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Lessons from a Federal Grant for School Diversity: Tracing a Theory of Change and Implementation of Local Policies

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Abstract: In 2009, the U.S. Department of Education made grants to eleven school districts under the Technical Assistance for Student Assignment Plans (TASAP) program. The impetus for the program came from the Council of Great City Schools, which was concerned that school districts would respond to a recent Supreme Court decision by dismantling policies with integrative aims. We analyze the design of the TASAP program, its implementation by the USED, and how the grantee districts used the funds, and find that TASAP's effects were mixed. Five districts represented examples of "successful" implementation, using the grant funds in ways that prioritized diversity. Six

demonstrated “subverted” implementation, using funds in ways that met local needs but moved away from the diversity goal.

Keywords: implementation; diversity; federal policy; politics

Lecciones de un Programa Federal para la Diversidad Escolar: Delineando una Teoría de Cambio e Implementación de Políticas Locales

Resumen: En 2009, el Departamento de Educación de Estados Unidos financió once distritos escolares usando el programa de asistencia técnica para los Planes de Asignación Estudiantil (TASAP). El impulso para el programa provino del Consejo de Escuelas de Ciudades de Gran Tamaño, que estaba preocupado que los distritos escolares podrían responder a una decisión de la Corte Suprema desmantelando políticas con objetivos de integración. Analizamos el diseño del programa TASAP, su aplicación por el depto de Educación, y cómo los distritos utilizaron los fondos, y encontramos que los resultados de TASAP fueron mixtos. Cinco distritos representaron ejemplos de aplicación “exitosos”, en el uso de los fondos en formas que priorizaban la diversidad. Seis demostraron una implementación “subvertido”, usando los fondos de manera que satisfacían las necesidades locales, pero alejadas de la meta de diversidad.

Palabras clave: aplicación; la diversidad; la política federal; política

Lições de um Programa Federal para a Diversidade Escolar: Esboçando uma Teoria da Mudança e Implementação de Políticas Locais

Resumo: Em 2009, o Departamento de Educação dos Estados Unidos financiou onze distritos escolares usando o programa de assistência técnica para os Planos de Atribuição dos estudantes (TASAP). O impulso para o programa veio do Conselho de Escolas das Grandes cidades, que estava preocupado que os distritos escolares poderiam responder a uma decisão da Suprema Corte desmantelando as políticas para objetivos de integração. Analisamos a concepção do programa TASAP, a implementação pelo Departamento de Educação, e como os distritos utilizaram os fundos, e encontramos resultados misturados. Cinco distritos representaram exemplos de implementação “bem sucedida”, na utilização dos fundos de maneiras que priorizaram a diversidade. Seis mostraram uma implementação “subvertida”, usando os fundos para satisfazer as necessidades locais, mas muito longe da meta de diversidade.

Palavras-chave: aplicação; diversidade; política federal; política

Lessons from a Federal Grant for School Diversity: Tracing a Theory of Change and Implementation of Local Policies

In its 2007 decision *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* (PICS), the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated policies that considered individual students’ race in assigning them to schools. Somewhat paradoxically, the Court also upheld the idea that government has a compelling interest in maintaining diverse public schools and reducing racial isolation in schools. After the decision, school districts’ leaders were uncertain about what kinds of diversity policies remained acceptable. To assist districts that sought to maintain or design voluntary integration efforts that would survive constitutional scrutiny, Congress authorized the Technical Assistance for Student Assignment Plans (TASAP) grant program. The TASAP grants, awarded to eleven school districts, represent a new direction for the federal role in education and social opportunity, as the supporter of local diversity initiatives rather than the enforcer of desegregation mandates over local resistance.

Three research questions guided our analysis of TASAP and its implementation, with the goal of expanding knowledge about local responses to federal incentives in general, and about

federal diversity policy in particular. First, what was the theory of action of TASAP, and did grantees' use of the funds tend to confirm that theory of action? Second, under what circumstances did grantees' work actually contribute to adopting or refining student assignment plans that had diversity as a goal? Finally, what general lessons can be drawn from TASAP to inform future federal efforts to encourage diversity and equity through technical assistance and/or by other means? We conclude that TASAP had both an implicit and an explicit theory of action, combining symbolic and material elements. Explicitly, the point of the program was to provide funds to school districts for developing new student-assignment policies or refining existing ones. Implicitly and symbolically, TASAP indicated the federal government's continued commitment to diversity as an educational goal, even after the Supreme Court limited districts' options for pursuing that goal. However, the federal government sent mixed messages on diversity. Although TASAP identified diversity and prevention of re-segregation as priorities, initial federal legal guidance after *PICS* went further than the Supreme Court had to discourage using race in student assignment. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education administered TASAP in a non-directive way that did not provide it with much leverage over how grantees spent the funds; it is also unclear that federal officials would have used more leverage if they had had it. Local politics and priorities led some TASAP districts to enact new student assignment policies that did not actually include diversity as a goal. (We examine local politics in more depth in a companion paper, Frankenberg, McDermott, DeBray, & Blankenship, 2015.) TASAP projects that built districts' capacity to implement existing policy were likelier to emphasize diversity than projects that included enactment of new policies.

We begin this article with a brief summary of the TASAP grant program, before grounding our study in existing research and establishing our conceptual framework. We then analyze TASAP's theory of action, and the federal government's implementation of the program. Following the program to the local level, we analyze local participants' understanding of TASAP, and how those understandings played out in terms of the goals they set. We conclude by discussing broader implications for policy and further research. In this article, we do not have an analytic focus on the link between local implementation of TASAP and district diversity or other outcomes, because our data collection ended with the refinement or enactment of local student assignment policies. However, where public data about how the local SAPs affected enrollments is available, we have included it. Our overall purpose is to deepen understanding of the dynamics of implementing equity policies across levels of government, and to identify challenges and possible lessons for policymakers for future efforts for design and administration of a federal role in technical assistance for student assignment policies.

Overview of TASAP

In order to understand the origins of the TASAP program, it is necessary to begin with the *PICS* decision. In *PICS*, five Supreme Court justices found that Seattle's and Jefferson County's race-conscious student assignment policies used individual students' race to determine which school they would attend in ways that violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Four justices also found that any use of race for student assignment was unconstitutional. Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote a separate concurrence that argued race was a permissible component to include in a multi-factor diversity index, and that individual students' race could be considered if districts had tried all other options without success. To diversity advocates, Kennedy's concurrence looked like an invitation to experiment with new approaches to student assignment that would achieve diversity – perhaps even in race-conscious ways.

Legislatively, TASAP was a \$2.5 million increase in the budget for the federal Equity Assistance Centers, within the U.S. Department of Education, earmarked for technical assistance for

student assignment plans. The Request for Proposals (RFP) to which applicants responded appeared in the *Federal Register* on July 22, 2009. The deadline for proposals was August 21, 2009. Twenty-one districts and one charter school submitted proposals, of which eleven were funded. Funds were to be spent within two years, though most of the grantees requested and received no-cost extensions to continue their work after the original end date. (Details of the grantees' proposals and activities appear in McDermott, DeBray, Frankenberg, Fung-Morley, & Blankenship, 2014.)

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Desegregation and Diversity

Decades of research concludes that schools whose enrollments are predominantly students of color have fewer educational resources such as middle-class peers, stable, qualified and experienced teachers, and advanced curricular offerings (Linn & Welner, 2007). Students who attend these segregated minority schools have weaker academic outcomes, including graduation and persistence to higher education. These effects have long-lasting impacts: for example, they limit students' opportunities for higher-paying employment (Johnson, 2014). Racially isolated schools – whether minority or white – also limit the opportunity of students of any race to benefit from diverse schools, which have a range of positive outcomes such as lower racial prejudice and higher likelihood to live and participate in integrated settings as adults (Mickelson & Nkomo, 2012). Despite evidence of its harms, school segregation is on the rise. Some of the increase is due to the end of desegregation orders in the south (Reardon et al., 2012). In addition to the end of judicial oversight, the rise of market-based types of school choice, district boundary lines, and stubborn patterns of residential segregation all help to explain these patterns of segregation in public schools.

Contemporary desegregation and diversity efforts must contend with changed demographics. At the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*, almost 90% of the U.S. population was white, and the vast majority of non-whites were African Americans, particularly in the South where the most desegregation cases occurred. Today, the public school enrollment is in its last years of a white majority, and Latinos outnumber African Americans as the second largest group of students nationally as well in many regions of the country including the South (Frankenberg & DeBray, 2011). This diversity is spreading beyond central city districts and transforming many suburban districts as well. As illustrated by many of the TASAP districts (see Appendix A), large districts have incredibly complex diversity, many with no majority group but several groups that comprise a substantial share of the enrollment and a rather small percentage of white students. Other districts may be newly diverse and dealing with increasing segregation without prior experiences of a generation or two ago. Finally, particularly in places where metropolitan areas are highly fragmented, districts may experience rapid transition from largely white student enrollment to majority nonwhite within a relatively short timeframe. There are a number of implications of these trends for desegregation efforts. As a conceptual and technical matter, devising desegregation policies is more complicated with multiple groups, and it can be difficult to muster political will to maintain commitment to desegregation in this changed demographic context (Frankenberg et al., 2015).

Within this context, our analysis of TASAP and its local implementation was informed by prior research on policy instruments and the assumptions behind them, and by research on local variation in policy implementation.

Policy Instruments

In a 1987 article, McDonnell and Elmore identified four categories of policy instruments: mandates, inducements, capacity building, and system changing. Our analysis in this article focuses

on mandates and inducements. In later work, Schneider and Ingram (1990; 1997) and McDonnell (2004) added the category of “hortatory” policy, which depends upon generating information and making it public. Policy makers’ choices among available policy instruments reflect their assumptions about what causes the problems they are trying to solve, and also about the causal chains that will enable policies to solve or ameliorate the problems (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; McDonnell, 2004; Mintrop & Sunderman, 2009). Policies also have symbolic dimensions, in that they express an official commitment to a particular goal, or a particular way of understanding a problem (Gusfield, 1981). *Mandates*, which for several decades were the policy instrument of choice for school desegregation, assume an “essentially coercive or adversarial relationship” between enforcers and enforcees (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 141). However, later work notes that mandates may actually affect local policy choices from below rather than above, if they inspire or complement politics on the ground (Welner & Oakes, 2005). Policy makers who use financial *inducements* believe that the targets of the policy will make the desired changes in order to get the promised funding, and that a variety of possible responses are acceptable (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 142). Hortatory policy instruments rely on persuasion and information production, rather than incentives or sanctions (McDonnell, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1997). McDonnell (2004) says that hortatory policies “can buy officials time and make it appear that they are doing something when no definite solution is available, or when political constraints prevent more direct intervention” (p. 44).

The goal of educational equity has posed particular challenges for policy makers. Mandates have had some positive effects, particularly where they changed local policy agendas (Welner, 2001). When this happens, the initial opposition sometimes gives way to acceptance and support of the previously unthinkable policies (Smith, 2004). At the same time, the initial opposition to mandates imposes a high political cost, so inducements often emerge as a preferred alternative. However, inducements present a “central problem” for officials: deciding “how much variation policymakers are willing to tolerate in production of things of value, and how narrowly they are willing to prescribe how money is to be used and what is to be produced” (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987, p. 142). Because federal equity-promoting policies are intended to serve the interests of constituencies who are often neglected in local politics, such as students of color, language-minority students, and students with disabilities, leaving the use or interpretation of such policies up to local governments is likely to limit the extent to which they have their intended effects.

In the case of federal Title I spending and the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), which was intended to fund local integration efforts, local school administrators initially diverted the funds away from the statutory goals of aiding disadvantaged students and supporting integration (Murphy, 1971; Hodge, 2012; Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, 1986). Tighter regulations reduced these diversions (Hodge, 2012; Peterson, Rabe, & Wong, 1986).

The advocates who promoted TASAP faced a particularly difficult set of legal and political constraints. TASAP was an incentive program that also served the symbolic purpose of expressing continued federal commitment to diversity as a goal. It used federal funds to support pro-diversity local initiatives, and also potentially to build local capacity for diversity policy. In implementing TASAP, the U.S. Department of Education deferred to local decisions about how to use the funds. Funding districts to seek technical assistance, rather than working through the Equity Assistance Centers, suggested an interest in system-changing: shifting the power to set the diversity agenda from the federal to the local level, within legal constraints.

Local Variation in Policy Implementation

Because our goal was to understand commonalities and variation in local TASAP projects, our conceptual framework is based on ideas from the literature on policy implementation. In

contrast to early research that sought to determine when policies were likeliest to come out looking like their designers intended (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979), later work accepted local variation as inevitable, and even as beneficial. The RAND Change Agent Study of federal programs designed to support innovation in local schools found that effective implementation strategies promoted “mutual adaptation” of a project and its setting (McLaughlin 1990, p. 12). It is particularly important for federal or state governments to be flexible about implementation when the process spans levels of the intergovernmental system, because state and local officials have authority independent of that of higher levels of government, and also must balance federal demands with their own constituents’ needs (Stoker, 1991). The assumption behind mutual adaptation is that people who work locally know best what suits their local context, and those at the top need to appreciate that programs and policies are likelier to succeed if they accept that local implementers’ changes to a policy or program may improve it (McLaughlin, 1987).

Complicating local implementation, governments communicate policies in multiple ways. In Spillane’s analysis of mathematics and science curriculum reform in Michigan, the state department of education was encouraging teachers to have their students work with problems that had no obvious answers, to discover their own solutions, and to communicate in ways that emphasized mathematical principles, not just procedures and algorithms. At the same time, though, the state assessed students’ performance with old-fashioned multiple-choice tests, signaling that nothing much had changed (Spillane, 2004). Faced with ambiguity, local actors’ interests shape their interpretation and implementation of policy. Lin (2000) points out that “absence of appropriate policy activities” indicates a gap between local staff’s “purposes and values” and those of the policy makers (38). She categorized the implementation of federally required prison education programs as either “successful,” “subverted,” “neglected,” or “abandoned” (p. 57), depending on the extent to which prison staff members understood the programs as supporting their values of communication and solidarity. A policy like prison education programs is likeliest to be implemented most successfully where it interacts positively with a value that local staff believes is central to their work and to meeting their other needs.

Conceptual Framework

Our analysis of TASAP draws on two of Lin’s categories, successful and subverted implementation. Because of the time frame in which we collected data, we focus on the immediate outcomes of the TASAP projects – new student assignment policies or refinements of existing policies – rather than on the policies’ ultimate effects for students and schools. We define “success” as a TASAP project that led to enactment of a new student assignment policy (SAP) that emphasized the goals of promoting diversity and preventing re-segregation, as outlined in the *Federal Register* and supported by the CGCS, or refinement of an existing policy with those goals. We identify TASAP implementation as “subverted” where districts used the federal funds in a way that did not prioritize diversity or prevention of re-segregation. Subverted projects met some other local need, such as cutting costs or responding to demand for neighborhood schools, while downplaying the *Federal Register* goals.

We anticipated some subverted implementation because we knew that local school boards and administrators have faced multiple other new challenges in addition to the long-standing task of improving educational diversity, quality and equity (McDermott et al., 2012; Frankenberg et al., 2015). The financial crisis of 2008 and ensuing recession led to a sharp drop in tax revenue and thus to pressure to reduce spending. Many urban school districts are also struggling with declining revenues and decreasing enrollments. Finally, as we will discuss further, federal oversight was minimal and the program’s objectives were somewhat ambiguous, which means that a district’s departing from the programmatic aim of attempting to create diverse schools may not always have

been an *intentional* subversion. Subverted implementation contrasts with mutual adaptation because local goals crowd out federal priorities, rather than being balanced with them.

Our other pair of analytic categories was the emphasis on “change” or “continuity” of student assignment policy (SAP) in TASAP projects. We classified as “change” the six proposals from districts that intended to use TASAP funds as part of a process of completely changing their student-assignment policies by redistricting, changing the extent of school choice, or redefining “diversity” and then reorganizing student assignment around the new definition. We classified as “continuity” the five proposals from districts that intended to refine implementation of an existing student-assignment policy, build a new data set that could inform change at an unspecified future point, or focus on closing a few schools (see Table 1).

Table 1
Scope and Diversity Orientation of TASAP Projects

	Continuing Policy	Changing Policy
Succeed	Evangeline: goal-focus on magnet schools; result-new magnet school eligibility policy and marketing plan Hillsborough: goal-Build GIS tool; result—built GIS tool for future use Jefferson County: goal-refine implementation of SAP; result-built internal capacity for SAP SFUSD: Refine new SAP; result-built internal capacity for SAP	Champaign: goal-redefine SAP; result-SAP with multifactor SES index
Subvert	Orange: goal-Close schools; result-achieve unitary status	Boston: goal-redo whole SAP; result-SAP with no diversity criterion Portland: goal-Reconfigure high schools & balance by SES; result-closed one high school; created new magnet program; adjusted attendance zones and ended out-of-zone choice--but SES range of high schools stayed about where it was Rockford: goal-New SAP; result-neighborhood schools St. Paul: goal-New SAP; result-No explicit diversity criteria when SAP enacted; set-asides for students from some neighborhoods when SAP implemented San Diego: goal – analysis of diversity/ re-segregation/ student achievement, including “new transportation schema.” Result-not all funds spent; 5-year plan for getting more students into schools close to home.

We assumed that the extent to which a district’s TASAP project carried out its goals as articulated in the proposal, and the extent to which the project actually advanced the diversity goal, would be a result of interaction between the project’s emphasis on change or continuity and the extent to which local decision makers viewed diversity as consistent with rather than contrary to their other goals and interests.

Research Methods¹

The Overall Study

The analysis in this paper draws on a larger study of the TASAP grant program and its local effects, undertaken with funding from the Spencer Foundation. The eleven TASAP grantees are a diverse group from across the country, including single-municipality and county school districts with a wide range of enrollment and demographics (see Appendix A). The TASAP grantees clearly are not a representative sample of U.S. school districts. Compared with the nation as a whole, they are relatively large, more likely to have been under a court order to desegregate, and more likely to have used or still be using some form of “controlled” school choice for student assignment.² The TASAP districts provide what sociologist Kristin Luker (2008) has labeled as a “data outcropping:” a case or set of cases that provide an unusual opportunity to study a particular phenomenon. The sites are chosen to represent the larger phenomenon, rather than to be statistically representative of a general population (p. 103). The TASAP districts are all places that have engaged in various ways with issues of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in schools, either through court-ordered integration or locally-adopted integration diversity policies, or both. Because the federal government’s 2011 guidance about pursuing racial diversity in K-12 schools identified controlled choice policies as one legal and effective means to achieve diverse schools and the USED is now conducting technical assistance regarding this guidance around the country, these TASAP districts may be useful examples as other districts may consider implementing such policies.

Rather than engaging with the details of each community’s experiences, this paper presents a cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989) of implementation patterns across multiple TASAP districts. We used qualitative case methodology to allow us to explore what the TASAP activities were, why particular policies were adopted, and how both diversity and the purposes of the federal grant itself were conceptualized by various policy participants (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

Data

Each author took responsibility for data collection in at least one grantee district, including documents and interviews. Depending on when we could establish access and the timeline of TASAP activities in each district, field research began in summer 2010 and ended in fall 2013.

Documents. We began by assembling available documents related to the TASAP work, including the districts’ proposals, expert reviewer comments on proposals obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, and relevant public documents from the districts like policy texts, survey results on student assignment, and products of public meetings. We also read and compiled information from local media coverage of student-assignment policy changes. We used these documents to understand the districts’ overall policy agendas, who important actors were, and other significant context. These documents were especially important to our fieldwork given that we had limited time in any particular district, and helped us to triangulate our interview data described below. They also helped us identify possible interview subjects and whether there were any particular topics to probe during interviews. Our analysis did not try to discern the extent to which the local staff who wrote the TASAP proposals had been sincere when they claimed to share the goals outlined in the *Federal Register*. We took at face value what was in the proposals, and in our fieldwork

¹ Much of this section is adapted from Frankenberg et al. (2015).

² In controlled choice, families apply to enroll in their preferred schools, and students’ final assignment to a school depends upon how their enrollment will affect the school’s overall demographics.

we did not see evidence that districts had only pretended to care about diversity for the sake of receiving funds. Even in the districts we classify as “subverters,” interviewees identified diversity as a goal that had value.

Interviews. In ten of the eleven districts, we conducted interviews with key participants. In San Diego, the eleventh, the TASAP coordinator did not respond to repeated requests for an interview, and in the absence of district cooperation, we chose not to conduct interviews there. Our San Diego analysis is based on district documents and press coverage. Within each of the other 10 districts, we used purposive sampling, beginning with each district’s TASAP coordinator and, in most cases, school board, and then following up with selected others like consultants and community activists as necessary to understand each district’s process. The exact number and combination of interviewees differs across districts because of differences in the complexity and organization of the TASAP projects.

Interview questions included the reasons the district applied for TASAP funds, the extent and nature of local understandings of diversity, local needs served by the TASAP work, the local support or opposition to grant activities, and local political coalitions. We used two common semi-structured interview protocols, one for district officials and employees, and another for participants who were not formally affiliated with the school districts. Overall, we interviewed 95 individuals, 89 in districts and 6 at the federal level (see Table 2).³

Table 2
Interviewees

District	District officials (current or former)	School board members (current or former)	Outside consultants	Community activists and parents	Interest groups	Others	Total
Boston	2	1		6		4	13
Champaign	4	3	3	1			11
Evangeline	6	1		4			11
Hillsborough	1	3	1				5
Jefferson Co.	5	2				1	8
Orange Co.	2	1					3
Portland	7	1		5			13
Rockford	3	1		2			6
San Francisco	4			2			6
St Paul	4	2	1	6			13
Non-district interviewees					3	3	6
TOTAL	38	15	5	26	3	8	95

Note: Others include non-educational governmental officials; non-district “other” interviewees included participants in the design and implementation of the TASAP program at the federal level.

Initial analysis of all interview data was conducted by the researcher responsible for fieldwork in that particular district. The first three authors did the full coding of the four interviews

³ See appendix B for more information about interview selection process, interview protocols, and coding details.

per site, with each author coding at least three districts. Except for one district, the author coding these interviews was not the person who had conducted the fieldwork. We initially coded using three thematic clusters derived from the project's overall theoretical framework: TASAP interaction with other policy initiatives, conceptions of diversity, and local politics. For this article, the most relevant cluster of themes was the first one. As we coded, "local theories of action" emerged as its own theme. Consequently, the first and fourth authors also recoded the TASAP coordinator interviews, as well as those with the federal-level program administrator, two representatives from the Council of Great City Schools, and one application reviewer, for the theme of "understanding of the purpose of TASAP" to identify local "theories of action". As we coded interview transcripts, we developed and adapted themes as we found emerging evidence.

TASAP at the Federal Level

TASAP's Enactment and Theory of Action

After *PICS*, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF), which frequently litigates racial discrimination cases, and the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), which represents large, urban school districts, both looked for ways of supporting districts that wanted to maintain diversity in student assignment policies. Candy Olson, a Board of Education member in Hillsborough County, Florida, and a CGCS Executive Committee member, recalled, "we started thinking and talking about what are we going to do, looking at the Supreme Court...how do you address it in a way that respects the Constitution, but also respects the needs of the society to have a very diverse educational system?" CGCS legislative director Jeff Simering recalled believing that technical assistance was going to be "absolutely necessary" post-*PICS* because districts were confused about their options (Interview, 12/2/11). Working together, the LDF and the CGCS obtained technical assistance funding from the Ford Foundation.

CGCS also went to the House of Representatives subcommittee with jurisdiction over the budget for the Title IV Equity Assistance Centers, seeking to include public funds for technical assistance in the 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act. As Simering said, "we did our thing, you know, up on the Hill, and discussed this with both the authorizers and the appropriators, and I think they seemed to be in fairly easy agreement that providing some help for some folks immediately after the decision seemed an appropriate thing to do so that's how it came about" (Interview, 12/2/11). Even though the timing of the RFP makes it easy to assume that TASAP was an early Obama administration civil rights move, the impetus for TASAP actually came from Congress (on behalf of the CGCS), not the executive branch. During the period when USED was implementing TASAP, it had other pressing priorities that included disbursing funds from the 2009 economic stimulus bill and managing the Obama administration's signature "Race to the Top" and "Investing in Innovation" grant competitions for states.

Establishing a separate grant program, rather than adding to the mission of the existing Equity Assistance Centers, was a deliberate decision. Simering said that CGCS wanted to "at least let our districts deal creatively with the issue and the particular politics they had to deal with," and "didn't want to constrain our districts" (Interview, 12/2/11). The Equity Assistance Centers, originally created as Desegregation Assistance Centers under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, have shifted in recent years to focus on a wide range of equity issues such as educating LEP students, assuring access to high-quality teachers, preventing school dropouts, and reducing over-representation of minority students in special education. Consequently, the technical expertise in the ten centers may no longer be relevant to voluntary desegregation efforts. TASAP had a narrower focus than the Equity Assistance Centers, but it also gave the districts more autonomy in deciding what kinds of

help they most needed. Earmarks by their nature happen quietly, noticed mainly by their sponsors and their beneficiaries (Rocca & Gordon, 2013). Many do not even appear in the relevant appropriations bill. Instead, they are part of the Appropriations Committee's report on the bill (Lazarus 2010), or like TASAP, in an even less visible Joint Explanatory Statement on the budget bill (Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2009, Joint Explanatory Statement, pp. 1446-1447). The first notice the office that would implement TASAP had of the program came when it received the appropriations language (anonymous federal official, interview, 2/10/12). To summarize, the TASAP enactment process was driven by the civil rights and urban education communities' urgent sense that a timely, small-scale program to which there might be a wide variation of local response was better than no response, and no alternatives for districts post-*PICS*.

If having a federal theory of action means that staff in either Congress or USED sat down and thought through what they wanted to do with TASAP, then we have to conclude that the federal government did not have a theory of action beyond a general sense that districts were better positioned than the Equity Assistance Centers to decide what kinds of diversity assistance they needed. However, a theory of change is implicit in the appropriations language; in fact, it is probably not too large a stretch to say that the Council of Great City Schools called on the federal budget to implement its own theory of action. The Council wanted to ensure that school districts would be able to continue work on diversity in some way. As Jeff Simering put it in our interview, "We didn't really want to constrain people [in districts] because we didn't know what direction they might want to go in, but we wanted them to go in at least some direction" (Interview, 12/2/11). In effect, Simering is saying here that something beats nothing.

Simering's explanation sounds very much like McDonnell and Elmore's account of the assumptions behind the use of inducements (as opposed to mandates) in education policy: that the targets of the policy are already inclined to do what the policy makers want them to, and that resources will enable them to act. The interest in local autonomy and the idea that local variation was to be encouraged, not restricted, led to the choice of an inducement that allowed districts to choose their own technical assistance providers, so long as their work served the goal of preventing racially isolated schools and/or pursuing diverse schools. Finally, TASAP had an implicit symbolic dimension. It signaled to local diversity advocates that the federal government was on their side, but because its enactment was low-profile, it also did not spark opposition from opponents of diversity or race-conscious policies.

One of the implicit purposes of TASAP was to shift the way in which the federal government interacts with school districts on diversity issues. In contrast to its history of forcing reluctant local officials to integrate their schools, and later of directly providing desegregation assistance, with TASAP the federal government endorsed the goal of diversity and financially supported technical assistance for district diversity efforts, without imposing a particular outcome or providing technical assistance itself. With eleven grantee districts, TASAP provided a potential opportunity for districts to learn from each other's efforts.

The *Federal Register* notice of TASAP lists the program's Absolute Priority as follows: Applications from LEAs seeking to obtain technical assistance in preparing, adopting, or modifying, and implementing student assignment plans that use strategies to avoid racial isolation and resegregation in their schools, and to facilitate student diversity, that are permissible within the parameters of current law. LEAs must use the grant funds to seek assistance and expertise from student assignment specialists, demographers, community relations specialists, facility and other planners, curriculum specialists and others in comparable school districts with relevant and successful experience, as well as specialists and consultants from

academia, non-profit organizations, civil rights organizations, and the private sector (*Federal Register*, July 22, 2009, p. 36175).

A few elements of a theory of action can be identified in this language. It refers to the “parameters of current law,” presumably *PICS*, indicating that the federal government wanted to help districts enact new student assignment plans or modify existing ones in ways that would survive legal scrutiny. At the same time, though, the language clearly identifies the goal of avoiding “racial isolation and re-segregation.” Recall that Justice Kennedy’s concurrence in *PICS* had suggested that some race-conscious measures as well as race-neutral efforts might be appropriate under different conditions. Here it seems as if the grant program was inviting school districts to seek USED help in pushing the bounds of *PICS* and crafting student-assignment plans that Justice Kennedy and the four dissenting justices might vote to uphold. These plans might emerge looking like those of “school districts with relevant and successful experience,” which presumably were districts whose student-assignment plans were achieving diversity and avoiding re-segregation in ways likely to survive federal court scrutiny. However, despite these lofty goals, the technical assistance was to be small-scale: lasting only two years, and costing less than \$250,000.

A TASAP grant reviewer described what he viewed as the weaknesses of the relatively small grant as an effective federal policy lever for change: “The money they [the districts] got was not going to affect policy decisions.” This reviewer believed that the federal funds would have been better spent on hiring a national student assignment and technical assistance coordinator (Interview, 9/29/11). However, this use of funds would have meant less change in the federal-local relationship on diversity issues, which CGCS had intentionally sought, and potentially less flexibility for local districts if there had been more capacity at the federal level. For local diversity advocates, TASAP combined material and symbolic benefits. The funds would enable a small group of districts to carry out work on post-*PICS* student assignment policies. Ideally, these policies could serve as models for other districts that did not receive funding. TASAP also provided a way in which the Council of Great City Schools could respond to its members’ desire for help responding to *PICS*. In contrast with earlier uses of federal funding as leverage for desegregation in resistant communities (Cascio, Gordon, Lewis, & Reber, 2008; Orfield, 1969), TASAP funds were not intended to induce changes in local leaders’ preferences, but to help them pursue a preference they had already expressed, within a changed legal environment.

In terms of our conceptual framework, the TASAP RFP was equally open to change- or continuity-oriented projects. In addition to the Absolute Priority, the RFP had a Competitive Preference Priority for districts that already had a voluntary student assignment plan. The Competitive Preference Priority seems like it would have made success (promotion of diversity) likelier than subversion of the diversity goal, but as we will show later, policy makers in districts that had diversity plans in place in August 2009 did not necessarily continue their interest in diversity for the duration of their projects.

TASAP also had potential to be a hortatory policy in that technical assistance is a form of information production (McDonnell, 2004; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1997; Weiss, 1990). TASAP provided an opportunity to develop new multi-factor or race-neutral definitions of diversity and to build examples of what kinds of policies remained possible after *PICS*. Other than one initial meeting for all grantees, the program design did not include opportunities for districts to share what they were learning, and did not fund overall documentation and evaluation. The federal government’s mixed signals on diversity also limited TASAP’s hortatory potential. When President Obama was first elected, civil rights advocates hoped for a rapid increase in federal pressure for racially diverse schooling, and for a change in the official USED position to districts as expressed in a 2008 “Dear Colleague” letter. The letter cautioned districts that any use of race in student assignment would leave them legally vulnerable. However, work on new federal guidance proceeded

slowly, and it was not released until late in 2011. By then, most of the TASAP grant projects were winding down, so the fact that the new guidance did include clear examples of permissible uses of race did not influence the TASAP work.

Federal Implementation of TASAP

The districts that received grants proposed diversity-related projects that spanned the full range of change and continuity in student assignment. However, USED's implementation of TASAP did not clarify the federal government's mixed messages on diversity or attempt to use the funds as leverage for diversity, which enabled some districts to subvert the original purpose of the program and instead pursue other goals.

Grantee selection. The RFP's one-month turnaround time for districts to submit grants fell during the summer when only year-round employees would be at district offices. This made it likelier that applications would come primarily from districts that were either already working on student assignment issues or had staff members responsible for identifying federal grants for which the districts might apply (Anonymous Reviewer, interview, 9/29/11). The short turnaround time meant that the districts did not have much time to consult with community organizations about how best to set up their local projects. In the field, this seems to have reinforced TASAP's tendency to have a low profile.

The RFP included "need," including "consideration of the complexity of the student assignment plan – the extent to which the applicant's student assignment plan involves particular challenges because of either the size of the student body that is part of the plan, the diversity of the student population that is part of the plan, or the applicant's current pattern for assigning students to schools" as the largest source of points (25 out of 100) (*Federal Register*, July 22, 2009, p. 36177). As a result of this definition of need, most (but not all) of those who were grant recipients were urban districts facing the challenge of declining enrollments and funding. According to the federal official we interviewed, USED did some outreach through the Equity Assistance Centers, but did not contact particular districts, in order to avoid the appearance that those districts had an inside track to win the funding. Finally, since all of the funds left USED at the same time, the Department did not have financial leverage over the districts once their projects began. The only financial report required was not due until the end of the project. Even if there had been multiple stages to the federal funds, it seems unlikely that USED would have attempted to use them as leverage.

USED awarded grants to eleven school districts representing a range of size, demographics, and region (see Appendix A): Boston, MA; Champaign, IL; Evangeline Parish, LA; Hillsborough County (Tampa), FL; Jefferson County (Louisville), KY; Orange County (Orlando), FL; Portland, OR; Rockford, IL; St. Paul, MN; San Diego, CA; and San Francisco, CA. Nearly all of the eleven awardees had histories of voluntary integration, and presented evidence that local officials wanted to preserve integration in some sense despite *PICS*. The applicants that did not receive funding, are even more varied than the awardees, including city districts, metropolitan districts, suburbs, and a charter school (see Appendix A for list).

Evaluation of TASAP proposals. We obtained the TASAP proposals, reviewers' evaluations, and score sheets from the ED through FOIA requests. Of the 22 applications, 17 were assessed by 3 reviewers and 5 were assessed by 2 reviewers. The USED staff faced the challenge of developing a program around several lines of a Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying an appropriations bill, rather than a statute (which would have been more typical, and most likely would have contained more language about legislative intent). The selection criteria in the RFP are less specific than the language that describes the grant program. The "Need" criterion mentions that the diversity of the population included in the plan will be considered, but the criteria do not mention racial isolation or, indeed, race (*Federal Register*, v. 74, no. 139, pp. 36177-78). The grant reviewer we

interviewed said that the language in the RFP meant there was some ambiguity about what projects to fund: “If you are a reviewer, you can take a position that we want to fund diversity plans, or you can take the position that you would fund any number of plans” (Anonymous Reviewer, interview, 9/29/11). Compared with the likely results of a mandate, this may not seem like a great deal of impact. However, it is consistent with McDonnell and Elmore’s analysis of the implicit theory of action behind incentives: that the targets of the policy are inclined to do what the policy maker wants them to do, if they get resources in exchange for doing it.

Among the funded districts, several themes emerge. First, many describe the TASAP-funded activities as part of an overall plan to be sustained after the end of grant funding. However, Orange County, FL, San Diego and Jefferson County, KY were criticized by some reviewers because they were deemed likely to carry out their projects regardless of whether they got funding or not. Second, reviewers described some funded proposals, including Hillsborough’s and Boston’s, as potentially too ambitious and not focused enough. Third, reviewers approvingly cited the use of research they felt relevant and appreciated reference in the proposals to districts’ past experiences.

In general, the non-funded districts scored high on project need, but earned lower marks for whether the project was well thought out and/or whether the district would be able to carry out the project (districts that only budgeted a small amount of staff time were routinely marked down). This result supported the hypothesis that the quick turnaround may have favored more-advantaged districts with better grant-writing operations and other internal capacity. The district with the tenth highest score, Walpole (MA), was not funded while two districts with lower average scores, Champaign and San Diego, did receive funding. Walpole applied with the METCO city-suburban choice program, proposing to diversify their suburban school district through increased METCO participation. We have been unable to learn why Walpole’s proposal was not funded. Except for the two lowest-rated proposals, the readers’ final scores were all within a ten-point range, demonstrating a fair amount of consensus.

Communication with grantees. TASAP was an unusual sort of federal program. As the USED staff member we interviewed noted, “It’s rare that we say to people, we are going to give you money because we don’t know what you should do, but you should find out from someone else what you should do” (anonymous federal official, interview, 2/10/12). Although the RFP cited the goal of avoiding racial isolation and re-segregation, it did not specify whether the plans supported by the technical assistance could use race or whether they were prohibited from doing so. According to this interviewee, USED received numerous inquiries from districts that were trying to understand what types of plans to propose that might receive funding. USED emphasized fidelity to the appropriations language in its communication with districts, but eschewed providing its own interpretation of what the language meant. According to the official we interviewed, this is the department’s usual role. Typically, Department staff “hew really closely to the specific language” of the statute (or appropriation): “You repeat the language over and over again, because it’s not our job to interpret for the public what Congress wants. That’s the language Congress wrote, that’s apparently what Congress wants” (Anonymous federal official, interview, 2/10/12).

It appears that in the absence of explicit, clear guidance from ED during the TASAP application stage and the duration of TASAP grants, confusion remained even among the eleven districts that were funded. As the federal official said, “it wasn’t like we could say, ‘here is the money, here’s what the Department thinks, take it or leave it, go for it.’ It was in my mind really a great opportunity but if you couldn’t grasp that opportunity as a district, then we weren’t providing any help. Just the money.”

Overall, USED’s implementation of TASAP was consistent with CGCS official Simering’s statement that his organization wanted federal assistance to help districts “do something” in the area of diversity, while giving districts a great deal of room to decide what that “something” should be.

The RFP favored larger, better-staffed districts that already had diversity-promoting voluntary student assignment plans. As will be seen in the next section of this paper, it turned out that having a history of promoting diversity through student assignment did not necessarily signal a continued commitment to diversity as a student-assignment goal.

What Happened in the TASAP Districts

We turn next to the questions of what kinds of policies were adopted or advocated for by the TASAP districts during the period we studied, and what kinds of technical assistance the grants actually supported. The federal government's non-directive implementation of TASAP enabled district leaders to emphasize local priorities other than diversity.

Local Understandings of the Purpose of TASAP

Based on our analysis of the applications received through FOIA, the 22 applicants had somewhat divergent understandings of the grant's purpose, in terms of what diversity meant and how funds could be used (see Table 3).

Table 3
Kinds of Technical Assistance Included in TASAP Proposals

Policies/Activities Pursued	Total funded	Total unfunded
Diversity Definition ¹	5-R 8-S 2-U 3-L 1-G	10-R 1-U 3-S 1-A 1-L
Redistricting Plan (Rezoning)	6	3
"School Choice" Plan (Magnet Schools)	7	7
Public Engagement	10	8
Program Staff	8	9
Translational Services	3	1
Web services	2	2
GIS Consultation	4	4
Legal Consultation	1	3
Transportation/Busing	2	1
Travel to DC Grantee Meeting	5	3
Equipment, Supplies and Printing	9	4
External Program Evaluation	5	4
Other kinds of consulting	5 ²	8 ³

¹ A=Academic Diversity, E=Equity, G=Geographic Diversity, L=Language Diversity; R=Racial Diversity; S=Socioeconomic Diversity.

² Including Grant writing, Academic consultant, Consultant to develop tracking system, Technical consultant, & Market research and management consultant; coaching the school board.

³ Including Academic experts on desegregation plans, Land-use management and environmental consultants, Magnet schools of America, marketing consultant & professional development for 4 schools, Urban Planner/Demographer to assist in the preparation and analysis of parent perception surveys, gain parent input in the formation of plan details, and to assess parent understanding of the implemented plan, Technology training and project managing consultant, & Development and installation of the new METCO, Inc. web-based Enroll Edu data-management software system and provide user training and system maintenance.

The types of diversity that districts were seeking were quite varied, with proposals often mentioning multiple types of diversity. Approximately half of the applicants mentioned racial diversity as a goal, including districts that were under court order to desegregate at the time they applied. A similar number of districts specified socioeconomic diversity, while other types of diversity included geographic, linguistic, academic and unspecified diversity. Many applicants understood that they could apply for technology and software to build internal capacity to facilitate student assignment, and most of the funded districts budgeted for community engagement and outreach activities. Some districts applied for funds to support activities incongruent with the intent of TASAP, such as professional development led by federal officials themselves, or environmental building assessments. Given the emphasis on compliance with *PICS* and other federal court decisions, we were surprised that attorneys were relatively infrequent providers of technical assistance in TASAP districts. Table 4 summarizes our analysis of what the districts actually did with the funds, drawing on interview findings. Among districts that won funding, the most popular kind of technical assistance was data analysis, particularly geospatial analysis that links demographic and educational data to neighborhoods (see Table 4). Five districts proposed student assignment scenarios involving diversity indices, but of these, only San Francisco, Jefferson County, and Champaign are actually currently using them.

Table 4
Summary of Grant Activities

	Boston	Champaign	Evangeline Parish	Hillsborough County	Jefferson County	Orange County	Portland	Rockford	San Francisco	St. Paul
Diversity Definition ¹	E	S	R	S	R, S, G	R	S, L	E	S, L, E, A	R, S, L
Redistricting Plan (Rezoning)	X			X			X	X	X	X
“School Choice” Plan (L for Limit Choice; E for Expand; X for revise)	L	X			X		L	L	X	L
Magnet Schools			X		X		X			
Public Engagement	X	X		X			X	X	X	X
Translational Services	X								X	
GIS Consultation	X			X			X			X
Legal Consultation						X				
Transportation/Busing									X	
Other kinds of consulting	X ²			X ³	X ⁴			X ⁵		
Refining/adjusting administration of SAP			X		X				X	

¹ R= racial diversity, S= socioeconomic diversity, G= geographic diversity, L= language diversity, E=equity, A=Academic

² Grant writing

³Academic consultant

Types of Change and Continuity in the TASAP Districts

As explained in this article's Conceptual Framework and displayed in Table 1, the eleven TASAP districts' grant-funded work falls into two general categories: projects that emphasized continuity in diversity-oriented student assignment policies and used the grant funding to refine or implement specific parts of them, and projects that included changing a district's SAP. The "continuity" projects proved to be less susceptible to subversion of the grant's diversity goals. Because changing an SAP means re-opening previously settled questions, the pressures of local politics and priorities other than diversity weakened policy makers' commitment to diversity in student assignment. These decisions represent "subverted" implementation in terms of the federal theory of change, because other local needs and issues crowded out the initial diversity purpose of the grants. These other needs and issues were genuine; subversion of the federal diversity goal indicates that local decision makers decided that some other goal was more important once the grant activities got under way.

Continuation projects. Of the five districts with continuation projects, four were TASAP successes, in the sense that their projects retained diversity as a goal (refer to Table 1). Evangeline Parish, one of two grantee districts that were still under a desegregation order, used its TASAP funds for an effort to reduce segregation at its two high schools with magnet programs, with the ultimate goal of being released from its order. The district hired a private contractor to work on student recruitment and coordination support for two years, from late 2009 to September 2011. The contractor's primary duties included setting up and running a marketing program to publicize the magnet programs, creating a lottery admission system for the magnet programs, and making logistical and systematic improvements to the two magnet programs. While initial enrollment changes to the programs were modest, in 2012, Evangeline Parish's desegregation order was lifted by a federal judge. The district continues these efforts as part of its Student Opportunity Program.

Jefferson County (Louisville) used the funds to convert their processing of transfer requests from a paper-based system to an electronic one. Its TASAP director described the new system as "the opening door for a bigger technology tool that we hope to be able to use that will allow parents to go in and use the system" (Interview, 3/28/12). Because the district has been in court several times defending its post-*PICS* SAP, it was perhaps especially important for them to focus on getting the details of their policy right. Preliminary analysis of the revised student assignment policy finds that the district has a slightly increasing share of students enrolling in JCPS and modest increases in what was quite low racial segregation of students (Frankenberg, 2015).

San Francisco's Board of Education used its TASAP grant for intensive community engagement to develop the specifics of a policy whose broad outline had been adopted in 2009. These included improving access to choices for disadvantaged families, building internal demographic analysis capacity to be able to adjust the plan, marketing the plan, instituting online applications, and monitoring its effectiveness. The district's own analysis shows that the number of racially isolated schools (which they define as 60% or more of one race) has risen since the implementation of the new assignment policy (SFUSD, 2014). According to a recent newspaper article, school district leaders fault the choice process as being a driver of rising segregation and are contemplating other options to try to reduce isolation (Smith, 2015).

In Hillsborough County, there was already an active magnet program in operation, as well as a strong school board commitment to maintaining diverse schools. Hillsborough used its TASAP funds to hire local consulting firm SEER Analytics to develop zoning "scenarios" that would maximize diversity while also efficiently using existing space (Interview, 8/16/11). The district's final report to USED describes the usefulness of the TASAP process as helping them re-conceptualize diversity beyond White/Black composition and also to further refine their work on boundaries.

Only one district that sought to continue existing policy, Orange County, Florida, subverted the diversity goal of the grant by changing policy in a way that seems likely to reduce diversity (refer to Table 1). Its TASAP proposal was to pay community engagement specialists to consult about the closing of eight small, racially isolated (majority-black) schools whose operation was costing the district \$6 million per year. While the grant was still under review, the Orange County board was persuaded by very vocal opponents, many of them teachers, to keep the schools open. At this point, the district's TASAP coordinator contacted ED to withdraw the application, but the federal officials told them to proceed (Interview, 6/22/11). Orange County then used the grant to hire two attorneys for input on a unitary status settlement agreement, and returned some funds to the US Department of Education. We view this as a subverted project because the school board was persuaded to abandon its plan to close schools. ED's response to the district's offer to withdraw its application shows that federal officials did not view this particular subversion as a problem that warranted not funding the district.

Change projects. Six TASAP districts used the grants to support development of new student assignment policies. Each had proposed redesigning their student assignment policies in ways that would pursue diversity or balance, and often make them simpler and/or more cost effective. Reversing the pattern of the districts with continuity projects, five of these subverted the diversity goal of the grants, by enacting new policies that downplay diversity as a goal (refer to Table 1). Notably, in three of the districts whose goals were subverted, prior attempts to change the SAP had ended in stalemate, indicating that the issue was politically unsettled.

In Champaign, the exception to the pattern, the one of the TASAP project evaluators clearly saw the grant as an opportunity to increase school diversity modestly, while also “recrafting” how the community understood school choice and diversity, from “something that was imposed upon [the district] as a result of the consent decree” to something more beneficial (Interview, 11/30/11). Prior to applying for TASAP and after court oversight ended, Champaign switched from a race-conscious controlled choice plan to one that was race-neutral. TASAP enabled them to successfully refine their race-neutral diversity index after using it for one assignment cycle after the end of their desegregation decree. In particular, they hired choice consultant Michael Alves to consider other race-neutral factors to include in their controlled choice algorithm (Interview, 1/4/12). This is exactly the sort of technical assistance that CGCS had in mind when it pushed for TASAP.

San Diego, which initially had an extensive school choice program, proposed to analyze the potential for reducing racial isolation by adjusting school attendance zones, develop “new transportation schema” that would maintain current diversity, and analyze racial and ethnic patterns in performance (San Diego Unified School District, 2009, p. 2). We have classified this district as an example of subverted TASAP implementation because when it spent the funds it actually adopted a new goal of transitioning to neighborhood schools. A progress report on TASAP from the district in April, 2011, which included a request to USED for a no-cost extension, indicates that changes in the district's leadership in 2010 (a new board majority and a new superintendent) had slowed progress. Furthermore, according to the report, the new board had asked for a complete change of direction from the TASAP proposal's emphasis on diversity and transportation for school choice.

According to St. Paul's TASAP proposal, the district's leaders saw existing policy as a poor fit with current demographics. The goal of its project was to actively engage the public about what it wanted in a new SAP, and to redesign its existing controlled choice plan in a way that would maintain both racial and socioeconomic diversity. St. Paul decided that the same firm that was assisting the Board of Education with strategic planning should also do the TASAP work. The consultant's analysis made the case that enrollment declines were due to families choosing other options over the St. Paul Public Schools, rather than to a drop in the number of school-age children

in the city. Channeling more funds out of transportation and into school improvement would lead to quality improvements, which in turn would attract more students and end school closures (Interview, 12/6/11). The analysis also showed that “white kids in the city can do well regardless of income, regardless of where they go to school but kids of color were really not being served by the magnets and they were spending a lot of time on buses” (Interview, 12/6/11), thus decoupling choice and diversity from achievement. The consulting firm also helped the district’s leaders explain their proposal to shift from citywide school choice to choice within six zones as a crucial part of its strategic plan for school improvement, rather than just a cost-cutting measure (Interview, 11/14/11; Interview, 12/6/11).

For several years prior to TASAP, Portland had been considering closing one or more high schools, and reducing disparities among the remaining schools’ enrollments, demographics, and academic offerings. Portland’s high schools were, in theory, neighborhood schools, but the city permitted students to attend high schools other than their neighborhood school, and many students did this. Portland’s TASAP application had identified a goal of developing a multifactor diversity index and using its high-school redesign process to “enhance diversity.” It contracted with SEER Analytics to develop the diversity index, but the actual policy that the Board of Education adopted in 2010 did not explicitly attempt to shift the schools’ diversity. The Board closed a high school campus and adjusted nearby high-school attendance zone boundaries to accommodate the displaced students. It also converted a high school to a citywide early-college magnet. Any student in the city may choose that high school, but otherwise, the Portland Public Schools ended the policy of allowing students to choose high schools outside their home zones. In 2011-12, Portland high schools’ percentages of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch ranged from 14.8% to 75.9%, about the same range as before TASAP. (www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/profiles/enrollment). Interviewees attributed the district’s non-use of the SEER diversity index to a desire to avoid political controversy and keep middle-class families in the public schools. As a Portland Public Schools administrator said, “We will do a lot of programming and policy in a way that maintains keeping the white middle class...when the white middle class say, we’ll take our kids out of schools, we will do things to accommodate that” (Interview, 8/26/11).

Boston’s TASAP focused on changing an SAP that had evolved from the district’s controlled choice desegregation policy. Many constituencies saw problems with this policy. Students often traveled long distances to school, and the district’s leaders wanted to reduce transportation costs. However, because the policy offered all students at least a chance to enroll in sought-after schools in more affluent neighborhoods, civil rights groups defended it, and efforts at change ended in stalemate (Frankenberg et al., 2015a). Boston’s original TASAP proposal was for a public-engagement process in collaboration with three civil-rights organizations, with the goal of enacting a new policy that would address problems with the current policy while preventing resegregation. This collaboration ended unsuccessfully in 2010. In 2012, an External Advisory Committee (EAC), appointed by Mayor Thomas Menino, began work with additional outside funding. In March, 2013, the EAC recommended, and the Boston School Committee adopted, a new “Home Based” elementary- and middle-school student assignment plan that went into use in early 2014 for Fall 2014 placements. Rather than diversity, the EAC’s focus was “equal access to quality.” The new policy uses an algorithm to generate a “basket” of choices for each address in the city, starting with the schools closest to a student’s home and then going further away if necessary to include at least four better-performing schools. Diversity is not part of the algorithm. Interviewees from Boston emphasized that the new SAP will get students into schools closer to home, without generating the divisive politics that led to earlier stalemates when the city tried to change the geographic boundaries of choice. The first time Boston used the new choice algorithm, for Fall 2014 school assignments, White kindergarten applicants were less likely to get into one of their top three choices of school

than applicants from other groups, but Black students were likeliest to end up in lower-tier schools. This pattern most likely emerged because higher-performing schools tend to be in neighborhoods where there are more White students, and lower-performing schools in neighborhoods with more Black students. Residents of primarily White neighborhoods often have more than three upper-tier schools in their choice baskets, so they are likely to be assigned to upper-tier schools even when they do not get one of their top-ranked choices (McDermott & Fung-Morley, 2015, pp. 36-37).

As in Boston, Rockford's TASAP dismantled the remnants of a desegregation-era SAP. Rockford had proposed using TASAP funds to redesign its elementary school assignment process after one prior redesign had been unsuccessful in 2007. The district considered different scenarios that ranged from neighborhood schools to controlled choice as well as hybrids incorporating choice and neighborhood preference. However, the business community successfully influenced the board to view diversity as unrelated to improving achievement and to adopt a colorblind, zone-based assignment policy. According to the Chamber of Commerce president, its goal was "getting people to live here," when young professionals and young families "wanted to have a better relationship with the school that they feel like they didn't get through the choice system" (Interview, 3/2/12). In a residentially segregated community like Rockford, zone-based student assignment sustains the advantage of whites and subverts TASAP's diversity goal. Three months after the Rockford board's decision, the local NAACP branch publicly questioned the new plan. They (unsuccessfully) argued that the choice plan that the district replaced was "the only way parents of color, students of color in this community, have an opportunity, even a chance, to get a good education" (Fay, 2011).

Overall Patterns

Interviewees in several districts mentioned that TASAP gave student assignment redesign efforts more legitimacy inside and outside the district, even in districts that were just trying to improve implementation efforts (e.g., had already adopted a new diversity policy). As the San Francisco director noted, "there's a lack of trust in the capacity of a bureaucratic organization within a city, [that's] why people like to think there's expertise informing and guiding the work" (Interview, 8/5/11). This statement is an example of TASAP's symbolic benefit to districts. Similarly, the theme of building public trust and credibility was mentioned by the Portland coordinator as she described how the grant supported their process of redrawing high school boundaries and programs: "[SEER] is nice to have, sometimes a point of having outside vendors so you can point to "an outside vendor did this." Because we don't necessarily elicit the most trust in the world" (Interview, 8/22/11). However, Portland did not actually use diversity as a criterion when it adjusted its high-school attendance zones.

Although the federal funding increased the legitimacy of diversity work in some districts, the USED's deference to local preferences and unwillingness to insist on a particular definition of diversity also enabled local priorities other than diversity to crowd out TASAP's goals. Without federal insistence that the work maintain a connection to diversity, other local interests and needs dominated TASAP implementation. Most of the districts had declining enrollment and decreased budgets, both of which produced pressure for simpler student assignment policies and lower busing expenses. They also wanted to retain their middle-class students and possibly attract more of them. Middle-class families tended to want neighborhood schools or something very much like them, a preference that conflicts with diversity when neighborhoods are not diverse (see Frankenberg et al., 2015). In the subverting districts, TASAP became a source of aid for post-*PICS* revisions of SAPs in general, rather than diversity-promoting ones in particular.

Several TASAP coordinators mentioned being interested in how Seattle had changed its SAP after *PICS* (Interview, 8/6/10, Interview, 11/14/11). The reference to Seattle is evidence that decision makers in the districts with subverted TASAP implementation came to see the grants'

purpose as supporting any kind of post-*PICS* change in student assignment policies, rather than focusing on changes that promoted diversity. Seattle, whose race-conscious SAP was struck down in *PICS*, had already suspended the policy before the ruling. Within months after the decision it had returned to having neighborhood high schools and was no longer pursuing any kind of diversity through student assignment (McDermott, DeBray, & Frankenberg, 2012). Like Seattle, the grantees with subverted TASAP implementation enacted new assignment plans that emphasized geography over diversity, and that responded to local needs other than maintaining diverse schools.

Discussion

CGCS's goal for TASAP was to use federal funds to stimulate and encourage local work on diversity-promoting student assignment plans. Based on our analysis, TASAP's diversity record is mixed. It did indeed support local efforts to revise and implement student-assignment policies, but only some of these efforts actually seem likely to enhance diversity and thus equity.

Theory of Action

As an inducement program, TASAP's primary, explicit theory of action was that providing federal competitive grants for work on diversity and student assignment would produce more such work than would happen in the absence of the grants. CGCS essentially had a something-beats-nothing theory of action. Its legislative staff wanted to enable school districts to "go at least in some direction" that would maintain diversity as a factor in student assignment policies. TASAP also had implicit, symbolic purposes, in that it expressed an ongoing federal commitment to encouraging local diversity efforts at a time when the legal climate was discouraging. TASAP was a subtle sort of symbol, though. Rather than a high-profile act of Congress, it was an earmark to the Equity Assistance Center budget, authorized via a Joint Explanatory Statement. TASAP provided encouragement to diversity advocates without arousing opposition from potential opponents. Thus, it represents a pro-diversity example of what some have called "dog whistle" politics (i.e., Haney López, 2014): a message audible to those who are intended to hear it, but not to others. Moreover, because many of the districts that wanted to continue with diversity as a goal were CGCS members, TASAP was a form of constituent service for the organization.

The flaw in the "something beats nothing" theory of action was that six of the "somethings" districts did with their TASAP funds lacked a focus on diversity. In terms of our conceptual framework, local subversion of the federal diversity goal was likelier than success in implementing it. Consistent with Lin's (2000) findings, local implementers' understanding of how TASAP fit with their own needs shaped subversion or success. Districts with current or past commitments to diversity could not necessarily sustain those commitments in the face of public indifference to diversity as a goal and of other pressing priorities, such as boosting test scores, implementing budget austerity, and attempting to recruit or retain middle-class and white students. Racial politics has changed since the days of massive resistance and anti-busing riots; resistance to racial diversity now looks like skepticism that racial categories still matter, or arguments that other goals (e.g., reducing students' travel time, or ensuring predictable school placements) are more important. One large challenge in evaluating federal programs that leave local leaders with broad discretion is that the line between mutual adaptation, which strikes a compromise between federal goals and local conditions, and subversion of legitimate federal goals, is blurry. Although some local school districts have been consistently supportive of diversity goals, in general, local leaders and institutions have trouble addressing equity issues (Hochschild, 2005; Welner, 2001). We believe it is worth following events in all of the TASAP districts to determine how the SAPs they continued or changed are affecting

students' access to seats in good schools and other scarce educational resources, and whether local politics become more, or less, receptive to integrative policies in the future.

Promoting Diversity

One reason for the TASAP grants' modest contribution to diversity policy at the local level was that the federal government's position on the use of race-conscious tools to pursue diversity or reduce racial isolation was ambiguous throughout the initial grant period. Federal policy sent mixed messages on diversity. The *PICS* decision had rejected Seattle's and Jefferson County's SAPs while at the same time reiterating that educational diversity is a compelling government interest. Justice Kennedy's *PICS* concurrence suggested that a majority on the Court would uphold some uses of race in SAPs, but the federal government's 2008 "Dear Colleague" letter told school district leaders to avoid all uses of race. The RFP for TASAP identified "facilitat[ing] student diversity" and "avoid[ing] racial isolation and resegregation" as Absolute Priorities (*Federal Register*, July 22, 2009, p. 36175), but USED's implementation of TASAP did not emphasize these priorities. In contrast to the mixed signals the federal government actually sent, the former director of Louisville's student assignment office described an unambiguous federal statement that diversity was important as what her district *really* needed in November 2009:

...what I really need, and what my community really needs right now, is for someone besides the local educators to be talking about the importance of vision and practicality of diversity in public education...we need to have people like the Secretary of Education, the President, and others talking about true transformation, and that is providing access and rigorous outcomes for all children in all of our schools through diversity" (remarks of Pat Todd, C-SPAN, November 13, 2009).

In other words, she sought a clearer normative and political messages coming from the "top."

Another reason for TASAP's drift away from diversity was that there was also not much pro-diversity mobilization from the "bottom up." Local officials were often preoccupied with lowering transportation costs or attempting to recruit and retain middle-class students, rather than with diversity. Civil rights organizations were generally not major participants in local TASAP projects, and there was little pro-diversity mobilization. In contrast, as in Rockford, community groups mobilized in favor of SAPs that did not have diversity as a priority. Our findings suggest that technical assistance can help districts carry out their existing commitments to diversity, but is less able to build political will. Many grantee districts were facing political, not technical, challenges. Where grantee districts' goals focused on continuing existing policies, their grant-funded work was likelier to promote diversity than when districts were enacting changes to SAPs.

Recommendations

Implementation of a future technical assistance policy would be far more effective if it were part of a larger federal strategy to support diversity, in which officials within the Education Department provided stronger and more consistent communication and were supported by the "bully pulpit" from the highest levels. Right now, there is no coherent federal strategy to support school-level diversity, although the December 2011 issuance of guidance to school districts by the Departments of Education and Justice was a positive first step. In a federal policy context dominated by policies like Race to the Top that do not make diversity a priority, it is easy for local leaders to view diversity as a distraction from real school improvement, or an optional add-on. The federal government could change this perception by building diversity incentives into multiple federal programs and priorities, which it has begun to some extent in the latter part of the Obama administration. Strengthening incentives for inter-district magnets within the Magnet School Assistance Program, and incentives for making federally funded charters less racially segregated

come to mind, or putting more money behind inter-district choice. Unless there is a clear federal commitment to diversity, local political and normative dynamics have the potential to undermine the specified reform.

Even though McDonnell and Elmore's original typology of policy instruments treats "incentives" and "capacity building" separately, experience with TASAP suggests that if an incentive takes the form of a technical assistance grant, it is likelier to have its intended effect if it builds on existing local capacity, rather than attempting to alter local policy makers' agendas. This is particularly true for relatively small grants like the ones in TASAP. Strengthening districts' staffing and infrastructure for diversity in student assignment is one form such technical assistance could take. Additionally, a future TASAP-like technical assistance program could contribute to local capacity for diversity work by facilitating connections and mutual learning among grantees, as several of our local interviewees recommended.

Another part of the local context for diversity work is school district geography and demographics. The five districts that came out of TASAP with new student assignment policies that do not make diversity a priority are all single-municipality districts. Three of these five districts (Boston, Rockford, and St. Paul) have small and declining populations of white students, and large proportions of low-income students. Interviewees in those districts suggested that efforts to integrate white students with students of other races and to achieve socioeconomic diversity are a thing of the past because of these demographics. In these districts, like other large cities, student assignment now involves not just the district, but also networks of charter schools. Where most segregation is between rather than within districts, future federal diversity grants should concentrate on building capacity to avoid further re-segregation through inter-district choice.

The CGCS and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, as well as the Ford Foundation and the National Coalition for School Diversity, can and should remain partners in thinking through future program design issues. Missing from TASAP were representatives of the Office of Civil Rights within ED, although clearly they are crucial players. The goal should be to have a coherent message about the importance of integration coming from various actors both in and around the federal government. Another role for CGCS member districts and the civil rights community is to continue and expand local-level efforts to build support for an equity and diversity agenda, so that there will continue to be politically receptive local contexts.

Implications

By itself, TASAP was just a small, relatively invisible technical assistance program. However, it is worthy of attention nonetheless. It provides an opportunity to learn about the conditions under which federal technical assistance is likeliest to produce the desired effects. TASAP's example shows that "technical" assistance works best when it is, in fact, technical rather than part of changing policy in a complex political environment. Furthermore, there is little chance of affecting policy changes unless a program is designed to anticipate local political tensions and prompt proactive school board and community planning about them, relative to desired outcomes.

For the past fifty years, policy analysts have become used to the idea that the federal government's role is to impose an equity agenda on recalcitrant local officials. Remembering his district's experience with desegregation, the head of the Evangeline Parish, Louisiana NAACP said, "you had to go through the court system. It wouldn't be for the court system, Ville Platte High would still be run down" (Interview, 10/14/11). Now the courts have pushed the federal racial equity role in the opposite direction – forbidding districts to enact the kinds of race-conscious policies that used to be federal requirements. In this new political context, the federal role should emphasize encouragement for local officials who have already expressed support for continuing racial equity work. Despite the flaws we have identified, TASAP did embody critical principles that

may, in time, prove to have laid important precedent for the future of the federal role in equity-based and student assignment policies.

We hope that further research will build on our findings about the local-level complexities of implementing technical assistance for student assignment. Racism and racial inequality are by no means dead in the United States, but the local politics of diversity are different in 2015 from what they were in the 1960s and 1970s. White attitudes are more supportive of diversity, at least in principle. People of color have more political power, and they constitute the majority in many school districts. The way forward is not obvious, but there is potential for the federal government to be a vital partner with local school districts in preventing school segregation.

Notes

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Appendix A

Table A1
TASAP Grantees and District Demographics, 2009-10

Grantee	Enrollment	Percentage of District Students who are:							
		American Indian	Asian	Black	Latino	White	Multiracial	Low-income	English language learners
Boston (MA)	55,371	0.4%	8.7%	36.5%	39.6%	13.1%	1.8%	75.6%	11.9%
Champaign (IL)	9,458	0.3%	9.7%	38.0%	7.6%	42.7%	n/a	52.7%	7.0%
Evangeline Parish (LA)	5,994	0.2%	0.4%	40.1%	0.9%	58.4%	n/a	79.2%	0.2%
Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL)	193,265	0.3%	3.1%	21.9%	28.5%	41.4%	n/a	53.7%	11.5%
Jefferson County (Louisville, KY)	98,808	0.1%	2.7%	35.5%	5.4%	50.6%	n/a	58.2%	5.0%
Multnomah County (Portland, OR)	45,748	1.3%	9.6%	12.9%	14.3%	52.3%	n/a	42.7%	10.4%
Orange County (Orlando, FL)	173,259	0.4%	4.5%	27.3%	32.2%	37.8%	n/a	50.9%	17.3%
Rockford (IL)	29,071	0.1%	3.3%	30.0%	22.8%	36.6%	n/a	73.9%	10.9%
San Diego (CA)	131,417	.39%	15.2%	11.6%	45.9%	23.4%	3.2%	64.5%	28.3%
San Francisco (CA)	55,140	0.4%	47.1%	11.0%	23.7%	10.7%	7.0%	56.6%	37.9%
St. Paul (MN)	38,531	1.8%	29.3%	29.8%	13.7%	24.4%	n/a	72.3%	36.1%

Source: NCES Common Core of Data 2009-10

Unfunded TASAP Applicants: Charleston City Schools, SC; Cincinnati City School District, OH; Clark County School District (Las Vegas), NV; Leake County Schools, MS; Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, TN; Pulaski County Special School District, AR; Scholars Academy Charter School, GA; St. Landry Parish School District, LA; Tucson Unified School District, AZ; Walpole Public Schools, MA (applying with METCO, Boston's city-suburban transfer program); and Wichita Public Schools, KS.

Appendix B

We first reached out to the TASAP grant coordinator, as listed on the application for funding, and interviewed him or her if possible. We conducted on-the-record interviews with TASAP coordinators in 9 of the 11 districts. If the TASAP coordinator recommended other school district staff for interviews because of their roles in the TASAP-funded activities, we interviewed those people. The second category of interviewee was school board members, whom we interviewed in 8 of the 10 districts where we conducted interviews. One of the remaining two was Boston, where the School Committee was less involved in TASAP because Boston Mayor Tom Menino and Superintendent Carol Johnson appointed an External Advisory Committee, which ultimately recommended an alternative student-assignment policy. In Boston, we interviewed a co-chair of the External Advisory Committee and the Menino administration's point person on student assignment. Despite repeated attempts to contact a board of education member in San Francisco, none agreed to be interviewed. However, we did observe a meeting of the board's student assignment committee during our fieldwork there, and because the district's TASAP activities involved implementation of board policy rather than developing or adopting new policies, district staff members seemed more important to interview.

The variation in how the districts used TASAP funds, and in the scope of their projects, required different selection strategies for our community-group interviews. Five of the districts (Boston, Champaign, Portland, Rockford, and St. Paul) used their TASAP funds to facilitate the adoption of new student-assignment policies. All of these districts spent part or all of their TASAP funds on public engagement, and, as a result, we interviewed at least one community-group representative such as an NAACP president or parent group leader. In four districts, we interviewed a technical assistance provider. In Champaign, we also interviewed the evaluators of the TASAP, whose findings informed the district's no-cost TASAP extension. At the urging of St. Paul district-level interviewees, we interviewed the consultant who worked with them on both data analysis and public engagement.

In the other five districts where we conducted interviews (Evangeline Parish, Hillsborough County, Jefferson County, Orange County, and San Francisco), which used their TASAP funds to build capacity to implement the policies they already had in place, or in Orange County's case, to inform the development of a unitary-status agreement, interviews focused on district staff, plus Hillsborough's consultant.

Interviews lasted in length from 30 minutes to approximately an hour and a half, depending on schedule constraints and the extent of the interviewee's involvement in and knowledge of TASAP activities. Of the district-level interviews, 19 were conducted by telephone and the rest were in person. Of the non-district interviews, 3 were by phone and 3 were in person. The vast majority of our interviewees chose to be identified by name and position. Almost all interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Initial analysis and development of coding categories included all interviews. Subsequently, in order to give all of the districts equal weight for the analysis on which this manuscript draws, we fully coded only four interviews in each of nine districts, and all three interviews conducted in Orange County, Florida. The analysis in this paper includes all ten districts' TASAP coordinators, or in the case of Rockford where current district leaders would not discuss the TASAP, the former superintendent. The other interviews coded for each district were chosen purposively. Where possible, they include a current or former Board of Education member. In Portland, no school board interview was coded because the only board member interviewed chose to be off the record. In Boston, for reasons described above, instead of a School Committee member, our analysis

includes a co-chair of the External Advisory Committee and Mayor Tom Menino's liaison to the committee. The below table provides details about the interviews chosen for detailed analysis and coding.

Table B1
Interviews Analyzed

District	Interviews
Boston	TASAP coordinator, External Advisory Committee co-chair, Mayor's liaison to External Advisory Committee, educational activist
Champaign	TASAP coordinator, Board of Education member, former Board of Education member, project evaluator
Evangeline Parish	TASAP coordinator, Board of Education president, NAACP president, TASAP contractor
Hillsborough County	TASAP coordinator, Board of Education chair, Board of Education member, TASAP contractor
Jefferson County	TASAP coordinator, 2 Board of Education members, district research and evaluation staff member
Orange County	TASAP coordinator, Board of Education member, Board of Education attorney
Portland	TASAP coordinators (2 over course of project), district Chief Equity Officer, parent member of redistricting advisory committee
Rockford*	Former superintendent, Board of Education member, NAACP education chair, Chamber of Commerce president
St. Paul	TASAP coordinator, Board of Education vice-chair, NAACP president, TASAP contractor
San Francisco	TASAP coordinator, Associate Superintendent, Parents for Public Schools representative, Parents Advisory Council representative

* The TASAP coordinator in Rockford did not allow us to record her interview, thus we have not selected it for analysis here.

Guiding Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

A. District Policy-Makers

I. Background

1. Tell me how long you have been in this position? Do you live in this community; if so, for how long?
2. Describe how the decision was made by the district leadership to apply for the TASAP.
3. What groups were consulted, if any, during the application process?
4. What were the major problems/issues with former student assignment policies that the district sought to address through the grant?

II. Process/Politics

1. Please describe in detail any changes in student assignment policies in recent years, whether connected to TASAP or not. How specifically were these changes adopted?

2. Now that the project period is ending, what were the major activities/services on which the funds were spent?
[cues: technical support, outside consultants, community convenings?]
3. What parent, community, or civil rights groups have been most engaged with the implementation of TASAP? In what arenas?
4. Has there been what you would characterize as political conflict or opposition to the new student assignment plans? If so, please describe in what settings the conflict has occurred.
[cues: school board or community meetings, the media]
5. Are there any differences between how policymakers and other stakeholders (parents, community leaders, school administrators) frame the issue of increased diversity?

III. Impact and Next Steps

1. Did having the grant make a difference? If you were eligible to apply for further federal aid to support the district's assignment plans, would you? What would be the areas of greatest need?
2. What do you see as the major challenges moving forward with implementation?
3. Whom else should we speak with?
[cues: community group or civil rights leaders; other policymakers including board members; parent activists; scholars who have written about local history prior to us]

B. Community Group Representatives

I. Background

1. How did you get involved with [this group]? About how long have you been involved?
[probe on where person lives if relevant to group/cleavage in community]
2. When did you first find out about the [new assignment policy/federal grant]

II. Process/Politics

3. Did [group] have a role in planning/designing the [new assignment policy/federal grant/ however we think people in a particular place will recognize it when we refer to it]
4. What does [group] think of the [new assignment policy/federal grant/ however we think people in a particular place will recognize it when we refer to it]?
Probe: were there problems before, and is the [whatever] likely to solve them?
5. What has your group done in response to the [new assignment policy/federal grant/ however we think people in a particular place will recognize it when we refer to it]?
[cues: school board or community meetings, demonstrations/organizing, the media]

III. How this person understands the issues

6. What do you/your group [need to think about which] think should be the goals of the district's policy for assigning students to schools?
7. Do you think the mix of students in a school affects the quality of the educational process?
Finally: what didn't I ask that I should have? With whom else should I meet?

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