogue and collaboration take time, a resource in short supply in a culture of crisis and urgency.⁵³ One official described the choice between centralized and decentralized decisions as a "balancing act" leaders must perform:

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 (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2006).

Pressured by NCLB, the state takeover, and a strained budget, School District leadership chose the efficiency of centralization over more inclusive decision-making processes.

Contracting Out

In the years since the takeover and initial privatization of many schools, Vallas and the SRC further developed a system of outsourcing core educational functions, including expanding the contracting out of school

⁵² Dean, M. (2002, December 20). A Year Later: What's Next in Our Schools. [Electronic version]. *Philadelphia Daily News*.

⁵³ Gold, E. et al., 2005.

NCLB brought a heightened sense of urgency to the already intense situation generated by the district's fiscal crisis and the state takeover. This further justified centralized decision making.

management.⁵⁴ Vallas tied his use of outsourcing to a broader pragmatism, an interest in "what works, whether it's private or non-private."⁵⁵ The long list of district contractors currently includes individual consultants, corporations, small and minority businesses, universities, educational nonprofits, and dozens of community groups that provide services and personnel to the district in the areas of truancy prevention, after-school programming, parent relations, hospitality and customer relations, and school and community safety.⁵⁶

Under Vallas and the SRC, the district began to rearrange its administrative structure to facilitate the development of external relationships, particularly with the private sector, including for-profit and nonprofit groups. The number of individuals and organizations contracting with the district has increased dramatically in recent years, from 80 in 2002 (the SRC's first year) to 183 in 2005, with the \$500 million the district spent on contracts in 2005 representing a quarter of its operating budget.⁵⁷ In addition to outsourcing, the district has increasingly looked for private sector "partners" to assist in its reform efforts. In a departure from past reform eras, the Vallas administration made the development of such partnerships a cornerstone of its reform strategy (Education Program Specialists – School

⁵⁴ Christman, J. B., Gold, E., & Herold, B. B., 2006; Mezzacappa, D. (2006, Fall). CEP Mystery: Many Pass Through...And Then. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*. 1, 13; Useem, E. & Rinko, K. (2006, Fall). Turning to Outside Organizations to do More Jobs. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*. 18, 20.

⁵⁵ Dean, M., 2002, December 20.

⁵⁶ Dean, M. (2006, September 21). Commission Approves Funding for Parent Truant Officers. [Electronic version]. *Philadelphia Daily News*; Useem, E. & Rinko, K., (2006, Fall).

⁵⁷ Useem, E. & Rinko, K., (2006, Fall). The number and amount of contracts, however, appears to be decreasing in 2007 in response to the most recent budget crisis.

District of Philadelphia, Sept. 2004; August, 2006). “Partners” are organizations that work with the district but, unlike contractors or vendors, do not receive funds. They include 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. Like contractors, they have a formal agreement with the district, a “memorandum of understanding” of the services they will provide, such as helping to create new schools or developing particular programs for students.

District leaders see contracting out and partnerships as ways to attract human capital, funding, programs, and material resources—thereby helping the district overcome its chronic lack of resources.

District leaders see both contracting out and partnerships as a way to bring in additional resources in the form of human capital, funding, programs, and materials—thereby helping the district overcome its chronic lack of resources. As a top official explained,

[W]hen you get down to the core of how we move urban education forward, we have to have the resources. And until and unless someone is going to address the issue of how education is funded... then school districts have to be more creative in attracting the resources to get their job done.... But the public-private partnership is really a mini solution to the bigger problem, which is the funding of public education

(Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2004).

The new administrative structure facilitates external relationships, enabling, for example, a local business organization to develop, implement, and assess a volunteer reading program. Referring to the Office of Development,⁵⁸ a business leader explained “with that office in place, there is one stop for us to go to, and they give us multiple opportunities to interact”

⁵⁸ The Office of Development was set up by CEO Vallas to be an entry point to the district for the private sector.

(General influential – Business, July 2006). This business leader praised the new structure, noting that it created a “streamlined” process and provided greater accountability.

While the district has always worked with local nonprofits and universities, its network of relationships is now much larger and more systematic than in the past. Reflecting on how university partnerships have changed since the takeover, one long-time district staffer explained, “in my memory, we have never done this kind of partnership with the higher ed community” and described earlier district-university projects as “small smatterings where grad students come in and do some stuff and undergrads volunteer to mentor and tutor” in a way that was difficult to monitor and assess (Education Program Specialist—School District of Philadelphia, Sept. 2004). The current university partnerships, which include administrative assistance, curriculum enrichment, and professional development, carry with them higher expectations and more substantive consequences. In the words of the same administrator:

The School Reform Commission wants to see statistical evidence of what the planned outcomes are and then at the end of that year they want to see how close we came to those outcomes... We can no longer float along as a district, not that we ever meant to, but this is very, very specific and structured.

District officials, particularly those at upper levels, believe the focus on developing relationships with external organizations has made the district far more “open” to outsiders than before. In the words of one high-level official, “everyone is at the door, and it is open” (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2004). Another staff member agreed, noting that more groups are involved in schools and now are seeking contracts to provide services to the district as a result of the contracting process (Education Program Specialist – School District

of Philadelphia, August 2006). In fact, one district official spoke of community engagement only in connection with the contracting process, implying that the contracts community groups received were the most visible vehicle through which such groups engaged with the schools (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, July 2006).

While supporters of contracting out, who generally come from the ranks of top officials, believe that the practice has increased efficiency and brought needed resources and talent to the district, others question the usefulness and appropriateness of the practice. Critics within the district, largely, but not entirely, mid-level district staff, express concern that contracts structure relationships in ways that interfere with a community group’s ability to act independently and hold the district accountable, a concern echoed in the general literature on privatization as well as in our own work⁵⁹ (Education Program Specialists, July 2006; August 2006). One top official observed that the district expects 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 (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, Nov. 2006).

Another way contracting can stifle genuine conflict or criticism, this same official noted, is that the district is much more likely to give contracts to groups that have been supportive of district policies, while “groups that have been very critical of the district find it very difficult to do business here.” In the words of another district administrator: “So many of

these people live off the district; they’re fueled, funded off the district. It is a difficult place to be and be objective” (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, February 2007). By constraining community participation, the district’s practice of forming contractual partnerships weakens the environment for civic capacity. By skewing power relations toward district-to-contractor and district-to-partner interactions, current School District policy makes genuine collaboration and collective action more difficult.

The district’s previously noted lack of system transparency carries over into and further complicates its contracting strategy. An investigation into district practices uncovered large numbers of “no bid” contracts. Without a normal competitive process, the community has no knowledge of the criteria used to choose and evaluate certain vendors.⁶⁰

In fact, even for competitive contracts, information about vendors and the terms of their agreements is not readily available, with one local journalist calling his efforts to attain information about contracts a “summer-long ordeal.”⁶¹ Since outsourcing is such an important part of the current reform effort, civic actors—local leaders, community groups, youth, and parents—must be able to stay informed about who is receiving contracts, what they are supposed to be doing, and whether or not they are performing. Without such information, it is difficult for these actors to work collaboratively with the district in moving reform forward—and, on a more basic level, it is impossible for them to ensure that vendors are held accountable for their performance.

Since outsourcing is such an important part of the current reform effort, civic actors—local leaders, community groups, youth, and parents—must know who is receiving contracts, what contractors are supposed to be doing, and whether or not they are performing.

⁵⁹ Gold, E. et al., 2005; Minow, M., 2003; Sclar, E. D. (2000). *You Don't Always Get What You Pay for: The Economics of Privatization*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

⁶⁰ Collins, T. (2006, Fall). Informal Bidding Process: Cause for Concern. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, 19, 23.

⁶¹ Socolar, P. (2006, Fall). Quest for Contract Documents Became Summer-Long Ordeal. *Philadelphia Public School Notebook*, 26.

Choice

The SRC has fully embraced charters and school choice as part of its market approach to school reform. During the five years of state takeover, the number of charter schools in the city has risen from 40 before the state takeover (2001-2002) to 56 during the 2006-2007 school year. In spring 2007, in the midst of a budget crisis, the district postponed granting any new charters. Nonetheless, SRC chair James Nevels continued to emphasize the district's commitment to the charter model, stating, "There has been a consistent support for charters by the School Reform Commission... They are an essential ingredient for school choice, and we will continue to support them."⁶²

The district has also worked to expand educational options among district-run schools, including developing smaller, themed high schools to replace or reduce populations in large neighborhood high schools. District leadership has proposed a system of high school choice within each region—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 theory, this range of regional options lets students choose a high school that would not entail traveling across the city to one of the handful of magnet schools currently available.

In some ways, this offers parents a new vehicle for involvement in the schools—as consumers in the educational marketplace. However, the focus on choice and charters also serves as a barrier to the development of civic capacity by channeling parents' involvement towards individual schools rather than the district as a whole. Indeed, a parent interviewed for our report expressed concern about this tendency, noting that when she and a group of parents from her child's school met with a member of the SRC to discuss the budget crisis, the commissioner suggested that the school, which has an active parent organization, simply become a charter to avoid the district's budget problem (Fieldnotes, August

2007). This suggestion is troubling because, had they followed this advice, this group of highly motivated, skilled parents would channel their efforts towards a single charter school and no longer serve as advocates for the public schools in general.

Communicating

At the time of state takeover, the district was a discredited public institution, marked by fiscal and academic crisis and political wrangling between city and state. The SRC and CEO Vallas, aware of the importance of creating a positive public image to restore confidence and legitimacy to the system, placed a great deal of emphasis on public relations—much more so than previous administrations, according to one long-time district insider (Education Program Specialist, School District of Philadelphia, July 2006). In addition to its own communications office, the district hired a public relations firm to help manage the public's perception of Philadelphia's schools and Paul Vallas began meeting regularly with local media. As one district official said of Vallas: "He's a total open book in terms of educating the people who are communicating to the communities every day about education" (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2006). The district also targeted city and state leaders, whose support and resources were crucial, in its communication campaign. "(K)eeping the leaders informed and engaged is really important because they can give you cover and they give you room and they help provide resources you wouldn't normally get," explained the same district official.

While the district's concerted public relations effort created the perception of openness and accessibility, communication through media channels actually precludes open and direct public dialogue, presenting yet another obstacle to civic capacity. The mode of communication favored by the School District positions Philadelphians as "audience" rather than as participants in reform; communication

⁶² Woodall, M., 2007, April 19.

becomes 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 are public relations challenges to be held in check, rather than opportunities for a broader public dialogue that could lead to genuine solutions.

Customer Service

Viewing public education through the market lens, the district has also focused attention on satisfying individual customers, defining its approach to community and parent engagement in terms of “customer service.” School District leadership encourages administrators and staff to view their primary mission as providing quality service to individual students and their families. One administrator 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” (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2006).

As this administrator’s response makes clear, for some district leaders a focus on customer service has come to predominate ways of thinking about working with the public (Personal Communication, March 2007). Consistent with this emphasis, the district has

developed a set of programs allowing staff to respond more quickly to individual needs and concerns:

We’ve tried to improve our problem-solving of individual family problems with things such as the call center, bully hotline, parent support hotline, and things like that. We had this 24-hour turnaround time to respond to some of these things. We’re trying to do better at that (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, July 2006).

With a strong customer service orientation, the system can respond more effectively to parents’ specific needs and questions concerning their individual children. But the market metaphor also renders uni-dimensional what in reality is a complex, multi-dimensional relationship. Many parents who understand that their problems are rooted in larger district practices or policy, or who want to be involved in decisions that affect every student’s education, want to be viewed as more than “customers.”

The resurgence of collective parent activity around the budget deficit in spring 2007 demonstrates well that parents care about the well-being of the community, as well as that of the individual child. As a result of parent pressure, the district held public hearings to address the budget shortfall. One district leader described the hearings as “necessary and healthy,” while characterizing the district’s responses as “kind of reactive to crisis versus a proactive on-going systematic way” of ensuring that Philadelphians are involved with the schools (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, Nov. 2006).

This sort of reactive response is typical, because the district, currently configured to

Many parents want to be viewed as more than “customers.” They understand that their problems are rooted in larger district policies and want to be involved in decisions that affect the education of all students.

respond to individual concerns, has developed few mechanisms for working with more collective mobilizations. As one district official remarked:

In terms of getting folks to the table and talking about policy, certainly around issues related to curriculum and the capital program as it relates to new schools, I would say it has been the communities [who have] had to stand up and say, "We want a voice here," and that there hasn't been a pro-active organizing of groups to give input (Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, July 2006).

While engaging with groups may be challenging, the district's reactive stance is problematic. It is only through ongoing collaborative work with groups (such as organizations comprised of parents, youth and community members) that the district will be able to contribute to the building of civic capacity that is essential to lasting educational reform.

Outreach and Involvement

Of course, not all of the district's initiatives fit into the market-oriented categories we have described here. In interviews, district officials pointed to a number of programs designed to increase and enhance parent and community involvement in schools. With respect to parents, the Parent Leadership Academy (PLA) and the Parent Assistance Desk were both attributed to Vallas' interest in "building parents as partners" (Education Program Specialists – School District of Philadelphia, July 2005; July 2006; August 2006). Discussing community involvement, officials described an effort to establish and formalize partnerships with local faith organizations to bring volunteers into the schools and develop additional programming for students. District officials note that such partnerships would bring important supports into the schools, such as tutors for the students, at little or no cost to the district, since the organizations involved receive no district money

(Education Program Specialist – School District of Philadelphia, August 2006; Personal Communication, March 2007). In these sorts of activities, parents and community members contribute to the schools not as customers or vendors but in traditional volunteer roles, supportive of goals defined by the district. Though these activities are important, they do not involve agenda setting or the co-construction of policy and therefore do not contribute to the development of civic capacity.⁶³

District staff members also describe working with members of the community to craft the "Declaration of Education" (the SRC's list of overarching goals that drives reform in Philadelphia) and the plan for capital improvements to schools (Education Program Specialists – School District of Philadelphia, August 2006). These initiatives held out the promise of involving parents and other members of the public in agenda setting, but in reality they fell far short. Rather than providing an opportunity for on-going collaboration and joint agenda setting, they were short-lived, and parents' and community-members' roles were limited to providing input without being able to track how, or if, their input influenced the ultimate decisions.

In fact, the district has often pledged to create more substantive vehicles for public participation, but it has repeatedly failed to follow through on these promises. Plans for community groups to partner with private providers of school management simply failed to materialize without explanation,⁶⁴ as did proposals for "regional parent advisory groups" and quarterly public meetings.

⁶³ Gold, E., Simon, E., & Brown, C. (2002, March). *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: Successful Community Organizing for School Reform*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform.

⁶⁴ Cucchiara, M. (2003). The Evolution of Reform: Studying 'Community Partnerships' [Electronic version]. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 2.

Conclusion: Civic Capacity and the New Market Paradigm

In this chapter we have shown how a market orientation to public education has shaped the School District of Philadelphia's interaction with the public. The district's focus on public relations and reversing the district's negative image seems to have had the desired effect.

Many in the business and nonprofit communities have expressed cautious optimism, noting that the district appeared to be more open and innovative and to have broken out of its old bureaucratic style. By creating new entry points for involvement through contracts and partnerships—as well as a positive climate for charter schools and a growing list of public school options—the district has increased the number and range of players involved in some way in the education of Philadelphia's youth. The district also showed it could be a responsive institution through a new emphasis on customer service that has established a plethora of avenues through which individual families can seek help with their children's social or academic problems.

Despite this array of interactions with the public, all important and laudable, the SRC and district management are not open and accessible when it comes to making decisions or assigning contracts. Instead, they have developed practices that prevent public actors from having access to the information they need to be full collaborators in setting agendas for reform. This lack of transparency is especially troublesome in a privatizing environment, which makes particular demands both on the district and the public. Indeed, for the public to play its essential role in monitoring contractual agreements for efficacy, efficiency and fairness, the School District must share information and make decisions in the public eye. Without transparency, there is no public accountability and without public accountability, the ground is shaky for building the kind of collaborative activity that moves reform forward.

In addition, when it has encouraged public participation, the district has channeled

involvement narrowly. Contracting, communicating, and customer service reify hierarchies of power favorable to the district, which then weaken Philadelphia's citizens as collective players in education reform. Choice furthers individual responsibility over collective action and well-being. The district's modes of interaction need to be expanded to include forums for debate, clear channels for public input, and protection from retribution for those who speak out. Funding is needed to support these types of expanded activities. With these changes, the district could more effectively play its role in creating an environment for the building of civic capacity.

Of course, school districts are not solely responsible for building civic capacity. Civic capacity is the result of a collective effort, and the School District is only one of the many elements in a city that come together in a collaboration if education reform is to be enduring and equitable. In this context, however, it is the special responsibility of the district to be open to collaborative interactions with the public. In other words, the district should help foster the conditions for, rather than impede, the development of civic capacity.

In Chapter One and Chapter Two of this report, we have examined the effect of the growing allegiance to market models on the development of civic capacity from two perspectives: the political and economic context of the city and the structures and orientation of the School District. In Chapter Three we turn our attention to four groups working to affect education policy and practice from different vantage points and what their experiences reveal about the promises and impediments to building civic capacity in Philadelphia.

Without transparency there is no public accountability, and without public accountability, the ground is shaky for building the kind of collaborative activity that moves reform forward.

Chapter 3

Case Studies of Educational Engagement in Philadelphia

In the previous chapters, we explained that now market discourses dominate ideas about how to solve city and school district problems, overshadowing, but not totally displacing discussion about an equitable distribution of resources. We also showed how the School District adopted a business model which, in conjunction with a top-down management structure, focused on swift and sweeping change, creating an environment adverse to the development of civic capacity.

In this chapter we draw on four case studies of local organizations involved with education. These cases provide important insight into local politics and community activity focused on education reform, helping us move from the contextual discussions of the previous chapters to what is actually happening “on the ground.” We show the implications of the work of these groups for civic capacity through an analysis of how these groups develop and pursue their agendas, interact with the district, and experience different levels of success in achieving their goals. While some of these important educational efforts do have the potential to help build civic capacity, the familiar tale of unresolved tensions and power differentials continues to make dialogue, cooperation, and alliances across different economic and regional sectors of the city difficult.

Our four case studies are: the Center City Schools Initiative (CCSI), Philadelphia Student Union and Youth United for Change (youth organizing), the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), and the Philadelphia Education First Compact (the Compact). These cases were chosen to represent a variety of types of involvement with education as well as a range of positions along the market-social welfare continuum. These groups also represent a range of perspectives on the city’s future, the role education plays in that future, and the geographic, economic and racial diversity of the city. Each group also has a unique connection to the School District as

well as to its own social network. (Chart C in the Appendix shows the variation among the case study groups on several key dimensions: primary theory of action; constituency, geographic base; type of leadership; etc.). In the sections that follow, we will tell the “story” of each group and discuss its activities in light of civic capacity.

The Center City Schools Initiative: New Groups, New Resources, New Divisions

The Center City Schools Initiative (CCSI) is sponsored by the Center City District (CCD), one of the country’s premier business improvement districts, which for the past 17 years has promoted the revitalization of Center City as key to city and regional economic growth. Launched in 2004, CCSI has identified schools as one important aspect of the broader revitalization project. The initiative’s fundamental premise is that enhanced school choice will cement Center City’s status as a desirable residential neighborhood by appealing to middle- and upper-income families who might otherwise leave the city for the suburbs.

The CCD is funded by Center City businesses and institutions, and its leader, Paul Levy, a respected Philadelphia figure, is often credited as the driving force behind Center City’s resurgence. Independent of partisan politics, Levy has built a network of contacts and allies that includes many of the city’s institutions, including the SRC and the School District. Because of the CCD’s stature and connections, when it approached the district with a proposal to work together to attract and retain “professional” families to the schools, the organization was received enthusiastically by the district, and a partnership formed soon after.

While Center City was already home to some of the most high-achieving elementary schools in the city, including the “Big Three” (a set of K-8 schools that historically attracted applicants from all over the city hoping to escape

low-performing neighborhood schools),⁶⁵ middle- and upper-middle-class parents in the area still hesitated to use their neighborhood schools, often choosing to move to the suburbs when their children reached school-age. To convince these parents to stay, the district and CCD devised a multi-pronged approach, including: altering the district's administrative structure to consolidate all schools in and near Center City into one newly created "region;" creating a new admissions policy giving families within the region priority over other families in admissions to Center City schools; launching a marketing campaign (including fliers, a new website, and public events); making improvements to individual schools that would make them more "marketable;" cultivating institutional "partners" for Center City schools (such as a local science museum to enhance science programming or a nearby theater to work with the performing arts); and helping the schools become more "customer friendly" as a way of competing with independent schools.

CEO Vallas and some members of the School Reform Commission shared Levy's interest in policies designed to attract and retain middle-class families to the schools and the city. They believed that if middle-class families could be convinced to live downtown— buying real estate, patronizing local businesses, and paying taxes—they would bolster the city's tax base and attract more businesses. Thus, these families could be a force for economic growth and prosperity, with trickle-down benefits for the broader Philadelphia community and its schools.

The School District reaped financial and other material and political gains as a result of its relationship to the CCD. For example, the CCD was able to rally architects to draw up plans for significant improvements to the "Big Three" Center City schools. At a broader level, the CCD provided the district with assistance on real estate, fundraising, and other issues (CCSI Administrator, April 2005). Perhaps

even more importantly, Levy lent the district his prestige, helping to build credibility within the larger civic and business community at a time when the district was working hard to restore its legitimacy. As one CCSI administrator explained, "We did a lot of things for the district... They were making a large public show of their Declaration of Education, and Paul Levy showed up there to publicly endorse them" (June 2005). Levy also supported the district's position in contract negotiations with the teachers' union, standing with the head of the Chamber of Commerce, CEO Vallas, the School Reform Commission, and other local dignitaries at the School District's press conference; the district then quoted Levy's praise of its contract plans in subsequent publicity. Levy's presence, and his willingness to create a visible link between his well-respected organization and the School District, signaled confidence in the district's leadership and its program for reform.

District and CCD leaders worked together behind closed doors to move the initiative rapidly from idea to implementation, with minimal public input or oversight. CCSI thus was able to sidestep any potential controversy it might generate as an initiative favoring a single region of the city and the relatively advantaged population living there. In the opinion of a CCSI administrator, neither the CCD nor the School District, wary of controversy, made a big announcement about the new region because they wanted to "put off the conversation" about comparison to other parts of Philadelphia (July 2005).

In fact, CCSI was worrisome to many, both within the school administration and the community at-large. Because CCSI would bring resources to schools that were already relatively advantaged and high-performing in one of the most affluent areas of the city, it was, in the words of one long-time education advocate, "a lightning rod" for controversy over equity (July 2005). In the words of one district administrator, CCSI's message could be interpreted as: "... offering basically to a white, middle-class population things we have not

⁶⁵ The "Big Three" are Greenfield, Meredith, and McCall Elementary Schools.

offered to families of color who are poor, but since we want these [middle-class] people to stay here, we're going to offer this, but too bad for you other folks" (July 2006). Disagreement within the School District was chiefly between those who shared the CCD's theory of action (largely from the upper echelons of the administration) and mid-level staff members who believed that the district should give precedence to equity over urban revitalization. Many of these staffers were attuned to the injustice that a number of local organizations, especially within the African American community, believed this initiative represented.

In response to those concerns, some district staff, along with local elected officials, pushed for a broader definition of "Center City" that would include significant numbers of low-income students in the new region. One district administrator recalled, "We struggled with what the region would look like around these equity concerns" (July 2006). A resulting compromise, in fact, did expand the boundaries defining Center City so the demographics of CCSI schools now match the demographics of the school district as a whole, ensuring that many low-income students would benefit from the initiative too. This, and positioning the initiative as a "pilot project" to be replicated in other regions, satisfied many of the critics, especially those from within the district.

CCSI also proposed changes to the school transfer policy that would privilege Center City families, which raised further concerns about equity.⁶⁶ Again, this was controversial

⁶⁶ Historically, students from across the district have applied for admissions to a number of high-performing elementary schools in Center City. Before CCSI, any spots left over after all students from within a school's catchment area had enrolled were opened up to students from all over the city who participated in a lottery process. Under the new policy, admissions priority is as follows: 1) catchment area students; 2) students transferring under the federal NCLB mandates; 3) students from within Center City; 4) students from the rest of the district. This makes it very difficult—if not impossible—for students from outside of Center City to achieve access to desirable elementary schools in the region.

because the region was home to some of the city's highest performing and most desirable elementary schools. When the transfer policy met strong objections, the district backed off, amending the policy by adding specific language giving priority to students transferring under NCLB and making other provisions for equity. Still, the two SRC commissioners appointed by the mayor were not satisfied. Explaining her "no" vote at an SRC meeting, Commissioner Sandra Dungee-Glenn argued that as long as educational opportunities across the district varied so widely, any changes to the transfer policy were premature:

I get so many calls in my office from parents who are struggling and sometimes almost in tears about trying to get access to schools that they believe are better. That's stressful.... The real answer is to make all of our schools quality schools... and, until we reach that goal, try to keep the doors as open as possible across the district.⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the policy passed, with Commissioners later agreeing to a resolution promising the equal provision of educational options across all regions.

Despite these changes, equity concerns remain. The decision to give priority in admissions to Center City elementary schools to Center City families has made it difficult, if not impossible, for students from outside of the area to use the regular transfer process to gain access to some of the city's most highly regarded elementary schools. Though the district has not made data available on student placements through either the NCLB or traditional process, several district administrators confirmed that no students from outside Center City achieved admissions to the "Big Three" schools through the normal transfer process (Personal Communication, March 2006; Jan. 2007). In addition, while professional families bring many important

⁶⁷ Snyder, S. (2006, February 16). Neighbors Get An Edge in Getting into Center City Schools. [Electronic version]. *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

One district administrator recalled, "We struggled with what the [Center City] region would look like around these equity concerns."

resources to public schools, efforts to attract these families can serve to marginalize other parents and students in the schools, raising further concerns about a policy that identifies certain families as more desirable than others.⁶⁸ This negative, if unintended, consequence can contribute not only to conflict and divisions within a school community, but can serve to fragment groups interested in public education citywide.

Discussion

With respect to civic capacity in Philadelphia, CCSI represents both a catalyst and a challenge. The initiative usefully increases the number of organizations and constituencies that are involved with, and invested in, the city's schools. At the same time, as evidenced by the controversies surrounding the initiative from its inception, CCSI also has the potential to exacerbate inequalities across the district and serve as a divisive force within the city.

There are a number of ways in which CCSI could contribute to the development of civic capacity around education in Philadelphia. For example, the establishment of a formalized partnership between such a powerful business organization as the CCD and the School District of Philadelphia generates new energy for the schools and draws other organizations (such as Center City businesses and cultural institutions) into relationships with them. By attracting professional families to the schools, CCSI also helps bring in a constituency whose resources—in the form of social, political, and economic capital—allow it to be an effective advocate for public education. The partnership between the School District and the CCD is also symbolically significant: in working with the district, the CCD shares its prestige and credibility and helps generate much-needed public confidence in the district. Finally, CCSI links the schools with the future of the city, showing that schools can play a role in

helping the city remain economically viable. By emphasizing the interconnection between the fate of the city and its schools, CCSI could contribute to the development of civic capacity by bringing new urgency and purpose to the task of improving the schools.

CCSI also has the potential to impede the development of civic capacity in Philadelphia for several reasons. First, the initiative focuses only on Center City and the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to it rather than on the city as a whole. Second, CCSI positions a sector of the city's population (professional families) as more important to the city's future than other sectors. Inherently divisive, this positioning impedes the creation of a sense of common fate among all families in the School District. For low-income constituencies, the initiative reinforces their distrust of the district and its policies. Third, though CCSI has been modified in the face of concerns about equity, it nevertheless directs resources towards schools and neighborhoods that are already relatively advantaged, thereby exacerbating inequities across the city. Finally, by operating largely outside of the public eye so as to avoid controversy, CCD's partnership with the School District sacrifices transparency and public trust for expediency. CCSI may have moved forward quickly as a result of decisions made behind closed doors, but, as we have noted previously, such lack of transparency is a barrier to open collaboration and the development of a shared vision for the schools.

Youth Organizing— Capacity at the Local Level

The Philadelphia youth organizing groups, Youth United for Change (YUC) and the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), are two of the oldest youth organizing groups in the country, working since 1991 and 1995 respectively to develop youth as leaders who can positively effect change in their schools and communities. Organizing youth in low-income, predominately African American and Latino areas of the city, both YUC and PSU have garnered national reputations for their work, and

⁶⁸ Cucchiara, M. (2007). *Marketing Schools, Marketing Cities: Urban Revitalization, Public Education, and Social Inequality*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Pennsylvania. (Call No. L001 2007 .C963).

its members are often called upon to speak at national events. Their activism has had an impact on district policies and practices, bringing new programs and resources to the schools where there are chapters. At the time of the state takeover of Philadelphia schools the two youth organizing groups jointly led the opposition to privatization, especially the large role proposed for Edison Schools, Inc. Their activities, in conjunction with others, pressured the newly appointed SRC to reduce the role for Edison Schools, Inc. and to adopt a diverse provider model. Since then, these groups have continued to work together, and on their own,

to develop campaigns to bring small high schools to their underserved neighborhoods in coordination with the School District's small schools initiative.⁶⁹

The story we present here is about YUC's and PSU's campaigns for small schools. The campaigns take place in West Philadelphia, Kensington, and Olney, three middle- to low-income neighborhoods, each with a unique racial and ethnic makeup. Each neighborhood has had its own distinctive history of development and each is positioned differently than the other in terms of the city's plan for revitalization.

Despite their differing characteristics, each of the three neighborhoods sits in the crosshairs of city-wide tensions over the balance between economic growth policies and equity. In attempting to draw attention and resources to low-resource communities and improve schools for the lower-income populations that

⁶⁹ The School District of Philadelphia announced an interest in "smaller schools" as early as 2002, but its Small Schools Transition Project was formally launched in early 2005. In Philadelphia, the School District considers a school of 700 students or less as small. YUC and PSU, more in line with national thinking about what constitutes small, have pushed for no more than 100 students per class, or schools of 400 students or less (9th-12th). Since 2002, Philadelphia has created 27 "small" schools, of which 23 have less than 500 students.

reside there, these youth groups are fighting the prevailing trend to invest in neighborhoods largely to attract and benefit middle-class professionals, frequently at the expense of the populations that already reside in these areas. Their challenge is to build the influence and political will to make their neighborhoods and constituencies a priority, even in the face of diminished belief among the city's business and elite leadership in strong social welfare policy.

The low-income communities in which these youth live and go to school have traditionally been considered a detriment to educational attainment, not a force for improvement; and the youth themselves have traditionally been the object of—not participants in—reform efforts. The resistance community leaders have experienced to their efforts to improve public schools has been frustrating and reflects the disregard in which they have been held. One community leader reflected, for example, that "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" (August 2005).

Despite the uphill battle, the youth organizing groups have seized the School District's small schools initiative as a means to bring positive change to their neighborhoods, and have worked to mobilize public and district support for making their own neighborhoods, and the lowest-income constituencies within those neighborhoods, a priority for the proposed small high schools. Working jointly with adult organizers, youth leaders are striving to recruit other youth to their ranks and mobilize religious and neighborhood leaders, local political leaders, and citywide allies from the school reform community. By advocating for improved educational opportunities for themselves and future generations of students in their neighborhoods, the youth organizing groups fill what one local politician identified as a "civic gap" or a lack of adult advocacy for educational reform. "In the wake of no parental involvement," this politician

By advocating for improved educational opportunities for themselves and future generations of students, the youth organizing groups fill a "civic gap"—a lack of adult advocacy for educational reform.

commented, “that’s when the students stepped up to speak for themselves, because nobody was speaking for them” (June 2006). Indeed, the activism of the PSU and YUC members has inspired a number of local elected offi-

“Action! The word of choice for small schools’ future. This is what we need. A large mass movement of students, parents, teachers, supporters, and believers.”

—*Student Activist, January 2005*

cials, religious and neighborhood leaders, and parents to support their campaigns. As one local leader stated, “My children should be able to get a quality education right in their neighborhood schools! ...I shouldn’t have to send my kid cross town! Really!” (June 2006). In addition, many community adults viewed the campaigns to improve the local high schools as more than an educational reform project. As one community member reflected, “A high school that works is important to the health of any community, and how can you be one with this total dysfunctional symbol of uncaring?” (June 2006). The local high schools’ inability to engage young people and keep them in school was a major contributor to high rates of truancy, in the mind of this community member. Truant adolescents were damaging to the long-term well-being of the neighborhood because they contributed to the perception that these neighborhoods were not safe.

However, because they represent low-income neighborhoods, the youth groups do not have social networks at their disposal that can trade off resources and prestige for a district commitment to their goals. The youth groups have focused on creating a web of allies at the community level and within the citywide advocacy and school reform communities through the Education First Compact and the Philadelphia Cross City Campaign. However, their networks, for the most part, do not encompass citywide business and civic leaders. Several

Philadelphia foundations, however, have supported the youth organizing, and these foundations have helped to build the power of these groups by providing them with both resources and increased legitimacy. In contrast to the CCD, which is positioned among the city’s elites, the youth groups are not “sitting at the table” with key city and district leaders, and, also in contrast to the CCD, they find themselves disadvantaged in the district’s environment of centralized, behind-closed-doors decision making.

As part of its capital improvement plan to build new small schools (or break existing large high schools into smaller ones), the district developed its own planning process, that, while streamlined and typically focused on quick results, was also designed to satisfy expectations for “community involvement.” The youth groups did not believe the district’s process either fully represented the breadth and diversity of their neighborhoods, nor gave students enough voice in the planning. They advocated for a broader and deeper process that would be student and community driven, and at a public action in spring 2005, won the commitment of the School District for a new planning process.

The William Penn Foundation, interested in both school reform and neighborhood development, has been among the Philadelphia foundations supporting the youth groups. The Foundation sees the school planning process as an opportunity to further its dual objectives to improve schools and neighborhoods. Using its national connections, the Foundation located an architectural design firm, Concordia, LLC, with a track record in community planning and support for the design of innovative small schools. The Foundation brought Concordia to Philadelphia to meet the youth groups, and with the approval of the youth groups, in summer 2005 Concordia began a planning process with the two chapters that were the furthest along in their campaigns, those in the West and Kensington neighborhoods. The Philadelphia Education Fund

(PEF), a citywide school reform group and supporter of the youth organizing groups, served as Concordia's local partner. Concordia was excited by the prospect of working with youth leaders, and the youth groups were convinced that working with Concordia was their best option for ensuring that the district would collaborate with the local community to design the new small schools, as well as follow through with its commitment and actually build them.

Concordia's planning process brought multiple community leaders, residents, students, and organizations, as well as school principals, teachers and staff, and key central office staff together for a seven-month planning process. The process resulted in a comprehensive report for each site that reflected community assets and a plan for small schools. In spring 2006, the reports and their recommendations were presented to top-level district staff and the SRC, as well as shared with community and citywide supporters.⁷⁰ The reports outlined the community planning process, and a vision for the new small schools, including governance, budgeting, curricular and student support guidelines, as well as plans for facilities and potential sites for new construction. The professional quality of the reports and of the student and community presentations impressed district leaders and helped to enhance the legitimacy of the process.

Concordia and PEF staff served as advocates for the community involvement process. As a Concordia staff member explained, the

“Today was the SRC meeting and I was nervous all day because I have never spoken in a meeting this big. It was hard for me to understand the things they were talking about because it seemed to me that they were speaking in code. When my turn came up all of YUC students that were there cheered me on. It comforted me a little but I was still really nervous, but I still did it and I think I did a good job.”

—Student Activist, January 2005

purpose of the process was to shift the locus of control away from the district and toward the community:

The question on the table at the end of the day was, “Is the community involved in the district’s planning process or is this district involved in the community’s process?” From our perspective, it is the last. This is about the district participating in a much broader community planning process that includes education as opposed to the community being involved in the district’s process (March 2005).

Over time, the mobilization of a wide array of groups created the momentum necessary to gain top administrators’ attention. As one youth organizer saw it,

... the value of [the Concordia planning process] was the amount of community input that went into it so we can come and say from a planning point of view “These are the recommendations of a very diverse, large community planning process.” Do you know what I mean? So it does bring a certain element of power and backing. It wasn’t the small select group ... it was 143 people in the neighborhood that came together for a planning process (Sept. 2006).

In both West and Kensington the youth organizing groups successfully transformed the district’s narrow planning process into a broad-based effort. “Sustainability Circles” of youth, community adults, and educators, established through the Concordia process, continue to meet regularly to ensure follow-up to the planning. In the third community, Olney,

⁷⁰ www.philaedfund.org/kensingtonhs/pdf/kfinalreport.pdf www.philaedfund.org/westphillyhs/pdf/wfinalreport.pdf

mentioned earlier, YUC is building a community-driven planning process on its own. Thus far, in all three neighborhoods the youth organizing groups and their allies have succeeded in getting district funds earmarked to build new small high schools or to renovate existing facilities to create smaller secondary education options. In fall 2007, the SRC committed to purchase a site for a new small school in Kensington. Yet, the School District's commitment to this student-driven, community-based initiative is fragile and budget deficits can easily jeopardize the groups' plans. As the SRC prioritizes capital expenditures, the youth and community solidarity created during the planning processes at all three schools and continued through the Sustainability Circles at West and Kensington, serves to monitor the district and hold it to its promises.

In sum, although small high schools were a part of the School District's reform initiatives, the youth organizing groups mobilized neighborhood, citywide and political allies to ensure that their neighborhoods would be prioritized in the district's small schools plan, and that their schools would reflect an inclusive community-based planning process. Arguably, the West and Kensington planning process altered the youth organizing groups' outsider status. Recognized as effective community leaders, these two youth organizations have moved toward being productive collaborators with the School District. Their work on the small schools campaign has also had positive community effects. Already the mobilization efforts have helped keep the needs and aspirations of a few low-income neighborhoods visible in a city where economic growth policies often trump broader social welfare goals. PSU and YUC have enhanced the ability of community-based groups to align scarce city and district resources with the needs of their neighborhoods. To keep the district focused on allocating the necessary resources and improving neighborhood high schools in a time of fiscal scarcity, however, these groups must continue to apply pressure to district leadership. PSU and YUC have become a critical force in

the city, demanding the district's engagement and respect. These youth groups hold the School District to a standard expected of all public institutions—to be transparent, equitable, and fair.

Discussion

In many ways, then, PSU and YUC contribute to civic capacity around education in Philadelphia and represent important vehicles for the cultivation of future leadership and activism. Like the CCD, they bring a significant constituency—in this case, youth—to the table in a new way. This is particularly critical because the youth involved in PSU and YUC represent low-income communities that have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes and have had little say over what happens with respect to the schools in their neighborhoods. Youth organizing also brings community groups from these neighborhoods into the school reform conversation, making an explicit connection between schools and neighborhood development. In the current market-oriented environment, these constituencies have an important role to play in making sure that resources are distributed equitably rather than being directed disproportionately towards neighborhoods targeted for revitalization.

YUC and PSU clearly build civic capacity at the local level: they have energized their neighborhoods around public education; they have helped students and community members develop leadership skills; they have kept their neighborhoods visible and a priority for small schools; and they have pushed the district to work with them as collaborators. However, they participate in a limited set of citywide networks, consisting primarily of school reform groups. This means the youth organizing groups are not part of larger conversations about the city's future, thereby limiting their ability to build civic capacity. As well, their focus on specific neighborhoods, albeit low-income neighborhoods, holds similar problems for civic capacity as the CCD's focus on

PSU and YUC have become a critical force in the city, demanding the district's engagement and respect.

Center City. In both cases, the groups involved are using their power to work for group or constituency interests, with the assumption that education policy represents a “zero-sum game” of sorts, with neighborhoods divided against each other in the contest for resources. In other words, neither the CCD nor the youth groups are working toward a negotiated vision that addresses the need for both economic growth and equity.

BAEO — Elevating School Choice

The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) is a national organization with several local affiliates. With African Americans making up two-thirds of the city’s public school population,⁷¹ the Philadelphia BAEO is one of its most active branches. The mission of BAEO is to enhance school choice for low and moderate income Black students and to inspire their parents to become effective educational consumers and advocates for their children. The national BAEO is known for advocating a range of means to enhance school choice, including the controversial voucher strategy. The Philadelphia chapter primarily champions policies favorable to the expansion of charter school options and state-sponsored corporate tax credits.⁷²

BAEO represents a key constituency for public education in the city. By helping parents be more informed about their options and learn to “work the system,” it provides an important service. BAEO’s adherents see their participation in its Parents with Power workshops as transformative and empowering. Pointing out that the public system has historically failed Black children, BAEO advocates for parents to

find the right educational “fit” for their children, including such public school alternatives as charter schools. A scholarship program that offers financial assistance for private education provides additional options. For many parents, often desperate and seeking alternative educational options for their children, BAEO is a source of information, insight, and tangible help.

BAEO was brought to Philadelphia through the efforts of one of the city’s powerful African American political leaders, State Representative Dwight Evans. Evans’ district encompasses middle- and working-class neighborhoods in the Northwest section of Philadelphia. Charter schools and school choice are an important part of Evans’ agenda and that of the Ogontz Avenue Community Development Corporation (OARC), which is closely associated with him and largely responsible for the revitalization of neighborhoods in his district. BAEO’s office is located in an OARC revitalized shopping center in the Northwest neighborhood.

BAEO embodies two lines of thought about school choice. On the one hand, the national organization, consistent with mainstream discourse about school choice in urban areas, promotes choice as a means of improving the quality of education. For its Black constituents in particular, BAEO promotes choice as a way of creating educational equity for low-income, urban students by providing high quality educational options, sometimes as alternatives to their low-performing neighborhood schools. BAEO’s local leaders enthusiastically share this view, arguing that enhanced school choice is a matter of equity. They also view choice, particularly the promise that choice will open up more high quality options for Black children, as key to retaining the middle class and staving off neighborhood decline, an argument that we discussed in Chapter One.

Representative Evans’ embrace of choice as a school improvement strategy is closely related to his other economic development strategies designed to stabilize communities. For example, he has sponsored a statewide initiative to

⁷¹ The School District of Philadelphia uses the term African American to refer to African Americans, Black Africans, and Caribbeans. BAEO uses the term Black to refer to these groups. For the purposes of this section, we will use the term Black as consistent with BAEO.

⁷² The state has set up the Education Improvement Tax Credit, which enables businesses to get a tax deduction for contributions to a fund for scholarships for low-income students to attend private and parochial schools.

re-establish supermarkets in low-income areas that had been abandoned earlier. He also sponsored a neighborhood-based “kid zone” in his Philadelphia district that would coordinate services for children. Like other moderate-income neighborhoods, Evans’ district in Northwest Philadelphia has experienced significant population decline in recent years, partly because its middle and working class families have left the city in search of better public schools. By pushing for expanded school choice, particularly in the form of charter schools, BAEO’s efforts reflect local community development leaders’ belief in choice as a means to retain economic diversity by keeping middle and working-class families in the area. Thus, though BAEO and CCSI target different populations—middle- and working-class families as opposed to “knowledge workers,” respectively—the two organizations share the goals of improving the quality of city life both for those tied by economic circumstances to the city and for those who were inclined to leave by giving them options for their children’s education.

Although Evans is probably BAEO’s most influential supporter, it has other important allies, such as state Senator Anthony Hardy Williams, who represents parts of West Philadelphia, and the Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition (GPUAC), a citywide organization that unites neighborhoods, business, and government. As a result, BAEO’s efforts reach beyond Philadelphia’s Northwest neighborhoods to target Black parents more widely, advocate for the establishment of charter schools citywide, and collaborate with other Philadelphia organizations on issues related to parent information and school choice.

Although the Black community does not speak with one voice in support of charters and choice, in the opinion of one BAEO board member, “BAEO has influence in the political arena for initiatives that have to do with school choice. They can speak for the Black community, [when] it comes to school choice” (May 2006). By adopting policies that are favorable to charter schools, the district gains

credibility with an influential segment of Philadelphia’s Black community.

Indeed, the Philadelphia school district’s change of attitude about charter schools from unwelcoming to, in the words of BAEO leadership, “charter friendly” is at least in part due to the group’s strong political influence on district leaders. Representative Evans’ connections to the city and state political power structure and to leaders in the city’s Black community have been critical to BAEO’s ability to advance its agenda. Evans holds a powerful position in the state capitol of Harrisburg as the Democratic Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. In 1997, Evans joined with those across the political aisle to support the Commonwealth’s pro-charter school legislation, and, in 2001, he was a strong supporter of the state takeover of the School District of Philadelphia. In addition to helping create an environment conducive to privatization and charters, Evans has also worked on the local level to increase the number of educational options in his area. He is closely associated with three charter schools in his district and historically has had a close relationship with the nonprofit Foundations, Inc., one of the private providers of school management that manages six schools in or adjacent to Evans’ district.⁷³ As one of BAEO’s board members said, referring to Evans and Anthony Williams, a state senator who is also on BAEO’s board, “They were the guys who were really behind this whole charter school movement... .Paul Vallas knows he better listen to BAEO” (May 2006).

According to its leadership, BAEO’s stance is not anti-public school. Its leaders argue that, although BAEO’s strategy is not focused directly on improving the district’s neighborhood schools, the organization believes charters can play an indirect role in bringing about improvement:

⁷³ This number represents the schools managed by Foundations, Inc. during the 2006-2007 school year.

Now, what I think will happen over time is, BAEO, and organizations like BAEO, will scratch off enough kids to build a critical mass of achievement outside the public school system, which will then put pressure on the [schools] to change. Because they're not going to change on their own (BAEO Board Member, May 2006).

In this way, BAEO's energies are focused on creating options so that parents have choices beyond their neighborhood public schools with the idea that this will improve the district as a whole.

BAEO's approach echoes the Philadelphia school district's emphasis on parents as consumers. BAEO has built a reputation as an organization that can work effectively with parents through its outreach programs and workshops. Aiming to help parents take advantage of the options open to them, BAEO provides tools and resources that strengthen Black parents to be advocates for their children's education. On the basis of BAEO's reputation, the district contracted with the organization to find and train parent volunteers to staff school-based Parent Welcome Desks. Working with the public schools in this way gives BAEO access to the low income parents that they were having difficulty reaching through word of mouth, thus serving their mission.

In order to help parents take advantage of the options open to them, BAEO provides tools and resources that strengthen Black parents' advocacy for their children's education.

BAEO has also focused on mobilizing parents for political action in support of school choice. In 2006, BAEO organized parents to lobby in Harrisburg to increase the tax credits businesses can earn when they contribute to scholarship funds that help low-income children to attend private schools. Its staff and parent activists also participate, on occasion, in public forums advocating for school choice.

Discussion

BAEO has inspired and strengthened the ability of many parents in Philadelphia to address their children's educational needs. It has benefited from the district's openness to charter schools and contributed to an expansion of educational options. In doing so, it has increased the number of people active in education causes and reform in the city.

Despite these contributions, however, we conclude that BAEO's activity does not support civic capacity for public school reform in Philadelphia for several reasons. Unique among the cases that we describe here, BAEO skirts the district as a target of change and aims directly at parents instead. First, while its leaders insist that BAEO is not "anti-public school," the fact remains that the organization does not think that targeting the public school system for reform is a viable strategy. That is, rather than strengthen parents' connection and ability to work to improve local schools and the local system, it has gone around the local system—using its political muscle with the state to build momentum for charter schools and expand scholarship funds to private schools for low- and moderate-income families. As a result, BAEO facilitates a process that drains support from the public schools rather than using its considerable potential as a voice for Black parents to build support and work towards system-wide improvement. In other words, BAEO promotes an exit strategy rather than direct engagement for improving the city's school system.

Of course, individual charter schools may well help to build civic capacity on the local level since they provide new opportunities for families and community members to be involved in a very immediate way. Indeed, as one civic leader noted, for some neighborhoods—and especially for Black, Latino, and Asian communities—charter schools have become an important focus of activity around education (February 2007). However, the very nature of charter schools means that the sort of capacity they help to generate is limited to the

individual school and does not benefit the children in the district as a whole. If anything, by enlisting local leaders and community members in support of particular schools, charter schools draw attention—and valuable civic energy—away from the district-run schools. And, effective and innovative as some charter schools may be, it is the traditional public schools that enroll the vast majority of Philadelphia’s students.

In pushing for greater educational options and training parents to be advocates for their children, BAEO’s efforts position parents as individual consumers in the educational marketplace, a focus that does not encourage parents to work collectively to improve the public schools for all. Thus, while BAEO may perform a number of important services around enhancing school choice and involving parents in their children’s education, its primary activities run counter to what is necessary to build civic capacity.

The Compact: Creating a “Table”

The Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), one of the city’s major school reform support organizations, convenes the Education First Compact as part of its civic engagement program. The Compact, established in 2002, brings together civic and community leaders and advocates from across the city for a monthly discussion of education issues. The Compact is supported by the William Penn Foundation, which has invested many of its resources in developing a more robust civic community for school reform.

Explicitly created to contribute to the building of civic capacity for school reform in the city, the Compact has evolved over time into a forum where the city’s nonprofit service and advocacy groups share information and learn about and discuss district policies and practices. While participants value this function, it is limited in terms of building civic capacity. Our discussion of the Compact will show that it has usefully created a “table”—a place for groups to come together—but has yet to find a

way to make that table a pivotal site for forming collaborative relationships across sectors, or for shaping policy.

The Compact’s identity and purpose have also evolved over the years. Initially, the Compact was conceived as a separate entity from PEF, with the Fund staffing the group and supporting its work. During its first few years, Compact chairs came from the larger civic community, but gradually PEF took a stronger role in guiding the Compact, and, in 2004, a PEF staff member assumed the position of chair. As we discuss below, this repositioning of the Compact vis-a-vis a major nonprofit organization with its own relationship with the School District of Philadelphia, has narrowed its original role and its mission.

During the Compact’s formative first two years, there was also a great deal of discussion about what role the School District should play, with some members advocating a formal membership and inviting a representative of the CEO to every meeting, and others arguing that School District representatives should be seen as “guests” at the meetings they attended. No formal decision was ever made, but over time, school officials have become frequent guest presenters, with the Compact participants now in the role of consumers of information about district policies and practices. Put in the position of presenting and, at times, defending its policies, School District participants are not in a collaborative relationship with other groups around the Compact “table,” a relationship that would contribute to civic capacity. As a result of the frequent district presentations, Compact meetings have devoted less and less time to prioritizing issues or coming to agreement as a group on specific issues.

To this day, Compact members disagree about whether the Compact’s mission is to forge agreement among groups about the future of

The Compact has usefully created a “table”—a place for groups to come together—but has yet to make that table a pivotal site for forming collaborative relationships across sectors, or for shaping policy.

education in the city or to share and disseminate information. Ideas about the mission also have evolved over time as leadership and staffing have changed. Interviews with PEF staff reflect the sense that the group is still searching for its mission. For example, one PEF staff-member commented that, early on, the purpose of Compact meetings was to “inform stakeholders on pressing issues in public education and to build a collective voice to influence policy in the School District of Philadelphia and beyond” (March 2007). Another believed that the Compact could serve as an “outside” group in which members can “join arms or join agendas” where appropriate. This person regarded the Compact as a place where ideas would be shared and then disseminated to the members’ various constituencies. “It was our expectation that they [members] would bring information and would be conduits of Education First Compact work back in their own worlds” (February 2007).

During its early years, when many members viewed the Compact as an action organization, the group did arrive at consensus around a small number of issues and mobilized participants to take action. For example, the Compact was an important supporter of the Teacher Equity Campaign, which advanced the notion that the School District needed to ensure equity in the distribution of qualified teachers across the system. The Compact also supported the youth organizing groups’ efforts to establish small schools, and especially helped make sure that schools in the organizers’ neighborhoods would be a priority. More recently, however, the Compact has become, as one PEF staff put it, a place solely to “bring members up to speed” on information pertinent to the district (March 2007).

PEF and many other Compact members have multi-layered relationships with the district, many holding contracts with the district for services such as curriculum development, evaluation, or after-school programming. These member organizations need to maintain smooth day-to-day working relationships with the district to be effective in their work. The

shift to Compact meetings becoming primarily informational responded to this need and has helped contain, though not altogether eliminate, controversy and conflict.

Members of the Compact currently find themselves torn between two roles: 1) as an insider, assisting the district in implementing programs and reform and 2) as an outsider involved with the broader school reform community, keeping watch on the greater public good. In particular, because many of the Compact groups have contractual relationships with the school district, the organization as a whole is ambivalent about taking public positions on issues. As early as 2004, members expressed concerns about “losing” other members who did not want to be publicly associated with particular stances. As one district administrator commented, “so many of these people live off the school district, they’re fueled, funded off the district. It would be great,” he continued, reflecting on how compromised many members with contractual relationships with the district feel, “to get a group of folks who can make decisions about what’s best for kids instead of the sustainability of the Compact or of their individual organizations” (February 2007). As this district official suggests, Compact participants are constrained by their focus on their groups’ individual issues and well-being, which means the Compact “table” is limited as a place for generating the kind of collective vision necessary for civic capacity. This observation mirrors our own, both here and in previous reports, about the effects of a contracting regime.⁷⁴

In turn, district leadership, including members of the SRC and the CEO, used the Compact as a mechanism for communicating with external groups. PEF’s credibility as a supporter of school reform made the School District’s top leadership—past Chair James Nevels and other SRC members as well as former CEO Paul Vallas—a willing guest at Compact meetings, where they shared information about pressing issues and new policies. In 2005-06, for example, a district official presented at almost every meeting. However, rather than presenting

⁷⁴ Bulkley, K. E. 2007; Gold, E. et al., 2005.

policies under development in order to incorporate Compact input, the School District reported on policies and plans (concerning such areas as student promotion from grade-to-grade or a strategy for choice within School District regions) that were either about to be presented to the SRC or were already in place.

In many ways, then, the Compact now serves as a “sounding board” that helps the district avoid controversy. As one member explained,

[The Compact is a place to] discuss issues in advance of them becoming too controversial. ... obviously it is better if it never comes to that—if the district comes to the table and solicits our input before we stand up and raise our hand and say “Why did you do that? That wasn’t a good idea” (March 2007).

The Compact serves to alert the district to issues that might generate a negative public reaction, particularly from equity-oriented constituencies, thus helping the district manage dissent and avoid negative publicity. While some Compact members expressed concern about this approach, district presentations have continued to dominate the meetings. Analysis of Compact minutes over the past several years shows a steady decline in actions or decisions, and a commensurate rise in presentations by district staff and others. Largely question and answer sessions, these presentations leave little time for participants to consider the issues, reach consensus, or take action. As a sounding board for the School District, the Compact has shifted away from the idea of being a place for groups to work with the district collaboratively on developing or revising policy.

Still, the Compact has been successful in attracting a significant group to its monthly meetings, usually between 25–40 participants from leading advocacy, service and community groups. As one PEF staff commented,

The idea was to bring together people on a regular basis, people from several

“buckets,” a loosely coupled group in terms of supporting issues for improving public education together ... higher ed, CBO, advocacy, business, and communities of faith (February 2007).

Over time, the nonprofit advocacy, service community, and education reform groups have come to dominate the Compact membership, with some representation from city agencies and area colleges and universities. For active groups, the Compact provides a valuable service, allowing them to stay current on district reform measures and share information and strategies with other organizations.

Other groups, though, have not joined the Compact “table.” There is scant business involvement, little participation by communities of faith, few neighborhood groups, and little racial and ethnic diversity among participants as well. Compact staff members continue to do outreach, especially to groups representing constituencies of color. However, its leadership has concluded that some sectors, like the business community, do not see the Compact as a place to achieve its goals. For this reason, PEF recently organized a separate group of business representatives. As one PEF staff explained,

The conclusion ... [was] that the business community thinks in a different way So we’ve made an effort to engage the business community in a different conversation... more on their terms (March 2007).

With membership limited to advocacy, service, and community organizations, the Compact’s work is largely isolated from other city issues or constituencies. In our interviews with business and other leaders throughout the city, we learned that many of them had only a passing knowledge, if any, of the Compact and its mission. Those familiar with the Compact, some of whom had even attended a few meetings, viewed the Compact’s work as marginal or unfriendly to their own concerns.

Discussion

In creating and funding the Compact, PEF and the William Penn Foundation sought to build infrastructure for civic capacity for school reform. While this case study has pointed out the many ways the Compact falls short of this vision, it is important not to overlook the Compact's major contribution, which is the creation of a "table" that brings different groups, including the School District, together to talk about educational issues. In fact, though the Compact has not spoken with one voice, it has served to facilitate the ability of member groups to meet separately with the district about policies that raise equity concerns. Member subgroups have also come together to support the district around key issues, such as city funding for education. In addition, PEF staff use the Compact network to share activities of the member groups, which sometimes challenge district policies and practices.

There are several reasons the Compact has been unable to build upon these achievements to have more of an impact on education policy or on the broader civic environment. First, the Compact developed an adaptive strategy for dealing with the School District to accommodate the complicated contractual or partner relationships many of its members have with the district, in effect, keeping the Compact from relating to the district as an equal. Second, the on-going ambiguity about the Compact's purpose has made it difficult for the group as a whole, or even individual members, to express dissenting opinions. Third, a fractured civic landscape coupled with the district's tendency to use Compact forums as

symbolic, rather than meaningful, public engagement provides an additional set of obstacles.

The Compact's inability to enlist members from outside of the nonprofit sector, particularly the city's business or civic elite, is another concern from a civic capacity perspective. Not only does this limit the Compact's impact, it also means that conversations at meetings are largely among "like-minded" people, people who work in the same general area and share the same core values. These conversations do not expose members to contrasting views or allow them to work through multiple agendas for the schools and the city. Thus the very encounters necessary for the development of civic capacity—particularly given the tensions in Philadelphia between growth- and equity-oriented agendas—are not happening at Compact meetings. For all of these reasons, and despite the good efforts of many thoughtful people, the Compact has been unable to mobilize an array of cross-sectoral actors around shared priorities for school reform.

Conclusion

Each of the groups we have discussed here is performing important work and each, in its own way, is attempting to deal with the challenges facing the city and its schools. Indeed, these cases represent only a small sample of the myriad of organizations involved in education in the city. The large numbers of individuals and groups working on behalf of educational improvement is reason alone for encouragement. A lack of energy or commitment on the part of the civic and community sectors is not the problem in Philadelphia.

But as studies of civic capacity in other cities point out: "The primary obstacles to systemic school reform are not a lack of clever ideas, indifference to education, or a lack of a willingness to try new things. The primary obstacles are political in nature; they are rooted in the fact that various groups have distinct interests that often lead them to work against each other in ways that dissipate energies and blunt reform efforts" (Stone, et. al, 2001). Our

"The primary obstacles to systemic school reform are not a lack of clever ideas, indifference to education, or a lack of a willingness to try new things. The primary obstacles are political in nature; they are rooted in the fact that various groups have distinct interests that often lead them to work against each other in ways that dissipate energies and blunt reform efforts" —Stone, et. al, 2001

analysis of the four case studies confirms this assessment and provides further insight into the challenges to building civic capacity in Philadelphia. Here we focus on four key factors.

- First, each group is operating in a certain amount of isolation from one another and/or other segments of the civic or business community. This is consistent with a long-documented tendency in Philadelphia civic life towards parochialism, such that organizations and neighborhoods focus only on their own interests and agendas and ignore broader, citywide issues.⁷⁵ As a result, individual groups' efforts are not coalescing to generate the sort of widespread resolve and mobilization the city so badly needs.
- Second—and related to the problem of isolation—organizations in Philadelphia seem to be occupying fairly extreme positions on the economic growth-equity continuum. Perhaps because there is so little cross-talk or collaboration, the groups we have described here (with the exception, perhaps, of BAEO) seem to find themselves entirely in one camp or another, either throwing their weight behind growth-oriented policies or arguing that any investment in affluent areas is inequitable. As a result, there is little discussion among these players of the ways in which both growth and equity are important or how to move beyond this divisive issue towards a shared vision of civic well-being.
- Third, our case studies show that some groups are better positioned than others to pursue their agendas with respect to the district. In particular, those groups that—like the CCD and BAEO—have political or material resources to offer the district, or who can bring the district status or prestige, have increased access to district leaders. In contrast, groups that do not have such resources—the youth groups and, to a lesser

extent, the Compact—must struggle for access or to be treated as equal partners. Because the current district context is characterized by behind-closed-doors decision making, groups that have the ability to reach leaders and whose agendas fit with the district's are much more successful in achieving their goals than groups that must rely on other approaches, such as community organizing or dialogue. Thus, there is an imbalance in the voices that contribute to setting the education improvement agenda.

- And finally, the expansion of contracting out district functions to external groups has “particularized” the role of many groups,⁷⁶ and as the Compact case study illustrates, served to greatly complicate—or even discourage—collective action around mutual interests in relation to the district and school reform.

As we have indicated throughout this report, civic capacity requires the participation of both elite and non-elite constituents, and collaboration on the part of the district. Particularly in urban areas, where low-income neighborhoods are disadvantaged in multiple ways, the development of a shared agenda, so important for civic capacity, is impeded when these voices are not heard. When this occurs, school reform efforts repeatedly lack the understanding, commitment, and participation of those who ultimately assure that school improvement efforts are carried out and reach everyone. It is this kind of reach that reforms must have in order to lay deep roots, benefit those that have historically been most disadvantaged, and meet broadly defined community interests.

Thus, though this chapter has shown that Philadelphia's students and parents have many allies across the city, the task remains to harness their energy more effectively and for greater equity.

As we have indicated throughout this report, civic capacity requires the participation of both elite and non-elite constituents in collaboration with the district.

⁷⁵ Whiting, B. (1999, May). *Philadelphia: Prospects and Challenges at the End of the Decade*. Philadelphia, PA: The Pew Charitable Trusts; Whiting, B. J. & Proscio, T., 2007.

⁷⁶ Bulkley, K. E., 2007.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Building Civic Capacity— Opportunities and Obstacles

This report was undertaken to assess the state of civic capacity for education reform in Philadelphia. As we have defined it, civic capacity involves three elements:

- First, members of the community understand that public schools are part of a larger community framework. As a result, they are willing to transcend the specific needs and interests of their own constituency or group to define a set of educational goals that represent a collective good.
- Second, the processes for setting an agenda and making decisions require the broadest possible participation, bringing citizens from different social positions and sectors of the city into agreement about shared goals.
- And, finally, these diverse participants must be mobilized to generate resources and create the momentum to forward school improvement efforts. Mobilization depends on the collaboration of the different sectors of the community, each as equal participants on a level playing field, with minority and low-income groups or neighborhoods working alongside those in positions of power.

In Philadelphia, we find both good news and bad news for civic capacity. A general sense of cautious optimism about the city and its prospects spills over to education as well. Signs of Philadelphia’s resurgence, particularly in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, are echoed in the School District by a sense of change and momentum. And the reasons behind this optimism suggest that some of the important elements that contribute to civic capacity and that support and sustain reform are present in Philadelphia.

As this report has demonstrated, however, many of the elements contributing to civic revival and educational improvements have also created serious obstacles to civic capacity and thus, to long-term, comprehensive, sustainable reform. As we have detailed in Chapter One, the focus of city leaders on the

middle class and on Center City development has divided the city against itself. While the city has never been unified, it now has embraced a market approach to revitalization that intensifies divisions among neighborhoods and exacerbates a dichotomy between improvement efforts that promote economic growth and reforms that promote equity. Groups active around education, no matter where they fall on the growth-equity continuum, are focused almost exclusively on the interests of their separate constituency or groups. This has contributed to an absence of discussion about how best to meet the needs for broader community well-being. In addition, as Chapter Two and Chapter Three illustrate, the School District, in following a market-oriented model, adopted modes of interaction with parents and community members that reinforce hierarchy, privileging the district and powerful “partners” while weakening the potential for all involved in the city schools, particularly those who represent low-income constituencies, to collaborate on an equal playing field. The district’s emphasis on “customer service” helps to meet the individual needs of families and children, but does not encourage families to participate in collective interactions aimed at system improvement. Further impeding collaboration, the district’s authoritative, top-down management style and accompanying lack of transparency in decision making leaves no means for the public to participate in setting criteria for decisions affecting education policy. In other words, public accountability, essential for building civic capacity, has been notably absent in the privatized environment of the School District of Philadelphia.

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Building Civic Capacity in Philadelphia

The challenge to Philadelphia, then, is to capitalize on the opportunities for civic capacity that have come out of the recent reforms, while taking steps to ameliorate the obstacles that we have described above and elaborated in this report. The citywide activities of parents, youth, school reform, and community groups in response to the most recent budget crisis are encouraging.⁷⁷ Their calls for greater input into budget decisions and for a role in selecting the next district CEO are testament to the desire and energy of local actors to work with educational leaders to ensure that school reform succeeds. However, if this energy and mobilization is to extend beyond the moment and beyond those leading the current effort, many more of Philadelphia's citizens need to join the effort. If this is to happen, new resources must be found to support community outreach activities.

Philadelphia is at a critical juncture in shaping its future. There is energy and momentum around the city's economic growth and an influx of young leaders who could potentially work with, rather than parallel to, a new city administration.⁷⁸ In education, the state takeover has fundamentally shaken up institutional arrangements and alignments. This means that there now exist new avenues for working with the public schools, as well as many fresh actors. As we pointed out above, contracting, partnerships, and charter schools have provided new entry points for participation with the School District and have increased the number and range of players involved in education in the city. The groups in the case studies we have discussed here are among the many organizations in Philadelphia committed in different ways to helping improve education in the city, supported by a philanthropic community committed to building informed civic and community engage-

ment around issues of public education. In other words, there is no shortage of activity around education in Philadelphia. However, these assets have not coalesced to overcome the obstacles to civic capacity that we have detailed in this report. Below, under four guiding principles, we offer recommendations for an effort to address the obstacles to civic capacity in Philadelphia:

1 Transparency

In order for all groups to work on an even playing field, they need the same information about district plans and priorities and they need to be able to evaluate what works and what does not. The School District's privatizing environment particularly needs to include some mechanism for public accountability.

- The School District must provide the public with clear and timely information about its decision making.
- The city's media must go beyond simply reporting School District accomplishments, and instead track and inform the public about district decision making. This may require in-depth investigative reporting of the stories behind district-dispersed information. In this regard, the *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* has been exemplary, particularly in examining the district's contracts.⁷⁹
- The advocacy, parent, and youth groups who have already been pressing for greater transparency will have to continue their efforts, joined by others in the civic community. In order to keep lines of communication open, they should work in collaboration with, not in opposition to, the district.

2 Collaboration

Civic capacity assumes that education is a community enterprise, with a broad base of groups active in charting neighborhood and

⁷⁷ This report did not closely examine school-based involvement of parents or others, but focused on the broader district context for reform.

⁷⁸ Whiting, B. J. & Proscio, T., 2007.

⁷⁹ The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* is an independent nonprofit news service that produces a quarterly newspaper.

citywide directions committed to strategies for improving education. Civic capacity requires all those involved to see beyond their own interests to create agendas that serve all citizens. In Philadelphia, as in many other cities, leaders working for the well being of a city often do so from a limited perspective, based on their own constituencies, political or economic ideologies, or geographic boundaries. If the city is to move forward and find solutions that address economic growth and equity, more collaboration and less competition is essential.

- The new mayor has an opportunity to provide leadership that will bring together key actors from different sectors to devise a broad-based agenda for revitalizing the city. This agenda must be coherent and go beyond the self-interest of each group. Representation is needed from civic, business, and community groups, as well as district leadership, front-line educators and their unions.
- The School District must participate in the broader urban agenda, joining more fully and deliberately in forums on housing and neighborhood development, health and welfare, and economic development across the city to discuss the city's future.
- The School District must rethink its relationship to the public and devise practices for interaction that facilitate collaborative relationships. Its top administrators and governing board need be open to meaningful exchange with a range of groups that goes beyond symbolic events, public relations, or customer service.
- The School District should continue to encourage involvement, innovation, and entrepreneurial efforts of external groups interested in working with it, without creating a competitive climate that discourages collaboration.
- The city's coalitions working for educational reform must expand to include the lead-

ers of sectors concerned about economic growth. The philanthropic community has supported coalition building and can exert pressure to increase collaboration across issues.

- Civic groups, the district, and city government should look to other cities for models of collaboration and mobilization for school reform, such as El Paso, Mobile, and Boston, which all offer useful lessons from which Philadelphia could learn.

3 Inclusiveness

While any public school district, and Philadelphia is no exception, has to consider how to serve the broad range of students that make up its population, planning for doing that rarely includes representatives that reflect that diverse population in real decision making. Our study has pointed out how, in the current School District configuration, elite and powerful groups are more likely to have their agendas recognized than those that are less powerful. The resulting reforms, then, lack wide commitment and often overlook the needs of low-income, minority communities; or they have negative consequences for these communities. Including these groups in planning is crucial for broad-based civic capacity.

- The School District and any governing or planning group that is established to forward an agenda for public education in the city must include groups that range across interests and lines of race and class. Any "table" that is established must represent low-income and less powerful constituencies, including parents and youth, and take their concerns seriously; it also must be a space in which groups can disagree or air grievances without fear of exclusion.
- More powerful groups must expand their limited agendas, as well as share their resources of influence and capital, to incorporate broader goals.
- Community-based groups that have been successful in coming to the table around

issues such as housing and community development need to include education on their agendas and contribute to shaping an education agenda.

- The philanthropic community can encourage inclusiveness in its guidelines for funding.

4 Mobilization

Civic capacity, as the scholars who developed the concept emphasize, involves the power “to get things done,” not power “over” others to force action.⁸⁰ In Philadelphia, we unfortunately have a long history of planning—summits, forums, task forces—and reports that have not resulted in action. We believe the city—its government, business, labor, higher education and other leaders, community-based groups, advocacy organizations, parents, and students—can use their power to get things done and move forward with broad public participation.

- The mayor and other city leaders must move beyond crisis mode when dealing with the public schools and concern themselves with education as a long-term endeavor. Efforts in Philadelphia to bring people together around a common table must also include follow-through.
- The mayor or other entities that take on education reform should look to other cities for examples of successful mobilization. What worked elsewhere may not necessarily work in Philadelphia, but successful examples demonstrate that mobilization for school improvement is possible, while offering lessons and principles for Philadelphia to draw on in devising locally appropriate strategies.

- Lasting school reform requires not just a group of elites making decisions, but mobilization of the wider citizenry through *ongoing* means such as community organizing, neighborhood forums organized by recognized community associations, and the like. This broad-based, inclusive strategy develops the deep roots necessary for gaining commitment that will sustain the work over time. The philanthropic community must see these efforts as worth funding and nurturing in, and of, themselves. They provide the sustenance for civic capacity that, in turn, generates genuine, comprehensive, enduring reform.

As we have shown in this report, Philadelphia faces unique challenges to building civic capacity. Yet without civic capacity, it will be difficult—if not impossible—for the School District of Philadelphia to motivate and fund reform, assure the stability of the schools, sustain reform efforts, and guarantee that all students have access to high-quality teachers and programs and thus the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success. Building civic capacity requires weathering conflict, negotiating compromises, and ensuring that all voices are heard. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, we are all bound together in an “inescapable network of mutuality.” To a large degree, the success of current and future efforts to improve the city’s schools will depend upon Philadelphians’ ability to recognize and build upon the many ways in which our destinies are intertwined—with one another and with the city as a whole.

⁸⁰ Stone, C. N. (1989). *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

Appendix Data and Methods

This study used qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, document review, and case studies. The research was conducted in three overlapping phases:

- First, we conducted dozens of interviews with local civic actors over a several year period. Our design included two rounds of interviews with civic, political and community leaders, once early in the reform period, and then later on, as reforms were implemented. In total we conducted interviews with 67 leaders, 12 of them twice. We used the categories developed by Stone, et al., in their 2001 multi-site study of civic capacity to select our interviewees, making sure we had a number of representatives from each of the sectors Stone and his co-authors identified as critical to civic capacity: General Influentials, Education Program Specialists and Community Based/ Advocacy leaders.⁸¹ (See Chart A below for the distribution of interviewees among these categories) These interviews focused on respondents' views of the reform and civic engagement in the schools and, in the second round, their understanding of the relationship between the schools and the city's future economic development.
- Second, we supplemented these with an additional set of seven interviews conducted between fall 2003 and fall 2006 with district administrators, two of them twice, to see how they characterized the relationship of the district to the public. We also drew on 4 interviews from our general research to inform this research question. Chart B below includes a description of these interviewees. We also observed the bi-monthly meetings of the School Reform Commission, where we took fieldnotes that included a focus on the Commission's practices for interacting with the public. These interviews and

⁸¹ Within the category of "Influentials" were city, state, business, civic, religious and media leaders; "Education Program Specialists" included those from the School District of Philadelphia as well as from among groups external to the district; "Community Based/ Advocacy" leaders were those from community and advocacy groups.

observations allowed us to examine how the district's changing institutional structure shaped its relationship with the public.

- Third, we conducted four case studies of local organizations involved in education issues to explore the "on the ground" dynamics of civic activity around education reform. Chart B below provides a snapshot of the diversity of these groups in a range of dimensions, including constituency, geographic orientation, theory of action, agenda, and interests. Two of the case studies, of the Center City District and the youth organizing groups, were part of larger studies. Each involved dozens of interviews with those directly involved in the efforts of each group, observers of their efforts, and District personnel familiar with their efforts. Observations of the activities of the groups were made over several years. In both cases, key program documents were reviewed. The Center City District study spanned 2004-mid-2006 and the youth organizing 2003-2006. The case study of BAEO was based on research conducted between July 2005 and August 2006. We conducted individual interviews with 11 people affiliated with BAEO, including top staff, board members and parents, as well as a focus group with 5 parents. We also attended and observed 5 BAEO events (one of which was in 2003), including parent workshops. We have been participant observers of the Education First Compact since its inception in 2002, and between then and February 2007, observed 39 meetings. In June 2006, the Philadelphia Education Fund agreed that the Compact could serve as a case study, and we supplemented observations with interviews of 7 participants, and 7 other non-participants who were familiar with the Compact's work. We analyzed Compact minutes from meetings spanning February 2003 to February 2007. In addition to the work detailed here, we drew on data about the case studies from our interviews with

business, labor, higher education and other leaders in the city.

- Also, we collected and reviewed relevant press clippings throughout the period of the study.

Interviews were semi-structured and generally took from one to one-and-a-half hours, and were later transcribed. Observations were one to two hours and recorded as fieldnotes. Using a qualitative software program, Atlas ti, to code the different data sets, we were able to identify perceptions about the city and public education, and activities and actions that build or impede civic capacity both within each data set and across the data corpus. We also compared our case studies across key dimensions (including theory of action, constituency, means of gaining access to the district, and goals), enabling us to identify the factors associated with an organization’s success or failure in achieving its agenda.

Analyses occurred in three major stages: the first analysis contributed to a paper presented at the Urban Affairs Association in 2004 (Simon, E., Gold, E., Mundell, L., Riffer, M., & Cucchiara, M.), the second in a 2005 Research Brief, *Time to Engage? Civic*

Participation in Philadelphia’s School Reform (Gold, E., Cucchiara, M., Simon, E., & Riffer, M.) and the third in the current report, *A Philadelphia Story: Building Civic Capacity for School Reform in a Privatizing System* (Gold, E., Simon, E., Cucchiara, M., Mitchell, C., & Riffer, M.).

The analysis for this report applied the conceptual framework for civic capacity established by Stone and his colleagues which posits the main elements of civic capacity to be: a multi-sectoral group, including low-income groups, which can form a shared set of interests or agenda, and an inclusive mobilization to forward those interests or agenda. Our analysis, which examined civic capacity for school reform in an era of privatization, also drew on the work of Minow⁸² and Sclar⁸³ which provide frameworks for examining the public’s role in monitoring public resources in a market economy and from Katz’s work on the late 20th century turn towards market solutions to social problems.⁸⁴

⁸² Minow, M., 2003.

⁸³ Sclar, E. D., 2000.

⁸⁴ Katz, M. B. (2001). *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Chart A: Interviews

Sector	Number of Interviewees	Male	Female	White	Black	Latino	Asian
General Influential-General	15	7	8	9	6	0	0
General Influential-Business	10	5	5	9	1	0	0
Education Program Specialist-School District of Philadelphia	9	3	6	4	4	1	1
Education Program Specialist-General	12	4	8	4	8	0	0
Community-Based/Advocacy	10	6	4	3	2	4	0
General Influential-City Government	5	3	2	3	2	0	0
General Influential-State Government	3	1	2	1	2	0	0
General Influential-Media	3	1	2	2	1	0	0
Total	67	30	37	35	26	5	1

Categories were determined by the position of the interviewee at the time of the interview.

Chart B: School District of Philadelphia Supplementary Interviews

Sector	Number of Interviewees	Male	Female	White	Black	Latino	Asian
School District of Philadelphia	11	3	8	4	6	0	1

Chart C: Case Studies

	CCSI	Youth Organizing	BAEO	Compact
Type	Partnership between business improvement district and the School District of Philadelphia	Student activist groups	Local branch of national nonprofit organization.	School reform organization.
Constituency	Families and children in the School District of Philadelphia's Center City region	Students at three neighborhood high schools	Citywide low and middle-income African American parents/students	Citywide advocacy and nonprofit support organizations
Geographic orientation	Center City region of the School District of Philadelphia (downtown & adjacent neighborhoods)	Three low and lower-middle income neighborhoods	Citywide (part of a national organization)	Citywide
Interests/agenda	Downtown revitalization, middle class attraction, expansion of school choice.	Equity & access to high quality educational opportunities as part of neighborhood improvement.	Equity, opportunity, educational choice	Equity, civic engagement
Primary Theory of Action	If professional families are provided with enhanced school choice, they will choose to remain in the city rather than move to the suburbs for better schools. This will benefit the city as a whole by bolstering its tax base and attracting businesses.	If youth leadership and adult alliances are formed in the neighborhoods and across the city, the district will be pressured into committing to break down large schools into small schools, equitably distribute resources and be accountable to the local community.	If high-quality school choice options increase and low-income Black parents are both educated about making school choices for their children and financially able to take advantage of those options, then choice can be a lever for greater equity in educational opportunities.	If a group of diverse public school stakeholders can come together around shared issues, they can create demand for both equity and quality in district policies and support the district by pressuring government or other relevant external entities. ⁸⁵

⁸⁵ There was significant variation among members of the Compact about the group's purpose, but this was the most generally shared theory of action.

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Authors

Eva Gold, Ph.D. is a Founder and Principal of Research for Action. She has conducted local and national research in the areas of parent, community, school relations, community and youth organizing for urban school reform, civic capacity and school reform, and home and school literacy and numeracy. Recently, she was a research director of the *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* project, a multi-year initiative funded by the William Penn Foundation and other foundations. Eva is a lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, where she helps to prepare graduate students for their dissertation research. She has a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Elaine Simon, Ph.D. is a Senior Research Associate at RFA. She is an urban anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research and evaluation in the fields of education, employment and training, and community development. She is Co-Director of Urban Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences and adjunct Associate Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. She has carried out research on school reform in cities across the country focusing both on district and community-based efforts. Most recently, she has focused on understanding the civic environment that supports equity and forward momentum to improve public schools, building on her broad understanding of the connections between the urban context and urban school reform. She has a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Urban Studies from Temple University.

Maia Cucchiara, Ph.D. is a Consultant to RFA. Her doctoral dissertation, *Marketing Schools, Marketing Cities: Urban Revitalization, Public Education, and Social Inequality*, examined the link between urban revitalization and school reform. A former Spencer Urban Research Fellow, she has been an instructor in the Urban Studies Program and the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, as well as a teacher and community organizer. Maia's areas of interest include urban education, education policy, urban sociology, and school reform. She received her Ph.D. in Education and Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania.

Cecily Mitchell is a Research Assistant with RFA. She is interested in school interventions to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for students who have been marginalized within the educational system. During her senior year of college, she conducted research that examined how student academic engagement is mediated by school rules and norms, together with race and gender, in a 2nd grade classroom. An article based on this research is forthcoming in the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*. Prior to coming to RFA, she worked in a school-based behavioral health program in a Philadelphia public elementary school, working collaboratively with parents, students and teachers in the development of effective classroom interventions for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. She has a B.A. in Psychology from Wesleyan University.

Morgan Riffer is a Research and Technology Assistant at RFA. Her work at RFA includes research and technology assistance for the projects *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*, an evaluation of the New Jersey Graduate Teaching Fellows Program, and an evaluation of the Pennsylvania High School Coaching Initiative. Publications include: *Contracting Out Schools: The First Year of the Philadelphia Diverse Provider Model* with Katrina Bulkley and Leah Mundell. She has a B.A. in Anthropology from Haverford College.



RESEARCH for *ACTION*

3701 Chestnut Street 6W
Philadelphia, PA
19104

ph 215.823.2500
fx 215.823.2510
www.researchforaction.org