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## ***Forbes* 30 Under 30 in Education: Manufacturing “Edu-Preneur” Networks to Promote and Reinforce Privatization/Marketization in Education**

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**Abstract:** Each year *Forbes* bestows a handful of “edu-preneurs” with the 30 Under 30 Award in Education (Under30), designating those individuals as the best hope for revolutionizing and reforming education. Boasting low recipient rates, *Forbes* elevates the manufactured expertise of awardees and the importance of their organizations and ventures. Further, *Forbes* employs the language and norms of neoliberalism to articulate a pro-market vision of education reform. This social network analytic (SNA) study seeks to untangle the edu-preneur network and critically examine the connections between awardees, their organizations, judges, and the larger education

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reform network. To this end, we utilized descriptive analyses and SNA. We find evidence that Under30 serves as a mechanism for promoting social closure and ideological homophily within education reform networks. Further, we consider the policy implications that such awards may have on public discourse and policy creation.

**Keywords:** Education Policy; Privatization; Marketization; Social Closure; Neoliberalism; Homophily; Echo Chamber; Edu-Preneur

***Forbes* 30 menores de 30 más destacados en educación: Fabricando redes “edu-preneur” para promover y reforzar la privatización/marketización en la educación**

**Resumen:** Cada año *Forbes* presenta una lista de “edu-prenuers” de los 30 más destacados en educación (Under 30), designando a estos individuos como la mejor esperanza para revolucionar y reformar la educación. Con bajas tasas de recepción, *Forbes* eleva la experiencia fabricada de los premiados y la importancia de sus organizaciones y emprendimientos. Además, *Forbes* emplea el lenguaje y las normas del neoliberalismo para articular una visión pro-mercado de la reforma educativa. Este estudio de red social analítica (SNA) busca desentrañar la red edu-preneur y examinar críticamente las conexiones entre los premiados, sus organizaciones, jueces y la mayor red de reforma de la educación. Para ello, se utilizaron análisis descriptivos y SNA. Encontramos evidencias de que el sub-30 sirve como un mecanismo para promover el cierre social y la homofilia ideológica en las redes de reforma de la educación. Además, consideramos las implicaciones políticas que tales premios pueden tener en el discurso público y en la creación de políticas.

**Palabras clave:** Política de Educación; la privatización; marketización; Cierre Social; neoliberalismo; homophily; Cámara de Eco; Edu-Preneur

***Forbes* 30 under 30 em educação: Fabricando redes “edu-preneur” para promover e reforçar a privatização/marketização na educação**

**Resumo:** Todos os anos a *Forbes* concede um punhado de “educandos” com o 30 Under 30 Award em Educação (Under 30), designando esses indivíduos como a melhor esperança para revolucionar e reformar a educação. Com baixas taxas de recebimento, a *Forbes* eleva a expertise fabricada dos premiados e a importância de suas organizações e empreendimentos. Além disso, a *Forbes* emprega a linguagem e as normas do neoliberalismo para articular uma visão pró-mercado da reforma educacional. Este estudo de rede social analítica (SNA) procura desvendar a rede edu-preneur e examinar criticamente as conexões entre os premiados, suas organizações, juízes e a maior rede de reforma da educação. Para tanto, foram utilizadas análises descritivas e SNA. Encontramos evidências de que o sub-30 serve como um mecanismo para promover o fechamento social e a homofilia ideológica nas redes de reforma da educação. Além disso, consideramos as implicações políticas que tais prêmios podem ter no discurso público e na criação de políticas.

**Palavras-chave:** Política de Educação; Privatização; Marketização; Fechamento Social; Neoliberalismo; Homofilia; Câmara de Eco; Edu-Preneur

## Introduction

The purpose of this social network analytic (SNA) study was to gain a deeper understanding of the *Forbes* 30 Under 30 Award in Education (hereinafter referred to as Under30) and the subsequent impact the network of the award has on generating “social closure” (Swartz, 2008) in who receives the award and “echo chambers” (Goldie, Linick, Jabbar, & Lubienski, 2014) in educational policy. Given *Forbes*’s national platform to cover (and promote) what is talked about – in this case, in education – the creation and promotion of the Under30 in education, and who oversees and receives the award, warrants investigation. With that in mind, our research questions were the following: (1) What are the academic backgrounds and demographics of those individuals receiving the Under30 award? (2) What are the backgrounds of the judges overseeing the award? and (3) To what extent are the recipients connected to the judges and to each other (either as individuals or through organizational connections)? In addition to answering these questions, we also provide a discussion about the policy implications of those answers.

In this article, we argue that Under30 awardees serve as “edu-preneurs” – a term used by *Forbes* (Howard, 2017) – because the creation of Under30 constructs them as experts and further entangles these networks of supposed experts, simultaneously suggesting that the reformation of schools be led by business and market-oriented ideals. Part of the reinforcement of the edu-preneur network is the establishment of a façade of prestige. The façade of prestige is constructed by *Forbes* who proudly advertises that less than 4% of those who are nominated for the Under30 receive it, which, according to *Forbes*, is a rate that is competitive with getting into “Stanford (4.8%) or Harvard (5.2%)” (*Forbes*, 2017). It is fundamental that the Under30 be constructed to appear prestigious in order to create a false sense of reality which reinforces the supposed importance and expertise of the award recipients, namely because most of them have little-to-no practical experience in public K–12 education. For example, while Stanford and Harvard are prestigious because they have low admission rates, *Forbes* (2017) does not cite or mention colleges or universities such as College of the Ozarks, which is more difficult to get into than Cornell University, Dartmouth University, the University of Pennsylvania, and/or Brown University (see Henderson, 2016) because College of the Ozarks is not as prestigious as the former universities.

Consequently, the purpose of this study was to break down the network of the recipients of Under30 in education using SNA in order to understand more about their individual backgrounds as well as how the awardees, their organizations, and the judges might connect to and fit within the edu-preneur and education reform network. Edu-preneurs exist to sell educational products and earn profits. When considering who receives the Under30, the vast majority are representatives of education businesses that provide, for a cost, products and services to schools that purport to reform pedagogical or assessment practices. Others represent the reform network more broadly; they are affiliated with organizations connected to for-profit charter networks that, through the marketing and promotion of a school “brand,” (e.g., Charter Schools USA) often seek to generate profits through the education market (Bonner, Stancil, & Raynor, 2017; Robertson, 2015; Singleton, 2017). It is an unfortunate reality that edu-preneur reformers would put themselves out of business if their products and policies actually cured what ailed public K–12 education because there would be no need to purchase their products and services. It is important to point out that the term edu-preneur—as a combination of the words education and entrepreneurship—focuses on business-oriented ways of knowing and being, such as competition (winners and losers) and earning financial profits.

Given the shared language and aims of market-oriented reformers and the interconnected network of the Under30 group, we situate our analysis against the backdrop of social closure theory. Wright (2009) states the following:

In order for certain jobs to confer high income and special advantages, it is important for their incumbents to have various means of excluding others from access to them. This is also sometimes referred to as a process of social closure, in which access to a position becomes restricted. (p. 104)

Social closure is not inherently partisan, liberal, or conservative. All political parties, people, and individuals can carry out social closure in their various spaces. Indeed, our results suggest that the Under30 is a mechanism through which social closure is established in the prestigious network of edu-preneurs in an effort to promote ideological homophily—a sociological phenomenon described as a “love for the same” in social networks (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). In other words, homophilous organizations and individuals seek out other organizations and individuals who share a common ideology, look, status, way of being, etc. in an effort to expand that sameness. Those who are labeled as edu-preneurs by *Forbes* may, as a result of their affiliation within the network and the strengthening of their ties within the reform network, unwittingly ensure those who hold similar perspectives and values receive the attention and business of those who share like-minded approaches to education reform. In essence, the award serves as a networking opportunity and marketing tool.

When considered against the backdrop of the pervasive myth embedded within American discourse about the “failed school” and “bad teachers” and the subsequent need to reform them, it becomes clear that an award for reform would gain traction. More importantly, the combination of the policy assumption that schools need to be reformed with the promotion of an elite group of reformers should raise questions about the affiliations of those individuals. It is of little surprise that an organization such as *Forbes*, with its focus on business, would take an interest in highlighting reformers who approach education from the free-market tenets of Friedmanism. Accordingly, developing an understanding of the demographics and educational backgrounds of the recipients as well as understanding how the recipients and judges themselves are connected within the broader education reform network will provide a clearer picture of how the award might help bolster privatization efforts along free-market ideology.

## Review of the Literature

In what follows, we briefly situate this study against the larger effort of neoliberalism to privatize education then provide a discussion on social closure, echo chamber, and homophily. These three concepts help to understand the findings as they assisted us in our data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

### Neoliberalism and Privatization

The marketization of public education in the era of neoliberalism elevates buzzwords like “innovation,” “investments,” “return on investments,” and “technology integration.” Moreover, within the context of education and schooling, the professional status of educators is challenged in an effort to exalt the logic and norms of the business class. President Trump, a businessman, appointed Betsy DeVos to be the Secretary of Education despite the fact she and her children have never attended public schools. The message the White House sent to Americans is that experience in education is not a necessary component of administrating education. Education reform, both

domestically and internationally, has been led by a consortium of organizations and individuals who have expanded market-oriented reforms throughout schools. Those market-oriented reforms have included charter schools, school vouchers, and alternative certification training for teachers. The logic, as it were, is that government based training, organization, and control of schooling is woefully inefficient and would benefit from market competition. Finding roots in Milton Friedman, market-oriented education reformers seek to inject competition (note the business terminology) into the public sphere of public education. And, despite a growing body of research that suggests that charter schools underperform traditional public schools (Miron, Mathis, & Welner, 2015) and exacerbate segregation (Author & Lubienski, 2017; Frankenberg, 2011; Frankenberg & Lewis, 2012), and other research raising concerns over alternative certification programs like Teach For America (Brewer, 2014; Anderson, 2013a, 2013b; Redding & Smith, 2016; Scott, Trujillo, & Rivera, 2016), these reforms continue to expand. And these reforms are not conducted within a vacuum. The disproportionate number of TFA alumni who have received the Under30 and the shared language of neoliberal education reform highlight the common understandings and aims of market-oriented reformers (Lahann & Reagan, 2011). Specifically, “neoliberalism calls for state policies that create competitive entrepreneurs as opposed to policies that set them free to act for their own gain and, as a result, society’s benefit” (Lahann & Reagan, 2011, p. 8).

Given *Forbes*’s ideological commitment to promoting business-oriented reforms in education, the Under30 award itself—using the language of industry—highlights the role that neoliberalism continues to play across education reforms. Grounded in the assumption that government is both too ineffective and inefficient to oversee schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1955, 1997, 2002; Greene, Forster, & Winters, 2005; Walberg & Bast, 2003), neoliberalism asserts a solution of free-market competition and individualization (Ball, 1994, 2003, 2007, 2012; Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005). As explicated in our findings, the individuals who receive the Under30 not only lack degrees in education, but the judges of the award and the majority of the awardees have direct connections to organizations that operate along an ideological commitment to competition, deregulation, and privatization (often, for-profit). In their discussion of alliances and divisions within the policy landscape, DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, and Scott (2007) outlined how various types of ideological groups influence policy outcomes. Our analysis here adds to that work by contributing further empirical evidence that the market-oriented landscape has become more complex in that support for such reforms have shared connections across the ideological (and often competing) stances of “Centrist/New Democratic,” (e.g., National Alliance for Public Charter Schools) “Center/Left,” (e.g., Center for American Progress) “Neoliberal,” (e.g., Center for Education Reform, Walton Foundation, Broad Foundation, New Schools Venture Fund, etc.) and “States’ rights” (e.g., American Legislative Exchange Council) groups presented in their findings.

Despite the varied ideological dispositions of such groups within the reform network, they find common ground in the neoliberal assumption that marketization and competition are necessary components of reform as they seek to create advocacy coalitions (Scott, Jabbar, Goel, DeBray, & Lubienski, 2015), to leverage state policies that are favorable to individual actors working towards their own gain and, according to the logic, will benefit society (Lahann & Reagan, 2011). Given the reform network’s ever-growing connection to governance bodies like the U.S. Department of Education and local school boards, the realization of state policies that favor marketization and privatization grows – especially given the close connection of venture philanthropy organizations within the network who provide funding and advocacy for such reforms (Horn & Libby, 2011; Reckhow, 2013; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Saltman, 2010). Social Closure Theory

Social closure refers to the intricate ways groups of individuals and organizations maintain resources, power, and influence by making access exclusive. In the case of the Under30, how might

the creation of the prestigious award help maintain organizational power and resources? The Under30 is not the first time an organization or entity created an award for what we are arguing here as self-serving purposes or with ulterior motives. For example, the owner of “My Pillow” created a fake foundation that supposedly endorsed the pillow. “My Pillow” was the official pillow of the National Sleep Foundation. The problem was that the National Sleep Foundation was created by the owner of “My Pillow” (see “My Pillow,” 2016). Some of the readers of this article may have seen the advertisement for “My Pillow” seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. MyPillow Gets a \$1 Million Wake-Up Call (Truth in Advertising, 2016).

Note: Reprinted with permission.

But pillow salespersons are not the only entrepreneurs who attempt to sell products and positively influence what people think of their products. The automobile manufacturing sector is equally guilty of self-congratulation in their marketing. The (in)famous JD Power and Associates award is an award that many people hear about and have seen. But as Morran (2010) points out, JD Power and Associates charges “hundreds of thousands of dollars to car makers just for access to their survey results and then charge another big-time fee for the right to mention their awards in ads” (para. 5). Some may say that JD Power and Associates is just doing business. JD Power and Associates conducts research that it sells to the automobile sector, which uses the information to help create better and safer vehicles. Maybe. But what such comments miss, however, is that JD Power and Associates is not independent of the automobile sector. Independence is important and can make knowledge more democratic and available to all manufacturers. The automobile manufacturers are, in essence, paying to “play.”

Advertising in the United States is estimated at \$70 billion per year (Hollis, 2011). Accordingly, successful advertisements do not center action on the part of the buyer as the target response; rather, advertisements are specifically designed to create positive impressions about the product or company being advertised (Hollis, 2011). The automobile companies would not value the JD Power and Associate awards if they did not help their bottom line: selling vehicles and making profit. The same truth guided the “My Pillow” CEO to create a fake foundation in order to endorse the benefits of his pillow. And, along the same lines of creation of an award that aligns with *Forbes*’s ideological commitments, provides fodder and reinforcement for the types of education reform that *Forbes* supports—*Forbes* has a history of publishing stories that are critical of public schools, teachers, and in support of education reforms like charter schools (see Kruse, 2017; Marr, 2016; Meyer, 2016; Ozimek, 2015; Skorup & DeGrow, 2017; Sullivan, 2016)—while establishing positive impressions of the reformers.

If we were to apply social closure theory to Under30, we might ask ourselves: “Who are the judges, and who are the recipients?” The four judges for the 2017 competition were: (1) Stacey Childress, the CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, (2) Arne Duncan, the Managing Partner of Emerson Collective, (3) Wendy Kopp, the Co-founder of Teach for America (TFA) and Teach for All, and (4) Marcus Noel, the Founder of Heart of Man Ventures and a TFA alum (see Howard & Conklin, n.d.). We might also ask, “Who were the recipients of the award?” If the award recipients were found to be mostly from the organizations that were connected to the judges, then we might be able to discern whether social closure is occurring. By nominating and awarding Under30 to people like themselves, the judges effectively act as gatekeepers to the resources and benefits that come to those who receive such a designation. Those benefits are national recognition, marketing of the individual and the individual’s organization or business by *Forbes*, and networking connections made during the Under30 Summit (a multi-day event of speeches and networking). Given that the purpose of the Under30 is to identify and celebrate those who are leading in their industry, receiving the Under30 designation stands to help recipients expand their business ventures.

Raymond Murphy (2001) points out that social closure is really about monopolization of opportunities. What this means is social closure and closed networks lead to protecting power and maintaining the same messages and signal ideologies. Within the realm of the Under30 network, those ideologies are ones that elevate ideologies of pro-privatization and pro-marketization of schools and education. These ideologies support the de-professionalization of teacher preparation. The manifestation of social closure increases and is an outcome of echo chambers whereby members of the closed network not only engage in self-congratulations but rely on the growing network information and resources to further its shared ideology. Social closure is not a new area of study; it has been documented to exist in higher education award systems, such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Fellows program (Hartlep et al., 2017). However, the present study contributes new knowledge to how social closure can lead to moving forward policies that are pro-market and pro-privatization and that lead to bolstering edu-preneurship.

### **Echo Chamber and Homophily**

In their research on echo chambers, Colleoni, Rozza, and Arvidsson (2014) investigated political homophily on Twitter. The researchers used a combination of machine learning and social network analysis; they classified users as Democrats or Republicans based on the political content shared. They found the political homophily present in Republican networks was higher and stronger than that of Democrats. Also, Boutyline and Willer (2016) found that homophily was more likely to occur on Twitter among those who were more politically conservative. This may suggest that Republicans find themselves in echo chambers, which can lead to more insular beliefs. Yet homophily and echo chambers are not limited to political party affiliation as researchers have found that Twitter, for example, has created an echo chamber through which intermediary actors and individuals with limited expertise in education have worked to shape public discourse and the policy landscape (Goldie, Linick, Jabbar, & Lubienski, 2014; Malin & Lubienski, 2015).

But what does this mean and what are the implications of echo chambers? The phenomenon of a “backfire effect” occurs when individuals receive information that contradicts or goes against their belief system, but instead of re-evaluating, double down on their original belief. In other words, backfire effects are present when contradictory information does not cause someone to have an open mind, but rather the opposite; people will become even more closed-minded when they hear and/or come across information that opposes their worldview. Echo chambers are self-reinforcing because of the phenomenon of backfire effects. Echo chambers encourage confirmation biases.

For instance, Williams, McMurray, Kurtz, and Lambert (2015) found that social media discussions of climate change often occur within polarizing echo chambers. The researchers, not surprisingly, found strong attitude-based homophily within these echo chambers. In other words, *activist* groups were segregated from *sceptic* groups when it came to climate change. Their research provides evidence that there is a virtuous cycle of reinforcement: echo chambers both produce and are produced by homophily and that the backfire effect contributes to intergroup polarization. Within education reform networks, leading reform organizations like TFA also engage in creating echo chambers on social media platforms like Twitter to insulate themselves and their discourse while attacking critics (Brewer & Wallis, 2015). According to the *Harvard Business Review* (2013), “Decision makers need to tap diverse social networks. If your circle is too tight and the members of it are too similar, you risk being trapped in an echo chamber where the same ideas keep circulating, limiting the payoff of social learning (p. 5). Does the Under30 continue to value and extoll the same ideas?

According to Stafford (2016), “One thing that drives echo chambers is our tendency to associate with people like us” (para. 3). Homophily is interrelated with the concept of echo chambers described above because the love or preference of sameness leads to exclusion and an outcome of exclusion is concentration of likeminded communities. Likeminded communities often create echo chambers because there are no dissenting voices, a situation that is nondemocratic and indicative of an unfree society. A free society permits that it is safe to be unpopular. Thus, the creation of and promotion of education awards like the Under30 present winners who share similar academic backgrounds (notably not in education) to create a private network and attempt to drown out dissenting voices who question the ideology and dispositions of market-oriented reform since those reforms are presented as commonsensical. We now turn to a discussion of our data collection and method of analysis.

## Data and Methods

Considering our first research question: “What are the academic backgrounds and demographics of those individuals receiving the Under30 award?” Demographic, academic, and organizational information for all Under30 recipients was gathered from publicly available resources—starting first with the announcement of winners published by *Forbes*. Age, gender, and organizational affiliation at the time of award was provided by the award recipient’s official *Forbes* biography. Information detailing the recipient’s undergraduate major, alma mater, year of graduation, graduate training, and program participation (e.g., TFA) was collected from a combination of the recipient’s LinkedIn page, organizational biographies, and press releases from their alma mater. Similarly, our second research question of “What is the background of the judges overseeing the award?” led us to collect the demographic information on the judges from their *Forbes* profile, as well as their LinkedIn and/or their organizational websites. In order to answer our final question: “To what extent are the recipients connected to the judges and to each other (either as individuals or through organizational connections)?” a holistic network of connections was developed as a matrix in Excel whereby the 2017 Under30 judges and recipients were listed along with any personal or business connection they had. Once connections related to the 2017 judges and awardees were exhausted, we repeated the process for 2016, 2015, 2014, and 2013 adding all discovered connections to the holistic network. Once all annual cohorts were added, along with their connections to the overall network, we returned to the 2017 cohort and reexamined their connections to the entire network. That is, in an effort to create a standardized network, we returned to each year to determine what additional connections (either direct or indirect) each cohort had to



the overall network. This additional process was repeated for all previous years. In total, our network consists of 616 nodes: 178 Under30 recipients, 123 organizations, and 315 individuals who were not an Under30 recipient. We have included figures in the Appendix (Figures A1-A5) that show all Under30 recipients – both within and outside of the reform network – based on the year in which they were named to Under30.

Information about an individual's connections to organizations were gathered primarily from LinkedIn profiles using a paid-subscription to the LinkedIn platform. Any registered user of LinkedIn is able to access the public data that we used for this study, however, LinkedIn limits the number of profiles that can be accessed in any given month. Purchasing a subscription to LinkedIn lifted the cap on the amount of profiles that could be viewed in any given time frame. Information and connections to organizations or companies were gathered from the organization's website. Additional individuals were added to the overall network if, in the process of gathering information on connections from an organization, an individual also shared a connection to an organization or person within the existing discovered network.

Unless there was a specific person-to-person connection (e.g., Wendy Kopp of TFA is married to Richard Barth of the charter network Knowledge is Power Program, or KIPP), no direct connections were drawn between individuals. Rather, as was mostly the case, individuals were connected by way of a mutual organizational affiliation. For example, if individual A worked at organization B along with individual C, individual A was connected to organization B and individual C was also connected to organization B—individual A and individual C were not directly connected. It is important to point out that connections were drawn only if the connection existed at the time of the award. While there are individuals who received the award in years past who went on to join the larger reform network those connections are not listed in this analysis. By way of an example, Beth Schmidt (a 2014 Under30 recipient) is, as of 2017, affiliated with the Emerson Collective (as is Arne Duncan who served as a judge in 2017); however, because Schmidt's connection to the Emerson Collective did not exist at the time of the award, no connection between her and the organization is reported here. And while no connection is reported here in our analysis, the ongoing social closure reinforced by the network is an artifact of the homophily that exists within the network.

The SNA analysis of the network was conducted using UCINET and related figures were created using NetDraw (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013). Further, in large networks with hundreds of individual actors and organizations, the identification of key players becomes increasingly complex and requires the use of additional analytic techniques (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). A commonly utilized set of techniques to conduct such key player analysis in large social networks are centrality measures (Ortiz-Arroyo, 2010). For the purposes of this SNA, we calculate three of the most widely utilized centrality measures: Freeman Closeness Centrality, Betweenness Centrality, and Eigenvector Centrality. Closeness is found by calculating the average distance between an individual node and all other nodes in the network. Key players in a network will tend towards shorter average distances to other actors (Freeman, 1979). Betweenness represents a quantified description of the instances one node serves as a bridge on the shortest path between two other nodes in a network. Betweenness is an important measure for identifying actors in a network who likely facilitate communication between other actors (Borgatti, 2005). The final measure, Eigenvector, provides each node with a numerical value based on the number of connections a node has to other highly connected nodes. This provides a more nuanced view of the number of connections a node has by trying to ascertain the quality of a node's connections by assuming key players in a network will be connected to other key players (Bonacich, 1972). Taken together, these three centrality measures help to illuminate the actors exerting substantial influence and power

through the control and facilitation of communication within a network. All calculations were performed using the analysis tools built into UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013).

## Findings

Across various venues, Under30 has experienced a fair level of critique over the years regarding the lack of gender and racial diversity in award recipients (*cf.* ELLE, 2015; Prince, 2011). While our study provides insight into these demographic disparities among the award recipients, our original interest in the education category—specifically within the context of education reform led by edu-preneurs—is further situated within the context of privatization and marketization of public education. We start by providing a descriptive analysis of recipients' demographic information, undergraduate major, and alma mater. Further, we visited recipients' organizational affiliation websites to classify network linkages. This information was converted into a matrix and analyzed using UCINET to provide a visual analysis of the edu-preneur network (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013).

### Under30 Recipient Academic Backgrounds and Demographics

For its 2017 cohort of Under30, *Forbes* received over 15,000 nominations (note: self-nominations *are* allowed) across 20 industries, ranging from Hollywood and Entertainment, to Law and Policy, in which 600 were selected for the award—a 4% acceptance rate (Forbes, 2017). For this study, we focus solely on the education industry, which admittedly, is a telling moniker for how *Forbes* views each category, including education. To put the *Forbes* education industry component of Under30 into perspective, of the 15,000 nominations that were received across the 20 industries in 2017, 450 were within the education category (see EAB, 2017). The Under30 began in 2011 and, in 2013, expanded its categories to include education as an industry, which promoted a list of edu-preneurs who were, according to the *Forbes's* judges, making lasting impacts on reforming education in the United States. In fact, the 2017 headline announcing the Under30 cohort of awardees suggested that the group was revolutionizing learning both inside and outside of the classroom (Forbes, 2017; Howard, 2017).

Teaching and learning is a process facilitated by educators within the context of schools and schooling; in the case of the Under30; however, teaching/learning occurs outside of professionally prepared educators. Only four of 192 Under30 recipients over the last five years have had an undergraduate degree that focuses on education. While 23 have master's degrees in some field connected to education, many of them completed that training through partnerships between universities and Teach For America (TFA), which has some control over the courses their corps members take. Some researchers have shown those individuals with a traditional undergraduate degree and license in education outperform those teachers who are alternatively certified (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Vasquez-Heilig 2005), while others have concluded that the differences are insignificant (*cf.* Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008). Notwithstanding a possibility of differences in outcomes based on undergraduate training, what is clear is that background training in education strongly shapes the dispositions and approach to pedagogy (Lahann & Regan, 2011; Nukic, 2011) and that teachers who are alternatively certified are far more likely to have higher rates of turnover (Redding & Smith, 2016).

Rather than conceive of education as a profession that requires specialized training, such as attending accredited teacher preparation programs that include lengthy practicum training and restricted entry into the field, *Forbes* Under30 highlights individuals with no degree or training in education as the best hope for “revolutionizing learning” (Forbes, 2017; Howard, 2017) and reforming education.

Our findings indicate that the vast majority of recipients of Under30 in education are individuals without degrees in education. In fact, the top undergraduate degree was computer science followed by economics and political science (see Table 1). In total, only four of the 192 recipients had an undergraduate degree in education (23 have a graduate degree in a field connected to education).

Table 1  
*Top 10 Undergraduate Educational Degrees of Under 30 Recipients*

Undergraduate Degree	<i>n</i>
Computer Science	26
Economics	23
Political Science / Politics	22
Engineering	15
Business	11
History	11
Psychology	10
Accounting / Finance	8
Biology	8
International Affairs	7

*Note:* In total, 49 varying educational degrees were observed.

Considering the undergraduate institutional affiliation of the awardees, we found that of the top 10 institutions, eight were classified as either Ivy League or Ivy Plus.

Table 2  
*Top 10 Undergraduate Institutional Affiliations of Under30 Recipients*

Undergraduate Institution	<i>n</i>	Classification
Stanford	19	Ivy Plus†
University of Pennsylvania	17	Ivy
Harvard	13	Ivy
Columbia University	10	Ivy
Princeton	10	Ivy

Table 2 cont.

*Top 10 Undergraduate Institutional Affiliations of Under30 Recipients*

Brown University	7	Ivy
Yale University	7	Ivy
University of Iowa	6	
University of Oxford	6	*
Cornell University	5	Ivy

*Note:* In total, 111 undergraduate institutions were observed. †Ivy Plus is a classification given to Duke, M.I.T., Stanford, and the University of Chicago (see Aisch, Buchanan, Cox, & Quealy, 2017). \*While Oxford is not classified as an Ivy League school, it is of comparable international classification.

Of notable interest among the recipients is the disparity of gender equality in the Under30. Of the 192 recipients of the award since 2013, 123 were male and 69 were female, and in many cases, female winners shared awards with males.

Table 3

*Gender of Awardees by Year and Sharing*

Year	Total Males	Total Females	Females with Males	Females with Females	Females as Individuals
2017	30	14	5	2	7
2016	16	16	1	0	15
2015	26	16	1	6	9
2014	27	13	2	4	7
2013	24	10	1	2	7
Total	123	69	10	14	45

### Under30 Judge Backgrounds and Demographics

Wendy Kopp, the founder of TFA, and Stacey Childress, the CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, both have served as judges for the majority of the years that the Under30 award has included the education industry. Additionally, other judges alongside Kopp and Childress have direct ties to the individuals and organizations being recognized through the award. While there is no way to know the academic background and connections of all of the Under30 nominees—that is, we do not know if the majority of nominees are, for example, TFA alumni—it is clear from our analysis that the majority of the recipients of the award have very close connections to the judges and their organizations. And while we explore the specific connections below, because the judges are so closely connected to the individuals that receive the award the Under30 serves as a mechanism through which judges are able to highlight the individuals and alums of their organizations. The

recipients can, in turn, use the platform the Under30 award affords to further market and promote their specific brand of education reform. This process feedback loop becomes reciprocal. For example, Marcus Noel, who, having connections to TFA was awarded the Under30 in 2016, became a judge in 2017. Additionally, Joe Vasquez, a judge for the newly announced 2018 cohort of Under30, has direct connections to TFA and was, himself, a recipient of the award in 2017 when Kopp was a judge (Kopp was also a judge in 2018).

In addition to the close connections that Under30 recipients have with the education reform network (see Figures A1-A5 in the Appendix for per-year connections), our findings also indicate that the judges for the Under30 often have very close connections either directly to individual awardees or share some organizational affiliation (either directly or secondary). For example, Wendy Kopp, the founder of TFA, served as a judge during 2016 and 2017. From those two years, there were 16 TFA alumni from her organization who were among the awardees.

With that in mind, our interest in this project arose from recognizing that the judges of the Under30 were primarily individuals associated with the domestic reform network (e.g., NewSchools Venture Fund and TFA), see Figure 2 below.

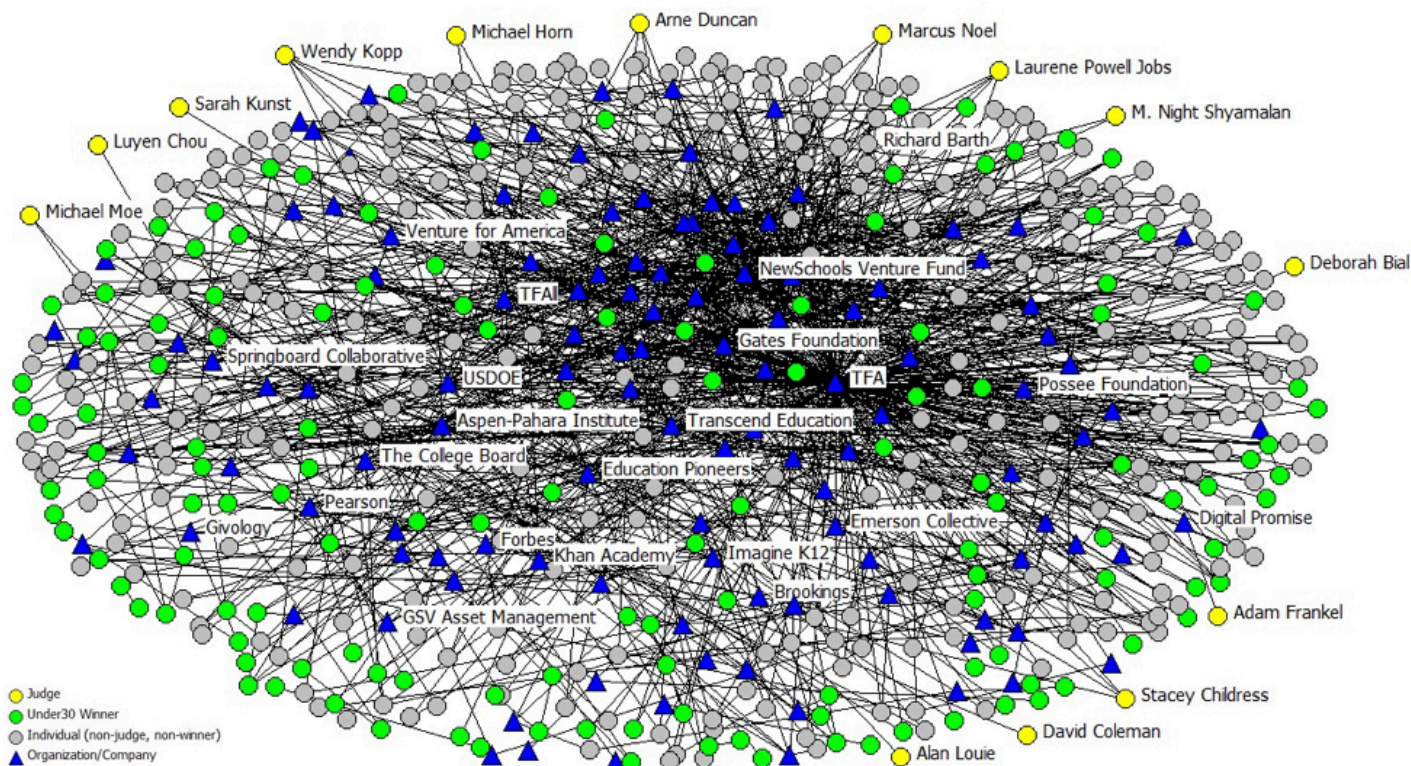


Figure 2. Forbes Under30 Judges and their Direct Connections to the Reform Network

TFA makes an annual habit out of promoting those alumni of the organization who have been selected for the award—seemingly to capitalize on the award in the same way that car dealerships may capitalize on and promote a JD Power award. In fact, *Forbes* released its 2018 cohort of Under30 recipients earlier than expected in 2017 (though, that cohort is not included in our analysis here) and TFA bought advertisements on Facebook to promote a link to their website listing out the newest winners who were alumni of TFA. Yet, over the scope of the project, while TFA became a central node in the network developed, our primary interest was not necessarily to center TFA. We

expected TFA to compromise a significant portion of the network but to the extent that TFA was connected was unclear at the outset of this study. That stated, what became increasingly clear is that TFA serves as a central hub within the reform network with direct and numerous connections to charter advocacy organizations, charter networks, intermediary organizations, and venture philanthropic foundations—shown in Figure 3 using Scale/Ordinance measures where the size of the node indicates the number of connections (the more connections that exist with the network, the larger the node). This finding aligns with the work done by Kretchamr, Sondel, and Ferrare (2014), which showed how TFA uses its connections to wield power and influence in the promotion of charter schools.

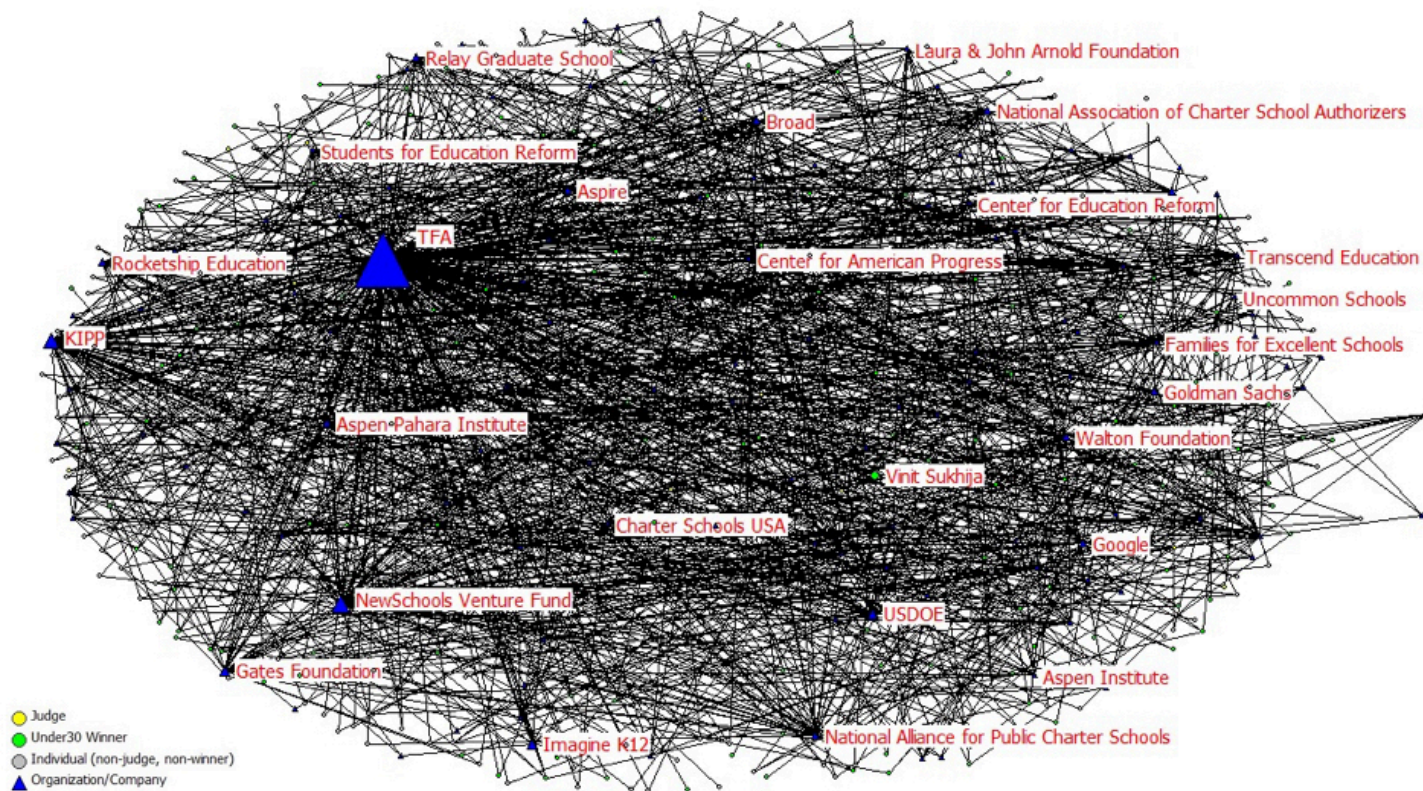


Figure 3. Scale/Ordinance Measurement of the Education Reform Network. Top 25 organizations labeled and top 1 individual labeled.

Because our analysis of the network suggested that TFA was the greatest connection throughout the network, we isolated TFA in Figure 4 to show the first-level Ego-Net of TFA (organizations and individuals with a direct connection to TFA).

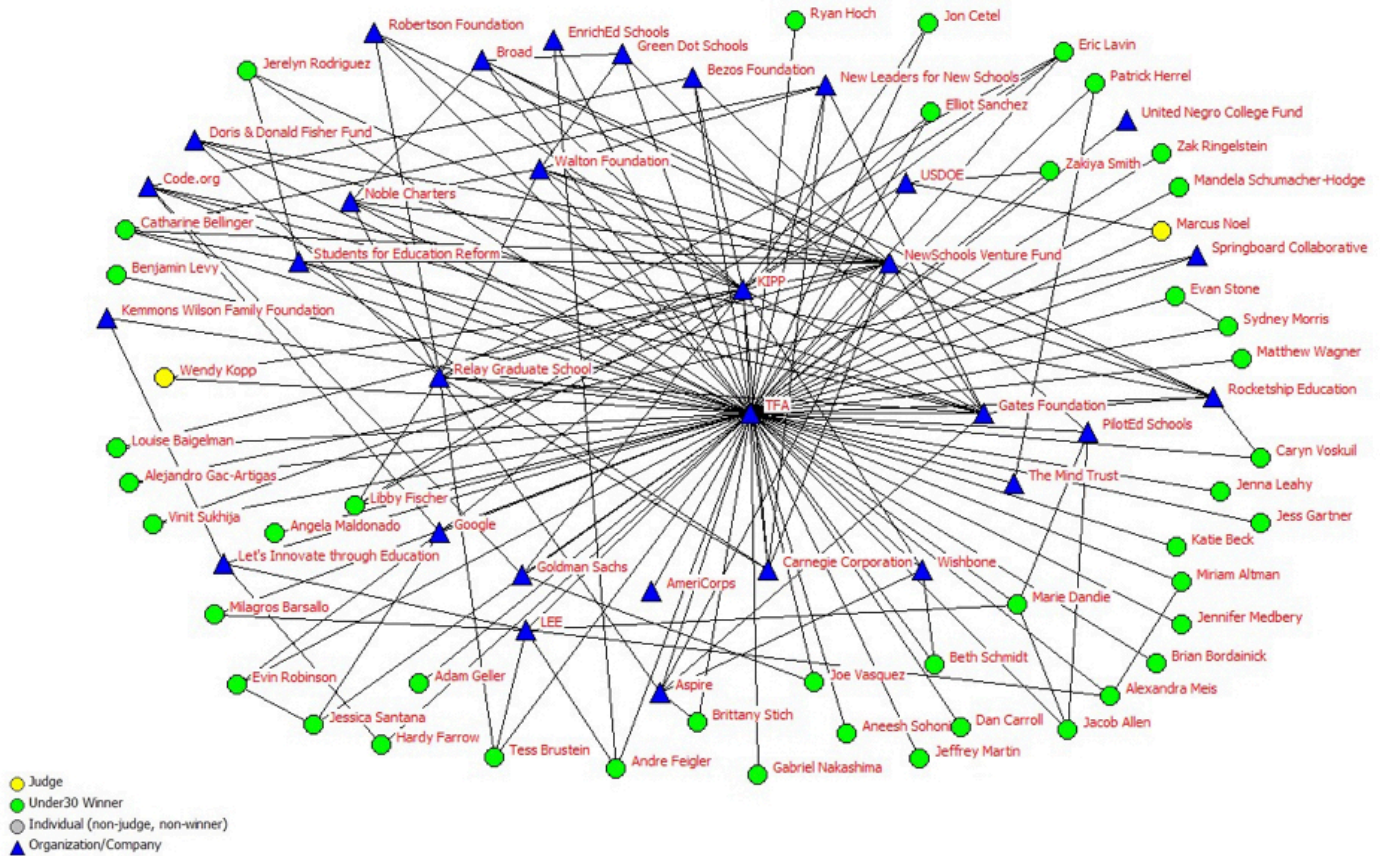


Figure 4. TFA’s First-Level Ego Net within Our Discovered Network

As illustrated in Figure 3, TFA has direct connections to NewSchools Venture Fund (of which Stacey Childress—an Under30 judge is the CEO), KIPP, the Gates Foundations, PilotEd Schools, Aspire, Carnegie Corporation, Goldman Sachs, LEE, the Relay Graduate School, Google, Students for Education Reform, Noble Charters, the Walton Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Robertson Foundation, EnrichEd Schools, Green Dot Schools, the Bezos Foundation, New Leaders for New Schools, Springboard Collaborative, the USDOE, the Kemmons Wilson Family Foundation, the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, and Rocketship Education—all organizations that also share many direct connections with one another. Additionally, TFA has direct connections to 43 Under30 recipients since *Forbes* began the education category.

Additional second and third-level connections between TFA and Under30 were also discovered which, considered alongside the eigenvector analysis discussed below, reveals the level of overrepresentation of TFA alumni amongst the award winners. Despite comprising less than 1% of the national teacher force (Vasquez-Heilig & Jez, 2010), TFA alumni account for approximately 22% of award winners. Assumedly, an individual who taught with TFA most likely entered the field of teaching through TFA and, thus, had their views and knowledge of education practice shaped by TFA or joined TFA because of ideological similarities. This hints at how the Under30 network functions as an echo chamber built on homophily. Organizations like TFA train individuals through a particular ideological lens then reward those same individuals for designing programs and services that parrot the ideology. Further elucidating these simple occupational associations are only one way of looking for homophily within a network and evidence of homophilic ties can also emerge in

similarly focused organizational missions and public acknowledgement and promotion (Koch, Galaskiewicz, & Pierson, 2015; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001;), which is also important for identifying homophily amongst those award winners who did not work with TFA. With these two points of emphasis in mind, it is easy to observe the common echo chamber award winners and TFA reside in. First, the majority of award winners were recognized for their work in organizations that focus on tech and computer science education, charter school promotion, and the use of venture capital funding. As has been documented throughout the school reform and neoliberal education literature, projects emphasizing STEM as an economic good and school privatization map well onto TFA's organizational mission and vision for school reform (Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014; Lahann & Reagan, 2011; Lefebvre & Thomas, 2017). Second, public acknowledgement of a connection comes from both award winners and TFA. Expectedly, award winners highlight their affiliation with TFA in public biographies provided to *Forbes* and their employing organization. What is important is the reciprocal nature of this acknowledgement. Each year, following *Forbes's* announcement of the new award winners, TFA issues a press release congratulating TFA alumni included amongst the winners, taking care to note how their current endeavors are aligned with the agendas promoted by TFA [for examples of these releases see: Teach for America (2016) and Teach for America (2017)].

While it is not surprising that organizations like KIPP, PilotEd Schools, Aspire, LEE, and others have a direct connection to TFA, given that many of the organizations were founded by TFA alums or also have formal ties to TFA, it may not be readily clear why the U.S. Department of Education shares similar connections. In short, the goal of TFA is not teacher preparation. In fact, Wendy Kopp has stated that TFA is a “leadership development organization, not a teaching organization” (Hootnick, 2014, para. 31).

Moreover, Wendy Kopp, despite being an Under30 judge and the founder of the most connected organization with the reform network is, herself, not overly connected. Our analysis suggests that outside of Under30, Kopp does not exert her influence directly within the network; rather, she relies on the organizations she created. Further policy implications surrounding these realities are taken up later in this article.

### **Connections Within Network**

Large networks can obfuscate important connections and key actors as visual analysis becomes more difficult. In situations where networks are so large as to make visual analysis burdensome, measures of network centrality are helpful for identifying key actors within large networks. The three centrality measures used in this study mentioned earlier—closeness, betweenness, and eigenvector—uncover useful information about the flow of information and influence within the Under30 network that would be undeterminable from visual analysis. We start by examining each centrality measure in isolation to reveal what each measure reveals on its own before looking across measures to understand how power and influence works throughout the Under30 network.

The ranking of network actors by closeness centrality (see Table A1 in the Appendix) shows TFA has the highest number of direct links to other actors in the network for all years under examination. Rounding out the top-three actors with the most direct links in the network are KIPP and the NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF), a venture-capital firm that largely targets investments at education reforms and charter schools. This representation of interests is common throughout the top-15 highly connected actors in the network, of which seven are funding bodies, four are charter school networks, and two are reform-oriented organizations. Only in one year, 2016, does an individual break into the top-15 of most directly connected actors—an award winner from 2016



whose work focused on providing information about education technology. Within the network of *Forbes* winners, perhaps unsurprisingly, large organizations that wield money and influence within the education reform community possess high direct connectivity.

Looking at the rankings of actors by betweenness centrality (see Table A2 in the Appendix), which is measuring the frequency with which an actor serves as a bridge on the shortest path between two other actors, reveals observations similar to those found when looking at closeness. Again, TFA occupies the top position in all award years, followed by KIPP and NSVF in the second and third spots. Unlike in the closeness measure, the U.S. Department of Education is within the top-five on betweenness centrality, which indicates an increased importance when it comes to facilitating communication between actors in the network. Interestingly, the results of the betweenness centrality analysis features the highest ranking of award winners, Tess Brustein and Vinit Sukhija, each in the year their award was conferred. Both winners were TFA corps members prior to their award and both worked for education focused venture capital firms. Similar to the closeness measure, the top-15 ranking of actors measured on betweenness centrality is dominated by private foundations like Walton and Broad, charter schools, and organizations advocating school choice and neoliberal reforms.

Eigenvector centrality (see Table A3 in the Appendix), which looks at the strength of an actor's connections by accounting for the connectedness of an actor's links, provides further evidence for the network ascendancy of a few actors. TFA, KIPP, and NSVF control the top-three spots across all award years, as was the case with measures of closeness and betweenness. The rest of the highly ranked spots are filled by charter schools and foundations that financially support market-oriented solutions to the problems of public education. The USDOE's ranking drops in this measure, though they remain in the top-15 representing the only public agency exerting any measurable influence over the network. Given the role that the government plays in developing and regulating competitive markets within education, the U.S. Department of Education's close connection to the reform network (which is reinforced intentionally through alumni of reform organizations as explicated above) raises questions about the ability for the governmental body to provide unbiased oversight of the education marketplace. In fact, as the USDOE and local governance bodies such as school boards become more closely connected to the reform network as alumni enter elected and appointed roles, it positions the network to wield more and more influence on the policymaking process.

Unlike the previously discussed centrality measures, there are no individuals who break into the top-15 for eigenvector centrality, which indicates even those with a high number of individual links are still mostly connected to individuals and organizations with few links of their own.

Considered together, the results of the closeness, betweenness, and eigenvector centrality analyses highlight some important features of the Under30 award network. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the same key players—TFA, KIPP, NSVF—hold the top spots in all three centrality measures. More specifically, TFA is clearly the most influential and connected organization within the network, holding the top spot for every measure in every year. No one else in the network comes close to TFA's level of influence. Moreover, most actors who rank highly on measures of influence advocate for an ideologically homogeneous set of policies and practices. Charter schools, school choice, punitive accountability measures, market-based reforms, and the further economization of public education. are the main source of connection between groups as seemingly disparate as TFA, the Broad Foundation, and Students for Education Reform.

Related to the previous observation, the centrality measures show that large, market-oriented organizations and foundations are not only highly influential within the Under30 award network but they are also structurally necessary for the flow of information and resources within the award

network. In other words, removing just the three most influential organizations—TFA, KIPP, and NSVF—from a network of several hundred actors would radically reshape the entire network. This inference is based on the consistency of top-rankings across award years. Valente, Coronges, Lakon, and Costenbader (2008) used simulated network data to investigate the extent to which common centrality measures are correlated. We found that having the same actors at the top of each measure was not a sign of redundant information, but instead indicated that the different centrality measures are related and, thus, similarity in rankings across measures speak to the importance of those actors. In the context of the current study, observation of the same actors, in the same rank, across three separate but related measures buttress the argument that organizations like TFA and KIPP exert an exorbitant amount of influence within the Under30 network.

Finally, the centrality measures reveal the role of organizations within the Under30 network. While the stated purpose of the award is to recognize the accomplishments of individuals, looking at the network shows that it is organizations who feature prominently. When it comes to occupying positions of influence within the network, individuals are largely lost under the weight of entrenched, well-monied organizations and foundations. This is true even of individuals who occupy positions of authority within top organizations. To cite one example: Wendy Kopp, who is the founder and former-CEO of TFA and an Under30 judge for multiple years, does not feature in the top rankings of any centrality measures even though her organization holds the top spot for every measure. Arguably, this demonstrates that individuals, when compared to the influence wielded by organizations, exert little influence over the network. This observation is at odds with the celebration of individual accomplishment that lies at the heart of the Under30 award. Awards are bestowed not to the organizations or technologies designed to benefit students, but the individuals who conceived them. The exaltation of the accomplishments of individuals is in line with the neoliberal project, which emphasizes a roll-back of the administrative state and social programs, including systems of public education, to be replaced the self-sufficiency of the individual (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Lipman, 2011). The political philosopher Wendy Brown (2005) noted that this withdrawal of the state from public life under neoliberalism ultimately redefines the individual's role in society:

neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self-care” — the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions. (p. 42)

While *Forbes* celebrates the individual, examining the underlying network of actors reveals a high degree of social cooperation and communication amongst organizations advancing a privatized and marketized vision of educational reform. Thus, the Under30 award ultimately provides an illusory picture of the diversity of education reformers while reality shows that all of these individuals are aligned with a small subset of likeminded organizations.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest that the *Forbes* Under30 award, its judges, and the growing network that the award creates both benefits from and reinforces social closure. The theory of social closure examines the myriad ways in which individuals and institutions are able to restrict access while simultaneously protecting the resources, power, and influence that members on the inside have and share among each other. If we believe the Under30 award to be a prestigious award, as *Forbes* suggests, then we should equally expect that those recommended for the award undergo a rigorous

and unbiased selection process. Yet, our findings suggest that the judges of the Under30 award systematically select individuals who are either directly associated with the organizations that the judges represent and/or those who share the same ideological commitments to education reform—ideological homophily. Such a reality is suggestive of an echo chamber where individuals within, or close to, the reform network are selected for the award as a means of self-congratulating the ideology fueling their reforms and, in short, self-congratulating the judges since the recipients of the awards largely come from the judge’s organizations. As the growing network of Under30 recipients (and the further entanglement of that network) continues to grow and continues to be presented as the nation’s best hope for educational reform, policy influence and business opportunities may very well shift more towards individuals and organizations within that network which may further insulate the network while protecting its monopolization over education reform. While we have outlined the existence of a growing echo chamber here, it is important to point out that while they do not represent the vast majority, there is a growing number of TFA alumni, for example, who have been outspoken about their resistance to TFA’s agenda and theory of change and the connected broader quest to privatize education through the reform network (see, for example, Brewer & deMarras, 2015; Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, & Manfra, 2016; Kretchmar, Sondel, & Ferrare, 2014; Matsui, 2015; Scott, Trujillo, & Rivera, 2016).

Given the rampant rise of market-oriented educational reforms both domestically and internationally, examination and scrutiny of those individuals who are being tapped to continue such work is as important as examinations of who are currently leading such reforms. To that end, our primary research question centering around the academic backgrounds and demographics of the Under30 recipients raises significant questions about the individuals who are “revolutionizing learning” (Forbes, 2017; Howard, 2017). The reinforcement of the purported goodness of market-oriented and privatization reforms through awards like the Under30 further secures the grip that edu-preneurs have over not only policy creation but policy conversations. That is, the creation of the Under30 in education reinforces the need for a specific business and market-oriented education reform. The selection of awardees gives little attention to individuals who work in schools. This reality bolsters the myth that educators cannot be trusted with the stewardship of their professions or the education of their students. The market language implies—and awards like the Under30 in education affirm—that privatization and marketization of our nation’s schools is the solution.

Public education is innately a democratic process and the science and art of teaching should naturally suggest that teaching is a profession and should not be susceptible to fast-entry de-skilling preparation characterized by alternative certification programs. Given the platform of *Forbes* and the ability of the judges and awardees of the Under30 award to promote their brand of education reform through the award this point becomes more salient. That is, the vast majority of the judges and individuals who are associated with the Under30 award are directly associated with alternative certification programs like TFA, New Leaders for NewSchools (now simply referred to as New Leaders), The New Teacher Project (TNTP) that specifically seek to de-skill and de-professionalize teaching by providing only 18 hours of student teaching (Brewer, 2014) when compared to traditional certification offered through colleges of education that require at least one full semester, if not two, of full-time student teaching. Additionally, the majority of the network has direct links to the charter movement (e.g., 50CAN, KIPP, National Authorizers of Charter Schools, etc.), which benefits from the “creaming” of students and intentional segregation (Brewer & Lubienski, 2017; Frankenberg, 2011), practices that explicitly undermine the democratic process.

If we conceive of public education as a democratic process and a collective good, we must question the infiltration of organizations that seek to privatize the learning process for profit and to reconceive of education as a commodity to be sold by edu-preneurs and purchased by schools,

teachers, and students. The creation of illusory awards like the Under30 award seek to reify the goal of privatizing education for profit while elevating edu-preneurs who operate in a homophilous network as the saviors of public education. The creation of and advertising of the award situates education reformers into a position where their motives for educational profits are not to be challenged since the aim of the award, like any advertisement, is to create positive impressions of the Under30 recipients and their organizations/businesses. Future work will continue to finalize the catalogue of the reform network and untangle ongoing financial and ideological connections that seek to further privatize and monetize education.

## Limitations

We took great caution with our data collection, coding, and analysis. Yet our data collection relied on self-reporting of affiliation with individuals and organizations. To those ends, the network likely contains additional in-network connections and there are likely other individuals and organizations not included in our analysis as a natural outcome of non-reporting on behalf of those individuals and organizations included here. Additionally, we acknowledge that while some affiliations may have not been reported, reported affiliations may have expired at the time we collected data and the reporting of that affiliation online had not yet been updated. As a precaution, we asked researchers who also conduct social network analysis research who were not affiliated with this study to examine our UCINET data for consistency and accuracy.

During the final stages of this analysis, *Forbes* released its 2018 cohort significantly earlier than previous years—the list was announced in early November of 2017 (Strauss, 2017). Due to time constraints in the research process, the 2018 cohort is not included in this particular analysis. However, a cursory glance over the list of winners and the judges show some immediate consistent patterns with the award. Namely, among the newest cohort are seven TFA alums. Not only does that align with the pattern we uncovered from the history of the award it is notable that Wendy Kopp and Stacey Childress returned again to serve as judges. Additionally, Joe Vasquez (a 2017 awardee) served as a judge for the new 2018 cohort. It came with little surprise that Mr. Vasquez himself has direct ties to TFA, Education Pioneers, Goldman Sachs, and Manhattan Prep—all central players within the education reform network.

While we know the total number of individuals who were nominated to *Forbes* for consideration, we do not know what percentage of those nominations were self-nominations (which *are* allowed), and those that were the result of a third-party nomination. Additionally, despite the type of nomination, we are unable to know what the demographics of the total nominee population were. That is to say: it is quite possible that the entire nomination pool was connected within the reform network. If that were the case, it might suggest the perceived power that the Under30 award carries within the network. It may also be the case that the nomination pool was a diverse mix of educators not connected to the reform network and those edu-preneurs who are. If that were the case, it might suggest—even more so than our analysis here—that the judges specifically award individuals within their networks. While either scenario (or others) are a possibility, we are simply unable to know who all of the nominees were and are therefore unable to draw specific conclusions about how some are, or are not, chosen for the award as we are only able to examine the academic backgrounds and connections of those that are chosen for the Under30.

## Policy Implications

With the rapid growth of education reforms that favor privatization and marketization of public education, it becomes clear(er) that researchers, policymakers, teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders in education should raise questions about who is pushing such reforms and to what extent are those individuals and organizations in collaboration—a cabal, as it were. The general public has long bought into the myth of the failed school and the bad teacher stemming back to both the launch of Sputnik (and the United States’ appearance of educational failure) and the release of “A Nation at Risk” by the Reagan Administration suggesting that the mediocre nature of our nation’s schools should be understood as synonymous with a foreign country declaring war on the United States. Connected to the long history of perpetuating the myth of the failed school, partnered with the conservative/neoliberal economic ideology and theories grounded in Friedmanism, many individuals and organizations have risen to prominent power (both in terms of political capital and large financial coffers at their disposal) calling for the deregulation of schools (reducing the role of government) and injection of free-market competition. From our analysis, the *Forbes* Under30 award is clearly a mechanism by which such individuals are not only recognized for their efforts at privatization but a mechanism through which like-minded individuals and organizations engage in self-congratulations and/or further reinforce network connections in such a way that entry into group requires ideological homophily. Manufactured awards like the Under30 create the opportunity to promote common interests by isolating disparate or competing ideas and individuals as not being in the “in group” and, in the process, create echo chambers that serve to self-congratulate those within the edu-preneur circle. According to Flaxman, Goel, and Rao (2016), echo chambers are instances wherein “individuals are largely exposed to conforming opinions” (p. 299).

It is vitally important that when individuals and organizations are held up as exemplar examples of reforms that the awardee being recognized is examined as well as their connections to the awarding judges/organization be scrutinized. As we have shown here, the majority of Under30 recipients have a direct connection to the organizations that the *Forbes*’s judges represent. It appears that the majority of individuals receiving the Under30 award are not only being recognized by the judges (and *Forbes*) for their efforts to promote privatization but also for their ideological alignment with the very organizations that the judges represent. Awards like the Under30 and its large public audience given the reach of a periodical such as *Forbes*, reinforce the public’s understanding of “problems” in education and the “solutions” that are “working.” That is, when *Forbes* identifies individuals who have policy solutions, like charter schools for example, it reinforces in the mind of the reader (parents, voters, etc.) that public schools need to be reformed through competition. Additionally, policymakers who are attentive to the perceptions of their constituent’s expectations of policy reforms, along with being reinforced by media outlets (Malin & Lubienski, 2015), may take awards like the Under30 at face-value and adopt similar reforms. Implications for students may mean that policy decisions surrounding educational reforms continue to elevate the importance of the individual over the collective good while orienting educational policies to benefit those edu-preneur reformers who stand to profit from their reforms. The isolation of TFA within the reformer network highlighted the close connections between TFA and like-minded organizations such as KIPP, LEE, Relay, Aspire, Students for Education Reform, etc. While it may be of little surprise that like-minded organizations (often founded by TFA alums) remain in close connection with TFA, the growing connections to the U.S. Department of Education are a cause for concern. A growing body of evidence has started to provide a glimpse into the impact that TFA alumni have once they move from the classroom to policymaking decisions (Brewer, Kretchmar, Sondel, Ishmael, & Manfra, 2016; Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014; White, 2016; Williams, 2016) but little has been done

surrounding the implications of their infiltration into the U.S. Department of Education. Alumni of TFA are actively encouraged and aided by TFA to transition from the classroom into policy making positions like those at the U.S. Department of Education. And as the U.S. Department of Education, as well as state-level governance bodies, become more populated with TFA alums, policy creation and implementation that prioritizes privatization by way of deregulation, alternative certification by way of de-skilling teaching, and the standardization of curriculum and the for-profit testing that follows (e.g., Every Student Succeeds Act), will likely continue to expand—particularly under administrations that are favorable to such reforms.

The present study offers evidence that there continues to be a convergence across political ideologies towards market-oriented education reforms and a circling of the wagons, as it were, on who is promoted and elevated within the reform network through manufactured awards like the Under30. In essence, *Forbes's* Under30 award presents a façade of prestige and uncritical examination surrounding the individuals and organizations that are being bolstered to further blur the lines between education and corporations as the insular reform network seeks to privatize education.

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### Appendix

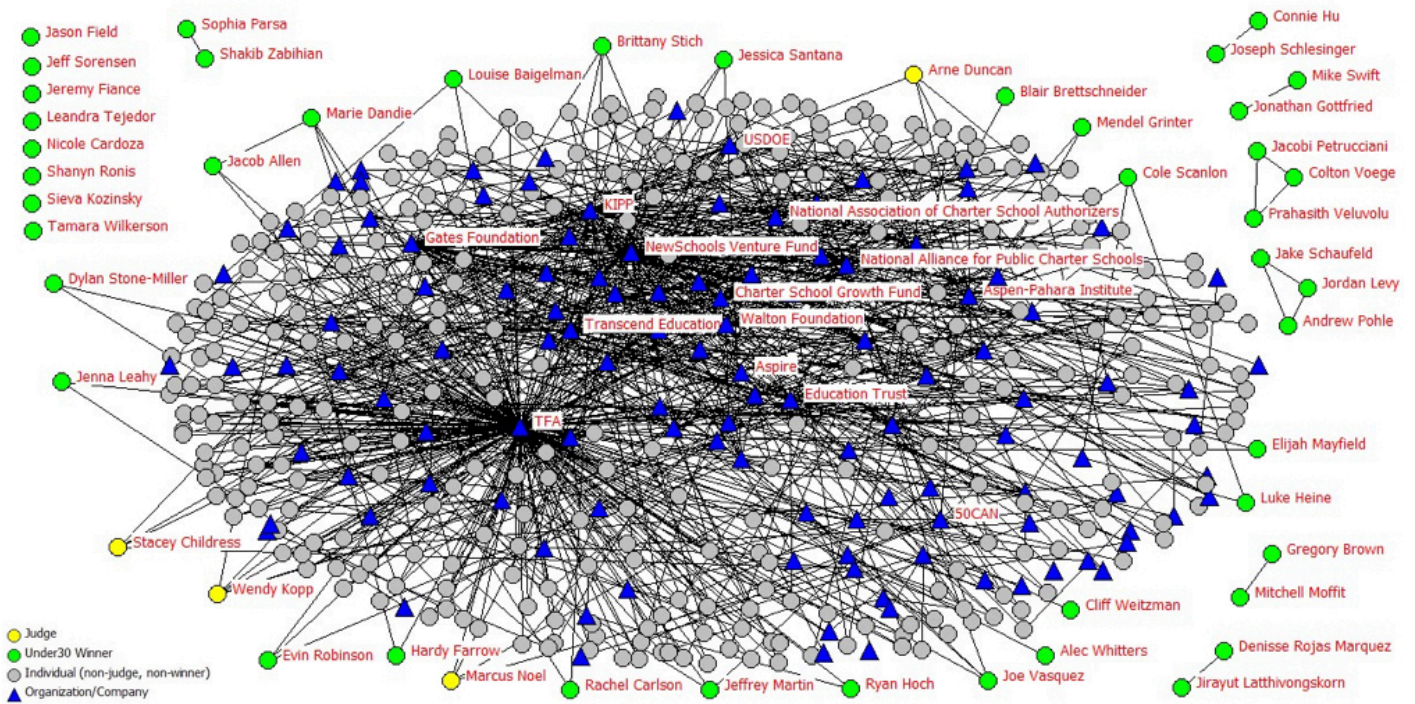


Figure A1. 2017 Under30 Winners Within and Outside of Reform Network.

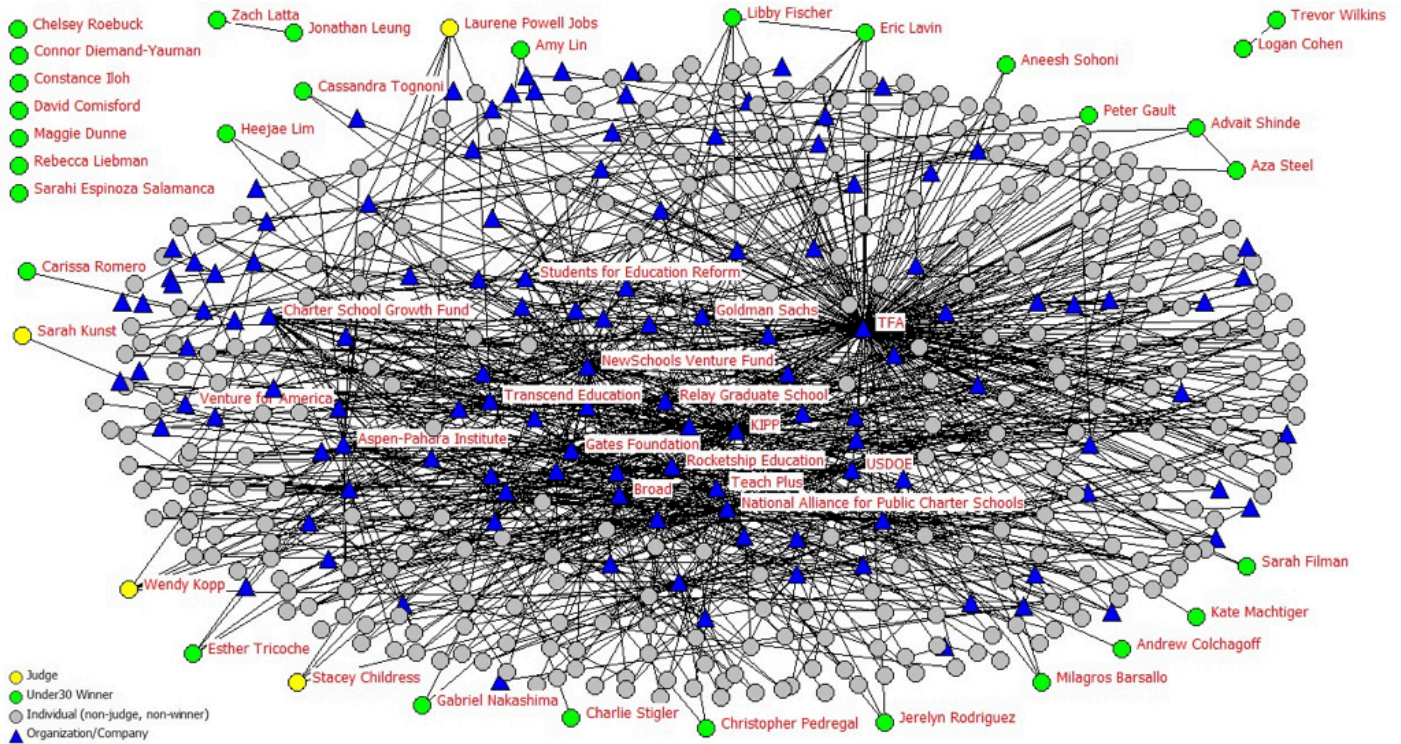


Figure A2. 2016 Under30 Winners Within and Outside of Reform Network.

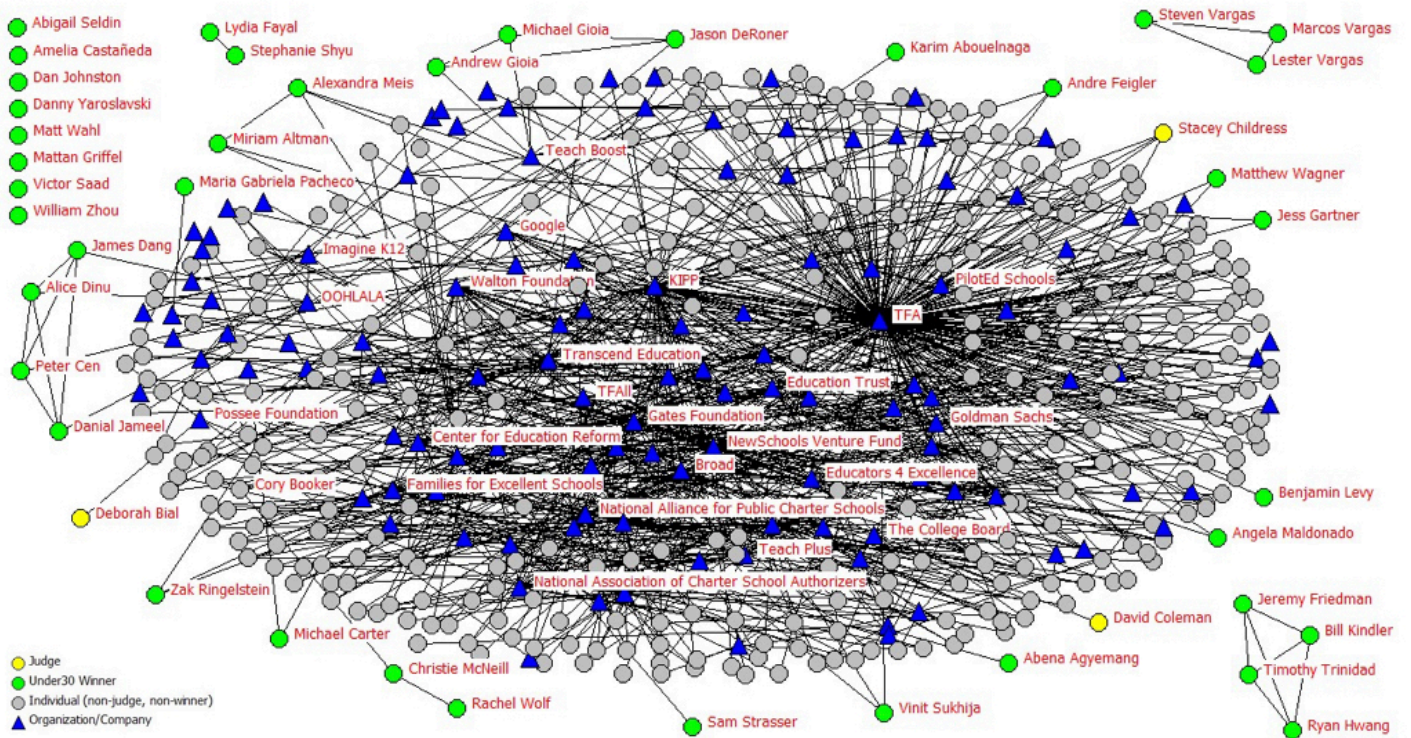


Figure A3. 2015 Under30 Winners Within and Outside of Reform Network.

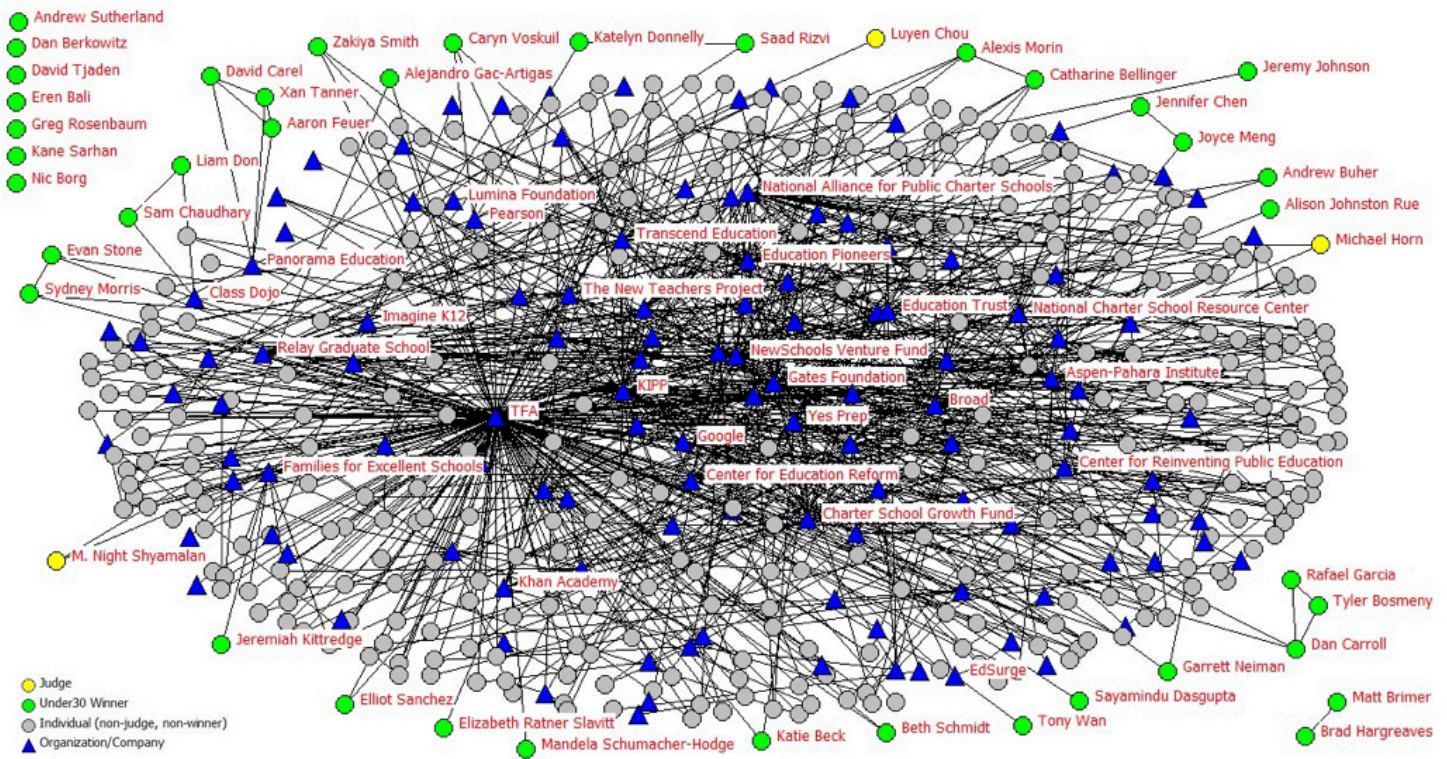


Figure A4. 2014 Under30 Winners Within and Outside of Reform Network.

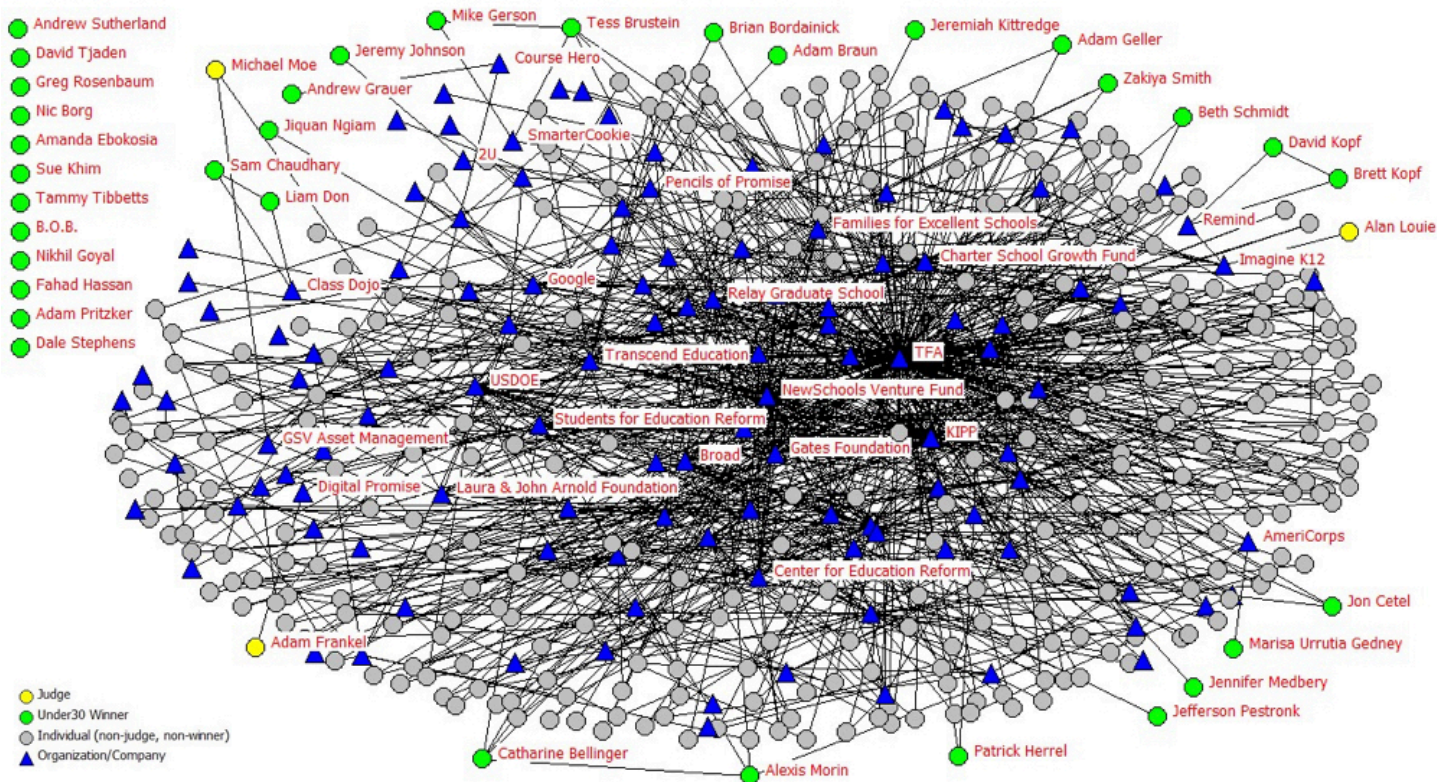


Figure A5. 2013 Under30 Winners Within and Outside of Reform Network.

Table A1

*Ranking of Freeman Closeness Centrality, by Year*

Rank	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	All Years
1	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA
2	KIPP	KIPP	NSVF	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP
3	NSVF	NSVF	KIPP	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF
4	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.
5	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Walton Found.
6	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Broad Found.
7	Relay	Relay	Relay	Relay	Relay	Relay
8	Carnegie Corp.	Rocketship	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Rocketship
9	Rocketship	Carnegie Corp.	Rocketship	Rocketship	Rocketship	Carnegie Corp.
10	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE

*Note:* The following acronyms are used in the table above: TFA (Teach For America), KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), NSVF (NewSchools Venture Fund). The following shortened names used in the table above: Relay (Relay Graduate School), Gates Found. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), Walton Found. (The Walton Foundation), Carnegie Corp (Carnegie Corporation of New York), Broad Found. (Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation), Rocketship (Rocketship Public Schools – a charter network), USDOE (United States Department of Education).



Table A2  
*Ranking of Betweenness Centrality, by Year*

Rank	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	All Years
1	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA
2	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	NSVF
3	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	KIPP
4	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE	USDOE
5	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Vinit Sukhija
6	Tess Brustein	Broad Found.	Vinit Sukhija	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Gates Found.
7	Broad Found.	Goldman Sachs	Broad Found.	NAPCS	NAPCS	Imagine K12
8	Smarter-Cookie	NAPCS	Imagine K12	Goldman Sachs	Goldman Sachs	Goldman Sachs
9	Imagine K12	Aspen-Pahara	NAPCS	Aspen-Pahara	Aspen-Pahara	Broad Found.
10	NAPCS	Walton Found.	Aspen-Pahara	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Google

*Note:* The following acronyms are used in the table above: TFA (Teach For America), KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), NSVF (NewSchools Venture Fund). The following shortened names used in the table above: Relay (Relay Graduate School), Gates Found. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), Walton Found. (The Walton Foundation), Carnegie Corp (Carnegie Corporation of New York), Broad Found. (Eli & Edythe Broad Foundation), Rocketship (Rocketship Public Schools – a charter network), USDOE (United States Department of Education), NAPCS (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools).

Table A3  
*Ranking of Eigenvector Centrality, by Year*

Rank	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	All Years
1	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA	TFA
2	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP	KIPP
3	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF	NSVF
4	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.	Gates Found.
5	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Walton Found.	Relay	Walton Found.	Relay
6	Relay	Broad Found.	Broad Found.	Walton Found.	Broad Found.	Walton Found.
7	Broad Found.	Relay	Relay	Broad Found.	Relay	Broad Found.
8	Rocketship	Rocketship	Rocketship	Rocketship	Rocketship	Rocketship
9	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.	Carnegie Corp.
10	Noble Charters	CSGF	CSGF	CSGF	CSGF	Noble Charters

*Note:* The following acronyms are used in the table above: TFA (Teach For America), KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), NSVF (NewSchools Venture Fund), CSGF (Charter School Growth Fund). The following shortened names used in the table above: Relay (Relay Graduate School), Gates Found. (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), Walton Found. (The Walton Foundation), Carnegie Corp (Carnegie Corporation of New York), Rocketship (Rocketship Public Schools – a charter network).

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