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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: MINORITIZED COMMUNITIES, URBAN SCHOOL REFORM, SCHOOL POLICIES, AND MAYORAL CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore a federal turnaround policy under a mayoral-controlled Northeastern school district that began in 2013. The study utilizes discourse and document analysis and interviews, as well as a life history methodology to explore the perspectives of educators, local politicians, and community activists from Black and Latinx communities, as well as other minoritized populations, within the jurisdiction of the school district. The framework for this study draws on a critical analysis of educational policy studies and utilizes Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy framework to highlight discourses and language used to *frame* individuals and groups. This study analyzes a forced leadership change and focuses on a particular elementary school as a result of the implementation of a turnaround policy, and offers some implications for educational policy, reform, and leadership practices.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, culture of educational policy, educational leadership, mayoral control, turnaround policy, integrated governance

Introduction

This study investigates the structural and systemic complexities occurring in the Sunnydale Everest[1] school district. Sunnydale is one of many cities in the Northeast whose marginalized populations and communities have continually been adversely affected by deindustrialization. During the height of the industrialization and manufacturing period, from the early to mid-nineteenth century, Sunnydale was a magnet for immigration (Brooke, 1985; Ryan, 1992). James Brooke (1985) of the *New York Times* recalled, Sunnydale "was the 19th-century version of today's Silicon Valley" (Brooke, 1985). Today, Sunnydale is an urban city ravaged by deindustrialization and economic divestment in the urban areas, in spite of some of the highest tax rates in Everest state—a state among the highest tax rates in the country. As a result, poverty and a debilitating drug epidemic have led to a sweeping mass incarceration phenomenon in

[1]Note: I refer to the Black and Latinx community members in this study as minoritized, a verb meaning an action that is happening to them. They are not *minor* or *minority*, a noun—as the noun suggests. Furthermore, they are the majority in the district, composing 85 percent of the students. Finally, they do not refer to themselves as minor or minority.

Sunnydale (Wright, 2019b). According to Reynolds and Murray (2008), Sunnydale became a host for politically corrupt systems and players, industrial sabotage, and various scandals.

Geographically, Sunnydale is about 50 miles outside of a major Northeastern city, and has a history of well-documented and widespread political and institutional investigations of city officials, notably within city hall (Associated Press, 2014; Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001). The first author in this study was raised in Sunnydale and attended the local K-12 schools there as well. The second author has no relationship to the research site. This study is about an entanglement with the mayoral-led Sunnydale public schools and this relationship to minoritized communities, mostly Black and Latinx, who make up more than 85 percent of students in the Sunnydale school district (Naples, 2014; Wright, 2019b). This study centers on the perspectives of educators, local politicians, and community activists from Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities as well as other minoritized perspectives. Educators and community members from Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities are concerned with turnaround policy application and mayoral-led educational strategies and practices. The study presented here is an inquiry of school leadership and the implementation of the *turnaround* policy.

The turnaround policy is analyzed using critical policy analysis informed by concepts from Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy framework. The culture of education policy allows us to look beyond the surface of policy and examine ideological assumptions informing policy (Stein, 2004). In 2013 McLanster Elementary School in the Sunnydale school district was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy funded through Title I. Schools in the lowest 5 percent on standardized test scores in math and reading meet the federal guidelines for turnaround. Implementation of turnaround in Sunnydale occurred through an integrated governance model: mayor control (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b).

Background of Sunnydale: A Life History

The following sections aim to provide both a historical context for Sunnydale and the lead authors' positionality for this study. Increasingly over the years, researchers have made an effort to explore and articulate their position in relation to their research. They have done so to acknowledge any personal relationships to the people and settings in the study and to discuss how these may have played a role in both data collection and analyses. Goodsoon and Sikes (2001) state:

> Indeed, since the 1980s, it has been common practice for qualitative researchers in general to 'write themselves' into their research, on the grounds that personal, background information will enhance the rigor of their work by making potential biases explicit. (p. 35)

Sunnydale is infamously known across the state and throughout the region by a derogatory nickname due to years of political and institutional corruption (Associated Press, 2014; Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001; Reynolds & Murray, 2008). Local hip-hop artists originated the infamous nickname in one of the city's urban neighborhoods, where the focus school of this study, McLanster Elementary, is located. A local Sunnydale DJ on a popular radio station in the region began referencing Sunnydale by this derogatory nickname during live broadcasts (Wright, 2019b). Sunnydale's urban and minoritized communities appropriated the derogatory nickname, popularized it, and repackaged it as a term of endearment. As a result, many throughout the Northeast came to know of Sunnydale by this alternative name. The nickname is, in part, a reference to recurring, widespread political and institutional misconduct on the part of city officials. Within a decade, two Sunnydale mayors, Mayor Brian Pietri in 1992 and Mayor

Randolf Marino in 2002, were imprisoned following investigations during their tenures as mayor (Associated Press, 2014; Cowan, 2003; Hays, 1992). These arrests and convictions were followed by the investigation and eventual imprisonment of Everest's governor Joseph Likert in 2004, also a Sunnydale native (Cowan, 2017; Zielbauer, 2004). Also, many of Sunnydale's inner-city and minoritized residents have, for decades, lamented about police brutality and misconduct as rampant federal investigations haunted many rank-and-file city officials (Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001; Mahony, 2016; Press, 2012).

In 2013 McLanster Elementary was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy funded through Title I and implemented under the auspices of the Sunnydale mayor (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b). As will be explored in greater detail throughout the study, the process in which officials responded to educational policy, in light of the populations whom the policy affected, is of great interest. As indicated in Sunnydale's history, many of the voices and people that were deemed fit to make decisions for others were valued over those from the Latinx and Black communities.

Literature Review

Throughout the history of the educational system in the United States, locally elected school boards have been, and still are, the most common model of educational governance. However, centralized structures are increasingly replacing locally elected school boards (Davis, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Manna & McGuinn, 2013; Morel, 2018; Wong, 2007; Wong & Shen, 2013). Aside from the most common school governance structure, the elected school boards, others include appointed school boards, school boards with both elected and appointed members, state-control, and city/mayoral control, which is the focus of this study. City/mayoral control is part of a reform model that centralizes school governance, shifting control of individual schools and school districts to the state and city administration, using large infusions of federal dollars. Morel (2018) found that integrated governance and centralization models, such as state and city takeovers, negatively impact Black and Latinx representation, stifle democracy, and exacerbate community conflicts, especially in minoritized and urban communities.

Takeover Laws and Race

Takeover laws "permit the state to assume direct operational control of a school district or individual school, thereby bypassing locally elected officials" (McGuinn & Manna, 2013, p. 6). School takeovers are enacted, it is argued, to remedy low-academic performance. However, over three decades of evidence suggest that race is a common factor in takeover implementation (Arsen, Deluca, Ni, & Bates, 2016; Bowman, 2013; Morel, 2018; Trujillo et al., 2014; Wright, Whitaker, Khalifa, & Briscoe, 2018). Conversely, research links academic improvement to parental and community engagement (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2018). Yet, "low academic performance does not explain why Black communities are more likely to experience the most punitive form of state takeover" (Morel, 2018, p. 73). Additionally, in Black, Latinx, and other urban and minoritized school districts, takeovers stifle and undermine parental and community engagement (Morel, 2018; Wong, 2007).

Mayoral Control in Education

As previously mentioned, integrated governance means the centralization of school governance, wherein school districts are integrated under federal, state, or city control (Henig, 2013; Wong, 2007). Large urban schools and districts with large populations of minoritized students are those most likely to be cited for takeover or mayoral control (Morel, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). Wong and Shen (2013) reported a strong correlation between mayoral governance and enhanced student achievement (test scores) in many large urban districts and cities. Thus,

business leaders, politicians, and school unions are leading the charge for mayoral control of schools (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; McDermott, 2013; Wong, 2007). Henig (2013) rightly acknowledged that there are "proponents arguing that it [mayoral control] catalyzes reform and opponents complaining that it marginalizes parent and community groups" (p. 178). Thus, mayoral control is perhaps most noted for the hard lines which it draws between its proponents and opponents.

Outcomes of Mayoral Control

Evidence is inconclusive regarding mayoral control as an effective strategy toward improved student performance. Although some large, mayoral-controlled urban districts showed academic improvement (i.e., test scores), such progress could be attributed to an array of other factors impacting urban education reform, such as curriculum changes (Kirst and Wirt, 2009; Warren, 2011; Wong & Shen, 2013). Thus, in cases where test scores had improved, "it remains unclear how much of this increase reflects real learning" (Warren, 2011, p. 484-485). Kirst and Wirt (2009) argue that there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that mayoral control's effectiveness is inconclusive. This argument is contrary to Wong's (2007) claim that statistically significant, positive gains in reading and math will result from mayoral control.

Critiques of Mayoral Control

Arguments for successful outcomes of mayoral control are vague and blurry (Morel, 2018). Davis (2013) argued that "governance structures too often allow politics to play an overwhelming role in education, some- times blocking innovation" (p. 74). Lipman (2011) posits that "mayoral control is a critical tool to restructure school systems from the top with minimal public 'interference'" (p. 47). Kirst and Wirt (2009) described the integrated governance strategy of mayoral control as an under-examined "bully pulpit" (p. 287). Hess (2008) noted that those who study the idea of mayoral control are generally equivocal about it. Kirst and Wirt (2009) noted that, "the overwhelming evidence is inconclusive" that mayoral control is as effective as it is branded (p. 163). Much research on mayoral control cites the potential for success in mayoral-led school districts; however, successful outcomes are scant and mostly idealistic (Morel, 2018).

Conceptual Framework and Policy Culture

This study is guided by a critical discourse analysis of policy and documents. Conventional policy analysis is rooted in the belief that policy serves as a mechanism to solve problems and produce better outcomes (Ng, Stull, & Martinez, 2019). For example, policy analysis in education is typically focused on inputs such as school leadership initiatives, like training, evaluation, resource allocation and on outputs like the quality of school leadership, and student achievement (Gates, Baird, Master, & Chavez-Herrerias, 2019; Herman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). However, recent scholarly engagements with policy studies are challenging conventional methods. These challenges encourage critical analyses of discourses, narratives, and symbols that undergird and define policy (e.g., Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014; López, 2003; Stein, 2004; Wright et al., 2018). Thus, critical policy analysis suggests that policy and policy reform should be understood for their potential to reproduce and replicate much of the inequity it seeks to dispel. Such critical approaches allow researchers to highlight power dynamics and control mechanisms embedded in education policies at all levels of governance (Levinson, 2005).

In accord with this critical perspective on policy, the concept of culture of education policy (or culture of policy) frames this study. Culture is recognized as the epistemologies: norms, values, practices, and ways of knowing specific to particular groups (e.g., Curry, 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Mignolo, 2012). Stein's (2004) culture of policy framework

identifies 60-plus years of failed equity-oriented educational policies in the US. The culture of education policy helps identify and examine "the ways in which policies shape institutional and individual perceptions and treatments of those they aim to serve" (Stein 2004, p. 12). Together, critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, and culture of policy assist with the analysis of the policy's decision-making process for Sunnydale, by considering the reality of those who chose and implemented the policy in comparison to the community affected, and the repercussions for Sunnydale's students and families (Abraham et al. 2019; Gillborn 2010; Radd et al. 2019; Smyth and Robinson 2015; Stein, 2004; Wright et al., 2018). This conceptual framework emerged because it brings to light the voices of the Latinx and Black community members and officials by analyzing their pleas and arguments to reinstate the former principal and their experiences with systemic injustice. By doing so, this framework exposes the power dynamics influencing the decision-making process by the government, district, and educational board.

Methodology

In this inquiry, the lead researcher conducted interviews and critically analyzed discourses across a range of documents. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that discourse analysis is one way to analyze documents and narratives and is a way to explore and analyze how language itself is structured. According to Davies and Harré (1990) *discourse* is described as when "one speaker is said to position themselves and another in their talk" (p. 49). Thus, a critical discourse analysis helps interpret and understand the positionality informing documents as well as ideologies that may be informing educational policies and leadership practices. In this study, we also utilize discourse analysis as a strategy to better understand the inequality occurring from the turnaround policy under the mayoral control for the Sunnydale Everest school district between 2013-2018.

Insights from the People

School leaders and prominent voices from Sunnydale's minoritized communities were interviewed and documents referencing schools in the district were analyzed in this study. Documents reviewed included federal, state and local policy documents and reports, board of education meeting minutes, local media publications, court records, and social media content. Specifically, the board of education meeting minutes propelled the lead researcher to various other school leaders, board members, community members, parents, students, and activists impacted or otherwise concerned with turnaround school policies and mayoral-controlled educational strategies and practices in Sunnydale. Data collection and document analysis coincide with the time turnaround was implemented at McLanster Elementary in 2013. Content analysis and interviews were collected and conducted between 2015 and 2018. Participants all self-identified as Black or African American. This purposive sampling selection (Palys, 2008) was intentional in that the perspectives that shaped the policies of the district and its schools—which in turn affected students and their communities—were of White administrators and other White stakeholders, which were generally in conflict or opposition with the perspectives and values of Black and Latinx residents.

Deficit Discourses and Minoritized Communities

The blowback from turnaround in the Sunnydale school district garnered much attention regionally and to a lesser extent nationally. However, Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities and students, and their respective cultures, were "deficitized"—which is to say, framed negatively and depicted as problems in much of the media content. These deficitized frames are indicative of what was found in the *Everest State Law Tribune*. This popular,

influential legal publication framed McLanster Elementary School as situated in a "rough part" of the city, full of "blighted homes" and poor families whose students struggled to speak English and in need of special education (Spicer, 2016, para.,1). Thus, communities and perspectives that were largely marginalized in dominant discourse platforms are centered in this paper. This study entails a critical, comparative analysis of discourses and practices of Sunnydale's mostly-White educational leadership and the perspectives of Black/Latinx and minoritized community members.

Life History Methodology as a Counterculture

This inquiry is conducted using a life history methodology. The focus years of this life history runs from 2013 through 2018. The life history methodology is utilized as an antithesis to traditional educational research methods. Some scholars call life history methodology a counterculture (Dhunpath, 2000; Wright, 2019a). The term is meant to signal a radical divergence from the epistemological foundations of traditional educational research methods: the ways we come to know including the strategies, paradigms, research models, grammar, and theories in educational research (Dhunpath, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Positionality

A life history methodology was selected to conduct this inquiry because it facilitates making explicit the first author's positionality in the study. The lead author was born and raised in Sunnydale and attended public and parochial schools there. His long relationship to Sunnydale corresponds to his knowledge of, and ties to, the sociopolitical discourses and practices in the city, particularly from the perspective of minoritized communities. The second author brought to this study the perspective of an outsider to Sunnydale, and she offered a different but complementary reading on the city and the data. This study is framed by a critical policy analysis of educational policy studies, specifically Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy; these concepts inform our analysis of discourses and language used to frame individuals and groups as part of this study.

Countering Deficit Discourses

The particular epistemological position of the life history methodology values the subjective, emic, and ideographic, wherein objective generalizations are not the goal (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). "Life history data disrupts the normal assumptions" and "forces a confrontation" with subjective perceptions and claims of objectivity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 7). Thus, this inquiry centered and amplified, oftentimes contrasting, perspectives and insights from minoritized communities and students, their culture, educational leadership, and district personnel. The approach to the life history method is to humanize the experiences of African Americans, Latinx, and other minoritized communities and groups in Sunnydale by chronicling a sample of their experiences and their insights. Such experiences and insights contrast with powerful discourses and practices driving public schooling in Sunnydale, led by a powerful mayor. Moreover, this approach works to fill gaps in educational history and in research on Black and Latinx/urban education in the United States, specifically Everest.

Centering those on the Margins

Everest is the state which is home to the Sunnydale school district and is often thought of for its affluence and wealth. Rarely do people associate this state's Everest cities and neighborhoods with Black and Brown families and their impoverished, failing schools (Wright, 2019b). Life history studies are designed to not only add shape to some feature of life experience but to bring to the front marginalized identities and perspectives (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Munro, 1998; Wright, 2019a). This life history study centers and amplifies voices of people

living in the shadows of Everest's affluence. This study highlights how the Sunnydale school district implemented the turnaround policy, and how the minoritized community members responded.

Talking Back to the Center

As noted, most of the participants from the interviews self-identified as African American or Black, which contrasts the predominantly White educational leadership in the district. The documents and interviews are analyzed primarily through two areas: first, the way the sentiments are expressed, such as tone and language, and second, the focus of the topic being conveyed.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, followed by identifying portions of the transcripts which expressed the sentiments and perspectives of the marginalized community toward the turnaround policy and the impact it had on them. Patterns were sought in order to identify sentiments around the actions toward the principal and school, and any historical institutional and/or systemic relationships between the community, educational structure, and government which carried over to the decision-making process. This data was then compared to the literature around takeover laws and mayoral control. Similar efforts were made when analyzing the documents from board meetings to seek patterns of what was expressed by Latinx and Black community members and officials and contrasting them with the decisions made by their White counterparts. Board meeting minutes were analyzed given that such meetings reflected one major space in which exchanges took place between decision makers and implementers of the policy and community members who were affected by their policies. Documents were used as supportive data along with our interview data; documents varied, and some additional context is provided.

Analysis

In 2013, a school in the Sunnydale school district was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy and is funded through Title I. Implementation of turnaround occurred through an integrated governance model: mayor control (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b). Our data and findings were analyzed using critical policy analysis and culture of education policy concepts.

Turnaround in Sunnydale

During the years of this inquiry, 60 percent of the City of Sunnydale's budget was allocated for education. Additionally, millions more poured into the district as a result of turnaround (State of Everest, 2010). Turnaround criterion indicated that schools be in the lowest 5 percent on standardized test scores in math and reading. Thus, in 2013, two schools met these criteria, and the district moved to implement turnaround. One of the schools, McLanster Elementary School, is the focus of this inquiry. Bradley Smith, an African American male, was the principal at McLanster at the time of turnaround. 95 percent of the students at McLanster were Puerto Rican and African American, respectively and nearly 90 percent received free and reduced lunch (Wright, 2019b).

What Mayoral Control Means for Sunnydale

Lipman (2011) reminds us that mayoral control is designed for minimal interference and can silence concerns and inquiries raised by individuals and groups. Per Everest's 2017 state budget, Sunnydale was one of 52 cities cited for an education budget increase (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Sunnydale was to receive a $38 million increase, raising its total educational budget to a staggering $174 million, one of the state's highest (Rabe Thomas, 2017). The state issued total

autonomy to local municipalities on how to spend that money. This autonomy caused alarm for some in the state because as Susan Altman, the deputy director of the Everest Association of Boards of Education warned, "it will be up to the municipalities to determine whether to actually spend it on their schools—or use it to close their own local budget shortfalls or make up for other state budget cuts" (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, Altman noted that if "it's not going to go to support student needs in most communities… It's important that people understand that education grants might not be being spent on education" (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Altman was concerned that federal funds designated for urban schools could be diverted elsewhere.

Ex Officio as Mayoral Control

The City of Sunnydale's charter grants the mayor ex officio status, which means the mayor is a board of education member. Although a board member (ex officio), the mayor is not allowed to vote, but in the event of a tie, the mayor breaks the tie (Wright, 2019b). Ex officio status was not a new development that emerged with turnaround. Ex officio dates back at least to the 1902 City of Sunnydale charter (Electors of the City of Sunnydale, 1902, 2002). We found that since 2013, Sunnydale mayor Brandon O'Hare used the legislative language in the city's charter in order to control the board of education and influence educational decisions throughout the school district. In spite of the city charter, historically, mayors in Sunnydale left matters of education to the district's educational leaders, the board of education, the superintendent, and the central office or the local education administration. O'Hare, a White male member of the Democratic Party, was born in Sunnydale and is the former chief of police, but stepped down in 2011 when he was elected as mayor (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). During his tenure as police chief, O'Hare was also a member of the board of education.

Bradley Smith versus the Sunnydale Board of Education

By multiple accounts coming from the Latinx and Black communities, including many educators who were interviewed or quoted from archived documents, Bradley Smith, the Blackamerican principal at McLanster at the time of turnaround, was beloved by students and parents and the broader minoritized communities in Sunnydale (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013; Wright, 2019b). The lead researcher interviewed Mina Gardner, an unapologetic Blackamerican community advocate, activist, member of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, and the president of the School Governance Council (SGC) at McLanster during Bradley Smith's tenure as principal. SGC was a bridge organization between parents and school administrators during the time of turnaround. When asked about her perception of Mr. Smith as a principal and as a school leader, Gardner described him as "fair" and "culturally competent" and as someone whom parents came to love because they knew that he loved and understood the community where the students in his school came from.

When turnaround was implemented in 2013, the Sunnydale school superintendent Kristen Mirund addressed community members' concerns at a board of education meeting regarding what would happen to Bradley Smith once turnaround was implemented. Superintendent Kristen Mirund was quoted as saying that "this principal [Bradley Smith] will stay in place, I will make sure of it" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 16). However, in 2013, McLanster Elementary School principal Bradley Smith was removed from McLanster and demoted to vice principal at another school within the district. Smith appealed his demotion, and was eventually vindicated by an arbiter who determined that Smith's demotion occurred without due process. Smith was reinstated as a head principal in the Sunnydale school district, but not at McLanster (Puffer, 2015).

Silencing Minoritized Voices and Perspectives in Sunnydale

At the board of education meeting on July 31, 2013, a significant amount of time was dominated by parents and community members addressing their displeasure at the removal of Bradley Smith from McLanster and at the new mayoral-led leadership (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). At that board of education meeting, Mina Gardner presented to the board of education a petition of 60 signatures from McLanster School parents that wanted Smith reinstated as principal at McLanster (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). In addition to Gardner, James, a McLanster third-grader, addressed the Sunnydale Board of Education at the July 31, 2013 board of education meeting. James proclaimed, "I want Mr. Smith back at McLanster School" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 17). Eva Gonzales, a Latina (Puerto Rican) parent, addressed the board, stating that the removal of Bradley Smith from McLanster was like a "punishment" to the kids and parents—who were never asked their perceptions of Bradley Smith by turnaround auditors or school leadership (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 18). The only Black board of education member, Christine James, said in an interview with the lead author that, overwhelmingly, parents and students wanted Smith at McLanster. She identified herself as, "a big fan of Bradley (Smith)," and advocated listening to the pleas of students and parents in the district. James believed Bradley Smith was wrongly removed from his principalship at McLanster Elementary School. She noted the psychological complexity of being deeply involved in Sunnydale's minoritized communities, contrasting her loyalty to the urban community with the uncaring attitude of the other commissioners (nine of ten who were White). As the only Blackamerican on the board of education when Bradley Smith was removed from McLanster, Christine James offered insight and a unique perspective. When policymakers remain removed from the reality of the students, their families, and the community, and fail to diligently and humbly learn the reality of those who are impacted by the decision, the repercussions can halt the advancement of those purportedly being served by policy decisions.

Centering Minoritized Voices and Perspectives in Sunnydale

After the demotion of Bradley Smith, members of the community and organizations that had a direct relationship to the school, emphasized the role that he played as a principal with the students, families, and his understanding and connection to the community. Mina Gardner's comment in particular highlights his skills, abilities, qualities, understanding of the school and populations it serves, as well as the trust he had garnered during his time as principal. The statements from the parents and students at a board of education meeting confirmed Mina Gardner's comments; they shared that they wanted Mr. Smith back at their school and stressed the impact his removal had on students. Their statements also stressed that the process of demoting him never drew on their firsthand and intimate knowledge of his ability to lead the school. The school board only had one Black member, who expressed that it was a mistake to remove Bradley Smith. They also expressed that 90 percent of the commissioners on the board were White and did not care about listening to the community. We argue here that the voices calling for Bradley Smith's removal came from a different understanding and lived experience than those individuals expressing the need to keep him as principal—differences largely based on race and socioeconomic standing. Our data and analysis indicated that discourses emanating from City Hall and the Mayor amplified a small but powerful collective of voices in favor of Smith's removal.

An Infamous Trinity: City Hall, Ex Officio, and Turnaround

Jeffrey Newcomb, Sr., a retired Everest state legislator and respected African American

politician, community organizer, and political science professor at a local community college in Sunnydale was interviewed for this study. Newcomb's political assessment of what was occurring in the Sunnydale school district was found insightful. He said:

I will put it this way: all politics [are] local and all local politics [are] about one thing—money. And the bottom line here is... McLanster as a turnaround school... you had the purse strings coming from the State [Everest] with special grants of which principals had autonomy to hire, and to implement what they felt their schools needed in order to succeed. There's no way, in the City of Sunnydale, with all that kind of money coming in, they [City Hall/Sunnydale's mayor] were [going to] allow non-political players [Bradley Smith-McLanster school principal] and those who look like 'us' [Black/minoritized community members] to control those purse strings. That's from a political standpoint.

Mr. Newcomb was alluding to the concept that turnaround would have given the principal, Bradley Smith, autonomy to make decisions about his school. Newcomb, with all of his insight and experience with Sunnydale politics, felt strongly that it was politically improbable that Bradley Smith, an African American, would be allowed to control federal funds designated for McLanster. Furthermore, Newcomb's statement, as a retired state legislator, respected politician, and professor, highlighted the lack of community input in the process. He emphasized that politically, the demotion of Mr. Smith was connected *to the flow of funds as a result of the turnaround* and most importantly, the desire of the mayor and the city to ensure that key political players were in certain positions in order to control those funds. Newcomb's suggestion that Smith's demotion was laden with race and discrimination resonated with earlier comments from the only Black member of the school board. In making clear his identification with Sunnydale's Black and minoritized community members, Newcomb draws a strong distinction between those who dictate or oversee school leadership and those who suffer the effects of such rule.

Past Fiscal Mistakes

Veanne McDaniel, a White-female community activist and parent of a special-needs student in the Sunnydale school district, raised concerns about corruption at the board of education meeting on July 31, 2013 (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). McDaniel indicated that Nicholas Lawrence, the State of Everest Board of Education commissioner at that time, informed her that "the Sunnydale educational system is on [his] educational radar because he saw past fiscal mistakes" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 4). Christine James, the longest-tenured Sunnydale Board of Education member, described the complexities of being on the board, stating, "Yea, I'm on the board, but it's very difficult being a Black [person] on the board." Again, the issues of race emerged in the conversation around life in the community and dealing with the needs of the school district,[2] Christine James was asked about mayoral control respective to the scandalous history of Sunnydale's City Hall, and its connection to what was happening in education. After a long pause and a deep breath, she stated:

I think as long as you keep the mayor's position as ex officio; that [corruption] will always exist in the education system. 60 percent of our [City of Sunnydale] budget is in education. Which means we control a lot of money. And with a mayor like this mayor that has his hands in everything, I mean he has done some good, but some things he needs to keep his hands out of... and let the school system, those that have been educated and trained to run the school system,

[2] Sunnydale mayors have been involved in political corruption, including graft, which led to the indictment and convictions of two Sunnydale mayors in 1992 and 2002.

run it. So as long as that ex officio position is in place the political part of it; that corruption will always exist until we remove that.

The heavy-handed, top-down, leadership of the mayor was found to have violated democratic principles and exacerbated tensions across lines of race and class.

Words from the Bully Pulpit

The accusations by members of various communities in the Sunnydale school district often stand in stark contrast to those of the mayor. At the Sunnydale Board of Education meeting on July 31, 2013, Mayor Brandon O'Hare, arguably the most powerful White male in Sunnydale, offered a much different assessment of what was occurring in the district (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). According to meeting minutes, the mayor described himself as being "sea-sick" by all of the back and forth and "cynical comments" being made by community members who came to speak in defense of Bradley Smith (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). The conflicting discourses and interests evident in board minutes is reflective of policymaking made without the community in mind, and in negation of the many testimonials made that expressed the community's confidence in Bradley Smith's leadership. Indeed, the mayor's rude commentary was directed at those coming to the defense of Bradley Smith, rather than on the issues and concerns that they had raised. The fact that there is a conflict and a dialogue taking place between the two sides is reflective of such a decision made without the community in mind, and inconsideration of the many testimonials on the impact that Bradley Smith had in the school and throughout the community.

Furthermore, the mayor that from his "numerous meetings and conversations" with the State of Everest Board of Education commissioner Nicholas Lawrence and the State of Everest governor Henry Brekten, he was acting dutifully; "they both have enormous respect for what's happening in this district" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 31). Though a member of the state board of education and the governor were cited as having "respect for what's happening" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 31), this can also be understood as an acknowledgment of changes occurring due to turnaround, which does not invalidate the communities claims of injustice. True respect on the part of the mayor would have been to include the community in the decision-making and policymaking process, drawing on their insights and keen understanding of their reality. The mayor's perspective speaks volumes about divides along lines of race, class, and culture, along with much broader and deeper systemic disconnects related to democracy and policy application.

Racial Tension and Its Day in Court

Between 2013 and 2017, Bradley Smith was battling a racial discrimination suit against the Sunnydale Board of Education and its superintendent after being demoted for alleged misconduct. In 2013 Smith, pending investigation, was transferred to vice-principal at another school within the district. In 2015, an arbiter overturned Smith's demotion citing due process violations (Puffer, 2015). Smith later filed a federal racial discrimination suit against the superintendent of Sunnydale and the board of education (Spicer, 2016; United States District Court & District of Everest, 2016). On March 11, 2016, a district court judge in Everest found merit in Smith's racial discrimination claim and allowed the case to proceed to trial (Puffer, 2015; Spicer, 2016; United States District Court & District of Everest, 2016). In late 2017, an undisclosed financial settlement was reached in Smith's racial discrimination suit against the Sunnydale Board of Education and its superintendent; Smith presently (2019) holds a head-principal position in Sunnydale (Gagne, 2017). To some extent, these key court rulings lend credibility to many of the minoritized community members' claims that Brown was an effective,

beloved principal who was treated unfairly by the Sunnydale school district and its leadership.

Conclusion and Implications

The Sunnydale, Everest school district was found enmeshed in structural and systemic complexities. In 2013, the turnaround policy was implemented in McLanster Elementary School, the focus school in this inquiry. 60 percent of the entire City of Sunnydale's budget is designated to the Sunnydale school district, which consists of more than 85 percent Black and Latinx students, along with additional federal and state funding incentivized by low academic performing students. This study found that mayoral control of the Sunnydale school district coincided with the implementation of turnaround. Sunnydale's infamous mayoral history raised credible concerns and exacerbated racial tensions. Mayoral control, however, occurred not due to new legislation but through a reinterpretation of the city's charter. The mayor's position as ex officio board member was utilized to strategically determine the trajectory of schooling in Sunnydale to the dismay of educators' parents, community members, and students. The removal of McLanster Elementary School's beloved Black principal, Bradley Smith, outraged many throughout Sunnydale's minoritized communities. Community members and parents were concerned that funds, designated for the district's most needy schools, were being diverted elsewhere. By imposing undemocratic leadership discourses and practices, the mayor, board of education members, and the superintendent intensified racial and cultural divides already adversely affecting the majority-minority school district.

The culture of education policy calls into account a history of discourses and practices which has shaped educational policy by crafting deficit depictions of policy beneficiaries. The present case study, concordant with other studies, has shown that racialized deficit depictions of policy beneficiaries are common in takeover implementation (Arsen, Deluca, Ni, & Bates, 2016; Bowman, 2013; Morel, 2018; Trujillo et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2018). An analysis by Wright et al. (2018) of a policy implementation and school takeover in Detroit bore out claims of systemic and racialized patterns of implementation, while strongly suggesting that "White children, cities, teachers, and educational leaders are unlikely to bear the disenfranchising and marginalizing brunt of neoliberal policy" (p. 16). In Sunnydale's mayoral-led district, parents and minoritized community members were not only unwelcomed, the district was also hostile toward the Black, Latinx, and minoritized communities and its educators who disagreed with its educational agenda.

Perhaps the most unfortunate outcome in this study was the removal of a principal whom Black and Latinx community members admired and respected and whom students were drawn to trust. As we see in this case study, district leadership decisions, which were overwhelmingly handed down by Whites, were adversarial toward the concerns and needs of the majority Black and Latinx community members. The leadership in the district ignored the urban community's capacity to contribute to student growth and success. Such an undemocratic form of decision-making and policy implementation removes those stakeholders most knowledgeable about the needs, concerns, and assets of the community—indeed, those stakeholders most impacted by policy decisions (Wright et al., 2018). As Wright et al. (2018) argue, "Although racialized laws are often drafted in ways that do not explicitly mention race, they are applied in the same ways that explicitly racist laws were once used" (pg. 19). We end here by arguing that to advance effective educational reform in urban or minoritized communities, we need to address deficit discourses embedded in educational policy and practices. Such discourses emerge from political

actors in the educational arena who are condescending toward the culture, epistemologies, values, and norms inherited by students from their broader communities.

Future research might include more of the student voice and experience in these processes, to compliment the adult community members and officials who try to have their perspectives and voices heard. This is an important consideration given that educational policy directly impacts the student and their educational experiences. While the emphasis in this case study is on the systemic forces of race and class and how they play out in the educational policy arena, incorporating the voices and concerns of students would certainly deepen our understanding of these systemic forces.

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