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Abstract

In June of 2002, New York State Governor George Pataki signed legislation granting New York City mayoral control of its public school system. The law dissolved the former Board of Education, replacing it with a schools chancellor to be appointed by the mayor. The system long reflected a shared pattern of authority, with power divided between the central Board of Education and the local community school boards. Under the new reforms, the community school boards were dissolved and replaced by community education councils, essentially policy advisory panels composed primarily of parents of children in the public school system.

In this case study, I utilize the social goals framework to assess the quality of the functioning of the community education councils. Through an analysis of documents, personal and telephone interviews, and observations of four community education councils, I find that these bodies can indeed produce some policy and administrative outputs and outcomes, some being of moderate significance, despite a lack of formal statutory powers. The community education councils appear capable of prompting minor policy and administrative changes relevant to local community school districts as well as some more substantive changes affecting the greater school system. The ability of these structures to produce such changes appears to be driven by a number of factors, including the working styles employed by CEC members when engaging Department of Education administrators, the nature of the political values emphasized within formal policy advisories, and the levels of social capital existent within community school districts. However, the community education councils do not appear capable of affecting the most significant systemic school policies stemming from the 2002 centralizing reforms.

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LEARNING OUR LESSON:
A STUDY ON THE STATE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS SYSTEM

By

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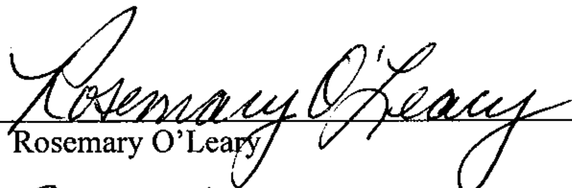
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Administration in the Maxwell School of Syracuse University

May 2008



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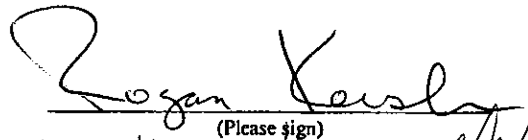

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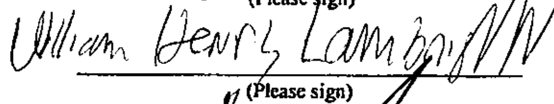

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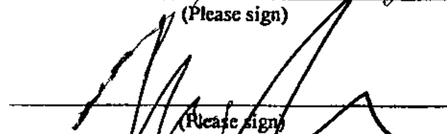

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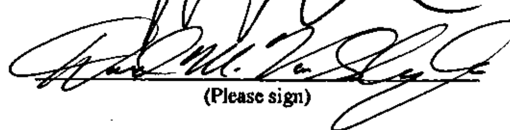

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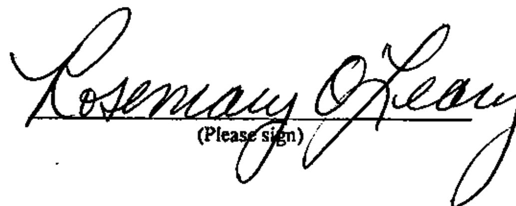

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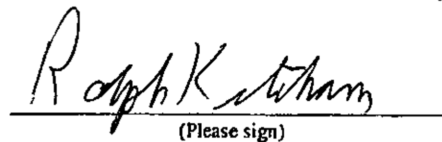

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction.

Achieving a balance between administrative performance and democratic responsiveness has been a challenge for large public organizations. The literature in public administration tells us that the American bureaucracy exists within a unique context; America's history of decentralized governance and democratic participation make the formation and administration of public organizations difficult. Public officials must reconcile the need for organizational performance with the requirements of democratic participation in the functioning of these organizations. Indeed, America finds itself in the unique position of having a virtually "stateless origin," making the processes of public administration in America both uniquely difficult and important (Stillman, 1990). This tension exists across a wide spectrum of American public institutions and organizations, at the federal, state, and local levels.

Recently, public school systems, particularly in large urban centers, are facing this tension of competing values. Public school systems are now facing increasing pressure from their clients, constituents, as well as various levels of government to improve school and student achievement. In many cities throughout the nation, governments are experimenting with the centralization of school governance authority, predicated upon the belief that centralized systems of school governance can streamline operations, reduce corruption, improve accountability and, ultimately, improve school and student performance. Thus, large urban school systems offer robust opportunities for scholars to study how large public organizations deal with the challenge of balancing the inherent tension between bureaucratic organizational forms and democratic expectations in the modern policy context.

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Policy Context

New York City has long faced the daunting challenge of educating the children of America's largest school system. The scope of the New York City Public Schools System (NYCPSS) is enormous. Its internal organizational structure and environmental context is highly complex, making it a fruitful subject of study for public administration scholars. The NYCPSS educates approximately 1.1 million students, employees 80,000 teachers, and administers 1,200 schools. Throughout its history, the system has been faced with the difficult task of educating a highly diverse student population, in terms of social and economic backgrounds as well as academic ability. Moreover, the level of academic skill necessary for success in the modern world has grown, as our economy has shifted from an industrial to a technological economy (Davies, 1981).

Various administrative strategies have been utilized at times to improve the performance of the school system and/or to adapt to social and ideological realities. Among these strategies are changes in governance structure. Historically, the New York City Public School System has experimented with various models of school system governance and administration, at times emphasizing a more centralized, closed-system approach to governance, while at other times emphasizing decentralization and greater local control and authority. The validity of these approaches has long been an issue of debate among education policy scholars and practitioners. In 2002, the NYCPSS ended its experiment with the decentralization of school system governance, a system that has existed in some form since 1969. In this year, New York State Governor George Pataki signed legislation granting control over the school system to the city's mayor, placing New York among a growing

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group of urban school systems that are concentrating governance power within their mayors, in hopes of achieving systemic improvements through such centralized administrative forms.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to note that the centralization of large public organizations require the striking of a delicate balance between competing priorities, namely an internal systemic need to perform with a certain level of autonomy with the publicly held desire to participate in and influence the operations of such systems. Education historian Dianne Ravitch documents the historical difficulties in achieving such a balance in New York City's Public Schools System in her book The Great School Wars. Ravitch illustrates a historical dialectic occurring between patterns of centralization and decentralization, a constant systemic vacillation resulting from the continuously changing social and demographic context of New York City vis-à-vis the presence of a steady cadre of professional teachers and administrators operating the school system. This tension and its continuous reconciliation results in changes to the governance structure of the school system, over time culminating in a more complex system and institution (Tyack, 1995).

However, it is important to note that this latest shift towards systemic centralization has occurred within a historical context that now recognizes, and even requires, a legitimate role for more direct forms of public participation in the administration of public organizations. The legitimization of public participation in the administration of the NYCPSS is reflected by the replacement of the former community school boards with community education councils (CECs). Federal law requires that some structure for public participation be created to replace the outgoing community school boards. These parentally

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dominated advisory panels are intended to work with and advise the Department of Education on policy matters, as well as participate in some administrative decisions.

Since the development of the CECs is recent and evolving, this study is partly descriptive in nature. It is descriptive in that it seeks to observe and analyze the actual functioning of a purposive sample of community district education councils. Part of the goal is to observe these structures more closely and to attain more rigorous knowledge about the operations of these participative mechanisms and the kinds of outputs and outcomes they are achieving.

This study is also explanatory in nature, as one of its goals is to answer an important "how" questions. *How* do these public participation mechanisms, with limited formal legal powers, achieve their desired outcomes? How can such structures participate effectively in large, centralized public organizations? As was previously stated, a growing number of urban centers are shifting towards centralized, mayorally controlled systems. However, this is occurring within a historical context that recognizes a legitimate role for the public in the administration of such systems. Thus, participatory mechanisms such as the community education councils are being used throughout these cities as mechanisms to facilitate public participation. This research may help us understand what kinds of participatory mechanisms, with what powers and characteristics, may best achieve the goal of fostering effective public participation. This study may also help provide knowledge for the participants serving in these structures. Our findings may help such participants understand the kinds of formal and informal powers available to them and how they might exercise them effectively for the benefit of their local school districts and constituents.

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Research Context

Using the case study methodology, this study explores and analyzes the functioning of a purposive sample of New York City's community education councils, the participative mechanisms that replaced the former community school boards. The legislation centralizing New York City's public school system required the approval of the United States Justice Department, as it virtually eliminated the powers of the local community school boards, whose members were elected by voters. Under the Federal Voting Rights Act, any changes affecting voting in a jurisdiction with a history of voting discrimination -- which in this case includes Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx -- require Justice Department approval. Thus, the forming of the community district education councils was the result of a legal compromise between New York State and the Justice Department.

While there is a growing thread of educational policy literature investigating the effects and implications of mayoral control in large urban school systems, much of this literature emphasizes the effects of these reforms on traditional performance measures such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, and other indicators of student achievement. This study is unique in that explores the implications of mayoral control for the functioning of the participative mechanisms existing within such systems. Public participation has long been linked with higher school and student achievement. Studies show that students perform better in environments where parents and other members of the community are involved in their schools. The community education councils, as the most prominent participative mechanism existing in the newly centralized public schools system, may be an important contributor towards the fostering of such an environment, justifying the study of their operations.

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Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on education policy in that it both explores and analyzes the functioning of these participative mechanisms within a unique context. While public participation in administrative operations has been a topic of study in the policy literature since the 1960s, this study explores this phenomenon in a unique historical light. Previous studies analyze public participation as a novel phenomenon; this study analyzes public participation as an evolving concept and policy practice. The community education councils, as the new mechanisms for public participation within the NYCPSS, exist within a historical context that legitimizes and even requires a considerable role for the public in administrative operations. This study can aid in the understanding of public participation as an evolving concept in American governance, as well as its more specific contribution to an understanding of the state and practices of public participation in large centralized urban school systems.

The community education councils are an important part of NYC's school reforms. They are a key mechanism by which parents and other community stakeholders interact with the school system, seek to influence its policies, and are represented in governance and policy decisions. Exploring and assessing the functioning of these bodies as governance and participation mechanisms can contribute to school reform literature, especially that focusing on the growing use of centralization and mayoral control as a strategy for school reform. History shows that efforts towards systemic centralization may face serious challenges from the public if adequate venues for community participation and governance are not provided and/or if the concept as a whole is neglected or overlooked. Effective, or at least satisfactory,

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public participation can aid in the development of the environmental stability necessary for effective school functioning.

This research also seeks to contribute to the broader discussion about the practical challenges to public participation in modern governance. The current public administration literature on public participation stresses the need for governments to develop "authentic" forms of participation, forms which "work for all parties and stimulate interest and investment in both administrators and citizens" (King, 1998). What broader lessons may we draw from studying this case, with regards to the pursuit of more authentic forms of public participation, in today's performance-oriented governance context? The recurring tension between the values of organizational performance versus democracy and participation, a classic tension in the study and practice of public administration, is explored throughout this case study.

Structure of Dissertation

This case study follows the traditional linear-analytic structure of reporting. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to this topic, emphasizing the citizen/public participation literature as well as the school reform literature. Chapter 3 presents the specific research questions and details of the methodology used in the conducting of this case study. Chapter 4 provides a more complete policy context for this study as well as an exploration and analysis of the internal workings of the community education councils, emphasizing how their operations conform or diverge from ideal notions of public participation as set forth in the academic literature. Chapters 5 and 6 report on the outputs and outcomes of these councils, exploring and analyzing their achievements as assessed through the lens of the

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social goals framework (Beierle, 1998). Chapter 7 summarizes the research findings, revisits and refines hypotheses drawn at the outset of the study, discusses the conclusions and policy implications that result from this study, and suggests paths for future research.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

New York City is not alone in its efforts towards improving school performance through the centralization of its school system under mayoral control. The cities of Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, the District of Columbia, and numerous other smaller cities, are experimenting with centralization, rejecting much of the previous faith in decentralized forms of systemic governance (Henig, 2004, p. 5). This is a curious development from the academic perspective, as such efforts seem to reject much of the fairly recent administrative wisdom regarding the advantages of decentralizing large bureaucratic structures, flattening large organizations, and devolving authority to the most local level. Why, then, are an increasing number of urban public school districts returning to an organizational and governance strategy that was recently thought passé?

The Motives for Mayoral Control

Present day public school reform efforts are a response to the chronic underperformance of these systems, particularly in major urban centers. This underperformance is well documented. One of the earliest reports calling attention to the problems of education in America was published by the United States Department of Education and titled A Nation at Risk. The report documents the growing failures of public education systems across the country, especially when compared to the school systems of foreign nations. The report notes a "rising tide of mediocrity" present in the educational attainments of schools and students, leaving Americans at a disadvantage with respect to other nations in terms of the development of human capital resources. The authors note that

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this is not just a domestic failure but an issue of national economic concern. The authors highlight that "[k]nowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce." (United States Department of Education, 1983). A high technology global economy increasingly needs the most highly educated and qualified workers, particularly in math and the sciences, to enable America to compete on the global market. A high quality educational system is crucial for the development of a strong economy.

Yet this is not just an economic concern. Education is important for reasons basic to the political functioning of our nation. The lack of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, along with a faltering acculturation process in the public schools, threatens to leave a large sector of American society effectively disenfranchised "not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life" (United States Department of Education, 1983). It is in schools that children learn the civic and social values necessary for people to work together in a democracy. A failing educational system threatens the social and civic life that binds our nation together.

A Nation at Risk called attention to the national scope of the educational problem. But on the local level, New York City has long been conscious of its problems of chronic underperformance, with various academic, government, and media reports documenting the system's problems. In his report State of the New York City Public Schools 2002, Raymond Domanico notes the continuing disturbing trend of systemic failure. A number of figures reveal academic underperformance. Only 70% of New York City public high school students complete high school, either by obtaining a diploma or through a GED, within *seven* years of initial enrollment. Only 50% complete high school through these means within a

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four year period. At the elementary school level, only 41% of students scored at an acceptable level on citywide reading tests in 2000 and only 34% performed acceptably on citywide math tests (Domanico, 2002).

Over the years, the standard for success in public education has evolved (Tyack, 1995). While the early 1900s school system was deemed effective if students learned the rudiments of literacy and numeracy, today's students need a more sophisticated set of skills to compete successfully in the modern economy. And large urban public school systems, such as New York City's, have failed as systems in delivering such an education. Chronic school failure has led to what Henig and Rich refer to as a "do something" imperative regarding the problem of public education, with the populace urging policymakers to take strong action to produce results (Henig, 2004, p. 6). Large scale reforms, then, should be expected. But why mayoral control? Why embrace an orthodox bureaucratic strategy that was once held as the very reason for public school failure?

Public Administration and Bureaucracy

Indeed, the use of bureaucracy to accomplish organizational goals has long been a controversial topic. While initially heralded as the "one best way" to organize and operate large public organizations, administrative thought has since evolved, at times lauding bureaucracy for its focus on organizational rationality, efficiency, and achieving measurable outcomes, while at other times vilifying such an organizational approach for its rigidity, inflexibility, and inability to provide for democratic input.

The publishing of Frederick Taylor's book The Principles of Scientific Management in the early 20th century proved to be a turning point in the intellectual conceptualization of

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principles that could lead to the rational, orderly, and efficient operation of organizations. It is perhaps the single work that best codified the idea that organizations could be organized and operated according to efficient and rational principles. Woodrow Wilson's essay *The Study of Public Administration* tailored this message more specifically for the public sector, positing that organizational efficiency and effectiveness could equally be pursued in government, provided that politics was generally separated from the processes of administration. It is here where the notion of a politics-administration dichotomy was born, that is, the idea that the political and administrative realms should and can be kept separate. Frank Goodnow, in his book Politics and Administration, further articulates this view when he states:

> *Enough has been said, it is believed, to show that there are two distinct functions of government, and that their differentiation results in a differentiation, though less complete, of the organs of government provided by the formal governmental system. These two functions of government may for purposes of convenience be designated respectively as Politics and Administration. Politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will. Administration has to do with the execution of these policies (Goodnow, 1900, p. 18).*

At mid-century, however, scholars began to question the framework of a "scientific" public administration that had been established in prior decades. Many prominent public administration scholars, such as Dwight Waldo, Herbert Simon, and Paul Appleby began to question the tenets of orthodox public administration, claiming that this threat of literature

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that sought a pure science of public management not only overlooked the democratic context in which public administration is embedded, but also was blind to the way in which humans and organizations actually function and make decisions. The critiques of these scholars opened the study of organizations to a multitude of perspectives, making it the heterogeneous discipline it is today.

Perhaps the single author who marked the diversification of the study of public administration as a field was Dwight Waldo. In his book The Administrative State, Dwight Waldo highlights the error of approaching public administration purely as a managerial science. Waldo denies a strict politics-administration dichotomy, noting that, "…doubt has arisen about both the possibility and the desirability of making a sharp separation of power or division of function between the deciding and the executing agencies of government" (Waldo, 1984, p. 200). There is an inextricable link between politics and administration with profound consequences for scholarship and practice, yet overlooked in the scientific myopia of the early 20th century. Waldo recognized this connection, opening public administration as a field to a more diverse disciplinary and methodological study.

Other writers in the mid-20th century reinforced Waldo's findings, criticizing the politics administration dichotomy, questioning the previous orthodoxy, and loosening precepts of this field. Paul Appleby's book Policy and Administration highlights the political environment in which all policymaking and administration is embedded. Appleby notes that politics is not just a "necessary evil" for scholars and practitioners to contend with, but a necessary and legitimate part of the governance process. It is the very foundation on which our democratic system rests. Public administration scholars should invite political concerns

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and perspectives into their studies rather than seeing them as threatening to the administrative orthodoxy.

The New Public Administration

The work of Waldo, Appleby, and other authors opened the doors of public administration to critique from scholars from various disciplines and schools of thought. Once the purview of scholars concerned primarily with organizational efficiency, public administration came to encompass a variety of views, including those of scholars more concerned with values of democracy, participation, and social equity. This movement in public administration scholarship soon developed into a school of thought known as the New Public Administration.

Exemplified by the writings of scholars like George Fredrickson, the New Public Administration developed a new set of values as the priorities of public administration. In his seminal article "Toward a New Public Administration", Frederickson makes a comparison between the core values of the New Public Administration and the bureaucratic administrative orthodoxy. Frederickson writes:

> *Conventional or classic Public Administration seeks to answer either of these questions: (1) How can we offer more or better services with available resources (efficiency)? Or (2) How can we maintain our level of services while spending less money (economy?) New Public Administration adds this question: Does this service enhance social equity? (Marini, 1971, p. 311)*

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For Frederickson and other New Public Administration advocates, efficiency and effectiveness could no longer be the primary values of the discipline. Societal changes demanded that public administrators reconsider their values and obligations to society. Values more closely connecting public organizations with concerns of the populace came to predominate over the former internally focused bureaucratic concerns. Frederickson states:

> *A preferred form of…minority…involvement would be…communication with decentralized organizations capable of making distributive decisions that support the interests of deprived minorities, even if these decisions are difficult to justify in terms of either efficiency or economy (Marini, 1971, p. 324).*

Thus, in response to the political and social dynamics of the times, the public administration scholarship that developed in the 1960s and 1970s reflected an emphasis on issues of representation, democracy, and public participation in the administration of public organizations. Public education systems, especially in urban centers like New York City, paralleled this trend, also changing in terms of institutional priorities, bringing local communities closer to the center of school governance.

New Public Administration and the NYCPSS

Education scholar Joseph Viteritti illustrates the effects of this new wave of administrative thought upon the New York City Public Schools System:

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"Access," "Representation," and "Equity" all became rallying calls for the educational politics of the 1960s. At the outset of this turbulent decade, remnants of the traditional model were still so embedded in the structure of governance that decision making remained controlled by professional administrators. These educators, who were predominantly white, were rapidly losing touch with the changing population attending inner-city schools. Thus was born the movement for decentralization and community control (Viteritti, 1983, p. 1).

Prior to the 1970s, the NYCPSS, while operated by a Board of Education, was fundamentally under mayoral control. All members of the central Board of Education, the governing body of the city's public education system, were appointed by the mayor. These members would choose a chancellor who functioned as the chief executive of the school system. The chancellor would act as executive of this system, proposing both educational and administrative policies that would then be implemented throughout the system. The Board of Education had the power to approve or disapprove of these policies, acting as a check on the executive's power. Since all the members of the Board were appointed by the mayor, such disapproval was a rarity (Viteritti, 1983, p. 11).

During the late 1960s, the changing ethnic background of the city came to prompt changes in New York City's public education system as a whole. Minority groups, especially African Americans and Hispanics, began to criticize the system for its lack of responsiveness to their communities. Minority parents wanted a voice in the system that was educating their children. They had lost faith in the largely white professional school administrators who for years "had acted as if they were accountable to nobody." (Viteritti,

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1983, p. 7). The result was the passage of the Decentralization Law by the New York State Legislature (Ravitch, 1997, p. 27).

Under this new law, two important changes were made:

- First, the composition of the Board of Education changed. The Board changed from a 9 member panel appointed by the mayor to a five member panel appointed by each of the borough presidents (Popa, Povolny, Rodus, & Lynn, 2002).
- Thirty-one community school districts were established in the City. In each district would exist a *local school board*, essentially a legislative body dealing with the schools operating within the school district, to be selected by popular election. These school boards would choose their own district superintendents and would appoint principals found eligible under criteria set up by the central Board of Education (Viteritti, 1983, p. 7).
- The Board of Education would still retain many powers. It would maintain complete control over the city's high schools, special education, bilingual education, and career education programs. Budget, personnel, business, and support functions would also remain under the control of the Board of Education (Viteritti, 1983, p. 7)

Thus, reflecting a new concern with issues of access, representation, and equity – the values of the New Public Administration -- power became widely dispersed. The Board of Education was no longer controlled by the mayor; it was controlled the presidents of the five boroughs. The community school districts further dispersed power, giving more influence to local stakeholders. Community residents now had a more immediate voice in the school system and could exert more authority over it.

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Modern Public Administration and Education Policy

More recent thought in public administration once again focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations. The 1990s saw an era of increased interest in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations, but this time through the application of private sector business-like practices and the utilization market forces to address public policy problems. This movement in public administration became known as the New Public Management.

Like the New Public Administration, the New Public Management is not a single theory but a set of principles espoused by a host of thinkers and reformers. David Osborne and Ted Gaebler's seminal work Reinventing Government best articulated the tenets of this philosophy, proposing a leaner, faster, more competitive style of governance, akin to the practices being utilized by successful private sector firms now competing on a global scale. The encouragement of competition for the provision of public services, the decentralization of authority, and the addressing of public problems through the influencing of market forces rather than direct government action were some of the approaches New Public Management scholars and practitioners proposed as strategies to deal with public policy problems.

Authors Chubb and Moe introduced these modern ideas of governance and administration into the realm of school policy with the publishing of their book Politics, Markets, and America's Schools. In this book, Chubb and Moe highlight the point that American public schools are essentially bureaucratic and political institutions. These are simple statements of fact, not value judgments. Chubb and Moe argue that these are not problems in and of themselves. Rather, the problem is that public schools are "too heavily bureaucratic – too hierarchical, too rule-bound, too formalistic" (Chubb, 1990, p. 26). Public

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schools are governed, funded, and administered through the political process, which encompasses the interests of the various groups in society. Parents and students are part of this governance system, but so too are other stakeholders (such as single individuals, families without children in the public schools system, etc.) The only way for government to reconcile these various and competing interests is through a highly regulated and bureaucratic public school system. These rigid and rule-bound bureaucracies do not allow for "…the kind of autonomy and professionalism schools need if they are to perform well." (Chubb, 1990, p. 26).

Curiously, the Bloomberg educational reforms seem to rely precisely on this strategy, seeking a streamlined, centralized systemic arrangement as a key administrative facilitator of improved school and student performance. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that today's urban school centralization may be different than prior attempts at reform and more than a simple regression to an orthodox bureaucratic past.

Why the 21st Century Centralization is Different

Is there any logic behind the seemingly recurring cycles between advocacy for centralization and decentralization as the paths for organizational effectiveness? Recognizing this vacillating tendency in the development of education policy, education policy scholar David Tyack isolates and draws a distinction between what he calls "policy talk", that is, the rhetoric of education policy, and longer-term institutional trends and changes in educational systems. Tyack notes that "policy talk" consists of the diagnoses of policy problems and advocacy for solutions. They tend to occur in cycles, as a result of the working out of the complex values and interests built into a democratic system and reflecting

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the changing climate of public education. However, underlying the cyclical policy talk that occurs in educational policy development are longer term institutional trends towards improvement and greater complexity in the educational system. Thus, while congruous in many ways to the early 20th century progressive era reforms, the 2002 NYCPSS governance reforms might better be seen as part of a longer term striving towards systemic improvement that better meets community needs. (Tyack, 1995).

The New Breed of Mayors

Another reason to believe that the 21st century centralization of the NYCPSS may be more than just a regression to prior forms is the new public demand for a higher performance school system with characteristics and capacities that take them beyond both that of previous centralized or decentralized structures. Urban dwellers are growing weary of the problems of chronic bureaucratic dysfunction. They have a decreasing faith in existing governance structures and demand new levels of performance from urban governments in general. This reality has led to the rise of a so-called "new breed" of mayors in major urban centers. These mayors are seen as having the ability to improve education and other city services while avoiding the political and strategic mistakes of the past. Kirst and Bulkley describe the "new breed" as follows:

> *The new improved mayors are largely about managing city governments efficiently in the public interest, rather than using it as a mechanism for arbitrating competing interest groups. They have an ideology: that cities can dramatically alleviate seemingly endemic urban afflictions without a massive redistribution of wealth, that*

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the way to achieve this is by using competition to make city services radically more efficient...[T]he new mayors speak the language of modern public management: reinvention, innovation, privatization, competition, strategic planning and productivity (Kirst, 2000, p. 9).

This "new breed" of mayors recognizes the higher level demands placed upon them by modern city dwellers. They realize that for cities to stay competitive in the modern economy, they must deliver a higher quality of city services than they did in the past, as "…above average taxpayers…might exercise their exit option." This would leave urban centers "…with the unhappy task of warehousing the least economically productive citizens, while a declining tax base [leaves] them less and less maneuvering room to address their resident's needs" (Sternlieb, 1971, p. 14).

Performance considerations, then, are at the top of the educational agenda. Local, state, and federal levels of government are all highly concerned with educational performance and have been seeking to improve performance and hold schools accountable through measurable criteria. But what seems to be underemphasized in the modern educational policy debate are questions of democracy and local participation, particularly when organizing public school systems in a more authoritarian fashion. Tyack's discussion on the cycles of "policy talk" points to historical cycles emphasizing different values in the administration of school systems. It seems we are currently in a "performance phase", so to speak, in the development of education policy. But if past history is any indicator of the

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future, it will only be a matter of time before issues of democracy and public participation once again come into the fore of the urban education debate.

Public Participation and the Community School Boards

Perhaps nowhere else can the issues surrounding the place of democracy and public participation in the NYCPSS be seen as in the debate regarding the role of the community school boards in the governance of the school system. Community school boards, both nationally and locally in New York City, have elicited widely varying responses from the public. On the one hand, they have historically been highly revered institutions, entrusted with the responsibility of governing schools that educate the nation's children. On the other hand, they have also often been highly criticized for being overly political institutions, vulnerable to the corruption of its members, and growingly inept in meeting the task of school governance in the complex modern environment.

In her article "Governing the Nation's Schools: The Case for Restructuring Local School Boards", Jacqueline Danzberger addresses these two aspects of school boards. She notes that school boards are "…among the most venerable of U.S. public institutions, embodying many of our most cherished political and cultural tenets" (Danzberger, 1994, p. 1). They reflect an American preference for more immediate forms of governance, and a distrust for distant government that dates back to colonial times. Americans have an aversion to bureaucratic governance and have historically seen school boards as buffers protecting them from the potential excesses of professional educators. Danzberger points to a number of important functions for school boards, irrespective of their ultimate effectiveness as governance structures. As venerable public institutions, they act as vessels of the public

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trust. Their dismantling is inherently troubling, as it leaves us with questions regarding the effectiveness of new structures in establishing the important link between communities and their schools (Danzberger, 1994).

Despite their historical importance as education governance structures, community school boards have also been the subject of much criticism. While school boards were originally intended to become mechanisms of professionalization, by which schools would be freed from the corrupting influence of "ordinary politicians", they have often have fallen short of this ideal in urban centers, becoming corrupting influences themselves (Danzberger, 1994, p. 1). Scholars and other critics studying school boards have noted many recurring shortcomings in the functioning of school boards. Some of the most commonly cited problems include:

- failing to provide bold leadership for education reform (Danzberger, 1994, p. 4).
- becoming mired down in special interest activity by board members (Danzberger, 1994, p. 4).
- a myopic focus on individual school-level issues, while showing little concern for systemwide problems (Danzberger, 1994, p. 4).
- having insufficient knowledge about the complexities of modern education policy
- having a reactive approach to education policy issues (Danzberger, 1994, p. 4).

We should note that many of these criticisms do not have to take on a moralistic overtone; some scholars have cited a new level of complexity in modern-day education policy as a major contributor to school board failure. School governance now encompasses a diverse network of stakeholders from local, state, and federal levels of government, as well as from

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the private and not-for-profit sector, not to mention the immediate local community. Urban education policy might be considered a "wicked problem", that is, a complex problem encompassing a wide array of actors, resisting technical or professional solutions (Huxham, 2000). Elected community school boards, as traditionally constituted, may simply not have the capacity to deal with modern day educational policy, especially in large urban centers (Danzberger, 1994, p. 2).

Despite their shortcomings as modern governance structures, the demise of the school boards is still troublesome, particularly in a country that resists centralized controls. Rich and Henig warn that over time, institutions "…can accumulate a complex array of associations and connotations that engender more emotionally grounded reactions of loyalty, suspicion, enmity, or trust." (Henig & Rich, 2004, p. 264) They recommend that, "Where elected school boards enjoy reservoirs of trust and confidence based on the particularities of local history, reformers should think at least twice before rushing to dismantle then, even when the performance of those institutions is legitimately suspect" (Henig & Rich, 2004, p. 264). The school boards are vessels and facilitators of what Robert Putnam terms as "social capital" in communities. Eradicating structures that house such social dynamics, without carefully considering the form and function of new replacing structures, can exacerbate current tensions and contribute to the deterioration of community-school relations.

But there are other reasons why the dismantling of community school boards is alarming. Maintaining healthy linkages between the schools system and local communities is not only important for systemic legitimacy, but also for the attainment of a variety of other benefits, including better implementation of school policies and, ultimately, school and student performance.

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Scholars have studied the implementation of public policy and have found that maintaining strong ties between policymakers and those involved in implementation is crucial for policy success. In their book Implementation, Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky illustrate how important the aspects of implementation are in the overall policy process. The various steps and actors involved in the actual implementation of policies make for a complex process that is more difficult to actualize than policymakers usually conceive. Thus, proper implementation is facilitated by the quality of communication and general relationship among the various policy actors and community stakeholders. This reality makes the issue of fostering healthy local stakeholder relationships important. Rich and Henig illustrate this point within the educational policy context when they state that, "Central authorities need local partners, with local knowledge and indigenous constituencies, if their policies are to be implemented and if their reforms are to be sustained…" (Rich & Henig, 2004, p. 12).

But having effective mechanisms for community involvement is not only important for effective policy implementation. Scholars have found that fostering strong ties between schools and their local communities is itself also strongly linked to actual school and student performance. In their report From Governance to Accountability: Building Relationships that Make Schools Work, Kavitha Mediratta and Norman Fruchter find that an excessive focus on macro level governance structures is a misguided strategy, as governance reforms alone have never been proven to improve school and student performance. Schools perform poorly in large part because they "have been severed from their communities through decades of bureaucratic insulation and professional defensiveness" (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2003, p. 9). They hold that schools improve largely because of local community action.

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School and student improvement are a function of phenomena that occurs at the local level. Improving administrative leadership, improving the skills of teachers and staff, getting parents involved in school and student activities, and creating positive educational cultures at the local level facilitate the establishment of an environment where education can occur and flourish, both inside and outside the classroom. Fostering this kind of environment and community action requires strong relationships between schools and communities. Encouraging community participation and relationships among parents, schools, students, and other stakeholders "foster[s] linkages, transparency and the leverage necessary to make these schools work" (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2003, p. 15). Thus, the success of the new community education councils as facilitators of citizen participation is crucial for a multitude of reasons, among them the establishment of systemic legitimacy as well as for the improved performance of the school system.

Dimensions of Public Participation

As we approach this study of public participation in the New York City public school system, we should first review the literature on the history and concept of public participation in governance. The debate over the proper role of citizens in the functioning of government is a perennial issue, with us since the founding of the country. The following section reviews some of the historical perspectives surrounding this issue, from the early days of America to more modern times, where more immediate forms of public participation has become a norm.

Indeed, the debate over the proper role of the citizen in our governmental system is a key part of America's history. The issue has its origins in the founding of the country and was debated vigorously throughout the Constitutional Convention debates. The Federalist

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perspective, espoused by the likes of Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, favored the use of a more distant kind of democracy. While recognizing the need for citizen input and influence upon government, the Federalists recognized the danger of having too much democracy. Excessively democratic rule could hamper the effectiveness of government, leading to social, political, and economic instability. A representative democratic republic was a better system that could provide for democratic input while maintaining a sufficient, but not excessive, level of authority in government.

The legitimacy of this form of government, particularly with regards to its authority over public agencies, lies at the heart of the current debate regarding the proper role of public participation in the NYCPSS. At core, the questions is whether a large public school system, as a public agency, can be governed legitimately by local-level executives (the mayors) within a culture accustomed to more immediate forms of public participation. Kweit and Kweit note the shortcomings in relying solely on public officials to represent the public will in administrative processes, highlighting a "…gap between the rhetoric of 'the people' and the reality of limits on citizen involvement" (Kweit, 1981, p. 15).

Evolving Expectations for Public Participation

While the republican form of government, and the administration of public agencies by elected executives with oversight by a legislature, is seen as technically legitimate, the history of the United States reveals changes in expectations for public participation in the administration of public agencies. During the mid 20th century, we saw a paradigm shift in the public's understanding of its proper role in government, with a renewed attention placed upon closer democratic participation in administrative operations. The civil rights

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movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, and other movements, in the pursuance of their agendas, contributed to profound changes in the American conception of government, creating a new public sentiment of popular ownership of government and a demand for greater government responsiveness

More specifically, a number of legal requirements for federal grants-in-aid programs developed under the Lyndon Johnson administration were responsible for initiating mechanisms for more direct citizen participation in government programs which would come to affect the public consciousness regarding the proper role of the public in administrative operations. These programs would popularize and legitimize the use of citizen participation mechanisms as formal mechanisms of governance. Three of the most prominent programs responsible for instituting the citizen participation norm were:

- *Urban Renewal*: Established by the Housing Act of 1954, this program was the first major piece of federal legislation requiring citizen input. Focusing on making improvements in housing in poorer urban areas, this legislation required that localities create a program of citizen participation in the planning and execution of projects as a precondition for the allocation of grants-in-aid (Ranney, 1969). These forms of citizen participation, while initially intended to draw the mass of people into the planning and implementation process, ended in drawing primarily local elites into governance processes. The participatory requirements were largely fulfilled by blue ribbon panels, appointed by mayors or other powerful public officials. They were criticized for neglecting the concerns and perspectives of average citizens.
- *The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* – the centerpiece of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the Economic Opportunity Act provided for job training, adult education, and

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loans to small businesses. These efforts were intended to address the underlying causes of unemployment and poverty. The EOA established over a thousand Community Action Agencies (CAAs), in charge of implementing Great Society Programs. These CAAs, essentially small community social organizations, would be responsible for implementing the EOA's requirement for "maximal feasible participation" by community residents. This program was the most liberal in its citizen participation requirements, granting extensive financial and administrative responsibility to local community groups, with little or no oversight (Cole, 1974).

- *The Model Cities Program* – Established by the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, this program was intended to mobilize public and private resources in a comprehensive and coordinated effort to solve the economic, physical, and social problems of blighted neighborhoods (Cole, 1974). Its citizen participation requirements were more conservative than those of EOA programs. Model Cities funds were channeled directly to municipal governments rather than to local organizations (Cole, 1974).

While these programs instituted the norm of a closer, more direct type of citizen participation, they also illustrate the problems governments encounter in the implementation of such requirements. Once again, striking a balance between the facilitation of citizen participation in governance with the practical need for governmental authority proved to be problematic. The EOA programs, with their "maximum feasible participation" requirements, soon faced charges of corruption and questions regarding their ability to effectively implement programs. The Model Cities programs, while visionary in their goals for

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revitalizing urban areas, took a step back from the more liberal forms of citizen participation, relying largely on traditional public agencies and officials to administer such programs.

Since the advent of this movement in the 1960s, citizen participation has become a mainstream concept in American governance. While considered an innovation in the 1960s, it has become an expectation in the administration of many modern public organizations. We now see mechanisms for citizen participation arising in the administration of many kinds of public organizations, including those involved in education, healthcare, policing, social services, economic and community development, and other areas. It is used in various forms and at various stages of the policy process (Roberts, 2004).

Defining Public Participation

While citizen participation can be understood as a general concept and subsumed under the idea of democracy, there is also a more specific understanding that should be clarified for our research purposes. Webler and Renn refer to citizen participation as relating to "forums of exchange that are organized for the purpose of facilitating communication between government, citizens, stakeholders and interest groups, and business regarding a specific decision or problem" (Renn & Webler, 1995, p. 2). Beierle and Crayford define citizen participation as being "any of several mechanisms intentionally instituted to involve the lay public or their representatives in administrative decisionmaking" (Beierle, 1998, p. 6). These definitions emphasize the establishment of formal and defined processes by government in order to facilitate interactions between government and citizens for the purpose of policy making and implementation.

Citizen participation, under this definition, occurs in a variety of forms and through a variety of structures, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Some of the more

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commonly used forms include public hearings, advisory committees, focus groups, citizen agencies, citizen surveys and forums, citizen juries and panels, mediation, and public notices. These mechanisms vary in form and in action. Some, such as public notices, emphasize a one-way pattern of interaction between citizens and governments while methods like advisory committees enable more complex and interactive relationships. They function more or less effectively depending on the goals of such public participation efforts and the context in which such efforts occur.

Cooptation

Scholars have long written about the challenges of engaging in citizen participation in a fashion that is mutually beneficial to citizens and administrators. Achieving such a balance has historically been a challenging endeavor. At times, administrators will administer citizen participation mechanisms in a fashion that emphasizes administrative goals and values while underemphasizing or overlooking the concerns of the general public. A classic work from the public administration scholarship defines this kind of citizen participation as "cooptation."

In his book TVA and the Grass Roots, Philip Selznick presents a case study where citizen participation efforts are unbalanced, resulting in a phenomenon he refers to as "cooptation". Selznick defines cooptation as "…the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence." (Selznick, 1949, p. 13). Formal cooptation occurs when, "…there is a need for the organization to publicly absorb new elements." It "…involves the establishment of openly avowed and formally ordered relationships. Appointments to

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official posts are made, contracts are signed, new organizations are established – all signifying participation in the process of decision and administration." (Selznick, 1949, p. 13).

Cooptation occurs in response to two general conditions. First, it occurs when "…the legitimacy of the authority of a governing group or agency is called into question." In this case, "[o]ne means of winning consent is to coopt the leadership or organization elements which in some way reflect the sentiment or possess the confidence of the relevant public or mass and which will lend respectability or legitimacy to the organs of control and thus reestablish the stability of formal authority" (Selznick, 1949, p. 13) Formal cooptation can also occur for administrative purposes, where there is a need to establish "…orderly and reliable mechanisms for reaching a client public or citizenry." (Selznick, 1949, p. 13). It is important to note that formal cooptation does not entail the transfer of actual power to the citizenry. Citizen participation is encouraged, but is "…channeled so as to fulfill the administrative functions while preserving the locus of significant decision in the hands of the initiating group" (Selznick, 1949, p. 13)

Authentic Citizen Participation

While aware of the shortcomings of administratively focused public participation efforts, scholars have also explored more ideal notions of this concept. More recent public administration literature terms this concept as "authentic" public participation. King, Feltey, and Susel define authentic public participation as "participation that works for all parties and stimulates interest and investment in both administrators and citizens" (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998, p. 317). King highlights that authentic public participation goes beyond the

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formalized, static, and mechanical kinds of interactions typically facilitated by traditional participatory mechanisms. Through a focus on continuous relationships over discrete interactions, King hopes that citizen and administrators will form mutually beneficial bonds of trust that translate into more effective and satisfactory government action.

Authentic public participation requires constant activity by all participants. It requires an active form of citizenship and administration. In her book Government is Us, King describes this dynamic:

> *Democratizing public administration means creating the conditions under which citizens and public servants can join in deliberating about, deciding, and implementing the work of public agencies. What we mean by Government Is Us, is a democratic public administration that involves active citizenship and active administration. By active administration we mean not an enhancement of administrative power, but the use of discretionary authority to foster collaborative work with citizens. The active administrator is one who acts creatively to direct administrative prerogatives toward active citizenship.... Active citizenship is different from voting, paying taxes, or using government services.... [I]n active citizenship, citizens rule and are ruled in turn ... (King, 1998b, p. 195).*

Thus, authentic public participation requires vigorous participation on both sides. Citizens must be active citizens; administrators must also develop sharp listening skills in the new administrative context (Stivers, 1994). The highest forms of public participation, then, are

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characterized by symbiotic interactions, taking into account and acting upon the needs of all involved parties.

A Ladder of Citizen Participation

Rather than conceptualizing this distinction between cooptation and authentic citizen participation as a dichotomy, some scholars have attempted to understand this distinction along a continuum. In her article "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Sherry Arnstein makes the point that, "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process." She conceptualizes the distinction between empty ritual and true public participation along a continuum, rather than on a dichotomous basis. She draws upon the image of a ladder to illustrate this notion.

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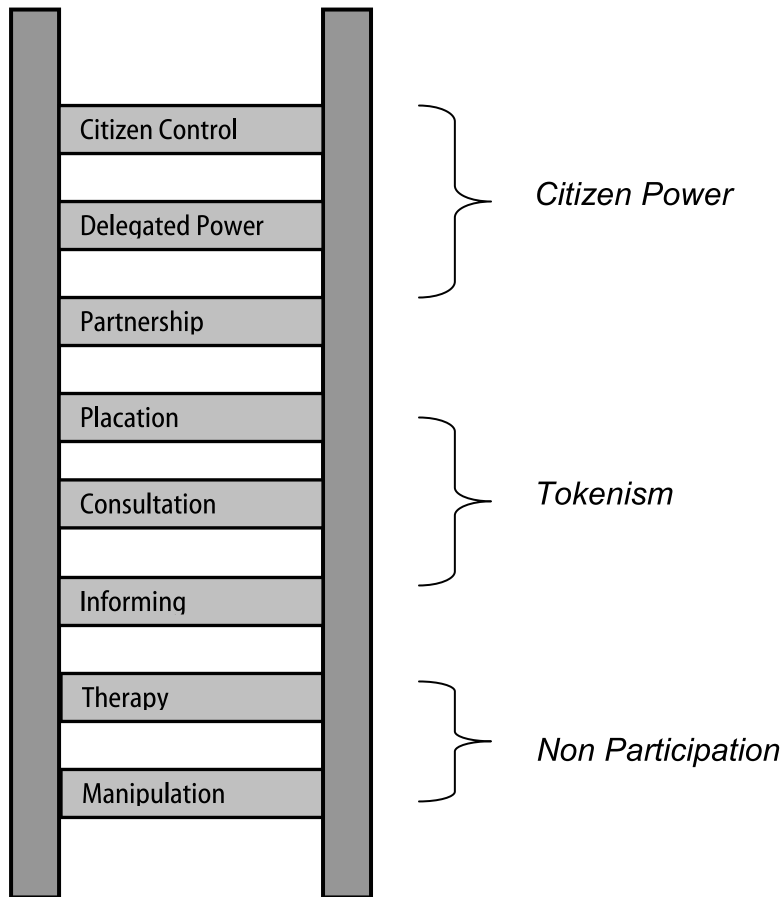
Figure 1.



From Shelly Arnstein's article, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Journal of the American Planning Association, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

At the bottom of Arnstein's allegorical ladder lie participative efforts termed "manipulation" and "therapy." These are the least authentic forms of public participation. Their objective, "is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to 'educate' or 'cure' the participants" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 3). Public demands

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are not considered to be substantial sources of input into administrative operations. Rather, they are seen as the voicing of ordinary restlessness and uncertainty in the public. The chief role of administrators working within such participative mechanisms is to assuage such public concerns without making any serious changes in policy direction.

The middle rungs of Arnstein's ladder move closer towards an authentic partnership between citizens and administrators. Citizen concerns are heard and greater efforts toward cooperation ensue. Yet most authority continues to be held by administrative forces. At the top of Arnstein's ladder, considerable citizen power is achieved. On rung 6, citizens "…enter into a partnership that enables them to negotiate trade-offs with traditional power holders" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 3). At rungs 7 and 8, common citizens "obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 3).

While Arnstein's ladder may oversimplify the phenomenon of citizen participation and uncritically laud the notion of full citizen power, it is effective in noting the existence of a continuum between pure administrative and pure citizen power.

In his book Public Participation in Public Decisions, John C. Thomas expands upon Arnstein's analysis while coming to less normative conclusions. Thomas posits that there exist three basic types of decision making that may arise from different conceptions regarding the proper role of public participation in such processes. The basic types include (1) autocratic decision-making, with no public involvement (2) consultative decision making, with a limited but significant public role; and (3) public decision making, with the extensive influence of a decision made jointly by the manager and the public. The choice of decision making priorities depends mainly on two factors, the need for quality and the need for acceptability of a decision (Thomas, 1995, p. 39). In contrast to Arnstein, Thomas posits that

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the varying contexts in which administrative decision making occurs may legitimately lead public administrators to differing approaches towards facilitating public participation.

Judging Effective Citizen Participation

The recent growth in the use of participatory mechanisms has sparked a growth in research on the evaluation of participatory mechanisms that can be useful in our context. Judging the effectiveness of citizen participation is difficult; there are many views and perspectives on just what "effectiveness" entails. Do we assess the policy outputs of citizen participation, judging participatory mechanisms by the quality of the policies that have been implemented? Or do such concerns give way to an emphasis on the enactment of the specific desires of participants, whose policy preferences may or may not coincide with the quality of public policies as assessed from a technical perspective? Citizen participation can be judged in a myriad ways. One can focus on the degree to which citizen trust in the government organization has been built as a result of participation. Or one can take the organization's perspective and focus solely on the degree to which public participation has facilitated the implementation of agency policies. Judith Rosener notes this conundrum when she states that, "…the participation concept is complex and value laden; there are no widely held criteria for judging success and failure; there are no agreed-upon evaluation methods; and there are few measurement tools" (Rosener, 1983, p. 45).

Nonetheless, scholars have since taken various approaches toward evaluating citizen participation mechanisms. The approaches vary and emphasize different criteria. In his article "Using Social Goals to Evaluate Public Participation in Environmental Decisions," Thomas Beierle reviews the various approaches taken by scholars and categorizes the more

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commonly used approaches into thee broad types: process evaluations, interest based evaluations, and theory-based evaluations.

Process evaluations focus on the degree of democratic input drawn into the policy making and implementation process. Critics have long argued that policymaking and implementation is often dominated by professionals, bureaucrats, well organized and funded special interest groups, and other elites. Resulting policies tend to primarily reflect the interests of these elites while overlooking the concerns of the common citizen. Therefore, process evaluations seek to evaluate the degree to which the participatory process is open to democratic input by the wider community. Process evaluations are focused on issues such as the representativeness of citizens participating in such participatory bodies and whether they adequately reflect the characteristics of the public they are deemed to represent. They are also concerned with issues such as the timing of public participation, particularly whether such participation is facilitated during a phase where it could realistically influence policymaking decisions. Other concerns include the level of commitment and responsiveness by administrators to the process, the clarity of goals and roles of participants, the sufficiency of resources (both financial and others), the presence of face-to-face discussions between the public and administrators, the value which administrators place on popular public input, and other criteria (Beierle, 1998).

Instead of focusing on democratic input as the determinant of success, interest based evaluations focus on finding whether the goals of parties involved in participatory processes were achieved. In short, did the participating citizens achieve their desired ends as a result of the participatory process? Or, from the administrative perspective, did the sponsoring agency

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enact its favored policy as a result of the process? While a simple and clear evaluation strategy, the interest-based approach can only measure a sliver of the concept of success in public participation. The question remains, whose perspective is the "right" perspective? Should all perspectives be equally weighed in a general assessment of participatory practices? Thus, while a useful strategy, interest based evaluations tell us only a part of the story (Beierle, 1998).

Finally, theory-based evaluations rely on preset theories and models to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation efforts. They are normative in that they explicitly state what goals or values should be achieved in order for effective participation to occur. Recognizing the limitations of process and interest-based evaluations, Thomas Beierle developed a theory-based evaluative strategy known as the social goals framework. The social goals framework for the evaluation of participative mechanisms has a wide range of criteria for measuring the success of participation processes and captures information relevant to all actors involved in such mechanisms. Beierle states that social goals are "…those goals which public participation ought to be expected to achieve but which transcend the immediate interests of the parties involved in a decision. The benefits of achieving these goals spill over from the participants themselves to the…system as a whole" (Beierle, 1998, p. 5). The social goals approach assesses the success of public participation mechanisms according to five criteria. These are:

1. Educating and informing the public – The public often has inadequate information about policy issues, making their involvement in policy formation, implementation, and in the general democratic processes a haphazard endeavor. Educating and informing the public on

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policy issues can contribute to the value of input given by those participating through these mechanisms, as well as help such participants become more effective advocates for their interests when utilizing other political pathways (Beirle, 1998).

2. Incorporating public values into decision-making – Most forms of public policy are value laden. While the judgments of professional administrators are often aligned with those of the surrounding communities, there remains a need for administrators to seek out and incorporate community values in policy development and implementation. Therefore, the incorporation of public values into decision making cannot be assumed. It must be a specific effort undertaken by public participation mechanisms and specifically addressed as part of the overall assessment scheme by which we judge participatory processes (Beirle, 1998).

3. Improving the substantive quality of decisions – In addition to its basic value in promoting democracy, public participation can also aid in the efficient and effective functioning of public organizations. Participation mechanisms, in addition to facilitating democratic imperatives, can also be seen as performance-oriented management tools, acting as information sources that help provide the data necessary for the improvement of the technical functioning of the administrative system (Beirle, 1998). Public participation may be equally justifiable from this managerial perspective (Langton, 1987).

4. Increasing trust in institutions – Increasing trust in institutions is valuable for all stakeholders involved in the administrative system (Beirle, 1998). A trusting relationship between the public and the government agency increases cooperation and improves organizational functioning. In the education policy context, there is also evidence that a

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positive, trusting relationship among students, parents, schools, and communities can lead to improved school and student performance (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2003)

5. Reducing conflict among stakeholders – Reducing conflict as a goal of public participation promotes a cooperative view of democracy, highlighting the idea that forums for public participation should be seen as opportunities for collaboration, rather than the imposition of the will of one particular group (Beirle, 1998). In addition to being an end in itself, reducing conflict among stakeholders may facilitate the achievement of other social goals.

We should note that other authors have utilized broad-based criteria similar to the social goals framework, seeing public participation as a means of accomplishing a wide set of goals.

Yet Beierle states that, "Finding a definitive answer to the question of what is the 'right' way to evaluate public participation is neither likely nor desirable" (Beierle, 1998, p. 17). Indeed, there are many standards one can use. This research project utilizes the social goals framework as a guide for collecting and analyzing data, allowing us to assess the functioning of a sample of CECs operating in the New York City public schools system.

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Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology

Introduction

All research studies must decide upon a basic methodological approach. The methodological approach should be guided in large part by the nature of the data at hand and the context in which the researcher finds him or herself with respect to the phenomena under study. Given the developing nature of the topic of focus, this project utilizes a multiple case-study approach to study the phenomena of interest and come to analytical conclusions.

The case study approach yields several advantages for our research context. Robert K. Yin defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Given the developing nature of the New York City public school system reforms as of the writing of this study, it is essential that we use a methodological approach with sufficient flexibility to draw information from a developing context. Moreover, this research study seeks to answer, in part, "how" questions regarding the ways public participation mechanisms function and seek to alter public organizations within a centralized organizational context. How do the community education councils seek to impact the policies of the New York City public schools system? What are their strategies towards accomplishing such outcomes? The case study methodology is well suited towards answering these types of questions.

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Research Questions:

This research project focuses on a few overarching questions regarding the functioning of public participation mechanisms in the New York City public schools system. In the most general sense, the study seeks to answer:

- *Are New York City's community education councils "working"?*

Certainly, this is a broad question. Initial data collection revealed that the public participation mechanisms under study in some districts revealed differing functional strategies and differing priorities from setting to setting. Notions of effectiveness, therefore, can vary to a considerable degree from setting to setting. Thus, the study then focuses further on the question:

- *What kinds of outputs and outcomes are the CECs achieving?*

Such a question is more specific than the prior, allowing for some contextual variation from site to site and incorporating local-level priorities into our assessment of effectiveness. This flexibility in assessment of outputs and outcomes, however, is tempered by our use of the social goals framework as a guiding standard for assessment. The case study method allows us to deal with information derived from local sites flexibly. Still, this study focuses on three general types of outputs and outcomes flowing from CEC operations – capacity building outputs and outcomes, policy and administrative outputs and outcomes, and relationship-related outputs and outcomes.

We should distinguish at this point the difference between outputs and outcomes, a distinction that can help clarify our understanding of the phenomena under study. Public

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administration scholars have defined outputs as the direct products of program operations. They are the plans, projects, and other tangible items generated by collaborative efforts. They stand as precursors to outcomes, which are derived as a result these outputs. Outcomes can be defined as the benefits to participants during or after program participation. An outcome may relate to changes in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, values, behaviors, condition, or status. They are changes experienced by program clients as a result of participating in the program, as opposed to the participation itself (Koontz & Thomas, 2006). Assessing outcomes require a more holistic analysis of the variety of outputs flowing from program operations, in order to see whether these various outputs have resulted in more substantive changes.

Unit of Analysis and Sampling Strategy

My unit of analysis for this study lies at the participative mechanism level, specifically, the community education councils of New York City. There are 32 community education councils across the city. This study focuses on four specific community education councils in different school districts of New York City.

At the outset of this study, the Community Education Councils were new and developing participative structures. As Robert Yin states in his book on case study methodology, researchers are often drawn to conducting particular research studies that focus on new, unique, and developing situations. The reform of the New York City public schools system, and the changes in their public participation structures precisely fit these criteria, making decisions on methodology and sampling strategies both a theoretical and practical consideration.

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At the outset of this study, it was apparent that many of the community education councils were at such an early stage in terms of their development that it was difficult to choose samples that were functioning well enough to become subjects of empirical research. Many councils were struggling to even fill their membership. Some were not meeting on a regular basis, and there was confusion in many councils regarding their roles and responsibilities. An air of secrecy surrounded much of the functioning of the public school system immediately after the centralizing reorganization, making it difficult for researchers to gain access to sites for observation and study.

The decision to include a particular CEC as a case in my research study, then, required the consideration of many factors. These factors included:

- A willingness and sense of openness by council memberships to become subjects of the study, given the closed and secretive environment encountered at the outset of this study
- The need to find a set of councils that were functioning sufficiently "well" (that is, with full memberships, holding regular public meetings, and having public documents available and in order)
- Some sense of socioeconomic variation from school district to district.

Informal heuristics were used to assess whether councils were functioning sufficiently well. 3 of the 4 sampled councils had websites, an informal indicator of better administrative functioning as well as openness to scrutiny by outside groups. Moreover, the presence of a coherent website allowed for immediate access to some public documents reflecting the functioning of the particular council. Other councils, while claiming to have such documents, were reluctant to release them to the public despite requirements that they do so.

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All the sampled councils had full memberships and were holding regular public meetings. The final choices for my research sample included the community education councils for school districts 2, 3, 26, and 30 in New York City. More specific information about the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of these school districts is included in the next chapter covering the policy context.

Concept Definitions

It is difficult to develop the specific notion of "effectiveness" for public participation. There are many different criteria one can use to determine whether a participative mechanism is working or not. Some of the literature emphasizes the role participative mechanisms play in forming policies that more closely reflect local interests. Concepts such as "coproduction" highlight the development of collaborative relationships between communities and administrative authorities for the development and implementation of public policies that reflect both administrative goals and local community interests.

Other literature, as outlined in the prior chapter, emphasizes the role of such mechanisms for facilitating the implementation and administration of centrally determined policies. Some of the literature on public participation emphasizes the frequent use of public participation strategies for *cooptation* of communities by central bureaucratic interests. Under this model, community leaders are influenced by central authorities with the purpose of bringing these actors into congruence with administrative policies and priorities. The goal of public participation mechanisms, then, is to "sell" more centrally determined policies to local communities, minimize community resistance, and facilitate initial implementation and longer-term administration efforts.

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Because this study focuses on new and developing phenomena, it explores both sides of this issue. Data collection and analysis focused on both dimensions of this issue: the degree to which our sample of CECs facilitated the actualization of local community interests as well as to the degree to which they provided for the less contentious enactment of centrally determined policies. While these goals were at times conflicting and mutually exclusive, this was not always the case. The tensions encountered in pursuing these differing goals are reflected in the propositions set forth later in this chapter and further explored in the upcoming data analysis chapters.

Throughout this study, effectiveness for our sample of community education councils is explored with respect to three major dimensions derived from the social goals framework as explored in the prior chapter. Thus, concepts derived from the social goals framework serve as preset codes, allowing is to deductively address the effectiveness of these participative mechanisms. Following are clarifications regarding these major concepts.

Focus of Data Analysis

The focus of data analysis is on the content of CEC activities and how they correspond with the goals outlined in the social goals framework. While there are five main goals presented in the social goals framework, this study subsumes these goals into three underlying categories to simplify data analysis. These are:

- **Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes***:* This evaluative category subsumes two of the social goals – *incorporating public values into decision making* and *improving the substantive quality of decisions.* These two goals reflect different

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aspects of the broader idea of participative mechanisms influencing the content of public policy and/or administrative decisions, whether in terms of having community values reflected in policy or decisions or in terms of contributing towards more technical improvements that improve the quality of public policies or decisions, such as changes that improve organizational efficiency or effectiveness without necessarily addressing concerns related to public values.

- **Capacity Building Outputs and Outcomes*:*** The social goal of *educating and informing the public* is included in this category. Educating and informing the public, in addition to being a valuable goal for participative mechanisms for normative reasons, also matters because it builds the public's ability to understand public policy issues, capacitating them to take individual action in pursuit of policy changes or refinements, whether through provided public participation mechanisms or through more traditional channels of political pressure. Educating and informing the public may also aid in making the public better *clients* of public organizations, in that they may learn how to better utilize the services offered by that organization. Finally, a better informed public may, in some instances, be less critical of policy reforms, as myths and misunderstandings about such initiatives can be alleviated through informative efforts.

- **Relationship-Related Outputs and Outcomes –** Finally, the social goals of *resolving conflicts among competing interests* and *building trust in institutions* are included under the general *relationships* category. Accomplishing these two goals is

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important for reasons beneficial from both the managerial perspective as well as from the perspective of the general public. Increased public trust and a reduction in stakeholder conflicts may contribute towards improvements in the environmental context within which public organizations operate, making it easier for public organization to operate more efficiently and effectively. Moreover, increased trust and reduced conflicts may also be indicators of improved organizational performance in a broader sense, giving us a more qualitative assessment of organizational outcomes than assessments made through the use of single metrics such as test scores. The improvement of relationships and increased trust require substantive changes in program participants. Thus, analysis of the achievement of this goal can best be understood as a program outcome.

These three overarching goal categories capture the broader array of goals outlined in the social goals framework. The data analysis conducted in this study focuses directly on the first two goal categories, capacity building outputs and outcomes, and policy and administrative outputs and outcomes. Issues regarding the achievement of improved relationships, that is, increased public trust and the reduction or resolution of conflicts, are also addressed in conjunction with discussions regarding the achievement of these other goals. The conclusions and implications resulting from these findings are discussed in the final chapter.

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Research Propositions

Before embarking on any research project, it is important that one have a set of propositions, or at least some general guidelines by which the study will be conducted. While some studies, such as exploratory research, may have legitimate reason for not having firm propositions, even exploratory studies need a general purpose and direction prior to empirical data collection. Robert Yin addresses the usefulness of propositions in guiding exploratory research:

> *[T]he complete research design embodies a "theory" of what is being studied. This theory should by no means be considered with the formality of grand theory in social science, nor are you being asked to be a masterful theoretician. Rather, the simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint for your study, and this requires theoretical propositions (Yin, 1994, p. 28).*

Thus, I offer the following propositions as guidelines regarding the overall dynamics that I expect will occur in the functioning of community education councils.

Proposition 1: *The administrator's relationship with a community education council is influenced by his/her identity as a professional employee of the public school system. Highlighting their role as agents of the school system, administrators will exhibit a greater concern with policies reflecting traditional administrative values, leading to a greater concern with the achievement of performance goals as defined by the central Department of*

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Education than with performance as defined by local communities as expressed through the CECs.

Thus, the activities of school administrators interacting with the CECs will reflect more internally focused administrative values, prompting them to seek ways to influence the outputs and outcomes of CEC functioning and align such outputs and outcomes with Department of Education priorities.

A corollary to this proposition is:

Proposition 2*: Community education council members, as agents of community school district interests, will exhibit a higher degree of concern with goals specific to their respective communities and a lower concern with performance goals as defined by central administrators.*

Thus, CEC members will seek to tailor the functioning of their respective CECs, and their outputs and outcomes, into directions that reflect locally-based goals that may diverge from central departmental priorities. The result of the incongruence in these competing values leads us to the following:

Proposition 3: *The conflict of the administrators' primary performance-based concerns and CEC members' democratically-determined priorities will result in dissatisfaction with the*

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participatory process from administrative, member, and participant perspectives and low perceived community education council performance.

Low perceptions of community education council performance leads me to the following proposition.

Proposition 4*: Low perceived advisory board performance will lead to the creation and use of new and alternative means of public participation.*

This may occur through increased stakeholder contacts with legislative offices, not-for-profit organizations, and advocacy groups. Stakeholders may seek the formation of new public or private participatory structures, and/or increased inter-organizational linkages. Administrators may respond in a protective fashion to these environmental pressures, leading to the following.

Proposition 5*: A higher pursuit of alternative avenues for public participation will lead to a higher pursuit of protective strategies by the school system. Legal and procedural measures to neutralize environmental opposition, or align it with managerial priorities, will be pursued.*

These propositions illustrate a posited dynamic between CEC members, community participants and school administrators, a tension leading to low perceptions of community education council performance by all parties. Administrators in the newly centralized school

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system will view the community education councils primarily as mechanisms for the pursuance of central administrative goals and initiatives, yet face opposition by community groups. CEC members and local participants, being primarily concerned with particular community goals and values, will find these mechanisms insufficiently responsive to community needs.

Methodology

Number/Logic of Cases

This study takes a multiple case study approach, focusing on a purposive sample of community education councils throughout the city. I include in my sample a set of councils reflecting districts with a history of considerable parent and community involvement in the school system, while varying in terms of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Multiple cases, relatively constant in terms of parent and community participation, are chosen in order to apply what Robert Yin terms a replication logic. Yin describes the benefits of using a replication logic when he states:

> Multiple case studies should follow a replication, not sampling, logic. This means that two or more cases should be included within the same study precisely because the investigator predicts that similar results (replications) will be found. If such replications are indeed found for several cases, you can have more confidence in the overall results. The developments of consistent findings, over multiple cases or even multiple studies, can then be considered a very robust finding (Yin, 2003, p.34).

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In this research project, I study the community education councils of school districts 2, 3, 26, and 30. Such districts illustrate relatively healthy levels of parent and community participation, while showing some variation in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. Studying multiple districts existing in different contexts, yet reflecting consistent levels or parent and community participation, allow us to generalize more ably about the capacity of such participative mechanism to function effectively within communities having higher levels of parent and community involvement.

Research Instrument

In addition to data collected from document reviews and personal observations, semi-structured interviews provide data for this study. Interviews were conducted with three categories of individuals involved in participatory processes in New York City. These categories are community education council members, administrators participating in the community education council proceedings (district and regional superintendents), and citizens participating in council proceedings. A mixture of phone and in-person interviews was conducted, depending on logistical considerations.

A snowball sampling strategy was used in each case, as interviews with council presidents, members, and other embedded units lead to contacts with other key subjects. Interview data was supplemented with data from government and advocacy group reports, archival data on council proceedings, state and local education committee reports, media reports, and other relevant documentation.

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Specifics and Limitations of Research Methodology

The case study methodology certainly has its advantages. It is a flexible methodology capable of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to address complex questions that may not be so easily or satisfactorily answered through the use of more restrictive methods. Nevertheless, it is a difficult methodology to implement, particularly for developing researchers with limited experience in conducting such studies. The case study methodology is both technically and personally challenging. While being a flexible methodology, it can be technically difficult to administer and particularly taxing upon the researcher's interpersonal and communications skills; researchers with more introverted personalities must develop the capacity to easily and routinely contact a wide array of people and develop relationships and a sense of rapport with them. While research methods textbooks and case study monographs may serve as helpful guides, they cannot fully convey to researchers the difficulties of this methodology nor the subtle skills needed to overcome its difficulties. Therefore, in this section, I revisit the difficulties I encountered in conducting this case study from the initial point of research design to the period of implementation. First, I discuss struggles stemming from the initial phase of research design. I recount my decision to alter my research design in attempts to deal with difficult and unexpected conditions I found in the field, while retaining a research strategy that continued to allow me to address the fundamental research questions under study. Second, I focus more specifically on the empirical techniques I utilized in this study and the challenges I encountered in collecting data through interviews, document reviews, and personal observations. Finally, I step back and reconsider the design and implementation of this research project as a whole, highlighting the changes I would

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make if implementing this study again and the changes I will make as I continue to employ the case study methodology in the future.

Issues in Research Design: Reconciling Field Conditions with Research Plans

Upon entering the field, it became apparent to me that field conditions would limit my ability to implement my research project precisely as planned. While I was initially troubled by this situation, I later found that such a situation is not uncommon for new researchers, nor are the problems of reconciling field conditions with research design an insurmountable obstacle. Robert Yin highlights this issue:

> *Very few case studies will end up exactly as planned. Inevitably, you will have to make minor if not major changes, ranging from the need to pursue an unexpected lead…to the need to identify a new "case" for study. The skilled investigator must remember the original purpose of the investigation but then must be willing to change procedures or plans if unanticipated events occur* (Yin, 1994, p. 57).

Early in the implementation of my research plan, I found myself precisely in such a situation. My initial research design proposed that I study three different Community Education Councils, varying considerably in terms of the posited quality of their operations, as connoted by their ranking on variables generally serving as proxies for the degree and quality of public involvement in school operations. Thus, I initially wished to conduct three case studies, one being a CEC operating in a community with a higher poverty rate and lower standardized student test scores, another with more average scores on these variables, and a final case with low poverty rates and high student test scores. These cases would have given

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me a cross section that was ostensibly representative of CECs operating throughout New York City as a whole. While this approach to choosing cases was theoretically sound, it failed to factor in the practical challenges of studying organizations plagued by organizational problems. Moreover, it did not take into account the fact that most small teams and organizations encounter considerable difficulties at the formative stage of their operations, making the empirical study of these structures a difficult process, particularly for new researchers.

While I chose this topic for my research study in part because of the timeliness of the issue, I found that studying these structures at such an early point in time in terms of the overall implementation of these school system reforms came with logistical challenges. During the early phases of my data collection, I took Robert Yin's advice to conduct a mini "pilot" case study to ease, among other things, my personal doubts regarding my ability to make extensive contacts and build rapport within a social structure I had no prior connection to. I also used this as an opportunity to acclimatize myself to the process of arranging and carrying out semi-structured interviews as well as to collect some initial documentary data regarding their operations. While I found the CEC I studied for my initial pilot case study to be reasonably accessible and accommodating of my interview requests, I also found that several members lacked sufficient understanding about their specific roles and duties at such an early point of their organization's development. While I was interested in gathering data regarding relatively sophisticated aspects of their performance as mandate by state law, I found considerable discrepancies between what this CEC "should" be doing according to state law and how it actually appeared to be performing. Many of the concerns of the members I initially spoke with were more concerned with aspects more basic to their

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existence, such as ensuring that their memberships were filled, finding ways to garner significant community interest in their operations, and acquiring training that would more clearly explain to them their roles, duties, and powers. Indeed, they were at a formative stage, and could not even provide me access to an organized set of documents reflecting their operations. At this point, it became clear that I needed to be as concerned with the logistics of the data collection process as I was with the theoretical issues under study. I particularly became concerned with problems I would likely encounter in collecting data from CECs operating at average or below average levels. Simply stated, if a CEC operating in a reasonably well-functioning school district showed such little evidence of meaningful and organized activity, what would I encounter when observing lesser performing CECs? It appeared that I was at risk of finding myself studying CECs with scant evidence of any performance at all, rather than studying organizations playing at least a moderately meaningful role in the politics and administration of their district's schools. From a more practical perspective, my subjects needed to have a clearer paper trail for me to conduct a satisfactory case study drawing on documents, interviews, and observations, the three main sources of information that enable case study researchers to triangulate collected data. In retrospect, it seems that I may have prematurely entered the field, precluding me from implementing my research study as designed at the outset. The timing of my data collection did not coincide with the amount of time most CECs needed to develop as functional structures, thus allowing them to serve as subjects for coherent study.

However, from my reviews of media reports, it appeared that there were some cases where CECs were operating with some level of effectiveness. For instance, some New York Times articles clearly reported meaningful political activity occurring within some of the

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city's CECs. Therefore, to ensure that I would be able to complete the empirical data collection phase of my research project, I decided to change my sampling strategy, opting to focus more specifically on CECs likely to be performing at higher levels. Ultimately, choosing my final sample relied on a careful blend of intuition and formal assessments of community school district variables commonly associated with higher levels of public participation. Simple heuristics, such as having a website, served as a potential indicator of higher levels of CEC performance. In terms of performance variables, higher standardized test scores, as indicated by district school report cards published by the New York State Department of Education, became other indicators I used to help me focus my data collection efforts on CECs more likely to be performing at a higher level. My own personal familiarity with New York City's neighborhoods also allowed me to more intuitively focus on CECs operating in neighborhoods I knew to have higher levels of political involvement. Finally, mentions in citywide news publications such as the New York Times also helped point me towards CECs that appeared to be administratively intact and engaged in meaningful democratic activity.

Disadvantages of Using Similar Cases

Upon changing the characteristics of my research sample, I was forced to forego some of the advantages of having a more diverse sample in terms of council functionality. Simply stated, the more diverse sample I originally envisioned would have allowed me to learn a more diverse set of lessons about the processes and outcomes associated with these public participation structures when operating at these different levels of functionality. The lessons drawn from this study as conducted teach us about the ability of these structures to produce a range of outputs and outcomes when operating *within relatively a relatively*

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narrow and favorable range of social and political conditions. Therefore, we can only hypothesize about how such structures would operate in a less favorable set of social and political circumstances.

Therefore, important questions remain. Can CECs operating in poorer school districts with lower levels of community involvement still produce some meaningful policy and administrative changes? If so, which stakeholder or groups of stakeholders act as the drivers of such changes? Finally, can CECs make a difference in actually changing the levels of social and political involvement in their school districts, rather than merely reflecting and channeling already existing patterns of public participation? While changing my research design to focus upon better functioning CECs ensured that this project would be logistically feasible, it left me in a situation were I could only theorize about such questions.

Advantages of Using Similar Cases

Nevertheless, there are some advantages to choosing similar cases that should also be noted. In the research methods textbook Qualitative Research for Education, Bogdan and Biklen speak to the issue of generalizeability, which can be greatly affected when choosing cases for empirical study:

> *People who are in search of a setting or a subject for a case study often feel in a quandary about whether to look for a so-called "typical" situation (one that is similar to most others of the type) or an "unusual" one (clearly an exceptional case…[S]ome people will try to pick a setting that is not so demonstratively different to forestall the possible charge that it is an oddball case. Researchers who choose to*

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go the "typical case" route are concerned about generalizeability as it is traditionally defined (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 60).

Indeed, choosing the "typical" case makes it easier for researcher to generalize their findings may apply to other such typical cases. Thus, the findings I make in this study may be more plausibly extrapolated to other instances where such mechanisms are operating under more ideal social and political conditions.

A subtly different advantage also results from my choice to study *multiple instances* of these typical cases. The replication logic involved in such an approach across several cases operating under more ideal circumstances improves the validity of findings that are consistent across similar chosen cases. Robert Yin addresses this issue when discussing the advantages of selecting multiple, yet "exemplary," cases:

> *The specific cases to be studied may be selected by following several different rationales, one of which is to select "exemplary" cases. Use of this rationale means that all of the cases will reflect strong, positive examples of the phenomenon of interest. The rationale fits a replication logic well, because your overall investigation may then try to determine whether similar causal events within each case produced positive outcomes* (Yin, 2003, p.13).

Thus, the final tradeoff appears to be between breadth in the lessons learned from our findings and the final generalizeability of our findings. Choosing a diversity of cases may yield more lessons, but our findings would remain open to the charges of being idiosyncratic

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to the chosen cases. Choosing multiple instances of similar and more ideal cases allows the researcher to benefit from the generalizeability in findings, and even causal claims, inherent to the replication logic.

Interviews and Related Issues

For this study, I conducted 37 formal telephone interviews. However, in order to familiarize myself with the policy context, I personally attended various meetings and hearings throughout New York City where I made initial contacts with a broad array of individuals involved in the governance of New York City's public schools. These personal contacts served both as direct sources of information in themselves as well as guides enabling me to make contact with other study subjects.

I recorded the audio for most of these telephone interviews on a digital voice recorder and saved the digital audio files in separate computer folders holding data on each of the community school districts I studied. Physical fieldnotes were taken for four interviews conducted at the conclusion of the study. The length of the telephone interviews varied, with most interviews lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. However, some interviews conducted at the outset of this study lasted well over an hour, and in a few instances, over two hours. These longer interviews diverged from the preset interviewing pattern sought by my interview protocol, but were instrumental to me gaining the breadth of knowledge I needed to more fully understand the policy context.

In terms of the sequence of my interviews, I opted to use a strategy of initially focusing on subjects who were involved with public participation reforms at a systemic level, as I was initially interested in speaking with subjects with a broad perspective on the issue.

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After this first phase of interviews, I began to focus on subjects operating at the core of the subject matter, focusing interview on the CEC members and district-level school administrators themselves. After getting this district-level perspective on the subject matter, I then turned to the third phase of my interview data-collection process which focused on "impartial experts" involved in the subject matter in various capacities. These experts provided me with more information, helped me corroborate my findings and interpretations, and helped fill gaps that remained in my knowledge and understanding.

Categories of Specific Interviewees

While a listing of the individuals contacted in this study is included in the appendix, the subjects of this study can generally be grouped into the following categories:

Policy Activists

At the outset, I sought to identify and interview subjects who were frequently mentioned in media accounts related to the policy context. My initial interviews focused mainly on activists who acted as critics of the centralizing reforms. Many of my initial interviewees were affiliated with ANYCEC, the Association for New York City's Community Education Councils, a private citywide organization that sought to form a conglomerate of CEC members and represent CEC interests at a citywide level. While these interviews were helpful in providing me considerable broad-based knowledgeable about the policy context, I had to remain wary of the danger of bias in their accounts. It was essential that I triangulate their perspectives with other sources to avoid bias.

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Elected Officials

Therefore, after focusing my initial interviewing efforts on policy activists, I proceeded to contact the offices of several elected officials involved in this area of educational policy. I spoke with the staff of elected officials, including state and local legislators and borough presidents, and listened to the elected officials themselves making comments on the topic at various meetings and hearings throughout the city. This second round of interviews helped me triangulate upon prior collected information and perspectives and also guided me towards some informative documents and government reports.

CEC Members

After collecting this contextual information, I then focused my data collection efforts directly on the CECs themselves. For several months, I attended meetings of CECs in boroughs across the city, as well as two meetings of the ANYCEC organization. I collected documents at these meetings, took fieldnotes of my observations at the events, and personally introduced myself to CEC members to collect initial contact information and to arrange future telephone interviews. Throughout this time period, I conducted phone interviews with several members from each of the CECs chosen as cases for my study. Within each CEC, I interviewed the president, vice president, and several "rank and file" members of the organization. In some cases, I spoke with members appointed by the borough president to these positions while in other cases I spoke only with the elected parent-members.

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Department of Education Officials and Other

My final round of interviews focused more specifically on Department of Education officials and employees. Towards the end of my data collection phase, I contacted community superintendents, parent support officers, and central Department of Education officials to ensure that I specifically included the Department of Education's perspective, again helping me triangulate upon my data and reducing the likelihood of bias. I also contacted a number of other experts on school policy whose names I became familiar with as a result of my immersion in the field. For instance, I interviewed representatives from organizations such as the New York State School Boards Association and spoke with a number of other individuals who might also be considered "policy activists," yet held the distinction of having particularly long records of involvement in New York City school governance, plausibly making their perspectives more balanced as they could not be easily affiliated with a single advocacy group.

Logistics and Challenges of Interviewing

Telephone interviews were generally conducted in a semi-structured fashion, with an interview instrument guiding these focused interviews (see Appendix A). However, in many instances, I allowed conversation to diverge from the topics being addressed in the interview instrument. This especially occurred with my initial round of interviews, as I was particularly concerned with building rapport with subjects at this stage and more broadly learning about the policy context. Therefore, initial interviews tended to be broad in scope and lengthier than subsequent interviews. While addressing the questions in the interview

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instrument, they also took on more of an exploratory nature, addressing topics more generally relevant to the study.

My initial round of interviews also focused more specifically upon policy activists who were interested in finding outlets for their perspectives on school system reform. It is probable that they viewed me in a category similar to journalists who could chronicle their concerns and deliver them to a larger audience, thus potentially contributing to their cause as policy activists. While their willingness to participate in this study aided me in developing a richer base of knowledge about the policy context, it also brought with it issues of bias. Thus, I found myself having to be careful about not only about developing my own biases, but also the development of bias in other stakeholders towards me should I be perceived to be acting as an agent of a particular group. Bogdan and Biklen caution researchers to remain wary of the possibility of this dynamic:

> *In organizations with conflict people may vie for your allegiance, wanting you to identify with one side or another. They may try to convince you that the way they see things is right and you should join them in the struggle against those they define as the enemy. Although as a strategy it is trying at times, and close to impossible at others, in general it is best to remain neutral. If you identify with one side, it will be difficult to understand or to have access to the people on the other side* (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 91).

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Other Logistical Challenges

The audio files for these interviews were systematically reviewed, and portions of the interviews containing narratives pertaining to the themes contained within the social goals framework were specifically transcribed. Throughout my interview efforts, I found the mechanics and logistics of the interviewing process surprisingly difficult. While the concerns of theory and research methodology consumed me at the formative phase of this research project, I found the practical struggles of implementing my research design to be as, if not more, difficult and personally taxing. Simply stated, it was difficult getting responses for interview requests, particularly at the beginning of my telephone interview data collection efforts. Voicemail messages I left introducing myself, describing my study, and requesting interviews were often left unanswered, and I initially feared that potential interviewees would not be responsive to my interview requests, leaving my entire study in a precarious state. However, I quickly learned that I needed to be more persistent, aggressive, and repetitive in my efforts to land these interviews. By removing some of the emotion from the process and addressing interview collection efforts from a more systematic and mechanical perspective, my fears began to subside and my skills in landing and completing interviews improved.

A major barrier that considerably, and surprisingly, slowed my data collection efforts was the issue of scheduling. As I initially contacted potential interviewees, I would often receive phone calls from subjects at unexpected times when I was not near a regular telephone. As I returned voice messages, I would again often only meet their own voicemail systems. It often took weeks from the point of initial contact to land interviews, and I found this problem particularly distressing and surprising. Finally, I also initially encountered technical difficulties as I experimented with several methods of recording telephone

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conversations. While I recorded my first two interviews on cassette tapes, I found the produced tapes to be cumbersome to store, handle, and properly review and transcribe. After these initial interviews, I experimented with more modern technologies, such as voice over internet protocol (VOIP) technology, where phone calls can be made via computer and routed over the internet. One service I experimented with even provided a rather user friendly "one-touch" phone call recording option built directly into its dialing software. While it was easy to record these phone calls, I encountered issues with latency in VOIP phone calls, that is, delays in the delivery of sound between callers leading to echoes and other problems in audio quality. The problems I encountered in audio quality prompted me to use a standard "landline" telephone to make these phone calls. Nevertheless, I did find using a digital voice recorder advantageous and used this option, rather than a cassette recorder, to record and review the majority of my interviews.

Documents

Documentary evidence also served as a major source of information for this research project. The documents I collected served as independent sources of information as well as sources for corroborating information I had collected through telephone interviews and / or personal observations. The data from these documents were organized according to the preset codes derived from the social goals framework. A coding rubric was used to analyze the data in each document (see Appendix B). Physical notes or memos, based on the coding rubric, were written regarding the data included in each of these documents, attached to each of the documents, and stored with the documents in a physical case study database. The physical case study database includes specific sections on each of the community school

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districts as well as a section on documents regarding more citywide, systemic issues that were accumulated throughout the course of the study.

The documents I reviewed came from a variety of sources but can be aggregated into the following main categories:

Documents Released Directly by the CECs

The most important set of documents that gave me direct insights into the actual functioning of the CECs were those documents released specifically by each of the respective CECs. These documents consisted largely of the minutes of their meetings (both internal business and public sessions). Three of the CECs had functional websites which posted these minutes. I had to personally visit the headquarters of one CEC to collect their minutes and other informative documents. Reviewing meeting minutes enabled me to develop an initial sense of what specifically was occurring at each CEC and allowed me to probe CEC members about issues and events particularly relevant to their school districts. Some CECs also had available various memos and letters which revealed specific and public positions these CECs were taking on certain issues. Some letters were directly addressed to district and regional superintendents and revealed tensions between CECs and school system administrators with respect to some school policy matters. Formal resolutions and policy advisories were also included in this set of documents, expressing similar sentiments and tensions.

Government Documents

There were also many reports and documents released by city agencies and public officials that provided me with information about the CECs. The Department of Education itself was

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a source of many documents that gave me a basic idea about how the CECs worked, the names and contact information for individual CEC members, as well as direct contact information for Department of Education administrators who could personally provide me with information through interviews. The Manhattan Borough President's Office was particularly helpful, as they released an initial investigative report in 2006 regarding the functioning of CECs operating in Manhattan. The offices of other city elected officials, such as the Public Advocate's office, were also helpful, as they released various statements and press releases highlighting issues of concern in this policy context. Finally, legislation and reports published by the New York City Council and the New York State Assembly, and its various task forces, also served as helpful sources helping me to understand issues regarding the CECs from a more systemic, historical, as well as legal perspective.

Documents Released by Policy Activists

As school policy is a politically charged topic in New York City, it tends to prompt activism by many community and special interest groups. Therefore, documents released by a variety of policy activists were another important source of information. I collected this information via internet web searches as well as in person, at the various events I visited throughout the city. Testimony from policy activists testifying at New York City Council hearings on this topic were particularly useful for my analysis. Through building contacts and relationships with these policy activists, I was also able to acquire access to online groups and forums normally reserved only for this community of policy activists, allowing me to access many electronic repositories of documents and statements released by diverse interest groups.

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Media Accounts

Finally, media reports pertaining either directly to events regarding the CECs in individual school districts, or to the more general issue of public participation within the newly centralized school system, were another important source of information. Citywide newspapers, such as the New York Times, issued well written accounts focusing both on district level and citywide issues. Local newspaper reports added to my knowledge, as they tended to report more regularly on the issues facing specific district CECs than did the citywide publications. Finally, I found that entities such as the Public Broadcasting Service and local New York City television stations would periodically host video news reports focusing on the issue under study, acting as another source of information. These and the other types of media accounts provided me with substantive information for analysis, as well as serving the practical purpose of helping me identify individuals who could subsequently be tracked down for direct telephone interviews.

Dealing with Bias

While bias is an issue that must be addressed in all research designs, it was particularly important in this study, as I was researching a politically charged topic. While policy activists often gave extensive and detailed accounts of the history and events associated with these school reforms, I was aware that their accounts and perspectives likely provided only a part of the story. Likewise, documents and interviews gathered from Department of Education officials clearly would tend to emphasize the mayoral administration's perspective on events while overlooking, or at least minimizing, criticisms coming from the public or from other elected officials. Therefore, I was careful throughout

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the study to gather interview and documentary evidence from the wide array of aforementioned stakeholders. Again, these stakeholders generally came from the general categories of policy activists, Department of Education officials, elected officials and legislative political bodies, impartial policy experts, and the independent media. Gathering multiple *types* of information (e.g. interview and documentary) on the same phenomenon *from a multiplicity of independent stakeholders*, was one way I sought to address the issue of bias.

The length of time I spent in the field collecting data is another way I sought to minimize bias issues. Again, the brunt of my data collection took place over several months, primarily form January 2006 to May 2006, with some additional data collection occurring between the June and August months. The length of time I took in collecting and analyzing data, and the degree to which I became embedded in the research context, helped me avoid making quick and superficial judgments. Bogdan and Biklen note how careful and lengthy observations of phenomena can help the judicious qualitative researcher avoid the issue of bias:

> *[Q]ualitative studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting or after some conversations with a few subjects. The researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the empirical world laboriously collecting and reviewing piles of data. The data must bear the weight of any interpretation, so the researcher must constantly confront his or her own opinions and prejudices with the data* (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 33).

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It was my experience that the qualitative researcher has little choice but to deeply immerse him or herself, not just in the discrete data, but in the entire context of his or her study. The qualitative researchers must become a sort of fixture in his or her policy setting, a "familiar face" among subjects, if you will, to be able to gather the kind of data necessary to complete the research project. Such a depth of immersion is necessary for one to develop initial contact with potential interview subjects, as well as the level of trust necessary for these individuals to open up to the researcher during telephone and/or personal interviews.

Memoing and other Technical Methods

Finally, while there are no simple mechanical methods by which one can eliminate bias in a qualitative research study, there are some strategies that can help reduce such bias. One method is memoing, the simple process of writing notes to oneself throughout the conducting of a research study. While memos can address a variety of issues (such as arising themes or theoretical findings), they can also specifically address issues of bias one encounters throughout the data collection and analysis process. At the data analysis stage, when I categorized my collected data according to the preset codes derived from the social goals framework, I also wrote and attached short notes to the various documents or transcribed interview notes that I was reviewing. These notes pertained to interesting issues, arising themes, or relationships that seemed meaningful but did not directly reflect that concepts included in the social goals framework. However, such notes were somewhat informal and focused on developing theoretical themes rather than systematically addressing the issue of bias. In retrospect, these notes could have been written in a more methodical and focused fashion, allowing me to develop arising themes while helping minimize the issue of

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bias. The shortcomings I retrospectively recognize in my use of memoing, as well as other aspects of my research methodology, are addressed in the following section.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

Indeed, a retrospective look at my research design and its implementation reveals many areas where I could have made rather feasible changes that would have improved the theoretical and empirical quality of my study. Retrospectively focusing on these areas allows me to notice the shortcomings of this study and can aid me in improving my use of the case study methodology in my future research efforts.

Perhaps the biggest problem I encountered throughout this study was the issue of timing. If I were to conduct this study again, I would implement my study at a later stage in the development of these policy reforms. As I previously stated, my desire to conduct this study at an early stage of the policy's implementation made the data collection process much more difficult. My enthusiasm for studying the general research topic resulted in my entering the field at a premature stage, where the CECs in general were not well developed enough as organizations to act as subjects for coherent research. While important lessons about team building and the development of public participation mechanisms may have been present at this early stage, such topics were not the initial foci of this research study. Thus, if implementing this study again at such an early stage, I would be particularly attuned to the issue of timing. If implementing the study at an early stage of policy implementation, I would now recognize the need to alter the types of questions I would be asking of the case at this time period. Issues regarding the development of these structures, rather than an evaluative assessment of their effectiveness, should be the focus of such studies at this early

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point. However, if I remained chiefly concerned with studying the effectiveness of these structures, I would simply wait longer to collect my data. Such a strategy would give me access to more data, and more *meaningful* data, that could be analyzed from a real-time as well as a historical perspective.

The second major change I would make if I had the opportunity to conduct this study again is that I would alter the theoretical framework I used to assess the data in this research study. After reviewing a variety of evaluative frameworks in the citizen/public participation literature, I decided to utilize the social goals framework, largely because of its theoretical breadth and the clarity of its concepts. Thus, in this study, the "effective" CEC was the one that exhibited characteristics conceptually present within the social goals framework. To assess the reams of collected data, I applied the social goals framework to the collected data in a deductive fashion to make my assessment regarding CEC effectiveness. However, a retrospective look at my data and analysis have prompted to me to realize that other broader frameworks, as well as important themes arising from the data, may have served as equally, or perhaps even more interesting foci of study. For instance, in the final chapter of this project, I discuss the issue of CEC effectiveness from David Rosenbloom's framework emphasizing the managerial, political, and legal dimensions of public administration. This framework may have been better suited for the research project under study that the utilized social goals framework. This broader framework, more specifically rooted in the classical public administration literature, would still have allowed me to answer questions regarding the effectiveness of these structures while enabling me to answer such questions with a greater depth than and breadth the social goals framework makes possible.

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Another set of changes I would make upon engaging in similar qualitative case studies pertains to changes in the application of techniques of data collection and analysis. Again, a retrospective look at the data collection process allows me to recognize several unexpected difficulties in the data collection process. Again, I did not anticipate how difficult and cumbersome it would be to make initial personal contacts with my interviews subjects and schedule my interviews. These logistical problems with arranging and completing interviews could be addressed by using a more systematic, and even mechanical, approach to the interviewing process. Likewise, scheduling issue could have been minimized through the use of more newly developed telecommunications technology. As far as scheduling interviews is concerned, I would now enter the data collection phase with a greater awareness of the lag likely to ensue between the point of initial contact and the time of actually holding such interviews. Building such expectations into my research, writing, and data collection schedule would have likely allowed me to collect such interviews within a more compact time period and with less personal distress.

However, the process of collecting data through telephone interviews still requires researchers to be physically near a standard telephone "landline" at all times, a requirement that, for a variety of reasons, is simply not always feasible. Such a restriction hampers the ability of researchers to engage in other important academic and life activities during lag periods when awaiting the return of phone calls by interview subjects. Therefore, upon completing the data collection process, I researched the availability of technological options to the standard telephone line for collecting and recording phone conversations. Interestingly, I found that today's generation of "smartphones," which are hybrid products merging cellular telephones with PalmPilot ™ type PDA (personal digital assistant) devices,

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are now a viable option for recording telephone interviews. Many of today's smartphones can be loaded with audio recording software enabling these devices to store even lengthy telephone conversations within the phone's own memory or in various memory expansion cards. Also, I found that the audio quality of these conversations was of good quality and that test recordings were clear and comprehensible upon review. Using this technology throughout the course of data collection can help researchers avoid the simple logistical problem of missing important phone calls that can greatly delay data collection efforts.

Finally, there are other techniques and technologies I have since experimented with that may streamline the data collation process and perhaps improve the process of generating theoretical findings. Prior to my data collection phase, I researched the various qualitative analysis software packages available that could aid me in organizing and analyzing the documents, interviews, and observations on which I base my findings. One major problem with this software for the average graduate student is expense. Most of these software packages cost at least several hundreds of dollars, deterring some doctoral candidates from using these options and encouraging them to rely on more traditional procedures of using folders, envelopes, and filing cabinets to store and analyze data. My research, however, did reveal the availability two promising pieces of public domain software for qualitative research. ANSWR (Analysis Software for Word Based Records), a freeware program released by the Center for Disease Control, is a qualitative analysis research program geared towards large scale qualitative research projects being conducted by multiple researchers. While this program is both free to download and rich in features, it has a cumbersome user interface by today's standards, making for a steep learning curve. CDC EZ-Text, another qualitative analysis research program available for download from the Center for Disease

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Control, is another freeware option geared towards more limited qualitative research studies using mainly semi-structured interviews. While having a simpler interface, I found this product to offer fewer features than its counterpart ANSWR. Moreover, it seemed to add little to the more traditional manual process of collecting and collating qualitative data using physical or computer folders.

Nevertheless, I have since experimented with higher quality commercial software packages with more user friendly interfaces. One such product is QSR's NVivo7. This packages allow researchers to emulate the physical process of organizing and analyzing data on their personal computers, including the storage of electronic versions of text-base documents, organizing and classifying themes that arise in the data, capturing the researcher's thought processes through a built-in memoing function, and even options for presenting results and findings through various types of reports, graphical representations, and textual or numerical charts. The functions offered by such a product could have simplified the organizational, analytical, and presentation phases of my research project.

Nevertheless, there are things I could have done to improve the way in which I came to my analytical findings without relying on computer technology. On simple, almost mechanical, technique that can substantially help researchers in inductive analysis and theorizing is the skillful and careful employment of memoing processes. While I did utilize the memoing process in conjunction with my analytical review of documentary data, I did not specifically draft reflective memos separately from other analytical processes. In retrospect, it probably would have been helpful for me to more steadily write reflective memos, perhaps on a regular chronological basis throughout my data collection and analysis efforts. Such memos may have aided me in adding an additional layer of inductive reasoning

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and theorizing to this more deductive and evaluative case study. Moreover, a more conscious and conscientious use of memoing may have also allowed me to remain more aware of, and thus reduce, the threat of bias in this study.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

While this project engages in exploratory research using the case study approach, issues of validity and reliability still apply to discussion about the quality of this research project.

Internal validity, while not a primary issue with exploratory studies, is still addressed in this research endeavor. There is an assumed link between the achievement of outputs and outcomes that runs across this research project that requires methodological attention. The use of a case study protocol, the careful collection and triangulation of data, the use of a case study database, and the following of a chain of evidence facilitate an explanation-building analytic strategy that helps establish this link between outputs and outcomes.

External validity is sought through the replication logic employed in the use of multiple case studies. By studying four community education councils operating within districts with higher levels of parent and community participation, research findings become more likely generalizeable to similar contexts.

Issues of *construct validity* are addressed though the use of multiple sources of evidence to ascertain answers to the two fundamental research questions of this study. Multiple sources of evidence – for instance, evidence from interviews, personal observations, and document analysis – seek to converge on the same set of facts, essentially providing multiple measures of the same phenomenon.

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This study seeks to achieve *reliability* through the building and maintenance of a case study database. A case study database is a central storage unit (in this case physical) carefully holding and categorizing the information used to answer the key research questions of this study. The case study database developed in this study consists of several types of information gathered throughout the research process. Case study notes and narratives based on interviews, notes on personal observations of council proceedings, and documents collected from the public domain (meeting minutes, letters, activity/performance reports, etc.) were arranged and maintained in this database. All information was carefully categorized and stored in physical form. Thus, future researchers can review the information from this database and come to similar conclusions.

Conclusion

The findings of this case study contribute to the scholarship on urban public school system reform as well as to the more general literature on effective public participation developed in the public administration literature. It is important to gather early evidence regarding how large urban school systems grapple with the issue of creating structures that can accommodate satisfactory public participation while moving the overall system towards higher performance. A growing number of cities are moving towards mayoral control as a strategy for improving school and student achievement within a historical context that recognizes the norm of allowing for public participation in administrative functioning. The case of New York City may be informative to other urban centers seeking to move towards mayoral control while facilitating effective parent and community involvement.

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In the next chapter, I present more fully the history and policy context of this study. The history and development of the New York City public schools system is discussed, emphasizing points of change in the governance structure of the system. The centralizing reforms, enacted by the Michael Bloomberg administration, are highlighted along with the implications of these changes for local level participation in the school system. The creation of the Community Education Councils is discussed, along with their structure and legal powers as set forth by the New York State Education Law. The following two chapters, chapters five and six, present the results of a cross-case analysis of our sample of community education councils, focusing on their outputs and outcomes with respect to capacity building and policy/administrative change; issues related to relationship building are discussed in concert with the analysis of these two goals. The final chapter revisits the propositions set forth at the outset of this study, discusses the implications of our findings, and suggests areas for future research.

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Chapter 4: Policy Context

The History of New York City Public Schools

From the founding of the United States until approximately 1840, there were no "public schools" in America, at least not in the form we know them today. The idea of a publicly financed and administered school system would not arise for some time, as the country held a small role for government in general. Education scholar Donald Davies notes, "Prior to 1840…the typical attitude towards education resembled the common attitude today towards religion: attend the school of your choice." *(Davies, 1981).* Early American education was characterized by a host of educational options, some formal but many being simple and informal by today's standards. Schools were run by various private, religious, and charitable organizations. Churches maintained small schools for their congregations, while families with means hired private tutors or sent their children to private schools. Many children at the time were "home schooled," developing basic literacy and numeracy through parental instruction, later progressing to learn specific trades through apprenticeships (Ravitch, 1988).

Early New York City operated similarly to the rest of the country at the time. There were no "public schools," in terms of taxpayer funded and governmentally administered public schools. There did arise two small private efforts to provide a free, non-religious education to children who found themselves left out of the informal educational system that existed at the time. One was a school for black children, started by the charitable Manumission Society, and formed by some of the nation's founders including John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. Later known as the Africa Free School, its purpose was to correct the harmful effects of slavery on black children. A second free school, founded by the Female

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Association, a charitable group of Quaker women, was later opened, aimed at educating poor white girls (Ravitch, 1988).

At the outset of the nineteenth century, however, New York State began issuing grants to localities as incentives for them to develop their own public schools. The program was effective, resulting in the opening of over 1,000 schools statewide, educating approximately 60,000 children within a few years. Rather than setting up a public system, New York City used these funds to support its existing network of charity schools. Nonetheless, a significant portion of poor children continued to be left out of the system (Ravitch, 1988).

In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the idea of the "common school" began to take hold in America. Education reformers like Horace Mann sought to transform the general American value for education into a specific belief in public education as it is known today. Pubic schools would be distinct from the publicly aided system of charity providers, being:

> *…[F]ree, financed by state and local government, controlled by a lay board of education, mixing all social groups under one roof, and offering education of such quality that no one would desire private schooling" (Davies, 1981, p. 15).*

In New York City and in other urban centers, public schools became increasingly popular for social as well as educational reasons. Urbanization, industrialization, immigration, was leading to a host of social ills. Education was seen as the most humane method by which the

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masses could be “civilized” and transformed into virtuous and productive members of society.

The Free Schools

In 1805, two wealthy Quaker philanthropists, John Murray Jr., and Thomas Eddy, came together and organized a number of other wealthy business leaders in New York to form what became known as the Free School Society. Its first president was Dewitt Clinton, then mayor of New York City, illustrating the quasi-public nature of this initial school. Originally intended to open just one school for poor boys, the Free School Society would expand over time, eventually becoming the foundation for a truly public school system. The system slowly grew, soon receiving funds from the state legislature for the expansion of the school and the matriculation of more students. By 1839, over 20,000 children were enrolled in the Society’s Free Schools (Ravitch, 1988).

Challenges to the Free School Society soon arose, as it had become the main provider of education and the main recipient of state educational aid. Competing religious denominations opened their own schools for poor children of all faiths and thus also requested a portion of the state’s common school fund. The Society found religious institutions encroaching on what it believed to be its proprietary mission – the provision of free, nonsectarian education to the city’s poor children. It soon took the position that public funds should not be granted to religious institutions, as they may be used for the furtherance of religion rather than the civil education of children. The City Legislature responded, ordering that funds no longer be disbursed to religious schools. The state’s common school

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funds would flow solely to the Free Society Schools, making it the de facto public school system of New York City (Jackson, 1995).

Immigration and Religious Challenges

In the 1820s and 1830s, New York City's population continued to expand. This expansion came primarily from the influx of Irish Catholics, a group that would prompt a change in the social pressures facing the Free School system, eventually leading to its replacement with a publicly financed and administered school system (Jackson, 1995).

Irish immigrants objected to the latent Protestantism present in the free schools. Free school education was, in fact, not strictly civil education as we know it today, but a form of non-sectarian Protestant education. Generic references and prayers to a Christian God were made throughout the school day. While seemingly innocuous in the eyes of Protestants, this latent, non-denominational Protestantism offended Irish Catholic religious sentiments. Initially, they sought compromises from the system that would alleviate their concerns. The hiring of more Catholic teachers, the removal objectionable references to Catholics in textbooks, and the allowance of the use of school buildings for religious purposes after school hours were some early efforts at easing tensions in the Free Schools. However, it soon became apparent that such concessions were insufficient (Ravitch, 1988).

Dissatisfied with the response from the local government and the Free School Society, some leaders of the city's Catholic churches soon began requesting their own share of the state and city's educational fund. This move sparked a competition among religious factions for portions of the educational fund; it prompted other religious groups, such as the city's Scotch Presbyterian Church, and then a Hebrew congregation, to request similar

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funding. After being rejected for such funding on the local level, Catholic leaders took their fight to Albany, the capitol of New York State (Ravitch, 1988).

State officials came to the conclusion that the Society's Free Schools were in fact not public at all but run by a private corporation with its own beliefs and interests. They were not truly accountable to the public. Proposals for a public school system -- owned, operated, and financed by the public -- began to take root as a plausible solution to the education crisis facing New York City. After much political debate, legislation was passed creating a publicly funded and administered school system for the City of New York (Jackson, 1995).

A Bureaucratic Education

New York City's public school system was finally in operation. From the mid 19th to the early 20th century, the system would grow substantially. It would process millions of children, bringing basic literacy, numeracy, and lessons in citizenship to the children of the City. However, rapid changes in American society prompted even further changes to the public schools system. Primarily, a growing wave of immigration into America in the early 20th century pressured the public schools system to adopt new bureaucratic methods to increase the efficiency of organizational operations.

Forced to absorb the wave of new immigrants coming to America from Europe during the early 20th century, the New York City public school system utilized bureaucratic organizational systems to achieve its new objectives. Diane Ravitch chronicles this change in the administration of the New York City public school system:

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They became infatuated with the creed, then current in private industry, of scientific management, which promised to improve organizational performance and promote new levels of efficiency (Ravitch, 2000, p. 2).

The school system was reasonably successful in its use of this mass-production model. Ravitch writes:

Through the middle of the twentieth century, the factory model [of education] worked remarkably well. It provided unparalleled educational opportunities to generations of immigrants who became literate and productive members of society (Ravitch, 2000, p. 3).

Ravitch further touts the success of this system:

The system worked well enough…In its first half century, the percentage of graduates increased in each decade, and steady progress seemed the order of the day (Ravitch, 2000, p. 17).

Within the early 20th century context, this "factory model" of schooling was sufficient, and even successful.

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Decentralization of the NYC Public School System

In the 1960s, a growth in the African American and Hispanic population in New York City's urban areas again prompted changes in the organizational form of the NYCPSS. Education scholar Joseph Viteritti notes the effects of this new wave of thought upon the New York City public schools system:

> *"Access," "Representation," and "Equity" all became rallying calls for the educational politics of the 1960s. At the outset of this turbulent decade, remnants of the traditional model were still so embedded in the structure of governance that decision making remained controlled by professional administrators. These educators, who were predominantly white, were rapidly losing touch with the changing population attending inner-city schools. Thus was born the movement for decentralization and community control (Viteritti, 1983, p. 1).*

Access, representation, equity – values espoused under the administrative paradigm of the New Public Administration -- would result in challenges to the previous organizational structure.

Authority Structures

Prior to the 1970s, the power structure of the school system was concentrated and under the mayor's control. Members of the central Board of Education, the governing body of the city's public education system, were appointed by the mayor. These members would elect a chancellor who functioned as the chief executive of the school system. The

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chancellor would was responsible for proposing both educational and administrative policies that would then be carried out throughout the system. The board had the power to approve or disapprove of these policies, acting as a check on the executive's power. But since all the members were appointed by the mayor, the system was generally considered to be under the mayor's control (Viteritti, 1983, p. 11).

All this changed in 1969. With the changing ethnic background of the city, minority groups began to criticize the system for its lack of responsiveness to their particular socioeconomic situations. Minority parents pressed for greater influence in a system administered by largely white professionals who for years "had acted as if they were accountable to nobody." (Viteritti, 1983, p. 7). Public pressure upon public officials culminated in the passage of the Decentralization Law by the New York State Legislature (Ravitch, 1997, p. 27).

The primary changes enacted under this law included:

- A change in the composition of the Board of Education. The Board changed from a 9 member panel appointed by the mayor to a five member panel appointed by each of the borough presidents (Popa, Povolny, Rodus, Lynn, 2002).
- Thirty-one community school districts were established in the City. In each district would exist a *local school board*, essentially a legislative body that shared authority over district school operations with the Board of Education; this board was to be elected by school district constituents. These school boards would select district superintendents and appoint principals found eligible under criteria set forth by the Board of Education (Viteritti, 1983, p. 7).

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- The Board of Education would still retain several powers. It would continue to hold complete control over the city's high schools, special education, bilingual education, and career education programs. Budget, personnel, business, and support functions would also remain under their control (Viteritti, 1983, p. 7).

In response to the cry by minority communities for greater representation and community control, power became widely dispersed. The Board was no longer controlled by the mayor; it was controlled the presidents of the five boroughs. The community school districts further dispersed power, giving more influence to local stakeholders. Local residents gained a new voice in the system, as well as significant governing authority over it.

The Third Wave

Nonetheless, the most recent reforms have again resulted in a broad overhaul of the governmental and administrative structure of the public schools. In June of 2002, New York State Governor George Pataki signed legislation giving New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg effective control over New York City's public school system. The law dissolved the Board of Education, replacing it with a single schools chancellor to be appointed by the mayor. The Board of Education became the Department of Education. Systemic control and accountability became rooted in the mayor, as is the case with the other local government agencies (e.g. the police department, fire department, etc.)

The Bloomberg reforms represented a transformation in the philosophy of a school system that long followed a decentralized system of governance. The reforms concentrate governing power at the top; it cascades from the chancellor to regional superintendents to principles to the teachers themselves. The reforms also separate budget and operations

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functions from instruction, ending the prior system whereby district superintendents oversaw both aspects (Goodnough, 2003).

Under Bloomberg's new plan, the city's community school districts were dissolved as administrative entities. In the place of the school districts would arise 10 instructional regions, each including about 120 schools (New York City Department of Education, 2005). Each region would subsume between 2 and 4 former community school districts. The prior 40 district superintendencies are now replaced with *10 regional superintendents*, solely supervising instruction, and *6 learning support centers*, dedicated to budgeting, hiring, and other administrative functions (Advocates for Children, 2004). The new system reflects the classical Weberian bureaucratic form. Teachers are accountable to principals; principals are accountable to local instructional superintendents. These local instructional superintendents (LISes) report to the regional superintendents, who then report directly to the school chancellor. Authority flows downward in opposite direction. This organizational arrangement is illustrated in the following diagram:

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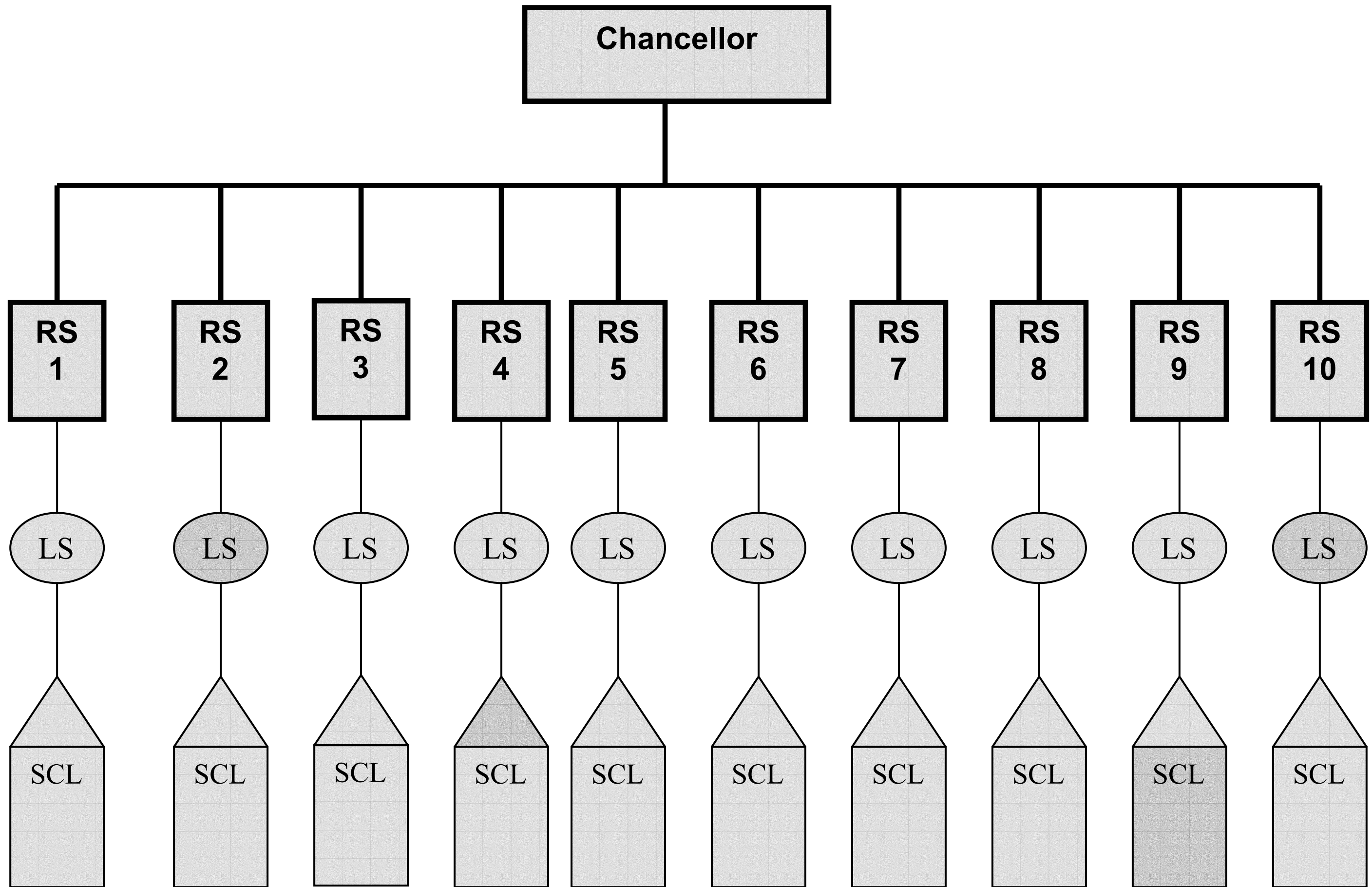
Figure 2: NYCPSS Organizational Chart



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System of Public Participation

Within this bureaucratic structure, there continue to exist numerous mechanisms for public participation, essentially officially recognized entry points by which parents and other community members can seek to have an influence on school policy and/or administration, at the school, local, or citywide level. The following section summarizes these various entry points. Most available public participation mechanisms present in the former decentralized system continue to exist under the new arrangement. However, some new mechanisms were developed along with the overhaul of the administrative system. Parent and/or public participation mechanisms operating in the NYCPSS can be categorized into 4 main types:

- Mechanisms operating at the school level
- Mechanisms operating at the district level
- Mechanisms operating at the citywide level
- Other bodies providing parents with opportunities for limited decision-making authority

School Level Organizations

Parent Associations (PA) and Parent-Teacher Association

New York State law requires that every public school have either a Parent's Association (PA) or a Parent-Teacher Association. PAs and PTAs are independent organizations. However, since they conduct business inside school facilities, they are subject to Department of Education rules and regulations, particularly with respect to the election of officers, the use of school facilities, and the management of financial affairs (New York City Department of Education, 2007).

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The PAs/PTAs enjoy a host of rights and are subject to various responsibilities under the Chancellor's Regulations, a compendium of rules issued by the schools chancellor. The most fundamental rights delegated to the PAs/PTAs include:

- The right to "full and factual information relating to student achievement and the operation of schools."
- The right to "meaningful consultation with school officials as appropriate on a variety of matters affecting the school." Topics include curriculum issues, budgetary concerns, disciplinary issues, school and student safety, food services, special programs and innovations, and issues related to infrastructure, procurement policy, recreational programs, and the use of non-city funding (federal, state, or private sources).
- Inclusion in the selection process for school supervisory personnel, such as principals and assistant principals.
- Participation in school-based planning and decision-making, through election of representatives to the School Leadership Team.

The general responsibilities of the PA/PTAs include their responsibility to encourage parent involvement in the organization and other aspects of school operations, seeking out and representing parent's views through their decision-making and advisement roles (New York City Department of Education, 2007).

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Title I Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 creates a set of programs administered by the federal government which distribute additional funding to schools and school districts having a high percentage of low-income students. To qualify as a Title I school, a school must have approximately 40% or more of its students coming from low-income families, as defined by the United States Census Bureau. These schools are subject to specific federal provisions regarding parent involvement. In addition, the Department of Education sets forth guidelines for parent involvement in New York City's Title I schools. The guidelines call for "…meaningful consultation with parents of Title I participating children in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of Title I programs" (Department of Education, 2004). Their role is to educate Title I parents with regards to Title I programs and policies and to ensure that the views of those parents are represented in planning and decision-making regarding Title I issues (Salimi, Atwell, Culp, Poreda-Ryan, & Hogrebe, 2006).

School Leadership Team (SLT).

New York State law requires that school-based management teams operate in the state's public schools. In New York City, such teams are termed "School Leadership Teams." These teams are intended to provide an avenue of participation for a variety of stakeholders at the school level. The SLTs must contain equal numbers of parents and school staff, and must have the following core members: the principal, the PT/PTA president, and the UFT (United Federation on Teachers) chapter leader, or their designee. SLTs may also have representatives from community based organizations (CBOs) or other community

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representatives (New York City Department of Education, 2007). Their main function is to develop a Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) – a plan of the main educational objectives for the school and specific strategies for their achievement – and the formulation of a school-based budget that is aligned with the CEP (Salimi, Atwell, Culp, Poreda-Ryan, & Hogrebe, 2006).

District Level Organizations

President's Council (PC) and District Parent Advisory Councils (DPAC)

The Chancellor's Regulations require that each Community School District have a council comprised of the presidents of all the PAs/PTAs of the elementary and middle school in the district. This council, the President's Council, has rights and responsibilities similar to the PT/PTAs, but concerning the community school district rather than the individual school. Similarly, Title I schools also have district level representation through District Parent Advisory Councils (DPACs), which are composed of representatives of the PACs of Title I schools. Their role is similar to the PACs, as they must share information regarding Title I programs and policies with other Title I parents, and represent the views of Title I parents in planning and funding and decision-making, but on the district level (Salimi, Atwell, Culp, Poreda-Ryan, & Hogrebe, 2006).

District Leadership Teams (DLT)

DOE regulations also require that a District Leadership Team be formed in every district. Their role is basically to support the functioning of the SLTs operating in their district. Their composition can vary somewhat, as final composition is decided upon through

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the agreement of district superintendents, the district UFT representative, and the president of the President's Council. Nonetheless, they are composed of administrators, teachers, and parents in the district (Shiroma, 2006).

Community Education Councils

The community education councils were discussed in depth in prior chapters (for a more detailed discussion, refer to chapter 3.) When the State Education law was changed to grant mayoral control of the city's schools, the community school boards were disbanded and replaced with the Community Education Councils (CECs). The CECs are the other primary public participation mechanism, operating alongside the President's Councils on the district level; they are the main focus of this study. Officially, the CECs are intended to have a voice in establishing district policies, in evaluating district and local instructional superintendents, and in approving zoning changes (Salimi, Atwell, Culp, Poreda-Ryan, & Hogrebe, 2006).

Citywide Organizations

Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC) and Title I CPAC

CPAC is the citywide body composed of all the presidents of the President's Councils of the city's 32 community school districts. They hold regular meetings with the schools chancellor and consult with him/her regarding various school policy issues (Salimi, Atwell, Culp, Poreda-Ryan, & Hogrebe, 2006). CPAC notes that their responsibility is to "…conduct a two-way dialog of information flow," between community parents and the chancellor, and vice versa (Johnson, 2006). Department of Education guidelines require a

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similar body to represent the views of Title I PACs, but currently there is no functioning Title I CPAC.

Panel for Education Policy (PEP)

The Panel for Educational Policy is the current structure replacing the former Board of Education. It is responsible for advising the schools chancellor on standards, policies, objectives, and regulations directly related to educational achievement and instruction. The Panel is composed of thirteen members. Each of the five Borough Presidents appoints one member to the Panel. The remaining eight members are appointed by the Mayor (Stringer, 2007).

In contrast to the Community Education Councils, Members of the Panel do not have to be parents with children in the school system. Appointees are prominent and successful professionals within their own fields, with a diversity of professional backgrounds, including a vice-president of a Colgate-Palmolive, a professor of electrical engineering, a museum director, and a Senior Director of Goldman Sachs, the global investment bank (New York City Department of Education, 2004).

Background Data: The Community School Boards

Original Powers of the Community School Boards

The purely advisory role of the CECs is a far cry from the role their more powerful predecessors, the community school boards, had, particularly at their inception. From 1969 to 2002, the community school boards shared power and accountability over a large portion of the public school system with the central Board of Education and schools chancellor. In

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response to growing cries from minority communities regarding equal educational opportunity in the public schools system, the state legislature established the 32 community school districts and elected school boards to disperse control of the city schools and to give local communities a greater voice school system policy and administration. While the law left the city's high schools under the jurisdiction of the central Board of Education, but it handed much control over the city's more than 800 elementary and junior high schools to the local boards. At the outset, community school boards had the power to hire community superintendents, principals, and assistant principals, as well as to approve school budgets (Task Force on Community School District Governance Reform, 2003).

The community school boards did indeed have more statutory power than the current CECs. But it is important to note that in practice, the powers of community school boards were steadily eroded since 1969. Actions taken by succeeding schools chancellors and the central Board of Education bureaucracy, coupled with the growing powers of teachers unions, principals, and others stakeholders, greatly qualified the power community school boards had over school system policy and administration (Wolff, 2002).

In response to charges of excessive infighting, corruption, and general ineffectiveness in managing public elementary and middle schools, state legislation was passed in 1996 that removed the power to hire and fire principals from school boards, turned it over to district superintendents. School district superintendents would now confer with community school board members regarding principal appointments but would themselves largely steer the process, proposing their own desired candidates to the school board for ratification. Likewise, the law further limited the powers of school boards by limiting their previous unilateral authority to hire school district superintendents. Community school boards could

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now only recommend up to four district superintendent candidates to the school system chancellor for appointment. The chancellor held the sole authority to make the final decision to appoint a particular community school district superintendent, or reject all candidates and request a new slate of candidates from the school board. The legislation further expanded the powers of the chancellor, granting him or her the ability to intervene when community school districts failed to meet performance and / or accountability standards and when school board members had acted "inappropriately" (Task Force on Community School District Governance Reform, 2003). The law also required greater financial disclosure by community school board members. The result was a set of school boards that some criticized as having, "…policy setting duties but no real authority" (Wolff, 2002).

Background Data: The Community Education Councils

The Community Education Councils are the replacing structures for the former community school boards. There are 32 Community Education Councils for each of the 32 community school districts, with each council having 12 members. In contrast to the former community school boards which did not require member to have children enrolled in the city's public schools, at least 9 of the 12 available seats on each CEC must be held by public school parents. 2 members of each CEC are appointed by the borough presidents and they may or may not have children in the public schools. One member of the CEC must be a non-voting high school senior who lives in the community school district and is on the elected student leadership of his/her school; this member is appointed by the Community Superintendent.

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Parent interested in serving on the community education councils can nominate themselves for the position. With regards to elections, members are selected by the President, Secretary and Treasurer of every Parent and Parent-Teacher Association (PA/PTA) in the district. These three PA/PTA officers are known as the “Parent Selectors.”

To facilitate public participation in electoral processes, there are public meetings held in each community school district. At these public meetings, candidates are able to make presentations to the parent selectors, other parents and members of the community. Anyone attending these public meetings can submit written comments regarding CEC candidates that are shared with the parent selectors. Following these public meetings, each PA/PTA is encouraged to hold membership meetings to obtain additional feedback on the candidates. Finally, “Part B’ of each candidate’s application for the CEC position is now available online and in administrative offices throughout the city. This part of the application includes a background and a personal statement section on the candidate, aimed at helping familiarize parents and members of the community with the candidate’s skills, experience with civic involvement, and motivations for running for this position. In terms of specific voting procedures, each parent selector receives a ballot with the names of all candidates in that district listed in alphabetical order. The parent selector can vote for any two candidates, and the nine candidates with the highest number of votes are selected to the CEC. Ballots are submitted to an independent agent hired to manage and validate the selection process.

The Role of CEC Members

Community Education Council members are considered representatives of the parents and community-at-large, and their role is to reflect the needs and wishes of the community

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regarding the education of its children. CEC meetings are open to the public, and provide an opportunity for the community to be heard on educational issues.

As set forth in New York State's Education Law, the CECs are responsible for "promoting the achievement of educational standards and objectives relating to the instruction of students" and should "establish a positive working relationship with the community superintendent and local instructional superintendents." To help ensure communication and collaboration among public participation mechanisms, council members must hold quarterly meetings with PA/PTA officers and provide assistance to School Leadership Teams. The CECs are intended to have a voice in establishing educational policy for the district and in evaluating the community superintendents and the local instructional superintendents. Moreover, the CECs have some statutory authority to complement their advisory role, as they are responsible for approving zoning lines submitted by the community superintendent.

Background Data on Selected Cases

As this study focuses specifically on the Community Education Councils operating in four of New York City's community school districts, it is important that we have knowledge of some of the basic characteristics of these districts. Following is a brief presentation about these four school districts, focusing on basic demographic characteristics of the districts as communities, the characteristics of the schools operating in the district, and finally information regarding the levels of crowding in these schools, giving us some information regarding the kind of environment in which these school districts operate.

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Community School District 2

Student Characteristics

Community School District two is often termed the "jewel" of the city's public school districts. Its geographical boundaries cover much of the lower part of Manhattan, spreading to midtown and then covering the southern portion of the Upper East Side. It serves many of the wealthiest communities in New York City but also serves a substantial number of poorer students who transfer into the district or who live in the lower income areas of district 2. As of 2005, Community School District 2 had 58,927 students enrolled in its 88 schools. 43.7% of its students are eligible for Free Lunch (a variable commonly used to estimate poverty rates of families utilizing public schools), compared to the citywide average of 64.8%. District 2 is an ethnically diverse district. 19.2% of its student population is categorized as White, 21.4% Black, 36.9% is Hispanic, and 22.4% is Asian or other. 47.9% of the student population is male while 52.1% is female. 8% of the student population identifies as recent immigrant, slightly below the city average of 8.5% (New York City Department of Education, 2005a).

School Characteristics

District 2 employs approximately 1440 teachers, including full and part time staff. 98.5% of these teachers are fully licensed, and 86% of them have master's degrees. 44.7% of them have more than five years of teaching experience. Per student pupil expenditure was estimated to be $11,312 per student. The district operates at about 91% of capacity (New York City Department of Education, 2005a).

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School / Student Achievement

District 2 is one of the most highly performing school districts in New York City, second only to district 26 of Eastern Queens, a district that performs at a slightly higher level, but has a far wealthier and more homogenous student population. Only 3.9% of students perform at level 1 in English Language Arts, the lowest level of performance for city school students. 20.9% performed at level 2, the minimal competency level for promotion to the upcoming grade level. 42.9% performed at level 3, the performance level where students meet the learning standards and illustrate and thorough understanding of the subject matter. 32.2% perform at level 4, illustrating a level of mastery (New York City Department of Education, 2005a).

In terms of performance in mathematics, 7.2% of District 2 did not meet standards, performing at Level 1. 19.6% performed at Level 2. 36.5% showed a level 3 competence while 36.6% showed a level 4 competence (together, 73.2% of students performed at the level 3 and 4) (New York City Department of Education, 2005a).

Community School District 3

Student Characteristics

Community School District 3 operates on the West Side of Manhattan, with its boundaries ranging from West 59th Street as far north as West 122nd street. The district includes the communities of Central Harlem, Manhattan Valley, the Upper West Side, and Lincoln Center. The district is part of Region 10. District 3 had 23,526 enrolling in its 42 public schools. The attendance rate is slightly above the city average, standing at 89.9%. 53.6% of its students are eligible for free lunch. 19.9% of District 3's students are classified

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as white, while 37.5% of students identify as black. 36.5% of the student population identifies as Hispanic, and 6.2% of the population is Asian or of another ethnicity. As of 2005, 4.9% of the District 3 student population was classified as recent-immigrant (New York City Department of Education, 2005b).

School Characteristics

District 3 has experienced a decrease in its number of teachers, despite having a steadily increasing student population. As of 2005, District 3 employed 952 teachers, a decrease from its 2003 number of 1,029 teachers. Virtually all of its teachers are fully licensed (98.6%). 52.2% of its teachers have been teaching for over five years. 81.4% of district teachers have master's degrees or higher. Across the district, its schools are operating at 80.1% of capacity (New York City Department of Education, 2005b).

School / Student Achievement

District 3 performs at a level slightly higher than the citywide average. In 2005, 56.4% of its students performed at a level meeting state standards in all tested grades in English Language Arts. Mathematics performance is similar in the aggregate, with 55% of the student population achieving state mathematics standards. 11.6% of students performed "far below" state standards, performing at a level 1, thus showing a minimal understanding of written and oral text. 18% of these students performed at a level 1 in mathematics, showing only a minimal understanding of key math ideas (New York City Department of Education, 2005b).

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Community School District 30

Student Characteristics

Community School District 30 is located in the northwestern section of Queens. It is one of the most ethnically diverse districts in the city, with its population representing over 120 countries. As of 2005, District 30 served 39,802 students in its 40 schools. Average daily student attendance was slightly above average in District 30, standing at 90.8%. The poverty level, as indicated by the percentage of students eligible for free lunch in the district, is high in District 30, with over three-fourths (76.1%) of its students being eligible to receive free lunch. Despite this high poverty level, student achievement remains high in district 30, as the district consistently ranks in the top third of NYC school districts on standardized tests. Again, the district is highly diverse, with approximately 15% of its population classifying as white, 10.5% classifying as black, 52% classifying as Hispanic, and 22.5% classifying as Asian and other. Its Hispanic and Asian /other population is well above the city average, as 39% of the citywide student population is Hispanic and only 13.5% is Asian or other. A full 13.2% of the District 30 student population is of recent immigrant status, considerably higher than the citywide average of 8.5% (New York City Department of Education, 2005c).

School Characteristics

Community School District 30 employs 1,984 teachers. Virtually all of these teachers are fully licensed (98.6%). 55% of these teachers have more than five years of teaching experience. 86% of these teachers have master's degrees, slightly above the citywide average of 81.5% District 30 schools are crowded; district wide, they operated at 99% of

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capacity, considerably over the citywide average of 88% of capacity (New York City Department of Education, 2005c).

School / Student Achievement

District 30 performed above the citywide average in terms of English Language Arts and Mathematics test scores. In terms of English language arts achievement, 60.5% of District 30 students met state standards in all tested grades, performing at levels 3 and 4. This is considerably higher than the citywide average of 51.8%. Only 7.5% of its student population performed at a level 1, far below the standard. District 30 students performed almost equally well in mathematics, with 60.2% of its students meeting the standards. However, more of its students performed at a level far below standards in mathematics, with 13.6% of the student population performing at a level 1 (New York City Department of Education, 2005c).

Community School District 26

Student Characteristics

School District 26 in Queens is rated as one of the best public school districts in New York City. The district encompasses Douglaston, Bayside, Little Neck, Floral Park, Glen Oaks, Bellerose, Jamaica Estates, and Fresh Meadows. It includes 20 elementary schools and five middle schools, and serves over 32,000 students a year. Attendance rates in district 26 were higher than the citywide average, with students attending approximately 93% of the required school days. District 26 has a far lower poverty rate than the rest of the city's schools, with just 23.5% of its student population qualifying for free lunch, compared to the

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65% citywide average.   District 26 has an ethnically diverse student population. 22.9% of its students classify as white and 17.9% of its students classify as black. 14.4 % of the student population is Hispanic. District 26 has a high percentage of Asian and other students, with 44.8% of the population classifying as Asian or other – over 3 times the citywide average of 13.5%. 8.6% of its student population identifies as recent immigrant, basically equal to the citywide average of 8.5% (New York City Department of Education, 2005d).

School Characteristics

District 26 employed 949 teachers as of 2005. Again, virtually all of its teachers were fully certified (98.8%). About 61% of its teachers have five or more years of teaching experience, greater than the citywide average of 53%. District 26 teachers are highly trained, as 88.1% of them have master's degrees or higher.   Despite its high levels of performance, District 26 schools are crowded, as they operate district wide at 108.1% of capacity (New York City Department of Education, 2005d).

School/Student Achievement

District 26 is the highest performing school district in New York City, as evidenced by standardized test scores. 82.4% of its students meet English Language Arts standards, performing at levels 3 and 4. Only 1.6% of its students perform far below the standard, performing at level 1. Performance in standardized mathematics exams is similar, as 85% of the District 26 student population performs at levels 3 and 4. Only 3.4% of its students perform far below the standard at level 1. More students in district 26 perform at level 4 than they do at other levels, with 51% of its student performing at level 4, thus exceeding learning

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standards for mathematics and showing a superior understanding of the subject matter. 34% of its students perform at level 3, and 11.5% and 3.5% of its students perform at levels 2 and 1, respectively (New York City Department of Education, 2005d).

Conclusion

This research project seeks to answer key questions regarding the ability of large, centralized urban public school systems to provide for effective public participation. New York City stands as a unique case among other large urban school systems in America; while being the largest school system in America with the most diverse student population, it has also become the most centralized of the mayor-controlled urban school systems. The literature in public administration illustrates a tension between these two competing aspects of public organizations, between centralized bureaucratic forms embedded within democratic political and social systems. American culture requires that public organizations, and in particular public school systems, provide for meaningful public input. Social developments and administrative practices evolving from the mid 20th century have made public participation not a privilege, but an expectation, in many policy contexts.

This research project uses New York City as the setting to explore this basic question, "Can public participation mechanisms in mayorally controlled school systems 'work'?" Using the social goals framework as a standard for effectiveness, this study utilizes a multiple case study methodology to address this question in four community school districts in New York City. The goal is to gather and assess data on the functioning of the Community Education Councils, one of the key mechanisms by which public participation is now channeled in to the New York City public schools system. Drawing on documentary

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evidence, interviews, personal observations, and archival sources, this study seeks to answers questions regarding participative mechanism effectiveness within a variety of socioeconomic contexts. Findings from this study may contribute to the literature on school reform, especially that focusing on the use of mayoral control as a governance reform strategy for ailing urban public school systems. Moreover, findings may serve as a contribution to the public administration literature focusing on effective strategies for public participation in large public organizations.

Findings from this study are divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on CEC outputs and outcomes related to capacity building. The chapter focuses on CEC actions and achievements related to educating and informing community stakeholders, and thus building the stakeholder capacity to act effectively in furthering their interests with regards to school policy or administration, either within the provided CEC framework for public participation or through the wider array of participative channels available. Chapter 6 focuses on another category within the social goals framework, that of producing specific policy and/or administrative outputs and outcomes. Issues regarding relationships, the third category of the social goals framework, are addressed *throughout* the two chapters, noting the links between improved (or eroded) relationships and achievements in capacity building or in producing policy and/or administrative outputs and outcomes. Relationships are not studied in isolation, but rather in *relation to* the achievement of the other social goals.

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Chapter 5: Capacity Building

Introduction

The following section reviews the findings from the four conducted case studies. The focus of data analysis is on the outputs and outcomes of CEC activities and the ways these outputs and outcomes correspond with the goals outlined in the social goals framework. While there are five main goals presented in the social goals framework, this study subsumes these goals into three underlying categories, which include: 1.) capacity building outputs and outcomes, 2.) policy and administrative outputs and outcomes, and 3.) relationship-related outputs and outcomes, as discussed in chapter 3 of this project.

These three overarching goal categories capture the broader array of goals outlined in the social goals framework. The data analysis conducted in this study focuses directly on the first two goal categories, capacity building outputs and outcomes, and policy and administrative outputs and outcomes. Issues regarding the achievement of improved relationships, that is, increased public trust and the reduction or resolution of conflicts, are also addressed in conjunction with discussions regarding the achievement of these two other primary goals. The conclusions and implications resulting from these findings are discussed in the final chapter

Data Analysis Overview

This chapter uses the four conducted cases studies as data sources to explore CEC achievements with respect to the social goals categories. In-person and phone interviews, document analysis, and direct observations of CEC and PEP (Panel for Education Policy) proceedings, as well as observation of some other public events (e.g. New York City Council

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legislative hearings) are the sources of data for this analysis. This study uses various data sources to triangulate upon the relevant phenomena, improving the validity of the data and the conclusions of this study's findings.

Community education councils 2, 3, 26 and 30 engaged in activities that reflected the goals identified within the social goals framework. However, we should note that the councils differed in their approaches towards accomplishing their goals and emphasized different goal categories from council to council. For instance, some councils focused primarily on the capacity building goal, seeking to educate and inform the public about issues relevant to the community school district, while others councils focused activity more directly on changing specific school policies. Issues of style and strategy also arose during this study, as some councils took direct and assertive action in opposition to certain Department of Education policies affecting their community schools while others opted to avoid controversial issues, partnering more closely with the Department of Education and focusing primarily on achieving policy changes in non-controversial areas of school policy where agreement between council members and Department of Education official could more easily be arrived at.

One point to note is that educative efforts at times took forms different from what was expected; rather than seeking to improve public knowledge as a means of facilitating future efforts toward policy change, some councils engaged in this function as a means to facilitate the public's *use of the school system*, making the public more competent *clients* of the school system and enabling them to utilize its various resources more effectively. Thus, despite their operating within a similar legal framework, the CECs exhibited considerable variation in terms of the goals they emphasized and the types of actions and strategies they utilized to

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accomplish these goals. Findings regarding this variation in CEC functioning can contribute to the academic knowledge on the functioning of public participation mechanisms in urban public school systems and the variety of paths they may take in their efforts towards successfully achieving different types of goals. In doing so, findings may also provide practical benefit to those serving on such public participation bodies.

Capacity Building Outputs and Outcomes

Educating and informing the public is a key goal for public participation mechanisms. Educating and informing the public about policy issues is important for participative mechanisms in that:

> *It integrates information about the problem at hand with participants' intuition, experience, and local knowledge to develop a shared understanding and a collective perception of solutions. Such an education helps the public build the capacity needed to formulate alternatives and helps to level the playing field between the public and the government (Beierle, 2002, p. 15).*

In each of the four cases, educating and informing the public was an important goal pursued by the councils. However, data analysis showed that educating and informing the public occurred in myriad ways. Often, Department of Education administrators led such efforts, as all the studied councils showed that CEC proceedings were often used as forums for administrators to explain goals, programs, and policies set by the Department of Education as a result of the 2002 school reforms. Thus, CECs became important tools for administrators

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to explain changes and new approaches towards education and school administration, potentially aiding in alleviating some of the public opposition that may arise with such changes. Other educative efforts also revolved around educating constituencies about the complex rules and regulations underlying Department of Education functioning; such efforts amounted to an education in the proper pathways by which parents and community participants can press for changes in school policies. Another educative use of CEC proceedings for central school system administrators was as forums for explaining to the public the reasons for difficulties in making rapid responses to individual or school level concerns. As a large public bureaucracy, the Department of Education often has difficulties with slow responses to individual and school level concerns; clients are often frustrated by dealing with "red tape" so often found in large public bureaucracies. Addressing the reasons underlying complex rules and regulations may alleviate some of the frustration experienced in dealing with the steps and procedures inherent in navigating a large public bureaucracy. In short, the data showed that educating and informing the public could take on a range of meanings and approaches within this policy context. The following section further illustrates the ways in which the four studied CECs pursued the capacity building goal.

CEC 30

Community Education Council 30 (CEC 30), of western Queens, took a largely collaborative approach in its capacity building efforts, mostly working in conjunction with administrative actors to educate and inform the public about issues impacting the school district. Many educative and informative efforts occurring at CEC 30 consisted of announcements and presentations by DOE administrators to the council membership and the

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public, informing district participants about programs and policies initiated by the newly formed Department of Education as a result of the 2002 centralizing reforms. Much of the early educative agenda discussed at CEC proceedings reflected Department of Education efforts towards explaining the host of new programs, policies, and administrative approaches taken towards education under the new organizational framework. While some CEC members used public information efforts to challenge certain aspects of school policy affecting their district, these challenges occurred individually and did not reflect a cohesive council-wide effort to challenge Department of Education polices through the use of public information efforts. For instance, early exchanges between the council membership and central departmental actors consisted of the council's membership seeking clarification with regards to significant policy changes, with citywide implications, implemented in the schools by the Bloomberg administration. Most prominently, council members and the public questioned Department of Education officials with respect to the mayor's then forthcoming policy to end social promotions for fifth graders, prior to a child's entry into middle school. Administrators addressed this controversial issue, replying to public concerns that the policy was "too drastic" with specific answers explaining the resulting developmental and academic problems that occurred as a result of the former policy. Explanatory efforts were followed with information regarding a range of new programs, and newly directed public funds, aimed at supporting struggling fifth grade students in achieving standards. Both the availability and the content of summer school programs, and their pedagogical approaches, were presented and explained to the public in response to public concerns. The district's degree of success in achieving these new goals – the achievement of minimal state standards by the district's fourth-graders -- was also reviewed at the end of the 2005 summer school term. Since then,

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the community superintendent has made it a point to inform the public about steady improvements in student achievement as evidenced by standardized test scores since the 2002 centralizing reforms. Thus, council proceedings played an important role for the DOE in educating the public about the justification underlying major policy changes and the relative success of the overall systemic reorganization. They also acted to inform the public about new programs aimed at supporting students in achieving mandated state standards, potentially helping reduce public opposition that could hinder further policy changes.

Table 1.1: Capacity Building at CEC 30

Educating and Informing the Public	
Output	**Outcome**
• Administratively led informative efforts	Improved community's knowledge of DOE reforming policies, programs, and initiatives
• Member-driven informative initiatives	Addressed *public* concerns regarding issues particularly important to the District 30 community (sex offender issue, air quality), thus empowering members & the community
• Efforts towards systemic transparency	Improved public stakeholder knowledge about modern managerial and instructional practices in district schools
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	**Outcome**
• Challenging DOE objectives	Occurred infrequently (e.g. 5th grade promotions policy); may have had effect of reducing public trust
• Involvement in citywide policy	HIV education program – CEC was not involved, potentially reducing public trust. Also, Empowerment Schools program not addressed, potentially affecting trust in the future
• Communications with regards to the budget	State's recalcitrance in disbursing funds emphasized, potentially deflecting distrust to state-level

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community education council began to address topics and arrange informative forums aimed at specifically addressing stated public concerns. However, the topics addressed reflected relatively "neutral" areas of school functioning, areas largely related to support functions and services. These areas pertained to problems and deficiencies in the school system that were basically agreed upon by a broad array of stakeholders – council members, parents, and school administrators – making these concerns more amenable to collaborative, and thus effective, action. Moreover, it reflects a council strategy of "carving out" specific, non-controversial policies for action.

One area in which CEC 30 particularly sought to increase its influence was in the area of school safety, particularly with regards to the dangers posed by sex offenders. While the Bloomberg administration made school safety an object of focus through the creation of its Impact Schools program, this initiative focused on violent student-on-student crimes occurring inside the schools or within school grounds, and not outside in the larger community. CEC 30 used its proceedings as opportunities to raise the public's awareness about problems with district school safety by bringing public attention to a rash of incidents regarding sex offenders in community school district 30. By raising this topic at public forums and informing the public on incidents that had occurred in the district, the council membership created a public dialogue on the problem of sex offenders with administrative authorities. This dialogue, while aimed at improving the public's capacity to protect their own families from such victimization, also captured the attention of the district superintendent and central authorities, leading to a revision in the system's citywide sex offender notification policy.

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CEC 30 also used its proceedings to educate the public about a variety of other safety concerns facing the district, particularly with respect to student health. In response to community concerns with air quality, the community education council gathered and disseminated information on a spike in reported asthma cases between the 2005 and the 2006 school years. In addition to raising public awareness on this issue, the CEC was also able to later respond with specific policy-changing action. The CEC also hosted a forum on disaster preparedness, focusing on the Department of Education's safety plans in the event of disasters as well as on what families could individually do for protection.

One prominent issue that arose on a citywide level with respect to health and safety, and which the CECs used their forums to educate the public on, was the implementation of a citywide HIV education program throughout city schools. This program, required by state mandate, became a subject of debate in several school districts, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that students would be taught some version of the curriculum as early as kindergarten. CEC 30, and other councils, criticized the Department of Education for a lack of parent involvement in the curriculum formation process, noting surprise that, "…they don't have it reviewed for public comment." However, we should also note that in the case of CEC 30, the membership itself became a crucial vehicle by which some of the public criticism and fear regarding this curriculum was alleviated. As CEC members themselves learned more about the curriculum and the age-appropriate manner in which it was being delivered, they were able to allay some of the concerns of district parents when contacted for more information. The fact that CEC members are themselves parents of children in the school system helped them in delivering a more convincing message regarding the HIV curriculum, as community parents can "better identify" with CEC members who are also

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parents with children in the public schools. In contrast to their communications with Department of Education officials, parents know that CEC members "…aren't just talking the talk, they're walking the walk" (Composto, 2006)

General Transparency

A major function of CEC 30's proceedings was also to bring a sense of general transparency to school functioning. Department of Education officials often used the councils as forums to make presentations about a variety of school level reforms and practices, such as the growing use of technology in the classroom, new experimental administrative models being used in some district schools, and the expansion of gifted and talented programs across the district. CEC proceedings were also instrumental in keeping the community abreast on the state of capital projects in the district. Repairs to school facilities are a topic often addressed by the CEC; this topic was addressed in detail by regional facilities managers as they visited the council and gave detailed reports on completed, ongoing and future projects, improvements, and repairs to District 30 schools. Finally, in addition to keeping the community abreast on district level programs, policy initiatives, and changes, public information efforts were also instrumental in keeping parents aware of a variety of programs and services directly available to them, potentially improving the public's ability to utilize available services. Information on supplementary education services was disseminated, and presentations on elementary school admission policies, and available programs, were made to the public, among other initiatives. These efforts made the CEC an important source of information for system utilization, making the CEC a de facto

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partner with other DOE offices in helping parents navigate the complex Department of Education bureaucracy.

While information provision with regards to district level concerns was an important function of CEC 30, larger scale policy changes with citywide implications were only minimally discussed in this setting. For instance, a pilot program experimenting with greater school level autonomy – the autonomy zones program – was discussed only briefly during one CEC meeting. The autonomy zones program, which releases school principals from close supervision by regional authorities in exchange for promises of increased school performance, has been expanded citywide into the empowerment schools program. This program has profound implications for the administration of the city's schools, essentially changing the systemic structure from a bureaucracy into one utilizing a networked approach. Empowerment schools principals will be freed from the oversight of regional authorities and enter into "networks" of approximately twenty schools; together, these networks will choose "network support leaders," who will work with small teams to help principals learn from one another and solve problems (New York City Department of Education, 2006). The Department of Education has noted that its goal is to move virtually all of the city's schools into this program by 2008, resulting in another de facto overhaul in the organizational form of the school system (Hempill, 2006). The profound consequences of this change seem to warrant a more complete public information effort which the CECs may be effective partners. Lack of information provision through the CECs with respect to this citywide policy change may be a lost opportunity, resulting in difficulties with future community relations and implementation efforts.

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Communications Related to the Capital Budget

Financial matters pertaining to district schools were another major area where CEC 30 sought to educate the public. Interestingly, such educative efforts consisted of more than just efforts to share technical information regarding the district's position in the broader New York City school budget. While technical information was a part of CEC 30's informative efforts, such efforts also took on political dimensions due to the unique position of the New York City Public Schools System in the state's school budget allocation process. During educative sessions on the state of the school system budget process, Department of Education officials were quick to focus on how budgetary shortfalls resulting from the state's delay in releasing Campaign for Fiscal Equity Funds (CFE) threatened the progress of specific school level construction projects, capital, and facilities improvements. Administrators urged citizens to place pressure on their elected public officials to work vigorously to acquire such funds. This strategy of educating the public with regards to budgetary matters, while highlighting the state's role in delaying needed school construction projects and facilities improvements, may have had the effect of deflecting public criticism regarding the state of disrepair in some city schools from the city's mayor to a broader set of state legislators and the state's governor.

Conclusion

CEC 30 took a broad approach towards educating and informing the public with regards to issues important to the district. The council sought to inform the public regarding a variety of issues; efforts ranged from general informative announcements explaining recent school policy changes to informative sessions aimed at facilitating parent and student

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utilization of services. Council member driven initiatives included sessions exposing health and safety issues facing district schools. The council's educative and informative efforts regarding budgetary issues took on a political hue, as Department of Education administrators emphasized the effects of the state's reluctance to release CFE funds for specific district school improvement projects. We should note that there was little evidence of CEC 30 using educative and informative efforts as a method of challenging major DOE policies. Moreover, there was little discussion regarding significant forthcoming, systemwide policy changes that may have important implications for the children and families utilizing New York City's public schools.

CEC 26

CEC 26 of Western Queens was also active in pursuing the capacity building goal, acting as a forum for educating the public with regards to new programs and policies instituted in the district as a result of the 2002 reorganization efforts. However, CEC 26 diverged from CEC 30's approach towards educating the public in that its membership tended to utilize public education efforts as means to defend the district against systemic changes and promote the continuity of district functioning. While early informative efforts were administratively led and emphasized DOE efforts to publicize the continued high-performance of district schools, later efforts reflected administrative responses to council-initiated requests for information and clarification on the implications of systemic reforms for district level functioning.

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Table 1.2: Capacity Building at CEC 26

Educating and Informing the Public	
Output	***Outcome***
• Administratively led informative efforts	Improved community's knowledge of DOE reforming policies, programs, and initiatives
• Member-driven initiatives	Addressed public concerns regarding issues important to District 26 (high stakes testing), empowering members and local stakeholders.
• Cross-educational efforts	Increase community's capacity to collaborate on policy issues
• Addressed limits of public participation	Improved public knowledge of proper protocol for accomplishing policy / administrative changes
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	***Outcome***
• Administratively led informative announcements	Educative efforts illustrating continued success may improve trust; also, emphasis on *reasoning* underlying administrative reforms may help improve trust
• Cross-educational efforts	Increased community stakeholder cohesion and public trust

General Informative Efforts

The Department of Education utilized CEC 26 proceedings as forums to emphasize the continued success of the school district; such success was deemed to be evidence of the effectiveness, or at least benign nature, of recent policy and administration changes. Early educative efforts highlighted district wide policy developments and successes, including increases in attendance rates at district schools, the success of ongoing professional

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development for teachers, the hiring of competent new principals, and improvements in district math and ELA (English Language Arts) scores. Highlighting district successes was important in the early development of the District 26 CEC, as local residents of this politically active district were concerned that systemwide changes could threaten the functioning of programs and policies already succeeding under decentralized control.

However, we should note that as with other councils, the Department of Education also used CEC 26 proceedings as opportunities to *explain* the reasoning underlying new programs, policies, and procedures affecting the school district. Such efforts may help the Department of Education reduce criticism that public information efforts are merely marketing efforts, rather than efforts to help inform the public about the logic underlying such changes. For example, Department of Education officials utilized CEC 26 meetings to educate the public about new pedagogical practices and reforms being instituted at the middle school and secondary level. At one meeting, DOE administrators gave a comprehensive presentation to the CEC 26 membership about the findings from the *Reading Next Report*, a national education policy study proposing a set of best practices associated with improvements in literacy skills at the middle school and secondary level. The study's findings were to be used as the foundation for district policies initiatives aimed at continuing improvements in school performance. In addition to explaining the findings and recommendations from this report, DOE administrators discussed these policy proposals specifically in terms of the district, detailing how the plan would be adopted across district schools.

Gaining the public's confidence was particularly difficult for the central Department of Education in the case of CEC 26, as the district's status as a high performing district

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resulted in CEC positions that were critical of many policy and administrative changes. Thus, the membership of CEC 26 often used its public forums as opportunities to publicly challenge major policy and administrative changes. For example, CEC 26 has been critical of the growth of excessive "high stakes" testing in district schools, questioning the value of such tests for a high-performing school. In an advisory to the chancellor on standardized testing, CEC 26 noted that, "…students and teachers were spending an excessive amount of time preparing for tests," and that such a practice, "…distract[s] from the coherent and logical flow of classroom instruction" (Community District Education Council 26, 2005). Again, the Department of Education was careful to explain the reasoning underlying the school system's use of standardized testing. Officials responded to such questions by explaining reforms in the use of often criticized practices such as test preparation, highlighting reforms that more closely link the practice to the comprehensive learning of the general curriculum and state educational standards. Administrators noted that new test preparation practices emphasize skills that supplement students' overall learning skills, improving their ability to analyze questions, building their reading stamina, and improving their overall reading and writing skills. Administrators noted that such skills complement, rather than distract, from curriculum instruction in the classroom.

Cross – Educational Efforts

While administrative explanations and justifications of specific school system policies and practices constituted a large portion of informative exchanges at CEC 26, there were other ways in which the broader educative goal was pursued. Interestingly, CEC proceedings became forums where CEC members could educate themselves with regards to

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the work of other parent and community groups functioning in the district, improving their capacity to collaborate effectively with other groups. Because of the dismantling of the former community school boards and rules restricting PA and PTA members from serving on the community education councils, much of the CEC 26 membership was new to the context and processes of public participation more broadly in the school district. They were less aware of the role of other parent and community groups, resulting in an initial disconnect among groups that would later collaborate to produce policy changes. One member addressed this disconnect, noting:

> *I think the PTAs were a little intimidated in the beginning of the year; what exactly is our role, how does it fit into their role. In the beginning of the year, you'd ask some people…they don't even know who we are…[so] we asked if we can sit it on PTA meetings, and they would come to the school. I think there was a big…intimidation factor [with regards to] what our role was and everything else. And I think it took our visits and presentations at their meetings and a couple of successful trips to their various meetings, and word of mouth really, to really get the message out, that we're going to help you. We're not here to replace you or hinder your progress or spy on you, or anything else. We're advocates for children. That's what we want to be, and that's what we want to help you be (Fallacaro, 2006).*

Thus, early CEC 26 meetings were often attended by senior members from the district's President's Council (a public participation group composed of the presidents of the PTAs functioning within the school district). The President's Council communicated with the

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membership and the public, relaying information with regards to the role and function of the President's Council and other groups within the district. Through this ongoing educational process, the district President's Council sought to increase the CEC's policy advocacy abilities, while simultaneously working towards aligning CEC 26's agenda with that of the other more established parent and community groups.

Limits of Public Participation

Interestingly, building the CEC's knowledge regarding the *limits* of public participation often proved to be as important a goal as building their knowledge regarding the avenues of action open to them. While the limits of CEC capabilities became a topic during communications with other public participation groups such as the District President's Council, Department of Education officials also took efforts to educate the new CEC 26 membership with respect to historically used strategies for effective public participation at the local level, as well as the limits of possible responsiveness of the government agencies to CEC requests. One CEC 26 leader noted the example of school safety:

> *School safety…it's always a big issue. It's always a problem with people wanting stop signs, so that's always a big issue that you'll hear from the PTAs. And we had someone from DOT come out and explain, well this is the process, this is why you can't necessarily get speed bumps, because the community boards hold protests because they don't like the noise of the trucks going over the bumps. You know, little things like that, just trying to educate people, this is what you have to do, these are the elected officials you have to bother, these are the people in DOE you need to*

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write to, these are the people in DOT that you need to be aware of and what their processes are. And you know…hopefully, we at a minimum…we learn enough so as we hear feedback and we build more relationships this year with the PTAs, hopefully they're encouraged to come to us. [Since] we have dealt with the issue in the past or at least have some knowledge of it…[we] can help them out (Fallacaro, 2006).

Another example of this occurred with respect to requests for physical repairs to district schools. The District 26 Deputy Regional Facilities manager attended a council meeting in response to community concerns regarding a variety of structural problems with school facilities. While the regional manager sought to gather information and organize future action in response to these requests, the manager also used the CEC proceeding to more closely explain his role working with school principals, PTAs, and school custodians with regards to facilities repair and improvement issues. The manager informed the public on the state of capital improvement projects in the district and each project's priority level. But most importantly, the manager explained to the council the formal steps and processes by which capital repair or improvement requests are bought to his office's attention, budgeted, and then approved. Bureaucratic rules and processes – "red tape" -- can frustrate the public, especially when they are unaware of the proper protocol for making requests. Using CEC proceedings as a method to clarify and explain these rules and processes may help alleviate some misunderstanding regarding bureaucratic procedures while aiding the council in more effectively pursuing such requests.

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Conclusion

Thus, the capacity building goal was pursued in CEC 26 somewhat differently from the way it was pursued at other councils. Educative and informative efforts were pursued in a fashion emphasizing the importance of district autonomy and continuity in the face of large scale organizational changes. While some educative efforts reflected the central departmental agenda, most latter efforts were initiated by the CEC membership, emphasizing topics of particular interests to the district and often being critical of central departmental intrusion. Moreover, information exchange occurred at CEC 26, such that the variety of parent and community groups operating in the district formed bonds and common positions with respect to many central policies. Such relationships among district participation groups proved crucial in latter efforts towards changing some policies of the central Department of Education.

CEC 2

From the outset of the council's formation, the CEC 2 membership quickly sought to identify issues important to the district and shaped a specific agenda that would guide their educative and informative efforts. CEC2 addressed a variety of issues, ranging from customer-service related concerns to more substantial instruction-related issues of longer-term concern to the district constituency. CEC2 was unique in that it was the only council whose membership initiated long-term educative efforts towards informing the public about substantial issues related to instruction in district schools. Such action was clearly consistent with the capacity building objective outlined in the social goals framework. By hosting educative forums with regards to mathematics instruction within the district, the CEC aided

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in building the public's knowledge with regards to the topic, enabling them to seek substantive policy improvements, whether through the CEC participative mechanism or through other available avenues.

Table 1.3: Capacity Building at CEC 2

Educating and Informing the Public	
Output	***Outcome***
• Administratively led informative efforts	Improved community's knowledge of DOE reforming policies, programs, and initiatives
• Member-driven initiatives	Addressed public concerns regarding issues important to District 2, such as middle school admissions; such efforts empowered members and community stakeholders and resulted in improvements to client service
• Specific Educative Forums	Substantially informed the public on issue of long-term concern to the district, building their capacity to take policy action
• Customer-service concerns	Improved public's knowledge on school support issues (food quality, safety and security around schools, human subjects research).
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	***Outcome***
• Administratively led informative announcements	Educative efforts illustrating continued success may improve public trust in school system ; addressing rumors regarding dismantling of successful programs may also have prevented erosion of public trust
• Cross-educational efforts	Increased community cohesion and trust in system

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Emphasizing the State of the District

As with District 26, the other highly performing school district included in our sample, the district 2 CEC operated as a forum for Department of Education administrators to inform the public about continued progress within the district, despite the substantial changes made in school system governance. As a high performing school district, community stakeholders were concerned that centralized governance would entail the dismantling of district programs and policies that had proven successful prior to centralization. At several meetings, the district superintendent emphasized district wide improvements in math and ELA (English Language Arts) scores, illustrating the continued high performance of district schools. Department administrators also sought to alleviate some concerns of parents with more highly performing children in the district by discrediting rumors of the possible dismantling of gifted and talented programs at district schools. These informative activities illustrate a commonality in use of CECs in highly performing districts; they often operate as forums for central administrators to make the case for the success, or at least the absence of failure, of new system policies within these highly performing districts.

Despite these similarities, CEC 2 was unique in its approach to other issues recurring in the district, educating and inform the public, over an extended period of time, on issues that inherently challenged central department policies. Unlike other CECs where the agenda was initially formed by Department of Education administrators, or was reactive to policies initiated by the central department, CEC 2 was active in forming an agenda closely responsive to public demands. One leader from CEC 2 noted:

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The agenda is determined by the parental input…what their needs are within District 2. We advocate them, we represent them. We don't determine our own agenda…The CEC's agenda is a result of parental influence and input. You tell us what the concerns are and that's what creates the agenda for the CEC (Propper, 2006).

One topic of early discussion and concern was the district wide implications of the city's change in its middle school promotion policy. As a high performing school district, the issue of detaining children due to the ending of social promotions was not as prominent as in other districts. However, along with this policy change came a tightening in standards for admissions to into coveted Special Progress classes and screened programs for high achieving students in the district. CEC proceedings served as important venues for clarifying the specifics of this new policy and how it would affect higher achieving students. CEC 2 later sponsored a middle school admissions forum, noting that the rules and processes of applying to middle schools were historically burdensome, and more so in a time of organizational change. Middle school admissions were noted as particularly complex in 2005, as criteria for admissions into district Special Progress classes and screened programs were changed and made more stringent. The CEC's role in providing this information and clarifying admissions policy and procedures illustrated an important role the CEC has played as a mechanism aiding in client service. Parents can become overwhelmed by the confusing red tape inherent in the large school bureaucracy, and the CEC has served as "another information source" and partner with Department of Education Officials in the provision of client service (Koss, 2006a).

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Specific Educative Forums

CEC 2's most notable distinction with regards to capacity building efforts was its initiative in holding a series of math forums aimed at educating and informing the public with regards to mathematics education in the district. These forums were held independently from any Department of Education initiative, and to some degree, inherently challenged the district's position and practices in math instruction. Moreover, these forums reflected a unique effort by the council to pursue the capacity building goal in a fashion that most directly corresponded to its conception in the social goals framework. The forums were a longer-term effort aimed at improving the public's capacity to understand math curricula issues from a variety of perspectives, thus capacitating them to participate meaningfully on this matter, whether through the CEC mechanism, through other political channels, or in their everyday interactions with the school system.

Under the newly centralized public schools system, most school districts were required to adopt a standard, citywide mathematics and English language arts curriculum. A small number of higher performing schools were granted waivers from adopting the standard curriculum, with district 2 having most of its schools exempted from such requirements. Such schools were free to select their own curriculum, provided standardized test results met required levels of academic achievement (Community Education Council District 2, 2005). District 2's unique position in having all its schools offered this level of flexibility made for a unique opportunity for the public to review the curriculum and propose potential changes. Recognizing this opportunity for public input, and in response to constituent concerns regarding mathematics instruction in the district, CEC 2 hosted a series of math forums to clarify the logic underlying the constructivist content and pedagogical approach towards

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math in district 2 schools. One community activist highlighted the independence and professionalism of this effort, noting:

> *[T]he CEC, understanding that this problem certainly didn't ever go away, and they wanted to do the right thing…the CEC, first time out of the box, only a year term…but you know what, they wanted to do what was important to do, so, to their credit, they sponsored four [forums] of their own (Carson, 2006).*

While various topics and perspectives were addressed, with some parents voicing support for the district's math curriculum while others sought more information on the topic, most parents in attendance directly criticized the district constructivist-based math curriculum, seeing it as insufficient for the rigors students will encounter in mathematics throughout their future years of education.

CEC 2 used its proceedings to address a host of other topics of concern to district parents. Issues of food quality were addressed early in CEC proceedings, leading to an informative session on food quality standards in the district and information on recent changes in the system's contracts with food vendors. Parent concerns regarding safety and security in the schools lead to an informative presentation by a DOE administrator on the systems plans for dealing with safety and terrorism related events. And parent concerns regarding research being conducted by universities on human subjects in public schools in District 2 have led to a developing dialogue between the CEC and the Department of Education's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which approves such studies.

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Conclusion

The speed with which CEC 2 was able to address policy issues was probably its most unique characteristic. In their pursuit of educative and informative goals, CEC 2 exhibited a high level of competence and professionalism almost immediately from its inception. The CEC addressed a host of concerns through their proceedings, seeking to educate the public about a wide array of issues, ranging from more routine client-service related concerns to more substantial issues of longer term concern to the district. CEC 2's effort in hosting a series of math forums was unique in both the depth of its content and the degree to which it challenged the district's math curriculum. CEC 2's efforts illustrate the breadth of issues that may be addressed by such participative mechanisms through educative efforts, while maintaining a professional and collaborative relationship with governing school administrators.

CEC 3

CEC 3 of the West Side of Manhattan served effectively as a forum for exchange of information among the various stakeholders involved in district 3 school governance and policy. The CEC benefited from numerous connections that were established among the CEC, parent groups, and community based organizations, building the community's capacity for action, both in terms of district policy and in terms of service improvements and utilization. CEC 3 worked towards these goals on various levels. Most locally, simple efforts that fulfilled some of the CEC's mandated duties such as assigning CEC members as liaisons to community schools proved to be fruitful, as information was exchanged between the CEC and school stakeholders leading, at times, to some outputs in terms of school

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improvements; moreover, some members reported improvements in relationships with parents and administrators at the school level, illustrating some impact on improving relationships between school administrators and the public in the community schools. On the district level, CEC 3 also served as a crucial information exchange mechanism for district level policy concerns, acting as a forum where ideas and positions were shared among various stakeholders, leading to a community consensus on long-standing school policy issues that later became objects of policy action. The facilitation of information exchange proved to be a benefit both to both the school system as well as for clients utilizing school services, as bureaucratic red tape was made less burdensome for individuals through the assistance of the CEC. School administrators were also aided in securing additional funds from various sources through discovery of additional sources of funding by the CEC. This red-tape-cutting function of the CEC alleviated some of the potential frustration and deterioration of relationships and trust that may occur among various stakeholders involved in the management of a large and complex public school system.

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Table 1.4: Capacity Building at CEC 3

Educating and Informing the Public	
Output	***Outcome***
• Liasoning with individual schools	Improved administrative knowledge regarding non-traditional sources of funding (political sources, hidden monetary sources).
• Facilitating district stakeholder policy discussion	Aided in the arrival of a district consensus regarding district level policy issues; also improved the depth of public knowledge regarding local policy issues
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	***Outcome***
• Aiding individual clients in navigating school system bureaucracy	Reduced client experience of red tape, potentially reducing a source of loss in trust
• Facilitating district stakeholder discussion	Building district consensus reduced conflict among participating groups

Like other councils, CEC 3 provided various kinds of information for local constituents, aiding families in the utilization of available school system services as well as in understanding policy issues in the district. The CEC reported that through these efforts, they were able to disseminate needed information out into the district community while simultaneously collecting information for future policy action. One member highlighted the council's vigorous efforts towards fulfilling this function while recognizing the inherent difficulty of doing so satisfactorily:

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We try to let people know what's going on. We send out emails to the people, and we also send out emails to the parent coordinators to post in every one of their schools. We have meetings throughout the district. Our public meetings are never in the same place. They are always in some schools throughout the district, so that everybody can get to these meetings…our goal [is] to gain more information for ourselves, and also spread it out to other people (Stollar, 2006).

CEC 30 particularly highlighted its efforts at encouraging public participation through its community outreach efforts to local families and community based organizations. However, it found that in general, it was a difficulty mission, as positive responses to such efforts were often determined by the circumstances of an issue:

It (public participation) happens around specific topics. So, as we gravitate towards a topic, or put a panel together on a certain area, we will see a large turnout. When we have a general public meeting, on a variety of topics, we get a small turnout. When we focus on just one topic, and it happens to be a hot topic, then we'll get a good turnout (Stollar, 2006).

"Good turnouts," in district 30 were reserved to meetings dealing with issues of children's access to coveted educational programs, especially community gifted and talented programs (G&T) and access to open seats in the district's most better elementary schools, seats left open because of wealthier parents opting toward utilization of private schools. Thus, the nature and relevance of the topic under discussion, rather than the council's outreach efforts

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themselves, were the primary drivers of public participation in local meetings. Another CEC 3 member noted:

> *[A]s we focus on things like that (G&T, elementary school admissions), we seem to be able to both educate the public and get educated about issues. It's a two-way information street at that point, because we're hearing from parents and at the same time we're giving information to the parents…[I]t happens less than we'd like…large attendance and good exchanges of information. [But] when we find the right issues, word seems to get out (Schimke, 2006).*

Standard Practices

However, there were some other educative and informative efforts and strategies under greater control of the CEC that led to positive outcomes. The compliance of the council with routine CEC responsibilities, such as assigning CEC members to serve as liaisons to specific community schools, was reported to yield considerable benefits to the schools and to the CEC in their joint efforts towards improving school functioning. One district administrator emphasized the effectiveness of this simple collaborative strategy, noting that, "…it works better than you'd think" (Sheppard, 2006). Through routine communications between CEC members and school level stakeholders, parents and principals were made aware of the presence and role of the CECs as advocates for district schools. New principals were made aware of the presence of discretionary funds for their district schools from local elected officials and from other alternative sources within school budgets. Overlooked facilities improvement issues were addressed or placed in the annual

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capital budget request as a result of the CEC's scrutiny. Thus, daily, ordinary communications between CEC members and district schools proved beneficial for clients of the school system, more so than initially expected. One CEC member, when discussing capital improvement issues, noted:

> *[P]rincipals have so much on their plates already. They're aware that they have these capital issues, but unless it's really a major thing, it falls lower down in the priority of all the things they have to deal with everyday…so I think its helpful …to have some "official" advocate who can make noise about different issues in the school (Shell, 2006).*

Through this advocacy and oversight role, CEC 3 was able to bring greater knowledge about options available to school administrators to make small scale capital improvements to their schools, as well as aiding school administrators in maintaining a focus on issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

The CEC also worked in a more directly collaborative fashion with central department administrators, acting as an aid in disseminating information directly from the Department of Education to local community stakeholders. As with our other cases, CEC 3 was extensively used as a resource by the Department of Education to communicate with the general public about program and policy issues developing in the district. The issues discussed were diverse at CEC 3 as they were at in other districts. One member noted:

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Our local superintendent has always been the single most valuable resource for brining information to participants on a daily basis, everything from closings of schools and how that's going to impact a particular community, to getting new appointments for presidents and assistant principals announced out to the community, so…everything from the hardships and developments to the celebratory ones (Shell, 2006).

The topics addressed by the administration varied and are discussed further in the in the upcoming chapter on policy outputs and outcomes. The more notable ones focused primarily on issues such as equitable access to coveted seats in higher performing district schools, admissions requirements to educational programs geared towards gifted and talented students, and systemic issues such as understanding and participating in the school capital budget process.

Links with Local CBOs

The highly diverse (in aggregate), yet locally segregated, nature of the client base of community school district 3 made it such that the CEC was required to form long-standing relationships with a broad set of community based organizations to inform the public on the most pressing issues arising in the community. Again, most of these issues revolved around access to vacant seats in higher-performing community public schools and to gifted and talented programs -- highly sought-after special programs with the reputation of having some of the most highly qualified teachers.

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These links between the CEC and local CBOs were crucial, as some immigrant segments of the community did not identify well with the local CEC, were not within its jurisdiction, or simply could not communicate effectively with the CEC because of language barriers. Local organizations such as the Center for Immigrant Families became important groups, acting as mediums for communication between the CEC and the immigrant community of school district 3. They interacted with the local immigrant community and came to represent their views throughout community negotiations regarding school system policies. Moreover, various tasks forces, think tanks, and other ad hoc committees spontaneously arose, illustrating the important role representative community groups played in the exchange of information across the community school district 3 stakeholder community.

Conclusion

CEC 3 was unique in terms of the extent of its linkages with a diverse range of community organizations representing different segments of the district 3 community. These organizations served as de facto representatives for the diverse communities acting as stakeholders in district 3; even actors external to the district 3's physical boundaries sought influence over district school policy, particularly with regards to equitable access to high-quality, yet underutilized educational resources. Because of the district's unique position of having excess capacity available in the district's higher-quality public schools, the CEC founds itself communicating perhaps more intensely with a wider array of interests than other studied districts.

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While given closer attention by central departmental authorities, educational and informative strategies occurred in a fashion similar to other CECs. Standard efforts towards reaching out to the community schools were important. Individual relationships between CEC members as liaisons to community schools were highlighted as being particularly successful, aiding the school in gathering some resources as well as aiding parents in navigating the school system bureaucracy, potentially improving parent trust in the school system. But most notably, the extensive representation of communities through civic groups and organizations arose as a theme in district 3, affecting dynamics observed in this case. One encouraging finding is that the CEC structure proved capable of communicating effectively with this diverse social community, even leading to specific equity-related policy outcomes as discussed in the upcoming chapter. CEC 3 was cited as being one of the more "effective" councils by the schools Chancellor, as they managed to utilize their advisory power effectively in producing policy change (Klein, 2005).

Cross Case Analysis

The four conducted case studies showed that CECs did achieve some success towards actualizing capacity building outputs and outcomes. Across cases, CECs achieved some success towards improving stakeholder knowledge and capacity which would later result in specific policy action. CECs appeared to serve an important educative function both for the stakeholder community internal to districts and for the central Department of Education. In several instances, the Department of Education utilized the CECs as forums to announce, explain, and defend new policies that were deemed crucial for successful system-wide reform efforts. The CECs did appear to function successfully in this regard, alleviating public

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resistance towards the implementation of central school policies through public education efforts, as well as through their very status as parent-dominated groups.

However, we should note that the CECs also acted as autonomous entities, setting their own agendas regarding what issues needed to be addressed in their respective districts. Different issues became topics of focus at different CECs; interestingly, some CECs favored a strategy of directly challenging major DOE initiatives while other CECs chose a strategy of focusing on more neutral areas of policy, educating and informing stakeholders about topics that were perhaps overlooked, but not opposed, by the central Department of Education. At the same time, some CECs sought to build stakeholder capacity to act on issues that challenged official DOE policy, but to relatively limited effect as discussed in the upcoming chapter.

CECs Instrumental for the DOE

An important finding across cases is the utility which the CECs seem to offer central departmental authorities. Despite criticisms from some community stakeholders, it does seem that there are substantial reasons why the Department of Education may be interested in promoting functional CECs. CECs with stronger links to individual community schools and other parent and community groups can help bring a sense of legitimacy to new DOE programs and policies which might otherwise be resisted by the public. This occurred clearly in the case of Community School District 2, where community wishes for changes in the district math curriculum were met with the development of open and considerably transparent community forums regarding the reasoning and justification for the current mathematics curriculum. Issues were addressed, questions were answered, and at least some

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public criticisms were alleviated. In this case, collaboration between the DOE and the district 2 CEC benefited the central Department of Education in its efforts to continue the use of a constructivist mathematics curriculum in the district.

DOE collaborations with local CECs also brought better information regarding education-related issues in local communities to central departmental authorities, allowing the department to better adapt to community conditions as it saw fit. In this sense, the CEC acted as "boundary spanning" mechanisms, drawing on information from the local district to aid the central department in making local adaptations to school policy. This occurred most specifically in the case of district 3's community controversy over the district's elementary school admissions policy. While initially resistant to the change, Department of Education officials came to learn the unique history and context of elementary school admissions policy in district 3. The information channeled from the community, through the CEC, to the Department of Education was later utilized by the DOE to make changes that were more congruent with the overriding value of equity espoused by the Bloomberg administration in the management of public schools.

Finally, the conducted case studies revealed a simple practical interest by the Department of Education in establishing a working relationship with the Community Education Councils and fostering their success. The president of CEC 2 in Manhattan articulated this position well when he stated:

> *I'm a believer that the educators want to educate, and that the administrators want people to be happy. And I'm a believer that the reason regions and districts have been cooperative are because it is in their best interest to be cooperative with a*

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particular group this is an appointed or elected group to have a focal point of communication with the parents at large. And I think that's why they cooperate… because it behooves them to. I say the CEC's agenda is a result of parental influence and input. You tell us what the concerns are and that creates the agenda for the CEC. And the region and the district would be…silly to not cooperate with the CEC, because the alternative would be to meet with bands and bands of different groups and clubs and organizations…[T]he concept of the CEC is a solid one (Propper, 2006).

CECs as Instruments of the Communities

We must be careful, however, to emphasize that CECs did act as independent entities to some degree, seeking to educate and inform the public in a fashion that advocated specific community interests, rather than solely acting as mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of central departmental initiatives. This differed from council to council, with some CECs working collaboratively with the DOE on issues of at least relative agreement while others worked in a more confrontational fashion. Some CECs sought to emphasize issues that challenged central departmental polices. CEC 26 utilized this approach, as members emphasized discussion and opposition to reforms threatening the district status quo such as local school redesign and recent emphases on standardized testing. Other councils similarly emphasized issues important to the district, yet focused on issues that neither supported nor challenged DOE priorities; such was the case with district 30's emphasis on health and safety issues.

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CEC emphasis on raising awareness about specific community interests also resulted in a networking effect, where ties among community stakeholder organizations became stronger, potentially improving district stakeholder capacity to act effectively with respect to certain policy issues, both on the district and the citywide level. In some sense, the CECs may have acted as catalysts for the development of more effective policy advocacy networks in some communities. The official status, yet lack of statutory power, of the CECs led to a strengthening in linkages between the CECs and other community groups in most of the observed cases, linkages that improved community capacity to pursue policy changes as discussed in the upcoming chapter. Collective action by community stakeholders led to policy changes in some of the observed cases. In some instances, however, these linkages did not develop, due to political and historical factors. Nonetheless, the CEC's status as the official policy advisory board for districts, and their more direct connection with the schools chancellor, did encourage other community groups to establish regular lines of communications with the CEC, creating a community network of activists that seemed to strengthen the district stakeholder community's capacity to act effectively in pursuit of district interests.

In some instances, the CECs actually contributed to the creation of new groups that added to the number of community organizations pursuing district interests. The CECs seemed to illustrate a sort of "spawning effect," where the normal operations of the group resulted in the formation of new community groups that focused on a more narrow set of issues than the general advocacy role the CECs engage in. This happened most specifically in the case of District 3, where a host of ad-hoc organizations, think-tanks, and task forces developed to work on specific school policy issues. This effect seems to be somewhat

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frequent in the history of the NYCPSS, as some of the more powerful issue advocacy groups collaborating with the CECs today actually developed from the functioning of prior groups, such as the community school boards. The mathematics-curriculum-reform advocacy group, NYCHOLD, which has led the charge for mathematics curriculum reform in District 2, is the current embodiment of the mathematics reform committee of the former District 2 Community School Board Math Committee. This organization has continued operations long after the demise of the community school board structure and continues to press the CECs and other entry points into the NYCPSS for reform to the mathematics curriculum.

While this effect appears to be occurring on a short term basis on the district level, it has also occurred on the citywide level with the development of the Association of New York's Community Education Councils (ANYCEC). Early interactions among leaders of the CECs resulted in the formation of this new group that has since evolved, now focusing on building CEC capacity for effective citywide action, largely through training seminars in both the formal and informal responsibilities of the CECs. A citywide movement has also arisen around the specific issue of banning cellular phones in the schools. However, in this case, the CECs have acted as participants within a larger, more loosely organized network of activists rather than as organizers, facilitators, and legitimators of specific community groups and interests.

Conclusion

Thus, there was some evidence of the CECs effectively building public capacity for action through regularizing the exchange of information among community groups, and in some instances, acting as a focal point where such information could be aggregated into a

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specific community position. Coming to a community consensus on an issue proved to be an important precursor to actual changes in public policy. The next chapter focuses on the transference of these policy positions into specific policy changes. The evidence on the ability of CECs to produce policy changes is qualified and dependent on the specific issue. In many instances, CECs were unable to produce any changes despite the formation of a relatively clear community consensus. However, in some instances, the CECs were able to act effectively and produce policy changes.

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Chapter 6: Policy and Administration

Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes

Despite their limited formal powers, our sample of CECs did illustrate an ability to accomplish some policy outputs where the values and preferences of the public regarding certain school policies were incorporated into policymaking or administration. The policy outputs ranged in terms of scope and content. Many efforts were aimed at influencing policy in areas that supported the general educational mission, but did not affect areas closer to the core of school functioning. However, in some instances, the councils did pursue and accomplish policy outputs that altered substantial areas of school administration itself. Moreover, the strategies used to accomplish these outputs also varied. While some policy outputs were accomplished through the use of formal channels of advisement and collaboration with Department of Education administrators, others were accomplished through exerting traditional forms of political pressure on the Department of Education, including collaborative action with other parent and community groups, local civic associations, state and local elected officials, and the media in opposition to Department of Education policy. Thus, rather than achieving policy outputs through direct advisement and collaboration with the Department of Education, the CECs, in some instances, found that taking stances in opposition to the Department of Education could also be effective, especially when such stances were taken in conjunction with other community stakeholders.

CEC 30

As with the approach taken in their educative and informative efforts, CEC 30 utilized a strategy of focusing on issues supporting school functioning, rather than seeking to

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alter the core areas of school functioning itself. With regards to efforts towards accomplishing policy outputs, CEC 30 pursued a strategy of "carving out" policy areas where it deemed it could be effective, rather than directly challenging the central departmental policies on issues more directly under its jurisdiction. CEC 30 focused its efforts on initiating or revising school policies primarily in areas that support education and student achievement, seemingly recognizing and working around limits imposed by mayoral control. One CEC 30 member highlighted, *"You can accept it and work with it [mayoral control], or you can just fight about it and not do anything"* (Bassini, 2006). Case study evidence suggests that such a position reflects CEC 30's general strategy towards affecting policy outputs. The most prominent areas of policy action were student safety and health, areas that CEC 30 identified for action early in the council's development.

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Table 2.1: Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes at CEC 30

Incorporating Public Values/Improving Quality of Decisions	
Output	**Outcome**
• Advocacy regarding student safety and health	Achieved changes in Chancellor's regulations regarding sex offender notification policy; introduced legislation regulating placement of cell towers around schools; expanded EPA air assessment, thus empowering CEC members and the stakeholder community
• Petitioning DOE on miscellaneous improvements	City enforces bus idling ordinance; traffic patterns around schools improve; expediting school repairs – empowered members and increased their skill in dealing with school system bureaucracy
• Relaying urgent concerns of district parents to DOE	Evidence of movement in some projects illustrated political clout of community stakeholders (e.g. kindergarten annex issue)
Increasing Trust/Reducing Conflict	
Output	**Outcome**
• Facilitating relationships between principals and public officials	Secured discretionary funds for district schools; improved relationships between school level administrators and elected officials
• Working collaboratively with DOE administrators on most issues	Facilitated fulfillment of CEC requests, increasing trust among stakeholders

Student Health and Safety Policy Outputs

Perhaps because of the nature of the issue, student safety and health became an area where CEC 30 could take effective action through collaboration with Department of Education administrators. By focusing on this relatively neutral area of school policy, CEC

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30 was able to accomplish policy outputs by directly appealing to the Department of Education for policy changes, or by partnering with other community stakeholders having the legislative power necessary to produce policy changes. One notable outcome achieved through this strategy was the identification of inadequacies in the school system's sex offender notification policy, leading to a citywide policy revision.

As stated in the prior section on capacity building, a rash of incidents involving sex offenders in western Queens neighborhoods prompted the CEC to address the issue of sex offenders issue living in the district. In addition to a public education effort, where the CEC conducted an informational campaign telling parents what they could do individually to protect their children from such crimes, the CEC also pursued policy changes with respect to the issue. The CEC focused its attention on the Department of Education's sex offender notification policy and found it inadequate, particularly in light of other changes in state legislation regarding this issue (e.g. the state's sex offender registry). After finding that the standing policy resulted in a relatively arbitrary parent notification policy, giving school principals discretion as to whether and how parents would be notified about the presence of sex offenders in community school district neighborhoods, the CEC urged the chancellor to revisit the Department's official sex offender notification policy and propose improvements. After some consideration, the chancellor revised section A-418 of the Chancellor's Regulations, governing the department's citywide sex offender notification policy. Principals in all of New York City's public schools are now *required* to notify parents about sex offenders living in the district at the beginning of the year through specific mandated outreach efforts. Moreover, they are now *required* to notify parents when a sex offender moves into a neighborhood within the same zip code of their children's school. Such a

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change illustrates a substantial revision in citywide policy in support of student health and safety, initiated in response to CEC 30's requests.

Another prominent health and safety issue where CEC 30 sought to achieve changes was with regards to the placement of cellular phone communication towers in close proximity to district 30 schools. In response to parent concerns regarding the placement of a cellular communications tower in close proximity to an elementary school in western Queens, CEC 30 helped organize a community movement in opposition to the placement of these towers, culminating in the passage of a CEC resolution condemning the installation of these towers. Collaborations with local community groups, elected officials, and the media resulted in sufficient public pressure to prompt the removal of these towers. One CEC member noted that, "That's the first time in the history of Nextel, where they have had to address community resistance and take towers down. That's not happened across the country." Moreover, partnering with local elected officials with respect to this issue prompted the introduction of local and state legislation regulating the placement of cellular phone communications towers within 500 feet of public schools. New York State Assembly bill A09425 / Senate bill S 6006-A seek to prohibit the placement of cellular towers or related equipment within five hundred feet of a public school building in NYC, while NYC Council Resolution No. 231 of 2006 calls upon the NYC Department of Education to not enter into contracts with wireless providers that allow any cellular towers, base stations, or antennas on school property.

CEC 30 was also able to make numerous local level changes in school policy, administration, or in acquiring resources for use at the district school level. Problems of air quality became a focus for CEC 30, as the Western Queens district has the second highest

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asthma rate in New York City. CEC 30 was able to ensure the expansion of an EPA assessment of air quality in district 30 schools from four schools to over fifteen, citing the widespread problem of high asthma rates through the school district. Members were also able to move the city to enforce its existing regulation banning the idling of school buses when stationed outside public schools, removing a "blue haze of diesel exhaust" that permeated the area surrounding district schools, improving air quality around the school premises immediately (Guyton, 2006). As with other councils, CEC 30 has been able to successfully petition appropriate city agencies to alter traffic patterns around district schools, acquire additional crossing guards, install split-phase traffic lights, and make other local-level changes towards improving school safety. A CEC member noted the council's success with addressing such issues:

> *We've had a lot of small bore successes. Quiet ones. Because…we were following the appropriate channels of communications, but not particularly at the appropriate time span. We were basically, as much as we could, trying to cut red tape and get things like…access for handicapped kids into an auditorium where there wasn't access. We were finding problems at particular schools and trying to address those. And create small successes, and create a certain sort of power of our own…and creating accountability for ourselves that way (Guyton, 2006).*

CEC 30 members reported numerous "quiet successes" that aided in school functioning, but that did not necessarily constitute large scale policy changes. CEC 30's efforts towards linking district school principals (many who are new to the system) with local and state

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legislators, resulted in local schools receiving approximately $5 million in discretionary funds from state legislators and local council members. These funds went toward funding a host of items, ranging from resolving "basic needs" issues such as a lack of heat in certain rooms of some schools and procuring video surveillance equipment for school safety, to purchasing computer and laboratory equipment, renovating school athletic fields, constructing science labs, community performance halls, theaters, and galleries in district schools. The membership also noted that with regards to their duty of reviewing the city's five-year capital plan amendment, they made numerous requests reflecting the needs of district school principals, "virtually all which have been met" (Bassini, 2006). Finally, CEC 30 members also noted that they were able to acquire other valuable resources in the form of services for district schools, such as securing more crossing guards and safety officers. Thus, in addition to its achievements in changing certain school policies, CEC 30 also acted as an effective mechanism by which additional resources could be brought into district schools and by which the administration of services could be improved through exercising an oversight role.

Relationships

Establishing collaborative relationships with the central Department of Education and regional administrators was an important contributing factor that enabled CEC 30 was to accomplish policy and administrative outputs and outcomes. Given the CEC's limited formal powers, it became important that the membership find ways to partner with and utilize external sources of power and influence to accomplish policy objectives. One CEC 30 leader

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addressed the CEC's early recognition of the importance of establishing positive and collaborative relationships with school system administrators:

> *Right from the beginning, it [the relationship with regional administrators] was a feeling out process…They were nervous about us [the CEC] whipping off and sitting down with principals, what were we going to say, what were we going to do. I think there was a great deal of fear from the administrators that the new CEC members were going to go off like a lot of loose cannons. And I said, we're going to have to trust [the district superintendent], and he's going to have to trust us. We're not going to have legislative power, and we're not going to have power given to us. We're going to have to make our own power, through establishing credibility through success, and that's going to be partially done with mutual trust. And he very quickly loosened the reigns on us, and let us get out into the community (Guyton, 2006).*

Trusting relationships with Department of Education administrators enabled CEC 30 members to establish relationships and communication with school, district/regional administrators, community groups, and other stakeholders without obstruction from administrators already occupied with implementing a host of organizational reforms. Moreover, it contributed to a more receptive position by the Department of Education officials with respect to CEC and broader community requests.

Collaborative relationships between CEC 30 and Department of Education administrators allowed the CEC membership to act as an effective "boundary-spanning" mechanism, as CEC members highlighted and relayed information to DOE authorities who

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subsequently took corrective action on such information. One CEC member noted one "behind the scenes" incident reflecting the positive results of such a collaborative relationship between the CEC membership and school administrators, leading to the administration taking action towards resolving a pressing community problem:

> *For example, one of our schools has had kids in a kind of annex, that in the parents' view, for many years, is an inadequate and not particularly safe or nurturing educational environment, to say the very least. It's in a bad location…it doesn't allow access to playground…there's all kinds of things wrong with it…the CEC organized, along with the parents association of that school, a parent initiative…and the parents wrote about 60 exceptions…reservations they had about that particular kindergarten annex, and there were several hundred signatures. I put that piece of…I put that document into Chancellor Klein's hand, into Superintendent Irizarry's hand, Phil Composto's hand…and everyone saw that. And there have been so many quiet negotiations, with the Catholic diocese, and with different schools. They have been working, quietly behind the scene, they have been working very hard to resolve that issue, because essentially, they agreed with the parents (Guyton, 2006).*

Establishing this sense of trust with school administrators occurred due to various factors. Styles of communications and exhibiting positive regard towards one another were a priority for the council that facilitated such a relationship. One CEC 30 leader attributed much of their success in acquiring resources for district schools to the simple fact that, "We're usually

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very civil, we're not militant. We usually humble ourselves when we ask for things" (Bassini, 2006).

Another particular resource CEC 30 members brought to the table was the background of its membership and its former experience working with the public school system; this experience included certain preexisting relationships with administrators in the school system, relationships that themselves helped CEC members accomplish certain outcomes. One member noted:

> *Different people in the different councils bring a lot of different skills with them and so…each CEC is going to be effective in a different way, depending on the individual skills and backgrounds of the 11 people on their council. We've got someone who, has been or is, on Community Board 1. Our new member of our council ran for city council. Our president was on the old school boards…and that can be much more powerful than some putative legislative power (Guyton, 2006).*

The CEC member expanded:

> *[T]he president] knows everybody. I mean, she's been around this stuff for 20 years and that's what she brings. Every head of every department…she's on friendly terms with…you know, people from the Queens Borough President…down to the APs [assistant principals] at any given school. She knows everyone. And that's a real commodity now (Guyton, 2006).*

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Thus, the prior relationships the CEC members bring to the table are valuable. But also valuable are the previous experiences members have in navigating the mammoth Department of Education bureaucracy, irrespective of particular relationships and contacts. One member noted:

> *[Y]ou have to go from being autonomous to being able to work with a group, and you also learn the rules and regulations, you [have to] get to know the system. To get the system to work for you, you have to understand it. If you don't understand the system, you can't manipulate it (Bassini, 2006).*

The member distinguished her council's approach from what she's seen at some other CECs:

> *[Some other councils] rock the boat by not following protocol, and having been around so long, I do know what the protocol is. They always laugh because I always get what the district needs (Bassini, 2006).*

Conclusion

CEC 30 provides us with a unique example of what one might term a "collaborative council." While some CECs have taken a more confrontational approach towards the Department of Education, pressing for greater statutory powers and partnering with community groups that more directly challenge administration policies, CEC 30 sought a more collaborative position, focusing its efforts in areas where it could work together with the Department of Education to achieve change, or focusing on areas that supported the

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educational mission and where the Department of Education had little formal jurisdiction. One CEC 30 summed up her position on the matter of CEC effectiveness when she stated:

> *So when I hear these councils complaining about lack of power, I get infuriated, because instead of complaining about lack of power, we take the power and influence that we do have and we try to help the children (Bassini, 2006).*

CEC 30 was able to find success through this approach, accomplishing specific policy outputs, gathering resources for district schools in terms of finances and services, and acting as an oversight mechanism that could expedite repairs and bring of other kinds of resources to schools. CEC 30 found that, for them, this was an effective path. Nonetheless, some councils opted for more confrontational approaches.

CEC26

CEC 26's efforts towards achieving policy and administrative outputs focused on a broader range of policies than other councils. A unique theme underlying many of CEC 26's actions was its perception of DOE policies as intrusions upon the continued success of District 26 schools, affecting the dynamics of CEC 26's relationship with Department of Education administrators. CEC 26's policy priorities reflect a strong desire to maintain the autonomy of the district in the face of systemic organizational changes. While other CECs appeared to conceptualize districts more abstractly, CEC 26 had a more concrete notion of the district as a distinct entity. The strong sense CEC26 had of its district influenced much of its policy-related action.

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The content of CEC 26's policy-related activities were diverse, again ranging from routine advocacy for minor capital improvements, altering traffic patterns around schools, and changing report card formats to more substantial action aimed at halting Department of Education reforms that would substantially change the utilization patterns of some district schools. We should note that CEC 26 was the only case where a CEC successfully exercised its statutory zoning authority, illustrating a potential for CECs to effectively exercise this statutory power. Such an achievement may also illustrate a growing sophistication in some CECs in terms of their ability to utilize both formal and informal sources of power.

Table 2.2: Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes at CEC 26

Incorporating Public Values/Improving Substantive Quality of Decisions	
Output	**Outcome**
• Petitioning DOE on routine improvements	Various school level improvements secured or expedited (e.g. facilities repairs, improved traffic patterns, enrollment information improvements) – evidence of successful oversight role of CECs
• Policy advisements (e.g. student variances, NCLB duplicate testing)	Only achieved change in duplicate testing policy, and little evidence of empowerment
• Facilitating community protests against redesign	Achieved temporary policy revision; CECs may delay, but not change, major policy and administrative decisions
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	**Outcome**
• Advised on various substantial policies	Various desired policy outcomes, coupled with lack of success, likely decreased trust in central DOE (although relationships with local administrators remained high)

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Minor Accomplishments

Like other councils, CEC 26 was active in helping resolve numerous routine school level issues, including facilities repairs and improvements in traffic safety around district schools. Client service issues also became an area of focus, as CEC 26 successfully achieved changes in report card formats and improvements in district wide distribution of informational materials related to the high schools applications process.

However, CEC 26 also has exercised its advisory power with respect to core school policy, urging the Department of Education to make changes in a number of key areas of school administration important for district families. One important policy that has become a key aspect of CEC 26's policy agenda has been the issue of control over student variances – that is, control over the discretion to shift students among different district schools. Student variances have become an important topic for several reasons. Client service considerations are one factor, as district 26 parents with children enrolled in special programs at non-zoned district schools are often left in the position of having children enrolled in two or three different schools. Parents in such a situation do not have the option of having their other children attend the schools with the special program, even if their other children only enroll in that school's general program. CEC members have pressed the Department of Education to grant such families "sibling variances", easing the stress of having children enrolled in multiple district schools. One CEC member notes the impact of this policy on families:

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You have to think twice about putting your child in the gifted program…You don't know if you should put your kid in a gifted program because their siblings are not guaranteed to go to that school. In the past when the variances were local, they were [guaranteed a seat]. So now, if I were to put my child in the gifted program…I would have three kids in three different schools…one in universal pre-K, somewhere else, because they don't offer it here, one in my regular elementary, and one in the gifted elementary school that's in the other side of town. So it causes issues (Fallacaro, 2006).

In addition to client service considerations, district control over variances is also important for reasons of district-level administrative efficiency. One CEC 26 member noted:

It's created a lot of problems because, what happens is, you have two schools that are relatively close to each other and once school is severely overcrowded and the other one is within capacity…so you clearly have the ability to take students from one school and put them into another. They're both in the same town, and in the same neighborhood, and within a relatively close geographic distance. We can't fill those seats, because we're not allowed to get variances. So what happens is, you have children in one school that is severely overcrowded, and you'll have other schools that, not only are they perhaps underutilized in some grades, but now they start to receive no child left behind [transfers] from outside the district, and to us that makes absolutely no sense. It makes no sense at all…not to be able to resolve some of your local level overcrowding issues with seats that you have open. The district

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superintendent knows that she could level out the numbers here and really help everybody, help the school that's [over] capacity, but more importantly, reduce the class size…Here is an opportunity for us to stabilize numbers within our district and yet we can't do it (Fallacaro, 2006).

While this and other CECs continue to urge the Department of Education to grant district control over variance policy, the central department has maintained its policy of centralized control over variances, granting them only for reasons related to the health and safety of students.

The Redesigning Controversy

Perhaps CEC 26's most significant success occurred in its efforts towards delaying the "redesign" of a district elementary school by the central administration. "Redesign" is the term used by the Department of Education to describe changes to the grade-levels offered within a school. In this case, the redesign consisted of the elimination of the sixth grade at a district elementary school, in order to align it with others citywide, which are typically kindergarten to grade five for elementary and grades six to eight for middle schools. However, the decision proved controversial, as it would require sixth-grade students of that school to attend what was widely considered a lower-quality middle school, with "a higher suspension rate and a lack of enrichment activities," in a neighboring district (Tozzi, 2005). This unilateral change by the Department of Education "outraged" district parents, sparking a district wide movement in opposition to the change (Tozzi, 2005).

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CEC 26 played an important role in facilitating community opposition towards this change. While a multitude of parents, parent associations, and community groups opposed the change, it was the CEC that was able to bring the chancellor out into the community and arrange a formal meeting with district parent and community groups. The event highlights the CEC's potential functions as a mechanism for aggregating the efforts of a wide array of public participants into a single source, lending the movement a sense of legitimacy, and connecting it with central departmental officials. Moreover, the event may serve as an initial test-case regarding the CECs' ability to exercise their zoning authority. One CEC member noted the legal basis for the council's actions:

> *On that one, we almost had the legal power. That would have been the question, because it's almost a zoning issue. If it's a zoning issue, they have to get approval from us. So it was going to become…it could have ended up being a lawsuit. And we let it be known that we were not going to be afraid of pursuing a lawsuit (Caloras, 2006).*

It appears that statutory authority played an important role in the CEC's ability to at least delay this redesign action. The final outcome was a one-year delay of the redesign, rather than an outright halting of the process. However, another member highlighted the role of the CEC's ability to organize political pressure against the Department of Education as the critical factor in this case, stating:

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I think the forum, and putting the pressure, and giving the parents a forum to voice their opinions…we had a lot of good publicity in the press as well. And again, that's just reaching out to the press and asking them to give us coverage, and things like that. I think that, combined with the local politicians and the amount of parents that came out and spoke against it, really probably swayed the chancellor that he had to do something (Fallacaro, 2006).

Thus, it appears that both a claim to legal authority, coupled with a strong and organized community movement against the change played a critical role in this temporary policy revision. However, statutory power alone did not prove to be sufficient to accomplish this change. One member noted the Department of Education's reluctance to allow the CEC to exercise their zoning powers:

It seems any time you're close to a zoning issue, a definition is created [by the Department of Education] that prevents it from being presented to an education council (Caloras, 2006).

However, the motivation and mobilization of parents and parent organizations also played an important role, placing additional political pressure upon the central department, together prompting such a change.

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Other Advisements

CEC 26 has advised the Department of Education on a host of other policy issues. District 26's position as a highly performing district makes it a highly sought after district for transfer students from low performing schools through NCLB federal requirements. CEC 26 has recently commented about a district need for an increase in funds to accommodate the special needs of NCLB transfer students, many who come from Title 1 schools. Title 1 schools, which include low performing schools from the poorest school districts, receive additional federal aid for educational purposes. However, under the NCLB transfer process, students often find themselves attending higher performing schools that are lacking in the specialized programs and resources that may be available for them at lower performing Title 1 schools.

> *[W]hen they have this NCLB program, where we're given a lot of children that are coming from Title 1 schools, that money doesn't follow the children, only the per child money follows them, not usually until the year later do you get it, but when they move these kids over…they usually are from schools that are not performing well, this is why they have the option to leave. They throw these children into the schools of children that are usually doing much better, so they're at a different level, so these kids are not getting…these kids are coming in lost. They have no idea where to even start…The fact that we don't get enough funding doesn't allow us the resources that the kids need…[I]f you're going to put these kids in the school, you have to realize that you have to make sure that where you're housing them is really going to be able to help them and not hurt them (Windland, 2006).*

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CEC 26 has released various statements urging the Department of Education for an increase in funding to help the district aid such students, particularly noting funds from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court decision as a possible source of funding.

There were other CEC 26 activities aimed at supporting policy changes. CEC 26 lent its support to a citywide campaign aimed at reducing class sizes in New York City, passing a resolution supporting the movement and aiding the campaign in collecting signatures for a ballot initiative mandating a maximum class size. It issued public statements highlighting the problem of duplicate testing, where delays in the grading of standardized state exams forced the city to subject students to two sets of math and language arts exams reflecting the same material; the Department of Education needed duplicate testing to ensure it had a set of grades early enough to make promotions decisions. This issue was rectified at the state level in response to public pressure from community groups throughout the city, including the CECs. Most recently, CEC 26 has focused efforts on oversight of science and art instruction in the district, as these subjects have tended to be overlooked in a system that focuses primarily on student achievement as measured by language arts and mathematics test scores.

Conclusion

The district 26 community education council stands as a unique case, as it represents one of the few school districts that were performing highly prior to the 2002 centralizing changes. Of all the city's community school boards, district 26's board was one of the few that may be considered to have been functioning effectively. In this case, policy and administrative changes implemented through central mandates tend to be seen as obstructions cast in the path of a highly performing school district. This is evident in the CEC's largely

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protective position towards many Department of Education reforms, as much action has been critical of DOE mandated changes. One parent activist expressed this sentiment:

> *I think we're fighting the changes…as a whole. I think everybody together is fighting the changes…We just really love our district. We don't want to be combined with other districts. We do want to stay as a district because we feel we do really well (Windland, 2006).*

The challenges both for public participants and central administrators are different in this context. When implementing organizational reforms, central administrators would be well advised to deal with such districts gingerly, so as to not disrupt a host of highly functioning schools and programs, nor to needlessly alienate the network of parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders working together successfully in the district.

CEC 2

CEC 2 was also able to achieve some successes in terms of policy and administrative outputs, again primarily in areas supporting school functioning rather than through challenges to major Department of Education policies. In the case of District 2, some of the policy outputs achieved were formal changes; that is, official school polices and practices were changed in response to council requests and recommendations. Interestingly, other changes included informal "street level" changes to school functioning, changes that occurred in school practices in response to pressure placed by the CEC and other community groups, rather than by directive from the central department. Also, as with the case of CEC

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30, policy changes occurred in areas external to the Department of Education's official sphere of jurisdiction, due to collaborations between CEC members and administrative authorities from other government agencies. Thus, while CEC 2's policy output accomplishments were limited, they illustrate another case where the advisory council mechanism produced some policy and administrative outputs, leading to outcomes including improved participant knowledge and skill in producing such changes.

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Table 2.3: Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes at CEC 2

Incorporating Public Values/Improving Quality of Decisions	
Output	**Outcome**
• Petitioning DOE on routine improvements	Various school level improvements secured or expedited (e.g. facilities repairs, improved traffic patterns, enrollment information improvements); cutting "red tape" – evidence of increased member knowledge and skill in producing such changes
• Policy advisements – client service issues (middle school admissions)	Improvements made to middle school admissions process; also some changes to admissions policy; - evidence of member and community stakeholder empowerment
• Improved public awareness regarding math curriculum issues	Evidence suggests informal "street level" changes in actual teaching of mathematics; also, formation of a survey potentially leading to some instructional changes and improved parent support – supports presence of member empowerment
• Collaborating with external government agencies to improve student safety (internet cafes, human subjects research)	City licenses on internet cafes revoked; increased police surveillance of establishments; introducing controlling legislation on human subjects research - illustrates improved council willingness and ability to produce change in areas supporting education
Increasing Trust / Reducing Conflict	
Output	**Outcome**
• Hosted forums investigating math curriculum from various perspectives	May have reduced public conflict on this issue stemming from lack of information

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CEC 2 was able to directly affect some school policies, primarily in areas improving the processes of utilization of educational services for district parents, rather than affecting the content of the services themselves. In response to widespread parent concern that the middle school applications procedure was an overly complex and "anxious" process, requiring them to navigate a host of choices and bureaucratic rules regarding applications procedures and admissions standards, CEC 2 was able to substantially alter the district 2 middle school admissions policies and practices. Through consultation with district and regional administrators, the CEC was able to make changes to the applications process as well as to middle school admissions criteria. More time was allotted to district families to complete the process, improvements were made to the dissemination of informational materials to parents, and the training of teachers and guidance counselor with regards to the middle school admissions process was improved. Middle school admissions forums are now hosted by the district, adding a more direct medium of information dissemination. Moreover, revisions have been made to the admission criteria itself, as student attendance, punctuality, and report cards have been added as criteria to a process that formerly relied solely on standardized test scores.

In the prior section on educative and informative outcomes, we discussed CEC 2's educative and informative efforts on curriculum issues through their holding of a series of math forums aimed at improving the public's knowledge about mathematics instruction in district 2. The CEC 2 math forums were a continuation of a long-standing debate in district 2 regarding the use of constructivist mathematics, as opposed to a more traditional approach espoused by many parents and local mathematics education advocacy groups. We should note that in addition to the educative value of these forums, they also may have contributed

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to an *indirect* effect on the actual teaching of mathematics in the district. The CEC 2 forums, in conjunction with a larger community wide movement criticizing the constructivist approach, may have aided in popularizing and legitimizing these criticisms, resulting in unofficial "street level" changes to the way district teachers actually teach math in the classroom.

One mathematics community activist supporting the more traditional approach to mathematics noted the existence of these "street level" changes:

> *Now people know that there's a problem. And I think it's empowered the teachers to feel a little freer about teaching other material. So the actual instruction in the classroom…they're [the students] getting more math. Not through the official policy, but through the actions in the schools. Now that's not good, you want the official policy to be a really really good one. The official policy in district 2 is still bad. But the freedom in the classrooms is better…[T]hey [the teachers] have…figured out a way, without going and changing the superintendent, you see…they're just buckling down, and in their own schools, closing the door…and teaching (Carson, 2006).*

This observation of changes in math instruction is corroborated by an official letter sent by CEC 2 to district and regional superintendents regarding the issue:

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[Although] [t]here were differences in various speakers' opinions regarding how much supplementation of constructivist methods is required, at what age supplementation should be introduced, and whether the curriculum focus should switch from constructivism to traditional methods…[t]he Council recognizes an unofficial trend, classroom by classroom, towards a more "balanced" mathematics approach in recent years, accompanied by continued professional development (Community Education Council - District 2, 2005).

Thus, while mathematics instruction continues to be a developing issue in district 2, we must note that the teachers, the "street level bureaucrats" responsible for implementing Department of Education policies at the local level, are sensitive to concerns voiced by parents and their representative groups such as the CECs, and they have sufficient autonomy and will to tailor classroom instruction in response to these public values and preferences.

The district is continuing to work on this issue, as they gather information from the public with regards to specific criticisms of the math curriculum, math instruction, and the specific needs of parents in helping their children with homework. Information is being gathered through the form of a survey distributed throughout district schools which has been developed in partnership with the CEC.

Changes in Support Areas

As with CEC 30, data showed that the members of CEC 2 held an informal power to act effectively in areas supporting school functioning, in gathering some financial resources for district schools, and in spurring agency action on facilities improvement projects. After

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being contacted by parents from one area of the school district regarding an increase in truancy at some district schools as a result of student loitering in local internet cafes, the CEC member investigated the issue and was able to spur action by the city police department, city licensing authorities, school safety authorities, and parent and civic organizations in order to resolve the problem. The member's intervention on behalf of the community was important, as parents in this community are typically reluctant to approach law enforcement authorities due to their often undocumented immigration status. An awareness campaign was started at a district school and business licenses were pulled from several local internet café operators. More formal action in currently being taken, as the CEC member is working in conjunction with a city council member to introducing controlling legislation for minors entering internet cafes.

As with other councils, CEC 2 worked on a diverse range of issues. In response to concerns regarding ethical considerations in several research studies being conducted on district students, the CEC has partnered with the Manhattan Borough President's office to introduce legislation aimed at improving protections to students who serve as subjects for psychological or behavioral research. And as with other councils, CEC 2 has found some success in helping expedite repairs to some district schools in deteriorating condition.

Conclusion

CEC 2 presents a third example as to how the CEC participative mechanism can have an impact on school functioning. Findings with CEC 2 are consistent with many of the findings found with other councils, illustrating some level of effectiveness with changing certain aspects of school policy, such as the district's middle school admissions policy,

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through direct collaboration with the Department of Education. Like other councils, CEC 2 has been able to hasten repairs and improvements to some district schools, illustrating some effectiveness in aiding schools in cutting through "red tape" with respect to capital repairs. CEC 2 was able to act successfully in producing policy outputs in areas supporting school functioning, again showing a council strategy of targeting areas outside of the direct supervision of the Department of Education for policy action. Our most unique finding with this case is with regards to its impact in prompting and/or supporting street level changes in schools functioning, changes that may escape the direct scrutiny and control of administrative officials, but nonetheless occur on a school to school, classroom to classroom basis.

CEC 3

CEC 3 was able to produce district level policy changes, primarily utilizing traditional channels of advisement to affect school policy. CEC 3 was successful in changing the elementary school admissions policy in district 3 through direct advisement and consultation with the Department of Education. In doing so, the CEC 3 functioned "as intended," and illustrated evidence of effectiveness in producing policy outputs despite lacking formal statutory authority (Klein, 2005). This and other changes occurring in district 3 school policy resulted in Chancellor Klein specifically referencing CEC 3 as a "successful" CEC, a case illustrating that the CEC participative mechanism can indeed work (Klein, 2005).

CEC 3's ability to produce policy change, with respect to elementary school admissions as well as some other issues, suggests that school centralization can actually

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empower particular community interest groups, in some contexts, and under certain conditions. In particularly, groups that press for policy changes that are consistent with social equity considerations – a value that inherent in centralized, bureaucratic administrative forms -- may be more successful under the centralized school system regimes than under the decentralized context, where school policy may reflect the interests of entrenched local community elites. CEC 3's success in changing the elementary school admissions process, and well as some other policies, illustrates this notion. The case of CEC 3 also showed that skills in communications, as well as in developing working relationships with Department of Education officials and local community based organizations were also important in actualizing their requested changes to school policy. Communicative ability, internal CEC dynamics, and skill in building trust with different stakeholders were important contributors to CEC 3's effectiveness in producing policy changes.

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Table 2.4: Policy and Administrative Outputs and Outcomes at CEC 3

Incorporating Public Values/Improving Quality of Decisions	
Output	**Outcome**
• CEC 3 facilitated forums that developed recommendations on district 3 elementary school admissions	Admissions policy changed in response to developed CEC 3 consensus – evidence of member/community empowerment
• CEC functioned as forum to express community positions on district Gifted and Talented programs	G&T policy changed, but on citywide basis, only minimally taking into concern D3 recommendations – limited evidence of developing political power
• Mobilized stakeholders and public officials to change district school as suspension site	Suspension site promptly changed in response to community pressure - evidence of developing oversight function
Increasing Trust/Reducing Conflict	
Output	**Outcome**
• Collaborative action towards changing district level school policy (elementary admissions, G&T)	Collaborative action resulted in improved working relationships among interest groups

Access to District 3 Elementary Schools

Access to high-quality public elementary schools in NYC is a serious issue. A journalist writing on this matter noted that, "Getting your child into a strong public school in New York City is the kind of thing that can bring otherwise calm parents to blows" (Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, 2005). Because of unique demographic factors, community school district 3 finds itself in the position of having vacancy rates as high as

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30% in its elementary schools; these schools are also known to be some of the highest performing public elementary schools in the city. District 3's diverse population includes a large population of wealthy households in the Upper West Side, as well as large portions of the city which have some of the poorest households, such as Central Harlem, upper Manhattan, and Manhattan Valley. Many of the district's wealthier households utilize private or parochial schools, leaving as many vacant seats in the public schools. This makes for a difficult situation regarding the distribution of these coveted seats. The New York Times reports:

> *For years, the empty seats in those schools went to pupils 'hand picked' by the individual schools administration from outside their geographic zone, resulting in a system that 'favors educated, savvy, connected parents (Saulny, 2005).*

Although a longstanding issues, the issue finally came to be addressed with the advent of school centralization, which emphasized the development of a system that promoted standard systemwide rules rather than policies that primarily benefited segments of a particular school district. In particular, the Spanish-speaking immigrant community of the West Side of Manhattan, long critics of the method of allocating vacant seats in District 3 schools, came to be represented by a community based organization named the Center for Immigrant Families (CFIF). Through a combination of policy research (which developed extensive evidence of the discriminatory effect of local district school admissions policies), community outreach, and vigorous advocacy efforts, the CFIF was able to make its case regarding discriminatory practices in the allocation of vacant seats in District 3 schools effectively to CEC 3 and to the

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Department of Education. The first result was the formation of a task force, reflecting a wide array of community interests, which was created in the summer of 2005. This task force was charged with the responsibility of specifically considering this issue and coming to a consensus that would form the basis of a formal policy recommendation to the chancellor. The task force was created by CEC 3, but included an array of stakeholders including teachers, local and central school system administrators, community groups and organizations, members from other parent-participation mechanisms (PTAs/PAs, President's Council), and others advocates and activists.

The task force met regularly over the summer of 2005 and was charged with finding a solution that was fair and acceptable to all parties involved. While the group worked hard to collaborate, a school system administrator notes that there was, "plenty of yelling and screaming" over that summer as stakeholders made progress towards a workable solution (Sheppard, 2006). Nonetheless, a consensus did emerge; this consensus was the implementation of a lottery process for the distribution of vacant seats. The task force came to the conclusion that a user-friendly lottery system, utilizing a simple and streamlined applications process, with applications forms printed clearly in both English and Spanish, was acceptable to all participating stakeholders. The lottery process would continue to give preference to students living within the district boundaries. Any remaining seats would be offered by lottery to students in neighboring districts, and then to students citywide. While not an optimal solution for some parties, it was an acceptable one for all.

The issue of building relationships between local constituencies and the public school system once again came into the fore with this issue. When asked about the implications of

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this policy output for the development of trust among stakeholders in the district, one administrator noted:

It depends on who you ask. In the end, everyone has to give a little to make things work. So maybe…feelings and good relationships…are not the most important thing. Maybe coming to an agreement matters more than making everyone happy. Everybody has to give a little (Sheppard, 2006).

Other Attempted Changes

CEC 3's success in addressing the elementary school admissions issue spiraled into discussion about other issues affecting equitable access to educational services. Access to gifted and talented programs became an issue in district 3, as it has in other districts. As with the case of access to elementary schools, the formerly decentralized system allowed individual schools to establish their own rules for admissions into their gifted and talented programs, and many parents utilizing these schools were pleased with the results. Schools with G&T programs often gave preferences to siblings, allowing families to enroll all their children in one school and in one program. Moreover, there was a preference in admission to gifted programs for families who lived near the schools. The decentralized way in which policy was set led to accusations by some sectors of the public that access to gifted and talented programs was also inequitable; each school's particular criteria made for a system that may or may not reward merit, but certainly rewarded administratively savvy and wealthier families in the distribution of such seats (Saulny, 2005b).

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After some discussion with public stakeholders through the CEC mechanism (but also through various other participative mechanisms), standardization was once again chosen by the Department of Education as the approach to distribute such seats. Former school-based criteria for G&T admissions were replaced with a citywide approach that relies solely on a standard, citywide intelligence test. Sibling preferences for G&T programs were eliminated as a result of these reforms, and merit and equity became the overriding policy concerns. However, siblings of children admitted to G& T programs are guaranteed a seat in the school's general education program, thus addressing parent wishes to have all their children attend a single school, provided parents are willing to enroll their other children in the general program.

Social Equity

The concept of social equity seemed to act as an overriding administrative value, facilitating the implementation of the observed policy changes in district 3. Another specific policy change that illustrated the importance of the social equity value arose early in the implementation of systemic centralization. In the early part of 2005, the Department of Education quietly decided to make a middle school in one of the most impoverished sectors of district 3 an in-house student suspension site. Students serving in-house detention at this site would include middle-school students, but also older high school students that could be assigned to the site for violent incidents. CEC 3 received word about this policy and took quick action to resolve the problem. Media outlets were contacted with respect to this policy. Elected officials were called. Community organizations were urged to protest the policy. And the CEC made direct appeals to the Department of Education itself. With 48 hours, the

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policy was reversed, illustrating the sensitivity the Bloomberg administration may have to policies that are perceived as being socially inequitable, as well as the development of effective oversight behavior on the part of the CEC.

This and other district 3 policy changes illustrate the notion that policy reforms espoused by particular community interest groups, ostensibly based in social equity, could be more easily actualized in the newly centralized system than under decentralized configurations. Counterintuitively, it is possible that formerly marginalized community interests may find themselves in positions of strength, rather than weakness, under the newly centralized system, provided that the polices they espouse reflect a broad-based concern with social equity. The decentralized school system may have allowed for the development fiefdoms, that is, local power structures that became entrenched and administered district schools in ways that primarily benefited community elites. School system centralization effectively uproots such entrenched power structures, allowing marginalized groups to "get a seat at the table," so to speak, in the development of new school policies. These minority groups may find a new voice and even success in their policy advisories, provided they do not directly counter central department priorities and emphasize systemic social equity as their overriding value. One Department of Education administrator highlighted the value the administration places on systemic equity during a discussion on the City's policy regarding access to Gifted and Talented Programs, noting that, "[T]he Department of Education can't think that way [parochially]…We have to think systemwide, broadly, about what is the best thing for all the children" (Saulny, 2006).

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Conclusion

CEC 3 was also capable of achieving other small scale changes in district schools. Ongoing communications between CEC members and community schools aided in the procurement of resources for district schools, as conversations with school principals and other administrators revealed alternative sources of funding for school improvements. Through communications with principals, additional items were successfully placed on the yearly Capital Budget revisions. These and other "small bore" successes illustrated the importance of communications between CEC members and DOE officials. An administrator from the New York State School Boards Association, placed in charge of training the city's CECs, noted effective communications skills as "one of the few real sources of power" for the CECs (Clark, 2006). A district 3 school administrator noted that it was "important to know *who* to make your case to, as well as *how* to make it" (Sheppard, 2006). Finally, internal dynamics were noted as important precursors to council success:

> *Social dynamics as a council are important. Councils succeed or fail based on social dynamics…I've just seen, just in training, where we saw how councils were performing or not, seemed to hinge on whether or not there was trust within the CEC...So social dynamics are important. If the CEC is going to be able to function, there is going to have to be some level of respect and trust. I think we had that in our CEC, for the most part. [And]…that's a critical component to…even just getting information shared, people are going to trust each other instead of just sit around a table with their arms folded and not feel comfortable talking and sharing information (Schimke, 2006).*

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Cross-Case Analysis

Urban school system centralization consolidates the administrative function under a central authority (Henig, 2004). Advantages to this administrative form focus upon increased efficiency in decision making and administration, as well as improved coordination with supportive agencies (Kirst & Bulkley, 2004). However, given the history of public participation in public school systems, as well as a public expectation for some level of public participation in administrative operations evident since the 1960s, questions remain regarding the proper role of the citizenry in the governance of such school systems within the current centralized context. What is the proper role for communities in the modern urban public school system? Can formal public participation mechanisms have an impact of school system operations? And if so, how? This chapter seeks to address such questions utilizing case study evidence for four community school districts in New York City.

In terms of policy and administrative outputs, the CECs were able to have some impact on school system operations, primarily at the local level and in some instances on the citywide level, as in the case of district 30's efforts towards changing the Department of Education's sex offender notification policy and district 3's efforts towards revising admissions criteria for gifted and talented programs. The ability of CECs to alter school policy differed from district to district, depending to some degree on the approaches and strategies taken by the CEC in their pursuit of policy changes, the issues the CECs decide to focus upon, the particular skills and previous-relationships the CEC members bring to the table, and other contextual conditions existing in each district. Given the lack of formal authority CECs have over school system governance and decision making, it seemed probable that CEC would largely choose a strategy of avoiding direct conflict with DOE

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authorities, opting to focus efforts in areas of school functioning that were non controversial and did not directly counter major Department of Education initiatives. Two of the four studied CECs exhibited precisely this strategy. CEC 30 was the best example of a CEC taking this approach, successfully focusing its efforts in the support areas of student health and safety, rather than making efforts to challenge core Department of Education instructional or administrative policies. CEC 30 was able to achieve substantial policy revisions in these areas, and was able to gather resources for the operations of district schools. CEC 30's operative strategy was virtually devoid of action challenging instructional reforms, in contrast to the case of CEC 2, which was similarly supportive of most of the DOE's instructional reforms, yet was cordially critical of the district's historical approach towards mathematics instruction. Yet even with respect to the issue of mathematics instruction, CEC 2 did not take a stance directly countering DOE policies. The hosting of educative forums was aimed at increasing stakeholder knowledge about the issue and allowing the information to drive potential future reforms; CEC 2 did not take an explicitly partisan stance on the issue.

In contrast to preset hypotheses regarding the CEC's potential efforts to acquire policymaking power through partnership with other community organizations and exercising traditional forms of political pressure, the case studies reveal that such activity, while present, was of remarkably little effectiveness. On the district level, CEC 26 attempted such action when organizing community stakeholders into a network that rallied against the central Department of Education's efforts to redesign a district middle school. Efforts in opposition to the DOE were only minimally effective, merely delaying the change for a year so that parents could better plan for their children's middle-school education. On the citywide level,

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groups like ANYCEC that sought to cluster the power of citywide CECs into a single organization found difficulties in organizing such disparate groups into one organization. While calling attention to the work of the CECs and hosting a number of training forums aimed at improving CEC capacity, this organization was similarly unable to achieve substantial policy outputs. CPAC, a more established citywide organization of the district President's Councils, was more adept at garnering public attention for their cause and more capable of forming coherent policy proposals. However, they too have been unable to achieve their desired policy reforms within today's centralized school system context.

The case of CEC 3, however, shows that CECs may be capable of achieving local level changes, provided they choose their issues carefully and seek to develop a consensus with other community stakeholders, regardless of the difficulties of the process. CEC 3 did achieve policy changes, showing that these participative mechanisms can in some instances function as intended. Through intense consultation with community stakeholders and the Department of Education, the CEC was able to produce substantial changes in the district's elementary school admissions policy. However, it is important that we highlight the seemingly important role of underlying administrative "regime values" in lending value and legitimacy to the policy advisories made by local CECs (Rohr, 1997). In this case, reforms to elementary school admissions policy occurred in large part because proposed reforms better reflected the overarching values of the governing administration more so than the previous policies. The lottery system now utilized to distribute available seats in district 3's most coveted, and underutilized, public schools better reflects the Bloomberg administration's focus on systemic reform and social equity, values associated with traditional understandings of public administration in a democratic society (Lynn, 2001).

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Other case study evidence supported this notion, as in similar instances, the Department of Education ruled *against* CEC policy recommendations that emphasized a local rather than a systemic orientation. Policy recommendations regarding district Gifted and Talented programs were heard and considered by the Department of Education, but affected G&T program policy only minimally; the final decision emphasized systemwide equity in terms of access to programs, while making only minor adjustments for particular district interests by allowing parents to enroll their other children in a G&T school's general education program. Proposals advocating preferences for families that lived within close proximity to gifted and talented programs were rejected as a strict definition of merit, as measured by standardized intelligence tests, was opted for. And student variances continue to be kept from district control; doing so prevents this practice from being potentially exploited to benefit entrenched community interests at the expense of the ideal of equitable access to school seats across the system.

Across the four conducted case studies, certain consistent outcomes resulting from CEC activities did arise. Certainly, the theme of council empowerment arose across cases. CECs did seem able to develop a level of power in producing small policy and administrative changes, as well as more substantial changes provided they focused on areas supporting school functioning (e.g. student health and safety). Policy changes that lied at the core of school operations, such as changes in elementary school admissions policy or changes to gifted and talented programs, could occur provided that such changes better reflected the overarching social values of the newly centralized public schools system. CEC empowerment was an observed outcome, although a qualified one. Data suggested that CECs could enact changes under the aforementioned conditions. But there was little

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evidence of empowerment when acting in a fashion that contradicted school policy that was more central to the school system's operation (e.g. council criticisms of the Bloomberg administration's decision to end social promotions). Such efforts, whether at the district or citywide level, were to little effect.

Some other outcomes, in terms of knowledge and skills also developed within the observed cases. Certainly, the competence of councils in interacting with school officials and producing limited policy and administrative change improved over time. Participation in council activities and learning through experience seemed to be the drivers of such improved competence in effective interactions with school system authorities. Continued effective interactions with school officials led to the development of a more formalized oversight role for the studied CECs. Across cases, councils were active and effective in functions such as cutting through red tape through the expediting of repairs, ensuring that district schools complied with student health and safety regulations, and correcting egregious cases of inequitable administrative decisionmaking (e.g. placing violent high school students in detention centers operating in middle schools located in the poorest neighborhoods).

Important outcomes also occurred in the development of relationships among district stakeholders and between these stakeholders and the central Department. Successful collaborations in achieving policy and administrative changes appeared to lead to improvements in trust between council members and school system authorities. In the case of CEC 3, such improved relationships seemed to extend outside the bounds of the CEC itself, as numerous important policy changes were made with the help and input of various community stakeholders and interest groups. The nature of interactions also seemed to have an effect on the development of relationships between the CEC and central departmental

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authorities. CEC 26's adversarial interactions with the central authorities, and resulting lack of success in changing certain problematic school policies, led to an apparent decrease in trust between members and the central department, although relationships with local administrators did not appear to be harmed. But adversarial interactions, in and of themselves, were not necessarily linked with decreases in trust between CECs and central administrators. The often conflicting nature of interactions between CEC members, community stakeholders, and central authorities in District 3's attempts to change the method for allocating vacant seats in district 3 schools or District 2's efforts to explore the foundations of the district's math curriculum, did not appear to lead to decreases in trust. The final success or failure of such communications in producing policy changes, then, appeared to play an important role in establishing or eroding trust.

Conclusion

Many case-study findings with regards to policy and administrative outputs and outcomes were unexpected. In some instances, observed outputs supported pre-set hypotheses regarding posited findings with regards to CEC effectiveness and political dynamics occurring between public participation mechanisms and central bureaucratic authorities. In other instances, findings specifically refuted such hypotheses. Yet in most instances, findings qualified and helped refine preset notions regarding dynamics and tensions between community stakeholders and Department of Education authorities. The next and final chapter utilizes findings from this and the previous chapter to specifically address the pre-set hypotheses set forth at the beginning of this research project.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

Urban school districts across the country are increasingly finding themselves under pressure from the federal government, and from local constituencies, to improve school system performance and student achievement. As a result, there has been a movement across the country advocating for the granting of governing authority of school systems to urban city mayors, under the belief that more centralized forms of control will increase systemic accountability and ultimately improve school performance (Kirst & Bulkeley, 2000). Nonetheless, this reality leaves open the question of the role of the public in the governing of such systems. What do we do with the host of parent and community groups that exist in the social and political environment of such school systems, groups that were accustomed to having a seat at the table of governance of these urban school systems? How do we deal with the issue of public participation within a historical context that expects a degree of direct community influence over school systems, while the administrative form of the system becomes more centralized and, ostensibly, less open to such types of influence? Most importantly, can provided public participation mechanisms exercise any influence upon a school system they no longer have statutory authority over?

This research project seeks to answer such questions. The study uses four case studies conducted within the New York City Public Schools System to explore whether the community education councils, the administratively authorized district-level public participation mechanisms in the NYCPSS, can succeed in their functioning. This study explores the operations of four Community Education Councils operating in different school districts throughout the city to discover whether substantial outputs and outcomes are

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accomplished and whether such outputs and outcomes correspond to the criteria set forth by the social goals framework. In doing so, it broaches broader questions about the way public participation mechanisms might work effectively towards achieving their goals. This study yields knowledge that contributes to the theoretical literature on public participation, as well as practical knowledge regarding the ways such public participation mechanisms might operate most effectively within the newly centralized context.

Research Contributions

The literature on public participation in the functioning of public organizations notes a conundrum in the coexistence of two competing sets of values. On the one hand, both recent history and the longer-term democratic norms existent in America drive us toward administrative systems that provide for more direct forms of public participation. Our republican form of government itself legitimizes the concept of democracy and provides for a certain amount of democratic representation in the process of governing. At the same time, by providing for representative, rather than direct, democracy, it creates a system where professional elected officials are entrusted with the processes of policymaking, allowing for a greater degree of skill and expertise to be reflected in the policymaking process. Under this model, professional, competent, and neutral public administrators are appointed or employed by elected officials to administer public agencies in a manner than is efficient, effective, and equitable to the public at large.

On the other hand, this indirect form of democracy has been seen as insufficient by many for the administration of modern public agencies in some contexts. Since the middle of the 20th century, federal, state, and local governments have utilized mechanisms intended to

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provide for more immediate forms of public participation in policymaking and administrative processes. This brings us into a conundrum. On the one hand, scholars note that more direct forms of public participation can bring inefficiencies into administrative systems. Public participation in policy making and public administration can be inefficient, as it is difficult to, "…get everybody in the act and still get some action" (Cleveland, 1975). However, this matters little to critics who recognize competing values in the practice of public administration. George Frederickson articulates this view in his discussions on the development of new priorities reflected by the New Public Administration, a framework emphasizing social equity as the overriding value for public administration, distinct from the efficiency concerns emphasized under more orthodox views.

This tension is intensified when we consider recent pushes for greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Urban public school systems across the nation are increasingly turning towards mayoral control as a governance approach that can increase accountability in such school systems and, in concert with more streamlined, hierarchical, and bureaucratic administrative forms, bring about improvements in organizational performance. While the current literature on mayoral control of school systems focuses on the performance of such systems as measured by school and student achievement, it overlooks the impact of such an administrative strategy upon the continuous interactions large urban school systems have with the broad array of community stakeholders present in the school system's environment, a network that was once an integral part of the administration of these systems.

How will such centralized school systems interact with the network of stakeholders present in their environment? Can centralized school systems provide for public

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participation successfully in this new environmental context? This research project seeks to address such questions within the context of the New York City public schools system.

Empirical Findings

Utility to the DOE

The first notable empirical finding across cases was the important role the CECs played for the legitimization of reform efforts by the Department of Education. While initial research efforts focused on the role of CECs as tools for community input, it became apparent than an equally important function was the role they played in explaining and legitimizing public polices particularly in already highly functioning school districts. This was most evident in the case of community school district 26, the most highly functioning school district under study with a considerably homogenous student population. Early CEC meetings focused on highlighting the continued success of the district, particularly as evidenced by rising standardized student test scores, in light of extensive organizational reforms that had uprooted the district-centered form of governance that was recognized as "working" under the former system of decentralization. New practices, including administrative reforms and greater emphasis on practices such as test-preparation, were explained and supported more clearly by administrators, in hopes of legitimizing these practices in the eyes of the public. We should note that often these efforts were not matters of brief, short term advertisements for policies. In the case of district 2, we observed rather intricate efforts towards providing an in-depth education to the public regarding the ideas underlying the use of a constructivist mathematics curriculum. Thus, such administratively

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driven efforts were often not superficial and did seek to build true public understanding, and hopefully support, regarding school policies and reforms.

Policy Changes

In contrast to the often-made criticism that public participation mechanisms with purely advisory powers are primarily used as "cooptative mechanisms," the data did show some instances where the CEC were able to make policy changes. While the observed changes were not large scale systemic reforms, the CECs were able to make changes in areas of school policy that served a support function. CEC 30 was particularly successful in this regard, succeeding in making changes to the city's sex offender notification policy. In conjunction with other community activists, the CEC was able to move a private corporation to remove its cellular phone communications towers from close proximity to district schools out of concern for their potential impact on children's health. Thus, the CECs illustrated an ability to change policy in areas where the Department of Education did not already have a strong policymaking role or position. Such policy areas should be more closely focused upon for policy-changing efforts by public participation mechanisms operating in similarly structured school systems.

CEC 3 did find success in altering areas of school policy closer to the educative mission of the schools system, a finding that illustrates the potential ability of these mechanisms to create change even when acting in areas that are more directly under central system control. CEC 3 was able to substantially change the elementary school admissions policy in district 3, providing for a system that is more standardized and equitable than the former admissions process. They also have played a similarly important role in advising on

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the city's policy regarding admissions to citywide gifted and talented programs. CEC 3 has shown another possibly successful role for the CECs as public participation mechanisms; they can act as "boundary spanning" mechanisms, relaying information to central departmental authorities regarding possibly inefficient and inequitable conditions in school system functioning. Provided that policy recommendations are rooted in the greater regime values of the current administration, it is possible for such recommendations to be actualized, giving the CECs some practical policymaking power.

Providing for a Participation Focal Point

One of the main intended functions for the CECs, from the administrative perspective, is for them to serve as focal points for the aggregation of community interests into a single mechanism for discussion of local public policy issues, the development of compromise and consensus, and subsequent communication and advisement to the Department of Education. Such a function is an important one, as the alternative would be for administrators to "meet with bands and bands of different groups and clubs and organizations" (Propper, 2006). Our findings support this function, but with limits. Across cases, there were instances where the CECs did successfully act as aggregative bodies, yet there were also instances where they did not.

Because of historical and contextual factors, a variety of public participation mechanisms and community based organizations existed at the district level. While these groups and mechanisms generally showed a willingness to collaborate with the CECs and at times operated as a united voice, they often did not hesitate to operate as independent actors. The president's councils, various community based organizations, and in some instances,

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committees on education on community boards spoke independently with regards to school policy issues. In some instances, such as the case of district 30, these groups tended toward collaboration making the CECs act as focal points. Other districts, such as district 3, showed a decidedly pluralistic flavor, with the CEC at times acting as focal points while at other times being sidestepped, acting as merely another interest group as community based organizations independently lobbied the Department of Education on behalf of their own policy preferences. In other instances, such as with the case of district 2, there was an outright disconnect between the community education council and other established district public participation mechanisms such as the president's councils. CEC 2 often collaborated successfully with the Department of Education on school policy issues, while other established public participation groups such as the district 2 President's Council took divergent positions on the very same issues. The ability for the CECs to serve as a focal point, then, is limited depending on factors unique to individual districts.

Service Provision and General Transparency

Finally, across cases, the CECs played a direct service provision role that should not be overlooked and that may contribute to the development of trust and improved relationships between the public, the local schools they are clients of, and ultimately the Department of Education. All CECs under study mentioned that they played a direct service provision role, in terms of providing information to families as clients of the school system, aiding them in navigating the often complex labyrinth that large urban public school systems can be. Across cases, families showed a need for help in navigating the complex school system bureaucracy. The CECs proved to be an effective tool in lending such aid. In some

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instances, the CECs directly provided needed information, while in other instances they acted as a mechanism that linked the public with needed information sources. In addition to directly providing such information, the CECs proved able to enact smaller policy changes that improved the quality of information provided to client families as well as the systems of access to that information. CEC 2 particularly illustrated this function, as they were able to make specific policy changes that improved access to information necessary for families to complete the middle school admissions process, in addition to some simplifying changes to the process itself.

The CECs also brought about a higher level of general transparency to school system operations, particularly with regards to aspects which were of higher salience to parents. Parents showed a particular interest in the status of projects and policies that would directly affect them as clients of the school system, such as the status of capital improvement projects in district schools. They were concerned about how systemwide changes in school policy would directly affect them, such as changes in the system's social promotions policy, the increased focus on controversial practices such as intensive test preparation, policies regarding access to gifted and talented programs, and other policies. The CECs played a role in relaying information about systemwide policy changes in a way that was particularly relevant to district families.

Links to the Public Administration Literature

This project adds to and elaborates on current research regarding the role that direct forms of public participation play in the democratic process. In contrast to the perception that public participation, as facilitated by mechanism such as the CECs, amount to

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"…democratic rituals that lack deliberative qualities and fail to give citizens a voice in the policy process," this research finds that such practices can in fact have an impact on public policy and achieve certain kinds of outputs and outcomes (Adams, 2004). The findings of this study corroborate some of the findings made in other like contexts.

Adams (2004) finds that, "While it is rare for elected public officials to change their votes based on citizen comments at a public meeting, it is much more common for votes to be delayed because of public outcry, especially if it is unexpected." The case of CEC 26 made a similar finding, showing that the CEC could be successful in delaying the enactment of controversial administrative decisions, thus allowing the public to better prepare for the decision's effects and alleviate its impact. Moreover, Adams finds that public meetings can serve as a channel for citizens to communicate with one another, especially active citizens. The findings in this study corroborate this notion, as across councils, the CECs proved to act as forums where active parents and community residents could network with one another, increase their collective knowledge regarding important issues and events, and thus improve their collective capacity to act on behalf of their local communities.

In recent years, public administration scholars have highlighted a need for improvements in the depth and breadth of provisions for direct forms of public participation in public administrative operations (King, Feltey, and Susel, 1998; Roberts, 2004). This research chronicles such an attempt in the urban public school system context, aiming to find whether such attempts can be successful and if so, to what extent and with what qualifications.

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The CECs and Collaborative Public Management

While this study explores the effectiveness of the CECs as observed though the social goals framework, the data collected, in combination with data from other similar urban public school systems, can contribute to a broader understanding of the ways such public participation mechanisms may contribute to improvements in the management of public organizational systems. More recent literature in the field of public administration, specifically focusing on developing knowledge in the area collaborative public management, can shed light on the topic addressed in this study. Collaborative public management can be generally defined as, "…the process of facilitating and operating in multiorganizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations." Such literature can provide us with an additional, and perhaps wider, lens through which we can more fully understand the phenomena under study.

Continued Research into Mechanism Effectiveness

Certainly, continued research into the area of public participation mechanism effectiveness is warranted, particularly within this context. As urban public school systems continue to experiment with school system centralization, public participation like the CECs in New York City, the LSCs (local school councils) in Chicago, and other like participatory mechanisms across urban public school systems will continue to find themselves responsible for achieving a wide array of goals and responsibilities, many stretching their limited capacities. A more studied approach toward the development of such mechanisms, drawing on theory developed in the public administration literature, may increase their ability to achieve the variety of social, political, and administrative goals they are expected to achieve.

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The structural characteristics of such mechanisms continue to be important. Fundamentally, the characteristics of public participation mechanisms as structures in and of themselves have important implications for how well they will function as appendages of administrative systems. In his article "Varieties of Complex Governance," Archon Fung develops a framework for understanding the range of institutional possibilities for public participation through such mechanisms. Fung finds that at the core of the issue of institutional design lie three questions that can aid us in understanding the design and potential outcomes flowing from such participatory forms. These questions are: Who participates? How do participants communicate and make decisions? And what is the link between their conclusions with actual public policy and administrative action? Addressing these questions lead us to consideration of a variety of possible institutional forms that have different implications for questions regarding systemic legitimacy, political justice, and administrative efficiency. Fung's model offers us a more precise framework for understanding the structural options urban public school systems have in designing their public participation mechanisms or system of mechanisms, forcing us to more clearly consider what capacities we might realistically expect from them, what structure might best facilitate the achievement of such expectations, and what kinds of questions we should ask prior to the development of such mechanisms. It offers both scholars and practitioners a coherent basis on which to build such mechanisms. Future academic research and policy experimentation should at least broadly reflect the elements of this and other like models.

Effective public participation, however, cannot be fully understood through a sole focus on the internal characteristics and workings of such mechanisms. The linkages of such mechanisms to the greater political and administrative system must be addressed to arrive at

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a complete understanding of effective public participation. Some recent literature broadens the perspective, seeking to find ways to more fully incorporate the citizenry in the administration of public organizational systems. Cooper, Bryer, and Meek refer to this ideal as *citizen-centered collaborative public management*. They offer a model positing that six variables must be maximized in order to achieve such an ideal: government trust in citizens, citizen efficacy, citizen trust in government, citizen competence, government responsiveness, and government legitimacy. Cooper, Bryer, and Meek then review the characteristics of five of the most commonly used approaches to public participation – adversarial, electoral, information exchange, civil society, and deliberative approaches – noting how such approaches fall closer or further from the ideal of citizen-centered collaborative public management. The variables reflecting the ideal of citizen-centered collaborative public management overlap with the social goals framework used to explore the effectiveness of the CEC mechanism in this study. Thus, additional data collection efforts, across additional cases and over a longer period of time, can lead us to a fuller understanding of the state of collaborative public management in this policy context as well to greater knowledge about the possibility of achieving this ideal. To what degree can we reach the ideal of a citizen-centered collaborative public management in this important context? Is this ideal compatible with the centralized approach to public management and if so, to what extent? What adaptations must be made to bureaucratic forms to achieve this ideal? The variables provided by Cooper et al can act as effective guides in conducting future research in this area.

Certainly, a citizen-centered collaborative public management seems a laudable ideal to work towards. Both administrators and the public agree on the merits of such an ideal.

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However, while there are clear merits in scholars' attempts to give comparable weight to the diverse values involved in achieving a more collaborative public management, it is also worthwhile for scholars to view this phenomenon more directly from the perspective of a smaller set of key values. William Leach does precisely this in his analysis of watershed partnerships in California and Washington State. Using democracy as the guiding value, Leach offers a framework to assess instances of collaborative public management. Leach's normative framework, emphasizing democracy as the fundamental value, posits that instances of collaborative public management may be considered more or less democratic depending on their levels of inclusiveness, representativeness, impartiality, transparency, deliberativeness, lawfulness, and empowerment. In doing so, Leach's offers us an alternative framework by which we can asses the functioning of entire administrative systems utilizing public participation mechanisms. Leach's ideals, and the indicators he offers suggesting the presence or absence of such characteristics, can be readily adapted to this study's policy context to assess the democratic merits of urban public school systems as cases of collaborative public management. Moreover, adopting such a model into our assessment can help address criticism made by some scholars that modern methods of administering public organizations in fact overlook key historical values, such as democracy, central to America's functioning (Lynn, 2001).

Addressing the Propositions

In addition to studying the outputs and outcomes associated with the functioning of the CECs, this project also sought to examine and support, reject, or refine five specific propositions set forth at the outset of the study. These propositions were intended to guide

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the direction of empirical investigations as well as to draw lessons that may be generalizeable to other similar contexts. The findings associated with these propositions are now addressed.

Proposition 1: *The administrator's relationship with a community education council is influenced by his/her identity as a professional employee of the public school system. Highlighting their role as agents of the school system, administrators will exhibit a greater concern with policies reflecting traditional administrative values, leading to a greater concern with the achievement of performance goals as defined by the central Department of Education than with performance as defined by local communities as expressed through the CECs.*

***Findings*:** Indeed, Department of Education administrators exhibited a distinct concern with the achievement of "success" as defined by central departmental authorities. Across all cases, Department of Education administrators working with the community education councils sought to use these participative mechanisms to support the host of policy changes being enacted as a result of the Bloomberg reforms. The emphasis of much discussion across our sample revolved around the success of these reforms, thus either "selling" these reforms to an unsure public or defending the Department of Education against criticism from local opposing activists. This was seen across councils as district superintendents consistently highlighted increases in standardized test scores. It was a particularly important function in the case of district 26, where there was a particularly high degree of resistance to the 2002 centralizing reforms.

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However, we should note that administrators showed a considerable amount of flexibility and openness towards district concerns that did not directly contradict policy priorities that were foci of Department of Education reforms. Across councils, school administrators showed a willingness to act upon specific district priorities as articulated by the community education councils, provided they did not interfere with specific reform priorities, or provided they focused on areas supporting the process of education, such as improving student health and safety or bringing greater equity to school system utilization. The posited administrative concern with internal administrative goals and values, then, is qualified.

Proposition 2: *Community education council members, as agents of community school district interests, will exhibit a higher degree of concern with goals specific to their respective communities and a lower concern with performance goals as defined by central administrators.*

Findings**:** The collected data did illustrate a greater concern by CEC members for the achievement of goals other than increasing standardized test scores. Across the sample, the CECs did tend to emphasize other aspects of school functioning while DOE administrators emphasized the improvements in these standardized performance measures. However, most councils were not sharply critical of system administrators for this emphasis. Only in the case of CEC 26, the council representing the most highly performing school district, did any council make a sharp criticism of the Department's strong emphasis on such measures. It seems that the other councils interpreted their role as one of ensuring that other aspects of

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school functioning were not overlooked in this process of reform, while district 26 CEC members took on a position of more directly opposing the reforms. Thus, CEC concern with other aspects of school functioning did not necessarily conflict with a broad based concern with improvements in standardized test scores held generally by CEC members, school system administrators, and other involved stakeholders.

Proposition 3: *The conflict of the administrators' primary performance-based concerns and CEC members' democratically-determined priorities will result in dissatisfaction with the participatory process from administrative, member, and participant perspectives and low perceived community education council performance.*

Findings: It is difficult to determine specifically whether there was outright dissatisfaction with the participatory process in the four conducted case studies. Certainly, the CEC members that were interviewed had their criticisms of the system, but most were not dissatisfied with the system's functioning. Some studied CECs were more satisfied with the functioning of the system than others. CEC 30 members, for instance, seemed to report a higher level of satisfaction with the CEC process than the members of other councils. CEC 30 established a more collaborative relationship with their district superintendent rather early in their development, leading to various achievements aimed at supporting school functioning and protecting student health and safety. CEC 30's focus on neutral areas of school policy for action, and their substantial achievements in these areas, likely lead to greater degrees of satisfaction.

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CEC 26 appeared the least satisfied of the councils, as evidenced by the narratives of interviews conducted with its membership. In contrast to CEC 30, CEC 26, to a much higher degree, used their proceedings to criticize school system reforms and to counteract, or at least delay, policies that they deemed as threatening to the continued functioning of district schools. Dissatisfaction, then, was not uniform across councils, and was positively correlated with more highly performing and more racially/ethnically homogenous school districts.

Proposition 4: *Low perceived advisory board performance will lead to the creation and use of new and alternative means of public participation.*

Findings: Dissatisfaction with CEC performance, for the most part, did not lead to the creation and use of alternative mechanisms for public participation for several reasons. First, the study revealed that various mechanisms for public participation were already available and utilized by public participants both prior to and after the centralizing reforms. Chapter 4, the policy context chapter of this study, illustrates the host of mechanisms that were already available to the school system clientele throughout the city. PA/PTA organizations are ubiquitous throughout the school system providing a school based mechanism for public participation. At the district level, the President's Councils are available as mechanisms for public input. The education committees of community boards operating in school districts are another possible avenue. Finally, in the case of district 3, the host of community based organizations provided for a multitude of venues for public participation available to the school system clientele. Public participation did not tend to occur through a single group

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such as the CECs, but was rather a loosely knit phenomenon occurring fluidly through this variety of mechanisms.

The second reason a particular option, or key set of options, did not develop as an alternative to the CECs was the difficulty community participants encountered in coming to an agreement on basic issues under debate. The best example of this phenomenon was the rise and demise of ANYCEC, a citywide organization aimed at unifying the city's community education councils into a single organization, and single voice, to produce policy action. While the CECs included in the sample were familiar with the organization and attended some of its meetings, none decided to become formal members of the group, seeing some of the member CECs as "too extreme" or a simply having concerns that were far different from the ones affecting their particular school district. The diversity of school districts, and the interests within those school districts, made it difficult for any specific alternative to the Department of Education authorized mechanism of the CECs to develop and succeed. While the case of district 3 did exhibit a tendency towards forming new community groups, particularly when dealing with the issue of the allocation of vacancies in district elementary schools, this phenomenon seemed to be a characteristic intrinsic to this politically active school district, one that was existent prior to school system reorganization.

Proposition 5*: A higher pursuit of alternative avenues for citizen participation will lead to a higher pursuit of protective strategies by the school system. Legal and procedural measures to neutralize environmental opposition, or bring align it with managerial interests, will be pursued.*

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Findings: On a district basis, Department of Education efforts towards neutralizing environmental opposition did occur, but this observation must be qualified. Again, it was clear that there were core policy concerns of the Department of Education, concerns which were not subject to negotiation as a result of public input. Some of these policy priorities, such as standardized testing and the ending of social promotions, are mandated federal NCLB requirements and therefore cannot be changed at the local level without considerable intergovernmental consequences. Similarly, reducing violence in schools has been a priority of the Bloomberg administration, and any community opposition to stricter disciplinary policies has not been recognized by central administrative authorities. Thus, there are certain core school policies that administrators are highly protective of and unwilling to negotiate on. In these instances, administrators are likely to use public participation mechanisms as boundary guarding mechanisms to protect schools and the greater school system from the influence of vocal opposition

However, we must note that in other instances, the Department of Education has utilized its public participation mechanisms as boundary spanning mechanisms. Again, when the topic of focus is in a support-area of school functioning (e.g. student health and safety) or diverges from current school policy but is in greater congruence with the overarching set of regime values of the public school system (e.g. social equity and equal opportunity), the Department of Education has illustrated an openness to such public influences, and even willingness to enact responsive policy changes.

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CECs and Cooptation

While we did find that CECs were able to achieve some degree of success in achieving policy and administrative changes within their "carved out" spheres of policy influence, we must still address the fundamental question, "Are CECs achieving what they were intended to achieve?" Are they operating as intended? Are they giving the families of children in the New York City public school system a substantive voice in school policy and administration? Or, as suggested at the outset of this study, are they being utilized as cooptative mechanisms?

In his book TVA and the Grassroots, Philip Selznick defines cooptation a practice where a government agency seeks to neutralize stakeholder opposition by bringing the most prominent of such stakeholders into the formal or informal operations of the agency. By placing such leaders into key positions in agency administration, the agency reduces or eliminates the most threatening forms of environmental opposition, allowing the agency to operate more autonomously. While there are problems with the new mechanisms for public participation in the NYCPSS, it is still difficult, under Selznick's definition, to precisely label the New York City Department of Education's new approach towards public participation as cooptation.

Cooptation, as understood by Selznick, would imply that the composition of the new public participation mechanisms would extensively include leading elements from the former participative mechanisms (the community school boards), or leaders from prominent community groups previously seeking to influence school system policies. While some members of the CECs under study were members of the former community school boards, most were new to processes of community activism in the public school system. The

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statutory requirements for serving on the board, which require that CEC members be parents of children presently enrolled in district schools, precluded a host of experienced community activists from board service, including many former community school board members and parent activists. Thus, the NYC Department of Education probably cannot be criticized for attempting to *coopt* opposing publics as much as it may be criticized as seeking to *create a new public* of parent and community representatives. The new system of public participation emphasizes and legitimizes a new set of parent representatives and excludes many of the more vocal opponents of school system reform, opponents who, nonetheless, continue to engage in activism through other political avenues such as political protests and local and state legislative committee hearings. Certainly, this calls to question the issue of the legitimacy of the current system of representation. But this is a distinct issue from concerns regarding the use of the new public participation structure for purposes of cooptation.

In addition to concerns regarding cooptation and the legitimacy of new public participation mechanisms are issues regarding their effectiveness in altering broader based public policies. Under New York State's Education Law, the Community Education Councils, while lacking formal powers over school policy, do have a general duty to, "promote achievement of educational standards and objectives relating to the instruction of students," and to, "Provide input, as it deems necessary, to the chancellor and the city board on matters of concern to the district." These two duties, at least in spirit, imply that even under the new system of public participation, the community education councils should have some reasonable level of impact upon a more substantial set of school policies. While this study shows the impact the CECs did have an effect upon a narrower set of policies, data reveals several substantial missed opportunities where the Department of Education may

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have more successfully accommodated the requests of the CECs, bringing greater meaning to the previously mentioned sections of the state's education law.

Indeed, while mayoral control implies that decision making regarding the most substantial school system policies will be made at the executive level, the data revealed numerous instances where a greater degree of local influence upon school policy through CECs advisories seemed feasible yet was not accommodated. For instance, in 2006, in response to New York State requirements, the New York City Department of Education launched a citywide HIV education program throughout the city's public schools. While the Department of Education took efforts to ensure that the curriculum was age appropriate, some CECs noted that, "…[The] HIV curriculum was put into effect and at no point did the DOE seek CDEC advice. The CDEC was informed of the change, not consulted about the change" (CDEC 26). A similar phenomenon occurred with the New York City mayor's decision to ban students from carrying cellular phones into the schools. Despite complaints from many CECs throughout the city, New York City's mayor has held steadfast to this ban, resulting in the issue being brought to be resolved in state courts (Hartocollis, 2006). Moreover, many CECs have expressed dismay about not being accommodated in what they perceive to be reasonable requests aligned with their duties as expressed by the state's education law, including fair access to schools, education department budgets, and participation in zoning decisions (MacKay, 2004).

Policy Implications

This study's findings yield some policy implications, particularly with regards to the conceptualization of the role of public participation mechanisms in urban public school

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systems prior to their creation, the training of individuals who will serve on these bodies, and the styles and strategies such public participants might use to achieve success in their efforts towards representing their respective publics.

Conceptualization

This project was initiated concurrently with the passage of legislation centralizing the New York City Public Schools System and the subsequent creation of the CECs, the mechanisms that would replace the former community school boards. Prior to engaging in empirical investigations, I studied the legally assigned duties to the Community Education Councils. Research revealed that the duties of the community education councils, as set forth by state law, only partially defined the practical day-to-day duties of these public participation mechanisms. While some councils reported specific efforts towards fulfilling the requirements of state legislation, others reported confusion regarding their legally mandated duties. Still others seemed to de-emphasize their legally mandated duties, seeing a more broadly defined advocacy role as their true responsibility in the participative process.

In the winter of 2006, the Manhattan Borough President's office conducted a study following up on the operations of community education councils existing throughout the borough of Manhattan. The study made several poignant findings. Among other findings, it found that 61% of surveyed CEC members in Manhattan reported that their council was not able to fulfill one or more of its responsibilities as mandated by the New York State Education law. 37% did not hold or participate in legally mandated capital plan hearings, and 18% did not understand what constituted a change to zoning lines within a district. In

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short, the study found that the CECs were experiencing considerable difficulties in performing their legally mandated duties up to par.

However, interviews revealed that legally mandated duties did not reflect the day-to-day responsibilities the CECs found themselves in charge of. One CEC president noted that the legally mandated duties "didn't matter" and that he was not even sure that such duties were appropriate for the CECs. All councils highlighted their roles as parent advocates as primary to their day to day operations. Moreover, research revealed an important role for the CECs in "filling in gaps" regarding the oversight of policy areas that may be overlooked in a system that focuses on the improvement of student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Several councils contributed meaningfully towards improvements in policies related to student safety and health. CECs were able to spur the completion of some school capital repair projects. The CECs also served as an effective aid in helping parents navigate the complex school system bureaucracy and thus access needed services. They also aided school level administrators in identifying areas of school repair needing improvement, and even in identifying sources for funding, both from the school budgets and from external political and private donor sources. This broader based service and oversight role for the CECs should be more clearly emphasized by the Department of Education at the outset of members' service on the CECs, and perhaps included more explicitly in the duties assigned to the CECs in section 2590-e of New York State's Education Law.

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CEC training

Difficulties the CECs found in fulfilling their formal and informal roles call for improvements in training regarding the main roles and responsibilities of the CECs. The Manhattan Borough President's Report on the CECs corroborates this finding. For instance, the report notes that, "Some of the duties of CECs that are outlined in New York State's Education Law are not detailed in the description of responsibilities that DOE provides to CEC members" (Stringer, 2006, p. 14). One parents' rights advocate added to this point, noting that the DOE's training sessions were inadequate and were plagued with a fundamental conflict of interest -- the CECs are being trained by the very agency they are charged to oversee (Colon, 2006). Improvements in the formal training of the CECs are warranted. The DOE's 2006 decision to contract with the New York State School Boards Association to provide CEC training, rather than having the Department of Education conduct such sessions, is a step in the right direction, particularly in terms of alleviating conflict-of-interest concerns.

Again, the research in this study revealed that much of the CECs' day-to-day operations focused on the informal roles and responsibilities of the CECs, roles which were not written into state law. One unexpected yet ubiquitous role the CECs played were as an aid to parents in navigating the school system bureaucracy. The Manhattan Borough Presidents report corroborates the importance of this role, noting that, "Surveyed CEC members expressed interest in receiving training on topics such as organizing and assisting parents in navigating New York City's public school system." The Department of Education should focus a substantial amount of its training efforts on these informal roles.

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Member Strategies

Finally, CEC members themselves would be well advised to consider working styles and strategies that can best bring them towards the achievement of their desired goals. Contrary to expected findings, the data showed that confrontational strategies were largely ineffective for the CECs. In only one instance did a CEC's direct challenge to a DOE policy lead to any substantial outcome; in this case, the policy change achieved was only a temporary one – a one-year delay in the redesign of an elementary school in district 26. On the other hand, more collaborative strategies yielded better results for the CECs under study. CECs were able to accomplish some policy changes in support areas of school functioning. Through more collaborative approaches, they were able to gain access to financial resources for community schools. Moreover, in the case of district 3, the CEC was able to directly challenge and change DOE policy on elementary school admissions.

Similarly, citywide movements in opposition to DOE policy by civic groups, community activists, and public participation bodies were also unsuccessful. Most recently, citywide protests by the CECs and other community groups against the mayor's ban on cellular phones in the schools have been of little effect, as the administration continues to hold firm on this policy. A member of the New York State School Boards Association charged with the training of the CECs noted the danger of taking purely adversarial stances and the importance of maintaining positive relationships with school administrators, as such relationships are "one of the few sources of real power" for the CEC members. Thus, this study's findings yield practical implications regarding the kinds of working approaches most likely to succeed in CEC interactions with administrative authorities.

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Future Research

Toward a Theory of Effective Public Participation in Centralized Schools Systems

An important question arises from this study's findings. We have seen some variation in the CECs' abilities to achieve policy outputs and outcomes. The question then is, why are some CECs' able to achieve such outputs and outcomes while others are not? Given the purely advisory role the CECs have under state law, it is curious observation that some CECs were observed as being more effective that others. Certainly, individual agency explains some of the variation, as some CECs utilized different approaches and strategies in communications and establishing relationships with public officials having statutory power. This may have aided CECs in developing some power in affecting school policy and administration within a limited range of issues. However, some evidence that arose throughout the data collection process points towards some other factors that may further help explain this variation. In this section, I discuss the evidence pointing towards this additional set of factors. From this available data, I also suggest propositions that may become guides for future research.

Politically Skilled Community Interest Groups

The partial success of CEC 2 exhibited in achieving limited changes to mathematics instruction in district 2 can provide us some lessons about factors that may influence the ability of participative mechanisms to produce desired policy changes. While CEC2 was not able to make broad-based, formal changes to the mathematics curriculum being used in District 2, there were some concessions by the Department of Education that make this a case worthy of additional consideration. Street level changes in classroom mathematics

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instruction and changes to the support services available for parents seeking to aid their children in understanding the subject matter were some of the changes that occurred in District 2. Thus, while the CEC was not able to produce wholesale policy changes, it did produce incremental changes that lend credence to the notion that these kinds of participative mechanisms can work to some degree, despite the centralization of final authority.

A closer look at the data from this case reveal that a major factor that may have facilitated the CEC in producing these changes was the presence of a politically skilled community interest group in the district acting in support of such changes. In this case, a politically skilled single-issue advocacy group appeared to lend additional strength to a more diffuse public opposition to the status quo in mathematics education in the district. NYC HOLD (Honest, Open, and Logical Decision on Mathematics Education Reform), the leading community organization that appeared to act as an important part of the impetus for the holding of mathematics curriculum issue forums at CEC 2, benefits from a highly educated and politically skilled leadership and a growing membership network, some with a personal history of service on the former District 2 community school board. The professionalism of this group's operations seemed to add to the strength of what might otherwise have been a more general form of public opposition that may have found more difficulty in accomplishing policy changes.

NYC HOLD was formed by members of the mathematics curriculum committee of the former District 2 community school board and has grown into a, "…nonpartisan national advocacy organization that provides parents, educators, mathematicians and other concerned citizens information, resources and networking opportunities to support systemic improvements in the quality of mathematics education in our nation's schools" (Carson,

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2007). In addition to benefiting from a growing group of member advocates, the group also gathered strength and credibility from the professional backgrounds of many of its members. NYC HOLD founding members include faculty members from the mathematics and computer science departments of respected colleges and universities, including the City University of New York, Manhattan College, New York University, Emory University, and SUNY Albany (Carson, 2007). The credibility of specific reform proposals of NYC HOLD, then, is rooted in the sense of legitimacy provided by the professional backgrounds and activities of its membership. This professionally-based legitimacy is further bolstered by the experience members have in advocating for education reform at higher levels of government. Simply stated, NYC HOLD members are accustomed to working with high-level public officials in their advocacy efforts for education reform. Many of their members have served as advisors to federal level panels on mathematics education. Many have testified across states at legislative committee hearings on related topics. Some have served as policy advisors to U.S. Senators and Representatives, while others have served as advisors on education policy to American presidents. This experience of activism within the realm of policy elites, and across different levels of government, likely gives these members additional skill in influencing higher level policymakers with the Department of Education bureaucracy, complementing the more dispersed district 2 opposition to the Department's stance towards mathematics instruction.

Politically Active Districts

In addition to the presence of politically and professionally skilled, single issue advocacy group, is the more general fact that community school districts 2 and 3, two

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districts in our sample that accomplished more substantial policy changes, overlap with a geographic area in Manhattan that is recognized as being politically powerful and, "…noted for its tradition of Democratic liberalism and intense political activism" (Hicks, 2002). The extensive history of political activism on the west side and midtown sections of Manhattan, reflected by the presence of numerous influential political clubs in both districts, may be an important factor in affecting the responsiveness of the mayorally-controlled Department of Education to demands of these politically active community school districts as expressed through the CECs.

The strength of political clubs is further bolstered by more recent political changes in the geographical area that have made Midtown and Westside elected officials more influential in the arena of local politics. The 2006 election of a Westside member of the New York State Assembly to the office of the Manhattan Borough President, coupled with the election of a Midtown/Westside city council member to the office of Speaker of the New York City Council, have contributed to the formation of, "…a new generation of power brokers [and]…a political machine based on the West Side," reflecting a, "…new, professionalized [form of] Manhattan politics" (Smith, 2006) It is plausible that community schools district 2 and 3, which overlap with the electoral districts of these newly influential public officials, may benefit from a more general increase in the responsiveness of the Department of Education to a broader array of stakeholders operating in these two electoral districts.

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District 2 as Site for Attention and Policy Experimentation

District 2's generally recognized status as one of the "jewels" of the New York City Public School System may also be a contributing factor aiding in explaining variations among the ability of CECs to achieve policy and administrative changes. As stated in the policy context chapter, district 2 is one of the highest performing school districts in New York City. This achievement is often attributed in part by many to a long history of experimentation and innovation with different programs of instruction and professional development in the district, programs which required collaboration between district level administrators and their supervisors in the central school system bureaucracy. One particularly successful project was a decade-long experimental project consisting of teacher professional development linked to research-based instructional practices which enacted throughout the 1990s. In a paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Harwell notes a marked improvement in reading and mathematics scores on standardized exams (17% and 18% respectively) over a ten year period (between 1988 and 1998). During this time period, District 2 was deeply engaged in a district wide professional development program enacted by a new district superintendent who had achieved success with such a program of reform in another New York City public school district. The program is credited with bringing the district from 16th in standardized test scores to a number 2 ranking. The success of this program was later modeled throughout other school districts in New York City. Thus, the experience and success of school officials, from the local district to the central departmental level, in implementing administrative and instructional reforms in District 2, may be an important factor prompting the current

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Department of Education to be generally more attentive and receptive to the requests and needs of this school district (Harwell, 2000).

Ethnic Social Capital in Community School District 3

While traditional political activism, the strength of local issue advocacy groups, coupled with the rise of a new class of influential elected officials, may be important drivers of the Department of Education's responsiveness to CEC demands, we should also note another unique characteristic of the social and political environment of the Upper West Side of Manhattan that may drive the success of CECs in producing policy changes. This characteristic is the presence of a socially and politically active ethnic group -- the Dominican community -- on the Upper Westside of Manhattan. Data suggests that activism on the part of this community may have contributed to the ability of CEC 3 to produce some policy changes. Legal scholar Julissa Reynoso notes:

> *Dominicans…tend to be…concentrated, residing exclusively in barrios or ghettos like Washington Heights-Inwood, home to 59% of Dominicans registered by the INS. Other areas of Dominican concentration include sections of the Upper West Side...The largest concentration occurs in Manhattan, where 41.1 percent of the Dominican population resides" (Reynoso, 2003).*

Moreover, this sizeable and concentrated ethnic population exhibits characteristics associated with the concept of social capital, an important precursor to effective political activism.

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The concept of “social capital” refers to the variety of social resources—such as information, social support, personal connections—important for achieving social, economic, and political goals (Putnam, 2000). “Ethnic social capital” refers to cases where social capital is bound by an ethnic, immigrant culture (Reynoso, 2003). In an analysis of New York City’s Dominican population, Reynoso specifically tests for the presence of factors associated with high social capital. Through analysis of survey data, she finds that this population:

> *…tested positively for ‘civic engagement.’ 85 percent of respondents claimed to belong to some form of formal organization or group. Of those claiming to belong to formal groups, 31 percent belonged to ‘educational’ organizations; 27 percent to ‘socio-cultural’ groups; 21 percent to ‘religious’ organizations with the remaining 20 percent belonging to sport and/or professional organizations (Reynoso, 2003).*

Thus, survey data suggests that this ethnic population exhibits characteristics associated with social capital, potentially leading to greater skill in political activism. She goes on to emphasize the implications of this observation:

> *Dominican prominence stems not only from their sheer numbers and spatial concentration but also from their…increasing clout in the local political power structure that can be attributed to the emergence of community social capital… Dominican migration proves that demographic concentration in New York City matters. Washington Heights stretching north on the west side of upper Manhattan*

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has provided a platform and inspiration for forms of political organizing and activism among Dominicans (Reynoso, 2003).

Thus, in addition the increased political power of elected officials representing Manhattan, it is possible that high degree of social capital present in the Dominican community of the West Side of Manhattan, which overlaps with Community School District 3, may be an important factor contributing to Department of Education responsiveness to the Dominican community's demands, as expressed by CEC 3 education policy proposals.

Nature of the Stakes

There are other factors that may have affected the skill and intensity of community activism and, in doing so, affected CEC ability to produce policy outputs. The nature of the stakes district 3 may have played a particularly important role. Again, district 3 possessed a resource that is rare in New York City and coveted by many of the city's families, namely, vacant seats in higher quality public schools. The fact that access to this resource was at the heart of much community activism in district 3 may explain the unusually high amount of energy poured by community stakeholders into activism in this school district, part of it expressed through CEC operations. Likewise, competition for access to gifted and talented programs, another highly coveted resource, may also have driven much community interest and activity. This unique constellation of factors together could form the basis for more a more general set of propositions regarding important factors driving the ability of public participation mechanisms to produce policy and administrative changes in similar policy contexts.

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Are CECs "Effective?" – A Reflective Assessment

It has been my purpose in this study to shed light on the effectiveness of the Community Education Councils (CECs) of New York City's public schools system. After considering several evaluative criteria used in similar research studies, I opted to utilize the social goals framework as the standard by which to analyze and discuss the effectiveness of the CEC structures. As noted in Chapter 3, arriving at a standard by which to evaluate the functioning of public participation mechanisms is a difficult endeavor, as "…there are no widely held criteria for judging success and failure; there are no agreed-upon evaluation methods; and there are few reliable measurement tools" (Rosener, 1983, p.45). The literature revealed an array of standards for making such evaluations, ranging from more specific and concrete frameworks focusing upon the utility of public participation mechanisms in aiding particular stakeholders in achieving their specific goals (interest based evaluations), to more esoteric theory based approaches, such as Webler and Renn's model assessing the level of fairness and competence exhibited in the proceedings of public participation mechanisms. Ultimately, my decision to utilize the social goals framework was driven by both theoretical and practical considerations. The social goals framework includes concepts utilized in many similar research studies, allowing me to assess the effectiveness of the CECs from a theoretically rich perspective, while its conceptual breadth allowed me to collect a diversity of data that could pave the way for diverse avenues of future research. At the same time, this framework offered concepts that were sufficiently clear and concrete to serve as helpful guides in both the data collection and analysis phases of this initial case study research project.

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Nevertheless, a retrospective outlook at this study and its findings allows me to address the issue of effectiveness from a broader perspective than that offered by a single evaluative framework. Moreover, a retrospective outlook allows me to reconsider the theoretical underpinnings of any evaluative criteria that might be utilized in the conducting of such research studies.

Public Participation and the Separation of Powers

Indeed, differences in the perspectives scholars take on the goals of public participation parallel the differences present in the major overarching paradigms underlying broader public administrative theory. Thomas Beierle, who developed the social goals framework, touches upon these parallels when he discusses barriers to developing generalizeable criteria for the evaluation of public participation mechanisms. He notes that developing generic criteria that can be applied across policy contexts is difficult because of "fundamental differences of opinion on the nature of democracy." He then notes there are wide ranging views on what forms public participation efforts should take, depending on whether one prioritizes managerial, pluralist, or popular views (Beierle, 1998, p.2). It is important that we remain aware of this conundrum, as such awareness can help us avoid frustration as we seek to make definitive judgments about the effectiveness of public participation mechanisms. Indeed, public administration itself "faces a serious and seemingly irresolvable problem in continually seeking to maximize the attainment of mutually incompatible values" (Rosenbloom, 1983, p. 219). This problem finds its way into any assessment of public participation mechanisms, regardless of the framework utilized.

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As with other public organizations, public participation mechanisms, as affiliated components, can be viewed as structures intended to achieve a variety of goals. These goals include, at the very least, *managerial* goals, which focus on the improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the sponsoring public organization, and political goals, which emphasize "the values of representativeness, political responsiveness, and accountability" (Rosenbloom, 1983, p. 220). These goals reflect the different priorities and values associated with the different institutions of our government. Thus, the question that must be asked retrospectively of this case study is whether the CECs, and the greater system of public participation currently present in the New York City Public Schools System, is succeeding, or at least making progress, in the achievement of these broad goal categories.

In retrospect, it appears that the NYCPSS has succeeded in some ways, and failed in others, in actualizing managerial and political goals. In terms of achieving managerial priorities, it does appear that the CEC participative system has managed the social and political environment in a way that enables the system to focus its energies on improving school and student achievement. In this sense, this system of public participation has been successful in facilitating the achievement of managerial goals. Likewise, evidence suggests that the new approach towards public participation has also aided in the actualization of political values. Changes to the system of public participation may in some ways have improved the legitimacy of participative structures, and case study evidence reveals that the CECs can produce some policy and administrative changes, illustrating some level of political efficacy, particularly in school districts with higher levels of social capital. Nevertheless, we must remain aware of the clear shortcomings of these structures and the difficulties of reconciling the achievement of managerial and political goals. At times, we

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appear to be involved in a zero-sum game where managerial achievements seem to inevitably come at political cost. At other times, it appears that the relationship between these two values systems is more complex, and perhaps even reconcilable.

Managerial Goals

It is important that we recognize that a heightened public concern with the achievement of managerial values was the driving force behind the centralization of New York City's Public School System. Public dissatisfaction with decades of underperformance led elected officials to centralize the public school system and implement a host of reforms aimed at improving student achievement, particularly as assessed by performance measures such as standardized test scores and graduation rates. The purpose of the CECs and other public participation mechanisms then, from the managerial perspective, is to contribute to the achievement of organizational performance by garnering the public's confidence in the school system and stabilizing the social and political environment in which schools operate, thus aiding in the implementation of policy reforms. From the managerial perspective, effective CECs should protect the public school system from social and political disruptions in the environment, thus allowing administrators to focus on improving organizational performance. Moreover, effective CECs, from the managerial perspective, may also seek to garner public input leading to some policy and administrative revisions that maintain the essential character of policy reforms while making reasonable and practicable adjustments that benefit local residents.

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Substantial Performance Achievements

But before we discuss the CECs' contribution to the achievement of managerial goals, we should recognize the existence of some evidence that the NYCPSS has, in fact, made improvements in school and student achievement. Recognizing such performance improvements is important, as questions regarding the contributions of CECs to the achievement of managerial goals would otherwise be moot.

The 2007 Mayor's Management Report (MMR), a document released by the New York City Mayor's Office of Operations on a biannual basis tracking the performance of city agencies, reports respectable gains in the performance of the NYCPSS since the 2002 centralization. In Fiscal Year 2003, the MMR reported that 41% of students in grades 3 to 8 met or exceeded English Language Arts standards as measured by New York State standardized tests; by fiscal year 2007, this statistic had increased to 50.8%. Performance on state standardized exams in mathematics increased by a greater margin, with 41.9% of students meeting or exceeding standards in FY 2003 and 65.1% of students meeting or exceeding standards in FY 2007. External assessments of student achievement told a similar story. New York City public school students also improved on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a set of standardized tests conducted by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), a bureau of the US Department of Education. Overall, 79% of New York City 4th graders performed at or above basic levels of achievement on the math exam, amounting to nearly a 12 percentage point gain since 2003, when Mayor Michael Bloomberg first took control of the school system. New York City 8th graders also showed improvements in math, with 57% performing at or above basic levels of

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achievement, an increase of three percentage points from the NAEP exam conducted in 2005, when it was last administered.

Therefore, there is evidence showing that the NYCPSS has made substantial gains in organizational performance. The question that remains is whether the CECs, and the general approach the NYCPSS has taken towards public participation, has played a substantial role in aiding central authorities in making such achievements.

Improved Performance Resulting from Environmental Buffering

Management of the social and political environment through well managed public participation processes is crucial to organizational performance, particularly in environments as diverse as New York City. Proper management of such efforts can lead to various benefits, including "legitimacy, a better-informed public, improved decision making, and altered patterns of political power." (Wang & Wart, 2007, p.266) Nonetheless, it is also true that "[c]itizen participation involves risk and uncertainty. Administrators have to invest their limited resources in participation programs, but participation can be time-consuming, costly, unwieldy, chaotic, and unproductive" (Yang, 2006, p. 574). Indeed, more chaotic forms of public participation may largely result in disruptions for public organizations, hampering the achievement of managerial goals while providing few social and political benefits.

Nevertheless, the evidence collected throughout this case study does suggest that the CECs have served as reasonably effective barriers to more noxious forms of political opposition. One way a CEC could perform this function is by simply prompting the Department of Education to rapidly address issues that are subject to action and compromise, thus preventing relatively minor citizen complaints from developing into more serious social

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and political problems. In the case of CEC 2, it became apparent that the Community Education Council was successful in seeking alterations in the implementation of some school policies through collaborative, rather than adversarial, partnerships and relationships. The stated changes in the district's middle school admissions policies, the implementation of the mathematics curriculum, and alterations in the delivery of support services for such mathematics instruction are just some examples that illustrate the CECs' ability to move the school system to respond to local resident needs, thus defusing what may subsequently become a basis for future antagonistic activism. When considered on a systemwide basis, this phenomenon enables school system officials and administrators to focus on improving school and student achievement while experiencing less social and political disruption.

A retrospective look at the data also reveals that the diversity of public participation mechanisms in the NYCPSS created an environment where social and political opposition could be dispersed across a variety of structures, allowing the Department of Education to more ably deal with such opposition. Again, in the case of District 2, the generally collaborative fashion in which CEC 2 members interacted with school administrators stood in sharp contrast to the way members of other local public participation mechanisms, such as the District President's Council, engaged in such interactions. In this case, the set of community activists and interest groups more staunchly opposed to the Bloomberg reforms opted to redirect their protest efforts through other available public participation mechanisms rather than through the CECs. This dispersion of opposition may have effectively diluted the social and political pressures experienced by the Department of Education, again allowing the school system to focus more directly on efforts aimed specifically at the achievement of managerial goals.

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Finally, in some cases, the observed community education council was able to perform this buffering function by directly absorbing public opposition, rather than attenuating it through preemptive service improvements or dispersing it across several public participation structures. In the case of CEC 3, we observed that the community education councils could act as forums where a diverse group of public interests could collaborate and compromise on a range of policies important to diverse stakeholder interests. CEC 3's ability to arrive at a consensus on policy related to access to vacant seats in high-quality middle schools, as well as access to coveted positions in Gifted and Talented programs, shows that these mechanisms can facilitate changes in school policy while allowing the overall system to continue focusing on improving organizational performance.

Issues in the Implementation of Public Participation Efforts

While the CECs and the greater system of public participation in the NYCPSS appear to have facilitated the achievement of managerial values through this buffering function, we should recognize some issues critics have raised regarding this dynamic. Some critics argue that the Bloomberg administration has unduly sought to influence local level social and political phenomena through the creation and of a central office intended to deliver support services to CECs and school-based public participation structures. Critics argue that this office may have drifted from delivering support to seeking to micromanage local level social and political phenomena.

To encourage and manage parent participation, the Department of Education formed a specific unit within the Chancellor's Office – the Office of Parent Engagement (now designated the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy) – to guide and support parent

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involvement efforts. Through the skillful use of this office, the Department of Education has sought to directly address many problems commonly encountered by families as they seek access to educational services, thus directly alleviating a set of problems that may unnecessarily agitate communities. A major project implemented by this office was the creation of a new staff position titled "parent coordinator," intended to provide students and families with a dedicated advocate at the individual school level who would "support students in the broadest sense" (NYC Department of Education, 2007c). The role of parent coordinators is to help parents in navigating the school system, file paperwork, answer questions, and otherwise aid students and families in participating in activities and accessing resources supporting academic success. But in addition to addressing the customer-service related problems, such school-based officers appear to give the central Department of Education a pathway by which to directly influence social phenomena occurring at the school level. Parent coordinators and their supervisors, the parent support officers, lend direct technical support to the CECs, providing another avenue by which the central Department of Education administrators may influence local level social and political action. While serving an important customer-service function, some observers express alarm at the influence of the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy upon local social and political phenomenon. Critics argue that parent coordinators lack independence and serve primarily as agents of the Department of Education. Principals, rather than parents, have the exclusive authority to hire and evaluate parent coordinators, and parent coordinators are not required to have children in the public school system. These factors may erode the ability of parent coordinators to "build independent parent bases in their schools and make principals and teachers more accountable" (Barrett, 2003). Moreover, some have noted that parent coordinators

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emphasize the improvement of service delivery, but do not seek to motivate parents to become meaningfully involved in school governance. Parent coordinators' duties are, "…important things, but they are not at all about power-sharing" (Robinson, 2006). Again, in some instances, improvements in the achievement of managerial goals may have come at the cost of the political empowerment of communities.

However, we must recognize the complex nature of the relationship between managerial and political values. While traditional public administrative theory highlights the inherent tension existing between these two sets of values, more recent research reveals that these value systems can, at times, be mutually sustaining. In an article on the relationship between public participation and trust in government, Wang and Wart find evidence suggesting that trust in government is higher when "the public perceives a high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the government" (Wang & Wart, 2007, p. 275) That is, o*rganizational performance itself* appears to be a contributing factor to the degree of public trust in government. Thus, utilizing public participation mechanisms in ways that seek to facilitate improvements in organizational performance may in some ways improve, but in other ways diminish, the actualization of political values. Indeed, the relationship between these competing sets of values is complex and requires future research.

Achieving Political Imperatives

Nonetheless, managerial values will conflict, at least at times, with politically driven demands for more immediate forms of responsiveness to the public in the administration of public organizations. Again, David Rosenbloom highlights this tension:

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Once public administration is considered a political endeavor, emphasis is inevitably placed on a different set of values than those promoted by the managerial approach. "Efficiency" becomes highly suspect…The political approach to public administration stresses the values of representativeness, political responsiveness, and accountability…These are viewed as crucial to the maintenance of a constitutional democracy, especially in view of the rise of the contemporary administrative state…(Rosenbloom, 1983, p. 221).

Thus, in considering the effectiveness of the CECs and the overall system of public participation, we must also specifically focus on this political perspective. Are the CECs succeeding, or making progress in, actualizing political imperatives? Indeed, we must recognize that "the values sought by the political approach to public participation are frequently in tension with those of the managerial approach" (Rosenbloom, 193, p.221). While the data illustrated some improvements in the achievement of political goals, it also revealed that such achievements are bounded by pressures to achieve managerial priorities. Thus, the victories of the Department of Education in improving school and student achievement require tradeoffs that limit the actualization of political values such as representativeness and responsiveness to community demands.

Parental Control of Participation Structures

This case study revealed some improvements in the achievement of political values. One of the strengths of the CECs from the political perspective, in contrast to the former community school boards, lies in its formal structure. As noted in Chapter 3, the New York

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State Education law requires that 9 of the 12 members of the CECs be parents of children presently enrolled in a district public school. This legal requirement stands in contrast to the former community school boards, which had no restrictions on their composition. While parents of children in the public school system could run for seats on the former community school boards, seats were not specifically reserved for parents of public school students. In fact, a 1995 survey of community school board members revealed that only about 1/3rd of community school board members had children presently enrolled in the public school system (Ravitch, 2000, p. 29). Many school boards were instead controlled by leaders of various special interest groups. Often, school boards were controlled by de facto representatives for teachers or administrators unions, affiliates of elected public officials, or aspiring politicians themselves. While many would argue that members of the community at large should play a role in the functioning of community school boards, the degree of control by non-parents had arguably tipped power excessively in favor of these special interests, eroding the legitimacy of these structures. Indeed, the combination of influence by special interest groups, coupled with frequent accusations of corruption, led to structures that, "[f]ew…would be willing to hold…as exemplars of democracy" (Robinson, 2006, p. 6).

Case study evidence appears to support the idea that changes in the formal composition of the CECs' membership may have improved the legitimacy of these structures. In addition to the inherent face validity of parental control of participative mechanisms, there were specific instances where the public seemed to have softened its criticism of Department of Education policies precisely because of the support of CEC parent-members for these policies. For example, CEC 30's support for the city's HIV education curriculum helped soften public opposition, as parents noted that the CEC

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members supporting this policy would have their children personally affected. Thus, changing the composition of public participation mechanisms to provide for parental control of the CECs may have improved their credibility and legitimacy, thus reducing public opposition to some policy reforms. And curiously, we again find ourselves in a situation where these participative mechanisms are simultaneously serving both political and managerial ends.

Evidence in terms of Policy Outputs

While improving the legitimacy of these structures through changes to their formal composition is a substantial contribution to the systemic actualization of political values, effectiveness as measured by a simple ability to produce policy changes is another important consideration in discussions regarding CEC effectiveness from the political perspective. Two of the social goals we used to analyze collected data – incorporating public values into decisionmaking and improving the substantive quality of decisions – helped us show that our sample of CECs were in some cases able to prompt policy and administrative changes that reflected local level priorities and values. Again, some of these policy outputs included changes such as adjustments to the middle school admissions process in District 2, substantial changes in policies for allocating vacant seats for highly regarded schools in District 3, a one year delay in the restructuring of an elementary school in District 26, and CEC 31's policy advisory resulting in a citywide change in the school system's sex offender notification policy.

A subsequent direct request for information from the Department of Education revealed other district level policy and administrative changes. These changes included the

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creation of new Gifted and Talented programs in District 10, changes in the citywide admissions policy for Gifted and Talented programs prompted by a task force led by CEC 3, improvements in safety in areas surrounding District 23 schools, and changes in bus routes to better reflect the needs of families in the Staten Island's District 18. These changes came as a result of collaborations between the Department of Education and the CECs and reveal a willingness on the part of the Department of Education to be responsive to some kinds of policy and administrative change requests. Thus, these collaborations illustrate that the CECs can be effective in making policy changes, again making them, to some degree, politically effective structures.

However, the successes of CECs in actualizing political values should not be seen solely in terms of their ability to produce discrete policy changes; they should also be seen in terms of their overall development as legitimate and respected institutions for public participation in government. While the citywide media has highlighted problems and a rough initial transition period, personal interviews and more locally based media reports point towards substantial improvements in their functioning and the level of respect they elicit from local communities. One Department of Education official highlighted these developments:

> *Many have become beacons of community activity, specifically CEC 15 and CEC 20 of Brooklyn, as well as CEC 31 of Staten Island. The local police commands, elected officials, community planning boards, and various social/religious organizations routinely attend the meetings.*

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Such local level developments show a growing community interest in the workings of the CECs and an increased investment by community leaders that was absent just a few years prior. Such investment is important for their long terms development as credible participative institutions.

Yet while many research studies highlight the importance of developing the legitimacy of public participation mechanisms in the eyes of the public, we must recognize that the *administrator's* perspective on the legitimacy of these structures is equally important. Recent research reveals that administrators' trust in participation institutions is an important mediator of their personal trust in citizens and affects the way in which they implement public participation activities. Improving the view *public administrators* have of these structures may be as important as improving the view of the general public.   Again, the final goal is one of attaining a more authentic form of public participation that "works for all parties and stimulates interest and investment in both administrators and citizens" (King, Feltey and Susel, 1998, p. 317) Such an achievement would be beneficial for the systemic attainment of both political and managerial values, and in the interest of public administrators, elected officials, and the general public alike.

Problems with Actualizing Democratic Imperatives

Nevertheless, we must recognize that there are inevitable limits to the degree to which political values can be actualized within centralized administrative systems, particularly when the achievement of managerial goals appear to be the overriding priority in the public's consciousness. Despite some Department of Education successes in reconciling the

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achievement of managerial priorities with the preservation of political values, the system continues to wrestle with the inherent tension between these two values systems.

Interestingly, a factor that may improve the legitimacy of the CECs in the eyes of the public may simultaneously impede their political effectiveness in other areas. While many posit that providing for parental control of the CECs may aid in improving the legitimacy of these structures, other note that this legal requirement comes with considerable political costs. In particular, some veteran observers highlight the problems associated with depending solely on parents, often with varying levels of experience in community activism, to represent the public interest in their interactions with Department of Education officials. Veteran activists highlight that for all their shortcomings, one of the strengths of the former community school boards was that their memberships were generally filled by experienced community activists skilled in the art of politics and negotiations. For these activists, these political skills are integral for effective service in any public participation structure. The requirement that most CEC members have children currently enrolled in the public school system systematically excludes those participants – many formerly having children in the school system -- who are most skilled and experienced in community activism and therefore best prepared to negotiate effectively with public administrators and officials. Moreover, some of these activists argue that parents with children currently in the public school system may, in fact, be *less* motivated than other members of the community to produce change and demand accountability from district schools. Some parents may fear retaliation from school system administrators for their activism in opposition to Department of Education policies which may have a negative impact their children's education. Indeed, parental control of the CECs, while potentially improving the legitimacy of these structures in the eyes of the

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public, may simultaneously reduce their ability to exert themselves as autonomous political entities.

Moreover, the Department of Education continues to struggle with problems in facilitating public participation that are seemingly endemic to urban public school systems. The inherent limits mayoral control places upon the degree of democratic participation are compounded by the chronic problem large cities have in garnering interest and participation in the administration of their public schools. New York City has historically battled with the problem of low voter turnout for school board elections, and it faces similar difficulties, at least in some districts, in garnering parental interest in service on the Community Education Councils. At the outset of the creation of the CECs, local media reports noted a dearth in the number of applications for service on the CECs, particularly in lower performing school districts. Moreover, in 2007, many school districts reported only "skimpy attendance" in district candidate forums, where the public has an opportunity participate in the election of CEC candidates (Bosman, 2007). Finally, there has been a steady decrease in the aggregate number of candidates running for CEC positions across the city. Together, these factors chronicle the continuing struggles of the NYCPSS in creating an effective system of public participation.

Inability to Affect Broader Policy Issues

Finally, while the CECs have been capable of producing local level school policy and administrative changes of moderate significance, they have not been similarly able to affect the most significant, systemwide policy initiatives promoted by the Bloomberg administration. While several of the mayor's policy initiatives were heralded by many as

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bold steps in the right direction, there have been some policies that have been particularly controversial and staunchly opposed by the general public. In such instances, we would expect that public participation mechanisms would exhibit at least some ability to amend such policies. However, evidence shows that even in instances of staunch opposition, the mayor can overlook the recommendations of these structures and implement desired policy changes with virtually no revisions.

Perhaps the most recent controversy where there has been nearly unanimous opposition by the public to a mayorally set policy has been in the public's opposition to a cellular phone ban for students within public school buildings. After implementing the Impact Schools program, which put additional resources into improving school safety and enacted a program of random "stop-and-frisks" in high-crime schools, the Department of Education found itself confiscating more cellular phones than weapons. Carrying cell phones in school buildings violates a decade-old policy banning the carrying of electronic devices in schools, as such devices often acted as incentives for theft and violence on school grounds. The Bloomberg administration opted to strictly enforce this policy, noting that the use of cell phones by students were a distraction in the classroom, made it easier to cheat on tests, and could facilitate violence or other illegal activity on school grounds. The enactment of this policy, without compromise or consultation with parents or their representative groups, offended parents who, for public safety reasons, wished to stay in touch with their children. Enforcement of this policy sparked myriad protests and the passage of local legislation challenging this policy. Yet after more than a year of consultations, protests, and legal challenges against the Department of Education, the cell phone ban continues to stand, both

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as an irritant to parents and as a symbol of the decisive power the mayor ultimately holds over school policy.

There have been other instances where they mayor has exerted his statutory power in opposition to the will of the public and its representative institutions. In 2004, the mayor asserted his authority over the Panel for Education Policy – the citywide advisory panel designed to advise the mayor on systemwide school policy issues -- through his eleventh-hour firing of two appointees who pledged to vote against the mayor's decision to end the city's long standing practice of social promotions -- the practice of automatically promoting students regardless of academic performance. On the local level, there have been other instances where the Department of Education has failed to consult parents and their representative structures in decisions regarding the siting of new small schools and charter schools. Thus, many of the most significant, systemwide policy initiatives continue to be driven centrally from the mayor's office.

New Propositions

The prior section suggests a host of connections and relationships among the concepts and variables discussed throughout this study. I now posit more specific propositions based on these findings that can serve as subjects for future research and elaboration within similar policy contexts.

My first proposition addresses the relationship between social capital and the general effectiveness of public participative mechanisms:

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Proposition 1: Public participation mechanisms operating in districts with higher levels of social capital will exhibit higher levels of effectiveness in producing substantive policy changes than similar mechanisms operating in districts with lower levels of social capital.

This proposition connotes that social capital, rather than other factors, is the defining characteristic determining the effectiveness of these public participation mechanisms. I suggest that despite legal and structural similarities, public participation mechanisms functioning both within and among different centralized urban public school systems will exhibit levels of effectiveness matching the level of social capital present within the school district.

Moreover, I suggest that this relationship between social capital and public participation mechanism effectiveness will hold even when controlling for socioeconomic status, leading me to posit that:

Proposition 2: Public participation mechanisms operating in districts exhibiting similar levels of social capital but different degrees of socioeconomic status will exhibit similar levels political and managerial effectiveness.

Again, this proposition suggests that the underlying factor explaining the effectiveness of public participation mechanisms is social capital, rather than socioeconomic status. Thus, we might expect to find similar levels of participative mechanism effectiveness in wealthier school districts with high levels of social capital as we would find with poorer school

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districts with higher levels of "ethnic" social capital. The presence of ethnic social capital may compensate for the lower levels of wealth present in such communities.

In addition to the importance of social capital in explaining the effectiveness of these structures, I also posit that the working styles and relationships of the members of these structures with respect to public administrators will have an independent effect on their effectiveness. Thus, I posit:

Proposition 3: The more collaborative the working styles and relationships among participative mechanism members and public administrators, the more effective these structures will be in producing substantive policy changes.

This proposition challenges the idea that effectiveness of these public participation structures is the dependent upon an adversarial relationship between citizen members and administrators. Rather, we post the opposite, that collaborative, rather than adversarial, working relationships between citizen members and public administrators increase the achievement of substantive policy and administrative changes. Conversely, adversarial working styles and relationships will result in comparatively lower levels of mechanism effectiveness.

We must also note that case study evidence suggests that the nature of disputed issues themselves seem to affect the likelihood of a policy change being made. Thus, I posit:

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Proposition 4: The greater the level of concern with systemic social equity reflected in a policy revision request, the greater the likelihood that such a policy change will be made by public officials.

Thus, as we have seen throughout this study, policy advisories requesting changes that strongly reflect the ideal of systemic social equity are more likely to be met than requests that would more specifically benefit interests within a particular community school district. Systemic social equity is a value that is more aligned with the centralized administrative form than are values reflecting diversity and difference in the provision of public services.

Finally, case study evidence prompts me to investigate the relationship between systemic performance and trust in the public school system. Thus, I propose:

Proposition 5: Across urban public school systems, higher levels of school and student achievement will correlate positively with higher levels of citizen trust in the public school system, despite varying systems of public participation.

Here, I suggest that higher levels of systemic performance, as illustrated by standardized performance measures, may override other factors in determining aggregate levels of public trust in the school system. Thus, it is possible that focusing on improving the performance of urban public school systems, rather than providing for optimally effective systems of public participation, may be the best way to improve the public's confidence and trust in public schools.

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Other Areas of Future Research

Findings regarding the ability of CECs to achieve limited policy outputs and outcomes, particularly in areas supporting school functioning, warrant future research. Such research should focus on the functioning of like participative mechanisms in other contexts to see their relative success in achieving policy changes in support areas of school functioning within mayorally controlled school systems. Similar findings in other like contexts may illustrate the generalizeability of this finding, supporting a focus by public participation mechanisms on these types of policies across large centralized urban school systems.

The success of a number of councils in achieving more substantial policy changes in areas where new proposed policies would yield greater congruence with the greater regime values of the current mayoral administration also warrant further study. Specifically, do other cases corroborate this link between regime values and the success of participative mechanism in advocating for policy changes? Can public participation mechanisms exploit a commonality between the values underlying their policy proposals and the values of the ruling administration? Future research is warranted to elaborate on this finding.

Finally, the surprising inability of CECs to successfully collaborate with other community groups in opposition to stated DOE policies warrants further investigation. Simply stated, are public participation mechanisms destined to be ineffective in challenging core central school system mandates in this and other like cases? Or can such mechanisms, over time, successfully join with other activists and entities to exert traditional forms of political pressure upon the ruling administration to achieve desired change? And if so, what specific political strategies yield the greatest effectiveness? Such research can help shed light on this seeming implication of mayoral control, as the exercise of political power and

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influence over policy processes lies at the heart of the very justification for the existence of public participation mechanisms.

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Appendix A
Semi-Structured Interview Instrument

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this project. I greatly appreciate your help and cooperation.

This research is solely for use as part of my dissertation. All information will be kept confidential. Before we begin, I would like to ask if I can tape record this conversation to facilitate note-taking. Is it okay if I tape this conversation?

Opening question:

I am interested in learning more about the CECs and the kinds of activities they perform, both broadly and specifically. Can you tell me about your experiences working with the CEC over the past two years and the kinds of activities you've pursued?

Outputs and Outcomes - General

1. What kinds of issues have you worked with the CECs on?
2. What have been the main outcomes of these efforts?
3. Are there certain kinds of issues that are more given to collaboration? What kinds of issues are these?
4. Are there certain kinds of issues that are more difficult to collaborate on? Why?

Social Goals

Capacity Building

5. Has your CEC undertaken any specific efforts to educate and inform the public about policy issues important to them / the district?
6. What have been the most prominent educative efforts?
7. How has your own knowledge about policy issues developed during your service on the CEC?

Policy & Administrative

8. Have there been any revisions or changes in aspects of school policy that occurred because of CEC recommendations?
9. Can you describe these revisions or changes?
10. Have there been any initiatives introduced because of CEC recommendations?
11. Can you describe these initiatives?
12. Have school operations improved in your district because of information you gathered from the CEC?

Relationships

13. How has the relationship between the CEC membership and DOE administrators developed over your CEC's term?
14. Would you say that trust among stakeholders has increased, decreased, or stayed the same over time?
15. Were there any conflicts among stakeholders that were reduced or resolved as a result of CEC processes?

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Defining Effective Public Participation

16. What do you think are the key challenges to garnering effective public participation in New York City's public schools?
17. Are there any specific changes you would make to improve the process of public participation?
18. What are the strongest aspects of the current system of public participation?

Conclusion

19. Can you suggest any other publications/documents that may be helpful to review?
20. Can you suggest other people I should speak with?
21. Have I missed anything that you feel is important for understanding the CECs and / or the process of public participation in New York City's public schools?

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APPENDIX B: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS RUBRIC

Name of Document:
Date:
Description:

Social Goal	*Questions asked of Document*
Educating and Informing the Public	1. Does the document indicate activities aimed at educating and informing the public about school policy/administration issues? 2. Describe this effort/activity 3. Who initiated and led this educative effort? (DOE, CEC membership, collaborative) 4. What systemic level was this effort related to? (school level policy, district level, region, citywide) 5. What was the effort about? (changes in school policy, curriculum issues, client service improvements, other?) 6. Was the information provided highly technical? 7. Does it appear that participants gained adequate knowledge about the issue? 8. Are there any other important details?
Incorporating Public Values into Decision Making	1. Does the document indicate activity by the CEC aimed at having specific values or priorities included in school policy or administrative decision? 2. Describe this activity. 3. What systemic level is this activity related to? 4. What was the outcome? Was a policy initiated or changed? 5. If not, how did administrators respond to this activity? Did they explain the reason for their decision? 6. Was the process towards the outcome collaborative? Conflictual? A mixture? 7. Are there any other important details?
Improving the Substantive Quality of Decisions	1. Does the document indicate efforts by the CEC to provide inputs into school policy /administrative processes such that systemic functioning is substantively improved? 2. Does it indicate efforts by administrators to gather information from the CEC aimed at improving systemic functioning? 3. Describe this activity. 4. What systemic level is this effort related to? 5. What was the outcome? Was information incorporated such that school functioning potentially improved? 6. Was the process towards the outcome collaborative? Conflictual? A mixture? 7. Are there any other important details?

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Appendix C

Case Study Sources by Type

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- NYU Public Service Scholarship, 1999-2001
- NYU Phyllis Wagner Scholarship, 1999-2001
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- Best Research Paper Award, New York State Assembly Internship Program, 1998
- Diamond Fellowship / CUNY Pipeline Program for Careers in College Teaching and Research for Minority Undergraduates, 1997

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