

**SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND GOVERNANCE CHANGES IN NEW YORK CITY:
THE BATTLE TO DEFINE EQUITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACROSS
SHIFTING TERRAIN**

by

Liza N. Pappas

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract**SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND GOVERNANCE CHANGES IN NEW YORK CITY:
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by

Liza Pappas

Adviser: Professor Ofelia Garcia

This dissertation describes and captures the contentious politics concerning school closing proposals introduced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) in years 2010-2011. It analyzes a variety of actors' framings of school closures, as well as respective actions they take to influence policy. Drawing upon interviews, observations, surveys, and documents, this study explores two fundamentally distinct and non-communicative theories of school improvement. The NYCDoE's rationale for school closings is part of a larger school improvement framework built on the pillars of choice, accountability, and a new management and governance structure, what can be understood as neo-decentralization. The Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ), a parent-led education coalition, challenges the rationale and implementation of school closure policy, and proposes an alternative vision and set of actions for schools to improve. Utilizing interpretative policy analysis (Yanow, 2000) across data and settings helped focus on how the meanings of policies are communicated to and "read" by various constituencies. Analysis revealed a sharp contrast between philosophies and practices promulgated on how schools improve. Other findings point to strategies for those school communities engaged in the phenomenon of school closings, contesting specific school closing proposals or proposing viable alternatives.

The central finding of this dissertation is the role that delocalized centralism plays as part of the Portfolio Management Model (PMM), and the challenges it presents to the communities it

purports to serve. PMM offers more than a new approach for restructuring the delivery of education services; it remaps the school district into an open marketplace and reshapes schools' relationships to neighborhoods and student and families' relationships to their neighborhood schools. Delocalized centralism extends the notion of decentralized centralism (Karlsen, 2000) by emphasizing the geographical aspects of governance arrangements. Delocalized centralism explains how accountability is removed from local agents, leaving families without actual places to go with their questions and concerns about their children's education. The NYCDoE's new management structure serves a function of conflict management, and appears to buffer the Central Office from the needs and input of students, parents, and teachers. The remapping of the school governance terrain poses significant new challenges not only to families, but also for education organizing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On Tuesday, January 26, 2010, more than three thousand people packed the auditorium of Brooklyn Technical High School in Brooklyn, New York, to protest nineteen school closure proposals announced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and then-School Chancellor Joel Klein. Parents, teachers, students, community residents, elected officials, union representatives, and school alumni waited for their turn at the microphone to demand that the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) not close schools. One by one, more than 300 speakers testified until 3:00 a.m. that school closings would have disastrous consequences, and that families and communities ought to have more of a say in what would happen to their children's education. When Dr. Annie Martin, President of the New York City chapter of the NAACP was not allowed extra time to continue her comments – that there was a new form of segregation in New York City public schools, and that school closings would displace thousands of low-income students of color – three thousand people stood on their feet and with a vociferous roar chanted “Whose schools?! Our schools!”¹

School closures are an increasingly common strategy used by school districts nationwide to address the problems of low-performing schools (Kowal & Hassel, 2008), yet what little empirical research exists suggests that closings on average do not significantly improve student achievement (de la Torre and Gwynne, 2009).² In 2009, the United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan promised the federal government's support – more than three billion dollars – to close the bottom 5% (~5,000) of schools across the country.³ According to the federal Department of Education, only 18 of more than 3,700 school closings in the years 2009-2011

¹ Field notes, January 26, 2010

² These researchers underscored that school districts need to have a supply of better performing schools that students can attend.

³ Federal school turnaround policy calls on administrators to identify failing schools, and implement one of four intervention models, including replacing teachers and or the principal, reopening the school under charter school management, or shutting down the school completely.

were financed through federal school turnaround policy (Zubrzycki, 2012). Federal school improvement grants, however, have been significant in recognizing and rewarding a national trend to restructure failing schools by providing school districts resources and incentives. In school year 2007-2008, 3,500 schools across the country were either planning for or were in the process of restructuring, a 50% increase from the year before (Steiner, 2009).

School closings are not new considerations for school districts eager to demonstrate their willingness to take action. In the late 1930s to the 1950s, and again in the mid 1970s through the 1980s, school closings were introduced to remedy budget shortfalls and declining enrollments (Colton & Frelich, 1979). In the 1960s, school closings were also pursued as part of desegregation plans (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967). In each of these periods community members and parents demonstrated similar fervor in their opposition to school closures. Much of the historical literature that discusses community opposition to school closings explains it as a concern for the loss of the relationships and identity (Berger, 1983).

In the twenty-first century, school closings have been re-introduced as an intervention, this time to remedy dismal academic outcomes. Administrators, under pressure to report increased test scores have latched on to school closings as a gallant endeavor to revive schools struggling to meet their benchmarks for years, in some cases even for decades. Most certainly one factor that has helped justify contemporary school closures is the sobering reality of profound and widespread school failure. But the numbers of school closing proposals that school districts are announcing in recent years indicate that school closures are being pursued as a uniform school reform plan in of themselves. Moreover, closure proposals are mostly being pursued in school communities that have been neglected for decades. These are the just a few of the pivotal issues that many skeptics of school closure policy are raising.

In November 2009, the Mayor declared that he will replace the bottom 10% of low performing schools in New York City (NYC) in the remaining years of his third term in office.⁴ While Department of Education administrators have insisted that school closings will ensure better educational options and outcomes, parent and community leaders, elected officials, union representatives and educators have expressed outrage over a lack of clarity and transparency of school closing proposals, including consistent criteria for identifying failing schools, clear replacement plans for students, as well as a genuine invitation for their input. They argue that public schools belong to them, NOT City Hall, and that sustainable school reform necessitates that district and community leaders work together (Communities for Excellent Public Schools, 2010).

Debates over school closings today offer a lens into perennial issues concerning school purpose, governance, and to whom the school is accountable. Throughout the history of American K-12 education, many have debated whether school decisions should rest with professionals or with the larger school community (Kaestle, 1973; Reese, 1995; Ravitch, 1974). Across this vast country, in different locales and over different circumstances, parent and community leaders have been engaged in a tug-of-war with school administrators over decisions affecting their neighborhood schools and kids. School districts in the United States continue to express an ambivalent commitment to parent and community engagement, especially when communities vocalize visions and ideas that contradict their own (Perlstein, 2004).

Timar and Tyack (1999) write that the history of education governance in the United States in the last 200 years can be chronicled by four significant sociopolitical periods: 1) local lay control; 2) centralization of control; 3) decentralization of control; and 4) market control. Each

⁴ Mayor Bloomberg address at Education Nation Summit, September 27, 2010. No. 406 www.nyc.gov

period represents specific ideologies regarding the direction for public education, and who has the authority and expertise to make decisions on behalf of students. Centralization and decentralization, terms that originated in the business world, refer to the decision-making structure of any organization. Centralized organizational structures rely on one individual or a few individuals, at the hierarchical top, to make decision and provide direction for the organization. Decentralized structures allow teams at various levels to make a variety of decisions, although those decisions do not necessarily involve the most important matters, such as setting direction for the organization. Both terms have been used to define organizational decision-making structures in education. “Centralization” has been used interchangeably with bureaucracy, to describe tight management control and efficiency.

Decentralization is a bit more of a slippery term. It has been used to describe the transfer of control from school administrators to parent and community leaders as well as the transfer of administrative control from the Central Office to school principals (David, 1989; Wissler & Ortiz, 1986). Others have argued as will I, that centralization and decentralization can be understood better as processes than organizational decision-making structures (Wohlstetter & McCurdy, 1991). Governance as a dynamic set of interactions involves diverse political actors who utilize divergent strategies, discursive and political tactics to influence policy (what I will refer to as framings and enactments). In this dissertation, I look closely at the new strategy of decentralization as part of NYCDoE’s emerging school management and governance model, Portfolio Management, from here on in referred to as the Portfolio Management Model (PMM).

Paul Hill (2000) developed the concept of portfolio management for school systems, envisioning that Central Offices could shed their traditional role and relationship with schools, and embrace a new role that would allow both more flexibility to meet increasing demands to

demonstrate academic performance. PMM shifts the Central Office role to a manager of a “diverse provider strategy.” This means that school districts set expectations for academic standards and then manage a diverse set of providers to operate schools. Over the past few years, school districts across the United States have started to adopt the PMM framework, but little research has been conducted on its efficacy. PMM incorporates fundamental strategies of choice, test-based accountability, and a revised relationship between the Central Office and schools, what many understand to be an effort in decentralization. I review the NYCDoE’s application of the PMM in chapter four, and for the purposes of this study, I focus on their decentralization strategy, and the impact this has in the public sphere as brought to light through the school closing process.

NYCDoE’s new decentralization strategy, what it originally termed “Empowerment,” grants school principals increased control over school resources and increased decision-making to more productively lead their school communities. The general theory behind this change in management approach is in line with former decentralization efforts, such as site-based management, which premised that school effectiveness would be enhanced if outcome goals were set at the top of the system, and implementation were controlled by the school site (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992). In New York City, PMM has also allowed for the creation of school support organizations or “network teams” that serve as the support structure for schools, formerly based in districts and regions, and at the Central Office. Individual school principals select the network with whom they will work, and have the authority to fire them if they do not prove to be effective. Significantly, in this arrangement the Central Office’s role has shifted too; it now functions less as a support infrastructure and more as a monitoring and evaluative body.

It is important to note that network teams in New York City were designed to be ageographic; they can work with schools across all five boroughs of New York City, but are not identified with any particular locale. Network Leaders, the director of network teams, have taken over the instructional oversight responsibilities that formally belonged to Superintendents. In the new management arrangement, Superintendents have been directed to provide assistance to parents (by addressing their concerns and responding to any complaints related to their child's education), and overall to assume responsibility for developing a cooperative relationship with the parents and the school community (Amendment S5887). Superintendents remain in their assigned community school districts however they do not have jurisdiction over schools' instructional practices. As the school closing process demonstrated in New York City, these shifts have left parents and school communities at a loss about who will answer their questions.

In this dissertation, I will argue that in the process of school closings, the NYCDoe's neo-decentralization strategy serves a function of conflict management in that "it allows the state to diffuse the sources of conflict and to provide additional layers of insulation between them and the rest of the system" (Weiler, 1990, p. 53). I will also argue that the Department's new management approach to delivering education services can be better understood as "*decentralized centralism*" (Karlsen, 2000), which captures the tensions between the Department's intentions to move more administrative control to schools and its need to retain centralized control. Lastly, through the school closings process in 2009-2011, I will investigate what appears to be a delocalizing aspect of PMM. I focus on concerns voiced by members of the public, and by Superintendents about families' lack of accessibility to the new network support structure. I also look at the efforts of the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), one of the most influential parent organizing groups in New York City, as it incorporates a

freelance component to its organizing model in order to confront school closure policy.

Ultimately, I argue that both NYCDoE and CEJ shifts can be understood as a dynamic I am calling *delocalized centralism*.

1.1 Study Background

For the past ten years, I have been primarily interested in community organizing for school reform, which to me represents ordinary persons affecting system change. Over the past decade, I have had the privilege of working with several education-organizing groups, adult and youth-led, that have been active in high-school reform processes across the country. I have experienced firsthand the positive impact of student, parent, and community leaders' active participation in school decision-making, as well as their ongoing struggles to be heard as they are often left outside of fundamental decisions concerning their schools. In New York City, under Mayor Bloomberg's controlled school system, and in an increasingly corporatized, technocratic, and market driven arena of education policymaking, I want to understand how organizing groups assert their intimate knowledge of neighborhoods, schools, and students, strategize to build power, and ultimately impact decision-making processes and decisions.

While practitioners and researchers across the ideological spectrum tend to support increased parent involvement in schools, significant differences persist in how parent involvement is defined (Baker & Soden, 1997; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parent organizing continues to challenge traditional models such as Parent Teacher Associations, as well as consumer-based frameworks that view parents as customers, which are on the rise. Organizing efforts aim to address systemic, rather than simply individual problems in schools, and mounting research suggests that community-organizing groups can create an external force for change in

school district policy (Anyon, 2005; Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Mediratta et al, 2009; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2011).

My interests in school improvement also include district-led reform efforts – specifically how school districts are reconstructing their relevance and roles, and reshaping their relationships with schools and school communities. I have worked as part of a professional development institute for district and school leaders, and on a national study that focused on how school districts are orienting their work to support schools’ capacity for expanding opportunities for students to learn. In these projects, I learned how school district leaders are discussing how to more intentionally focus their work on learning improvement (Honig & Copeland, 2008).

Through my ten years in school reform work, I have become more curious about the comparative ways school district and community leaders think about how schools improve, and what kinds of changes will lead to improvement. The first education reform group I worked with, the Cross City Campaign for Urban School reform, advocated for the two separate areas of work I am examining in this study: meaningful roles for parent, student, and community leaders in school decision-making processes, and school district facilitation of school decision-making. At the Cross City national office we pursued these areas separately, and we often struggled to reconcile how they coalesced or at least informed each other.

As I began my research, I channeled my interests in studying conflicting theories and practices between school district and community leaders into the topic which has exploded in New York City and across the United States: school closings. In New York City, school closings took on a new significance when in January 2010 the Mayor’s Panel for Education Policy approved nineteen schools to be closed despite vociferous opposition. I have found that the contentious issue of school closures provides a window into starkly different understandings of

the most commonly used buzz words in education debates: *education equity, accountability, and parent and community engagement*. It also provides a window into the rapidly changing landscape of public education that is restructuring more than just the delivery of educational services; it is restructuring the relationship of schools and neighborhoods.

1.2 Study Purpose and Research Questions

In this dissertation, I study conflict in the school closing process in New York City as the lens to describe and analyze how school and community leaders understand educational equity, accountability, and community engagement in school decision-making. Using interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 1996, 2000; Fischer, 2003), I examine data from interviews, observations, public hearing transcripts, and surveys and compare how the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) explains and pursues school closures as a school improvement strategy, and how the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), a parent-led education coalition of citywide community-based organizations, challenges the rationale of school closure policy, and proposes an alternative vision and set of actions for schools to improve.

NYCDoE and CEJ are not the only vocal leaders on school closing policy in New York City. I focus on the NYCDoE and CEJ to compare the positions of school officials to that of some parent and community leaders. Of course no group in NYC, CEJ or any other, is broad enough to speak for all parent and community leaders. Moreover, CEJ and NYCDoE organizations are not monolithic organizations. The politics surrounding school closings are complex partially because of the number of stakeholders involved, the convolution of their relationships, and the layered strategies they take to influence policy and decision-making. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the largest teachers' union in New York City, for instance, has strongly opposed school closure policy in New York City, issuing lawsuits in 2010, 2011,

and 2012. In 2010, the New York Supreme Court agreed with the UFT, the NAACP and other parties that the NYCDoE ignored provisions of state law in its pursuit to close 19 schools. The second and third cases are still pending. The UFT has consistently contended that the NYCDoE has relied too heavily on school closures to drive school improvement, and along with the Council for School Administrators (CSA) in 2012 has argued that school closings is a pretense for illegally firing staff.

A plethora of activist groups in NYC as well as state, city, and locally elected officials have also been outspoken in this debate – some joined the UFT lawsuits, others did not but have consistently criticized the Mayor’s endorsement of school closures. Among a wide variety of stakeholders, there has been remarkable agreement that the Department’s push to close schools is not based in research and risks burdening the most vulnerable students. However, this consensus has not been strong enough to stop the overall policy. The Mayor’s unilateral control of the school system has ensured his policies succeed. And again, school administrators are armed with data that many of the schools targeted for closure have not registered graduation rates for more than 50% of their students for years. Like studies before mine (Weatherley, Narver, & Elmore, 1983; Finnigan & Lever, 2011; Rogers, 2012) I chart deliberations over school closings in 2009-2010 to probe how different members of the public interpret school closure policy, as well as attempt to exert influence in the public sphere of education policymaking and governance.

Finally, in my study of the school closings process in New York City I focus on recent shifts in the public education landscape. The school closing process reveals a remarkably altered terrain, one in which the school system is being delocalized. School closings stand on three pillars of the Portfolio Management Model: school choice, test based accountability, and a new

ageographic management and governance arrangement that appears to have diluted lines of answerability to families and the larger public.

The following research question guides this study:

How do school and community leaders frame school closure policy and enact their positions on school closing proposals?

The following subset of questions are used to explore this primary research question:

- a. What are their respective goals, strategies, and concerns?
- b. What do school closure framings reveal about their underlying theories of equity, accountability and community engagement?
- c. How do various leaders confront, position, influence, or collaborate with each other?
- d. What challenges to school closure policy do members of the public who participate in the public hearings make?
- e. What kinds of shifts does the Department's decision to restructure its management and governance strategy have in the public education landscape?
How has the CEJ counterpublic shifted in response?

1.3 Conceptual Overview

This conceptual overview provides an overview of interpretative policy analysis as the foundation for this dissertation; it lays out the relative terms; and introduces the principal actors.

1.3.1 Interpretative policy analysis. In the tradition of interpretative policy analysis, this study acknowledges that the social world is characterized by multiple interpretations. In contrast to traditional policy analysis, which seeks to understand the impact of policy objectively, an interpretative approach recognizes the diverse experiences, knowledges, and subjectivities of

individuals and groups. Interpretative policy analysis then is an understanding of the struggle over meaning among institutions and standpoints, an interpretation of the interests of the actors involved, as well as their underlying theoretical assumptions. Fischer (2003) writes, “policymaking is a constant discursive struggle over the definition of problems, the boundaries of categories used to describe them, the criteria for their classification and assessment, and meanings of ideals that guide particular actions” (p. 60). Fischer reasons that the job of the policy analyst is to examine multiple understandings of that which otherwise appears to be a single concept, how these understandings are derived and how they are utilized to exert influence.

Seeing policies as interpretations of meanings, and not just as instruments of rationality, emphasizes aspects of communication “that include the language, objects, and acts associated with a policy and its implementing agency” (Yanow, 1996, p. 13). Yanow suggests we see policies as texts that are read and enacted by various stakeholder groups, and then approach the implementation of policies interpretatively through an organizational analysis of implementing agencies (and those agencies who block implementation). I employ Yanow’s methodological framework to examine primarily how NYCDoE administrators and CEJ community leaders *frame* and *enact* school closure policy. *Frames* concern how actors read and write school closing proposals (and proposals against school closings), especially those elements to which they direct their attention, and those they ignore (Yanow, 2000, p.11). They explain how distinct actors situate school problems and solutions in an attempt to shape education reform discourse and influence the direction of policy. But they also reveal the underpinnings of their (respective) school improvement frameworks, underlying reasoning, values and assumptions. *Enactments* in this study refer to the strategies and actions taken by each group. Ultimately, I strive to examine

contending frames, values, and courses of action in order to map the architecture of debate relative to school closure policy and the rapidly changing landscape of school governance.

1.3.2 Relative terms. Whereas equality refers to the state, quality, or ideal of being “equal,” *equity* refers to the state, quality, or ideal of being fair. Educational equity is more than equality of opportunity, but attention to equality in results for all students (Noguera, 2001). As an aspect of governance, *accountability* refers to answerability (both acknowledgment and assumption of responsibilities). In this study, school and community leaders utter “accountability” to refer to answerability, but differ on who is answerable to whom for what. *Community engagement* in this study is used interchangeably with participation. It refers to actual ways that parent and community leaders are involved in school decision-making. I also distinguish *engagement* from *involvement* to signify more active participation in governance (see Chapter 2). Community is an umbrella term for parent and community leaders. Family is a more inclusive term than parent but parent is widely recognized in the literature and used in both NYCDoE and CEJ organizations so I use this term.

1.3.3 Principal actors.

1.3.3.1 New York City Department of Education. In New York City, I approached education administrators at the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) responsible for creating school closing proposals and implementing school closures. The NYCDoE, the largest school operator in the United States employs more than 135,000 persons, and historically has been organized into three main levels (central level, district level, and school level). I focused my inquiry at the central office, which according to the NYCDoE organization website sets the relevant laws, regulations, and requirements for the entire school system.⁵ I interviewed

⁵ <http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm>

Deputy Chancellors and Central Office administrators in five offices⁶ that coordinate efforts on school closings (Division of School Support and Instruction, Division of Portfolio Development, Office of Accountability, and Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy). In the revised education governance legislation in New York City, Community School District Superintendents were delegated to work with the public on school closings, including meeting with school communities and presiding over hearings. I interviewed, surveyed and on a couple of occasions observed Superintendents' work in this realm. I also sought access to observe school closing proposal meetings conducted by the Division of Portfolio Development but was told that, "given the political sensitivity of school closings, researchers would not be welcome at such meetings" (fieldnotes, October 20, 2010). In a select number of schools proposed for closure, I interviewed principals, teachers and staff, and parents but the totality of these interviews were not analyzed for this dissertation.

1.3.3.2 *The New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ)*. The New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ) is a collaborative of community-based organizations and unions whose members include culturally diverse parents, community members, students and educators. Formed in 2006 from three regional organizing entities, CEJ sees its mission "to organize a movement to end the inequities in the public school system".⁷ Over the past six years, CEJ has emerged as the preeminent parent-led organizing group working for educational excellence and equity for all New York City's public schools. CEJ's organizational structure combines the leadership of African American and Latino parents from low-income communities with the institutional backing of its community-based organizational members (CEJ working papers, 2005). In an educational policy arena typically dominated by policymakers,

⁶ All offices at the NYCDoE central office have changed names.

⁷ as cited on CEJ's website, www.nyccej.org

administrators, and academics, CEJ has been able to appear and remain visible in the debates offering a distinct view on challenges in and solutions for public education from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE), the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), elected officials, and other prominent institutional actors. Between February 2010-May 2011, I observed CEJ's *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, which included their drafting a resolution for the passage of a *School Transformation Zone* as an alternative to closing schools and its unanimous passage in the City Council; convening a coalition of allies across activists, policymakers, and practitioners; and organizing parents and others at schools in danger of closure in order to pressure the NYCDoE not to close schools. I also interviewed and surveyed CEJ group members, organizers and parent leaders.

Before I turn to the theory that shapes my conceptual framework, I review first the context in which my study is situated—Mayoral Control in New York City.

1.3.4 The contemporary New York City governance context: Mayoral control. For most of New York City's history, school governance has consisted of an independent central board appointed by the mayor and local school boards appointed by the central board. For a thirty five year period however (from 1968 to 2003) New York City elementary and middle schools were governed by locally elected community school boards that had the power to appoint and remove superintendents, as well as veto or accept the superintendent's choice of principals (Gitell et. al, 1972; Ravitch, 2009). The 1969 legislature called this reorganization of the school system "*decentralization*" as it limited the power of the mayor, eventually replacing the central school authority with a seven member board – five seats appointed by each of the borough presidents, and only two appointed by the mayor - and provided for the election of 32 community district (neighborhood designated) school boards with parent and community

representatives. To this date, New Yorkers vigorously debate the efficacy of this decentralization arrangement.

In 2002, Michael R. Bloomberg was elected mayor of New York City, and he abolished the city's governance structure, the Board of Education and the local community school boards. In an education newsletter at that time, Bloomberg wrote, "Last month, Governor Pataki signed a law that assigns responsibility for the school system where it belongs – on the Mayor's desk" (August, 2002). With the approval of the legislature, Bloomberg renamed the system "the Department of Education, and moved its headquarters from Brooklyn to lower Manhattan, across from City Hall. Under the current configuration, the mayor appoints the Chancellor, as well as a majority of 8 seats on a 13 seat-advisory body, the Panel on Education Policy (PEP), which replaced the former Board of Education. The PEP is itself the subject of much debate, as the all 8 Mayoral appointees vote as a block in accordance with the Mayor on all issues. School closing proposals proved no exception.

Both Mayor Bloomberg and the Chancellors he has selected have used the term *accountability* as the key rationale for these governance changes – the mayor and the chancellor bearing ultimate responsibility for the management of 1,600 schools and the education of 1.1 million students. The mayor and chancellor have consistently argued that in the decentralized system, there was a diffusion of authority that created paralysis and dysfunction; mayoral control, by comparison, they reason, allows those in charge to define responsibilities and expectations, set standards, and measure results.

The conflict over the larger community's role in school decision-making has become even more heightened in school governance under Mayoral Control (Moscovitch, 2011; Viteretti, 2009). While some education scholars assess that mayoral control is "sensible for troubled urban

school systems” (see for example, Hess, 2008), others argue that it needs a more robust form of democracy as its counterpart if it is to support and sustain school improvement work (Stone et. al, 2001). Proponents argue that Mayors are better positioned than school boards to coordinate resources for schools, and that they are more accountable through a citywide election with greater voter turnout. As Rotherham and Harris reasoned (2007), mayors

are the only officials accountable for the health of entire cities. They have experience delivering and monitoring a wide range of services to their constituents, and are able to mobilize their cities’ resources to create high quality educational options for youth. And, because voters hold them accountable for the quality of life in their city, mayors might as well truly be engaged with improving education. (p. 2)

The rationale for Mayoral control is that it establishes a direct and clear channel of command, at the same time that it promotes efficiency and eliminates corruption. Opponents equate mayoral control with lack of transparency, lack of meaningful opportunities for public engagement, and a lack of checks and balances. Henig & Rich (2004) ask whether giving city hall the authority to manage schools on a day-to-day basis, determine budgets, and select board members in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and the District of Columbia, has given city residents and the larger community a clearer target for their concerns, or if it is better characterized as a “power grab by corporate leaders and state legislators with their own visions of urban revitalization and a belief that they can pursue their visions more effectively if power is moved into [these] venues” (p. 5). Opponents also dispute that an election is a reliable form of accountability, especially for those voters with children attending the public school system. A new empirical analysis looking retrospectively at the referenda in support of Mayoral control governance system in Boston (1996) and Cleveland (1998) exposes that referenda results veiled

class-based and (in Boston) race-based support for Mayoral controlled school governance (Shen, 2012). This most recent study lends more credibility to previous research indicating corporate and social elite support for Mayoral control (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Shipp, 2006) at the expense of grassroots disapproval (Chambers, 2006).

In New York City, the battle over Mayoral control has been a source of contention not only between more entrenched interest groups and educational reformers, but also among activists. As the Mayor sought a third election term, community leaders across the city held open forums to discuss whether mayoral control was in fact promoting accountability and democracy. In the fall of 2008, three groups that represented distinct positions on mayoral control emerged: *Learn NY* advocated for the continuation of Mayoral control. It was later found to have ties to Mayor Bloomberg (Henig, Gold, Silander, and Simon, 2011). The Industrial Areas Foundation Metro NY (IAFNY) also advocated for the continuance of mayoral control; IAF was briefly associated with *Learn NY* but then broke ties with them. *The Parent Commission* called for a return to the previous governance structure and an end to “one-man rule.” And under the banner of the *Campaign for Better Schools (C4BS)*, two-dozen education organizing and advocacy groups testified on the ill effects of mayoral control without checks and balances, transparency, and meaningful opportunities for participation. Occupying a middle position, C4BS argued that changes to the governance legislation would help temper Mayoral control. They lobbied the state legislature to adopt their three recommendations: the reinstatement of community district superintendents to oversee schools in their district, address community concerns, and be accountable to the public; support for the independent budget office’s ability to review and report on the Department of Education’s research, data, and fiscal activity; and funding for an independent parent and student empowerment center where parents and students could receive

leadership training to fully participate in the school decision-making bodies structured at the school and district level. In November of 2009, the State Senate adopted these recommendations as amendments to the S5887 school governance law, although funding for the parent and student empowerment center was never appropriated. Reauthorization of the school governance legislation which extended Bloomberg's appointment for a third term also mandated public hearings concerning any proposals to school utilization including proposals to close or phase-out schools.

While Mayor Bloomberg has maintained his control over the school system ensures accountability, critics continue to argue that Bloomberg's implementation of mayoral control has only ensured that "major decisions about the school system are made in private, behind closed doors, with no public review and no public discussion" (Ravitch, 2010b, p. 25). Immediately after the Panel for Education Policy's approval of the closure of 19 schools on January 26, 2010, and after eight hours of oppositional testimony, I had a chance to ask Chancellor Klein if he thought the public had a say in the process. His response appeared in the *New York Times* the next day: "In the end, the nature of Mayoral control is about making the tough decisions. That's what it's all about."⁸ The Chancellor's response aptly represents a central tension between school and community leaders in school closings debate and that is a tension between technocratic expertise and local knowledge. As the CEJ campaign illustrates in Chapter 7, the controversy over school closings is not a controversy over individual parents' worries about their own children as Sperry writes (2012, p.8) nor over entrenched interests fighting to preserve the status quo (Hill, Campbell, & Gross, 2012). In my two years following school closing debates in NYC, I found that many parent and community leaders hold very different ideas from school

8 Otterman, January 27, 2010. "School Supporters Fear They Weren't Heard." <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/28/nyregion/28closings.html>

administrators on how schools will best improve and what decisions will truly improve their children's education. As I will also discuss, the complex and swift restructuring of the school district under Mayoral control have positioned the Mayor and the Chancellor to make unilateral decisions about school closures in the name of "accountability," but with limited interaction and struggle with families and the larger public's notions of what constitutes equity, accountability, and community engagement in school decision-making.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

In this study's theoretical framework, I draw upon the concepts of the public and counter-public from interdisciplinary perspectives that go beyond educational frameworks to include philosophy, political science, sociology, and deliberative democracy. Understanding the contests around school closing through this analytic lens helps to theorize formations of participation in school decision-making. My study specifically draws upon the writings of Jurgen Habermas (1962) to investigate the conditions and institutional arrangements that best enable community participation and the accountability of democratic decision-making bodies. As critics such as Nancy Fraser (1990), Michael Dawson (1995), and Archon Fung (2006) have pointed out, Habermas' conceptualization of a public sphere is devoid of an adequate analysis of the role of power. Still, I find Habermas a useful starting point to consider how members of the public convene to discuss an issue of common concern, school closings. I briefly describe the concepts of the public sphere and counter-publics and explain how they map onto the current landscape and conflict over equity, accountability, and the role of communities in school decision-making in New York City. I also discuss Habermas' validity claims to assess how distinct actors evaluate school closure policy and each other's statements. In Yanow's (2000) sense of interpretative

policy analysis, validity claims are useful to explore the competing ways to read school closure policy in 21st century urban education reform and politics.

1.4.1 The public sphere. Sociologist and philosopher Jurgen Habermas' (1962) study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, defined the public sphere as an imaginary community that, in its ideal form, is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (p. 176). For Habermas, the public sphere mediated between individual's private concerns and the intrusion of powerful institutions; it is a social place where individuals could discuss their common interests, and could be critical of the state. In this way, it serves a dual function to hold the state accountable to public opinion and later, to transfer public opinion through more formal participatory channels in government. In his analysis, Habermas identified three institutional criteria by which public spheres must abide: disregard of status, domain of common concern, and inclusivity. By disregard of status, Habermas argued that in the public sphere an individual's humanity is emphasized rather than their social or economic status in society. This principle, Habermas theorized, equaled the "playing field" for participation. Domain of concern referred to the space created by public spheres for individuals to discuss affairs that are not subject to the "monopoly of interpretation" of the church or state authorities. Independence from the state and other institutionalized bodies is important for individuals to develop their own opinions. Lastly, inclusivity means "everyone had to be able to participate" (p. 37); for Habermas, inclusivity realizes democratic ideals.

1.4.2. Validity claims. Through his theory of communicative action (1984:8-22, 168-85), Habermas distinguished between two concepts of rationality that shape knowledge and ultimately guide discussion and action: cognitive-instrumental rationality aimed at a strategic win, and communicative rationality aimed at mutual understanding. Privileging the second,

Habermas noted that the goal for achieving mutual understanding did not preclude dissent or disagreement, but he underscored that certain conditions would best guide a path toward understanding in communication. In the public sphere, Habermas explained that participants best direct speech authority through making moral, critical, and rational appeals – what he called “validity claims.” Validity claims were a moral-practical reasoning situated in the everyday experiences of individuals, and according to Habermas, in order to be effective, ought to cover four dimensions: claims to intelligibility, truth, normative rightfulness, and sincerity. In the process of communicative action, speech acts can also be rejected under each of the four aspects [ibid, p. 307].

These four criteria for Habermas realize ‘an ideal speech situation’, and best assure that deliberation not fall to self-interest, prejudice, or political affiliation. *Intelligibility* refers to semantic clarification but also contextualized knowledge so that all participants understand the language spoken (p.89). *Truth* refers to assertions and explanations that reflect reality. *Normative rightfulness* recognizes prevailing norms, and *sincerity* reflects an expression of intention (p. 90-91).

By Habermas’ accounting, a collective agreement is achieved if all participants would, if asked, answer yes to each criterion, and any policymaker attempting to communicate with the general public would not achieve understanding unless his or her validity claims are fully accepted. Even if a policymaker subjectively believed that his or her position is valid, mutual understanding would not be achieved to the extent participants disagree with any of the validity claims. Validity claims challenges give rise to typical questions. Habermas (1984, p. 90) explained that if the intelligibility of a speech act is challenged, the question “what do you mean by that?” would be raised. If the truth of a speech act is challenged, questions such as “are things

really as you say” or “why are things that way and not some other way?” would be asked. If the normative rightfulness of a speech act is challenged the question becomes “what is your justification?” Finally if in the context of the interaction, there is question about sincerity, questions such as “are you deceiving me?” or “are you deceiving yourself” arise.

Table 1.1 below outlines four validity claims, their domain of focus, and challenges as distinguished by Habermas.

| Table 1.1 <i>Habermas' Four Classes of Validity Claims</i> | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| Criteria | Domain of Focus | Challenge |
| Intelligibility | Contextualized Knowledge/Comprehensiveness | What is the argument? |
| Truth | Facticity | What is the basis? |
| Normative Rightfulness | Positional Authority | What is the justification? |
| Sincerity | Intention of Truth (or Deceit) | What is the intention? |

Communicative rationality achieves legitimacy for Habermas, because it is brought out not by violence, coercion, order of bureaucracy, or incentives of the market, but by “the unforced force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1998, p. 147). I apply Habermas’ theory of communicative action and the validity claim construct to the school closing public hearings in New York City in 2009-2010 in Chapter five. I find that challenges to the NYCDoE’s school closing proposals are made largely on the grounds of insincerity.

1.4.3 Criticism of the public sphere concept. While lauded, Habermas’ model of the public sphere has drawn criticism from feminist and civil society scholars (McLaughlin, 1993; Abu-Haidar, 1999) for minimizing the reality and impact of power relations (economic, social, and political) on forms of participation. Political scientist Nancy Fraser (1990) challenged four assumptions undergirding the conception of Habermas’ public sphere: that status identity could indeed be disregarded; that one singular public was “preferable to a nexus of multiple publics”; that discourse in public spheres “should be restricted to deliberation of the common good”; and

that a “sharp separation between civil society and the state” is necessary (p. 62-63). For purposes of this dissertation, I pay more attention to Fraser’s first two challenges of Habermas’ model: that disregarding identity status is unrealistic, and that a singular public ought not be preferable to multiple publics, as well as to Fraser’s fundamental argument: that “counterpublics” are more suitable domains for those who are typically excluded from decision-making processes.

1.4.4 Disregard of status. On the first challenge, Fraser argues that the public sphere Habermas describes while in theory is open to all, in practice excludes many on gender, race, and property grounds. Fraser, like others (see Baker, 1995), note that the bourgeois public sphere emerged at the same time as the African slave trade and colonization by these same European and white bourgeoisie. This declaration was eventually conceded by Habermas (1989) and offers an important admonition: not all spaces – or spheres - intended to facilitate participation can do so, for they are part of large structures that both recognize and structure opportunity on the basis of status; many, like the bourgeois public sphere can, and do, exclude already marginalized peoples (Dawson, 1995). Fraser argues that the principle of disregarding status inequalities is not ideal, as it does not foster participatory parity. In fact, Fraser points out, ignoring status inequalities has the tendency to benefit dominant members in the public sphere who have developed cultural practices that can easily “marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups” (p. 64). Here Fraser finds public spaces that aim to dismiss, and as a result not challenge power inequities fundamentally undemocratic.

1.4.5 On the promotion of a singular public. On the second challenge, Fraser zeros in on Habermas’ promotion of a singular public sphere. Fraser contends that in stratified societies, “competing public spheres better support the ideal of participatory parity than an overarching and singular public,” (p. 66) which as she already argued in her first challenge, is likely more

influenced by more dominant members and their interests. Fraser promotes competing public spheres that help to recognize multiple publics and interests. She calls these competing public spheres “subaltern counterpublics,” and to the extent that they emerge in response to the exclusivity of traditional public sphere, Fraser reasons, they help to expand the notion of the public. As a corollary to her first challenge, Fraser contends that “counterpublics” are a necessary space and deliberative process for those who have marginal status in the larger society to identify their interests apart from the state’s interests and interpretations, and from those more dominant members of society. “Counterpublics” then serve as a means to challenge more dominant publics.

To summarize, Fraser’s challenge to Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere model is two-fold: 1) for not recognizing social equality as a condition for equal participation, and 2) for its aims to “bracket rather than eliminate structural social inequalities” (p. 65). Implicit in Fraser’s two-fold challenge is an argument that certain public spheres are not suitable for individual members of marginalized or subordinated groups. Her second challenge to Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere is that “subaltern counterpublics” better represent the interests of marginalized groups. Implicit in this challenge is that “subaltern counterpublics” are more likely to engender accountability to marginalized agendas, as they function in “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” from wider publics, as “bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward [these] wider publics” (p. 68).

Fraser’s theoretical contentions support the emergence of community organizing in education policymaking. Community organizing groups have long argued that official school associations are not neutral and do not provide genuine opportunities for participation for all publics, as they have been co-opted by administrators who silence critics (Fruchter & Mediratta,

2003) and are often dominated by white and wealthy members (Pritchett, 2002). Essentially, education organizing groups have established themselves as a necessary “counterpublic” for those traditionally excluded from political processes, such as communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income communities. The publics created by organizing groups, as I will discuss in the literature review, illuminate the larger governing power relations, as well as facilitate the local knowledges and counter story telling of politically disenfranchised groups, and formulate their own “social solidarity” (Calhoun, 2002), through relationship building and common interests.

Like Fraser, Dawson (1994, 2006) argued that in a stratified society, counterpublics are necessary for the deliberation and vitality of politically subordinated groups. Writing about the black public sphere, Dawson wrote (1994) that it is “a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices which facilitate debate of causes and remedies to the current combination of political setbacks and economic devastation facing major segments of the Black community, and which facilitate the creation of oppositional formations and sites” (p. 197). Dawson was cautious about the ability of the counterpublic to effectively inject its analysis into the political system, and influence state power from an isolated position. After Hurricane Katrina, Dawson (2006) reflected on a bifurcated civil society that produces different publics and worldviews, “sufficiently distinct to undermine the basis for rational communication between members of the dominate public on the one hand and the subordinate Black counterpublic on the other (p. 241). Dawson also looked critically at the local black counterpublic in New Orleans after the storm’s devastation – which he concluded was constrained by its own internal weaknesses: its inability to insert a legitimate framework for consideration, and its inability to mobilize sufficient political power. The question that continues to engage deliberative

democracy scholars is what kinds of strategies are effective for counterpublics to have an impact in the larger public sphere.

Fraser and Dawson's theoretical propositions acknowledge the vital necessity of “counterpublics” to promote accountability and democracy, but neither considers complimentary arrangements between the larger public sphere and “counterpublics” and as such cannot help explain any positive relationships that may develop between the two. Archon Fung (2006) joins Fraser, Dawson, and others who have drawn attention to the limits of the dominant public sphere, especially in a climate with resource and privilege disparities. But rather than promote an ideal sphere for the participation of marginalized groups, as Habermas and Fraser do, Fung envisions a more complex framework for understanding a variety of possibilities for public participation in policymaking. Fung outlines three dimensions to judge participatory bodies for promoting social justice and democracy: who participates (“participants”), how participants exchange information and make decisions (“communication and decision mode”), and how these conversations are linked to larger policy or public actions (“authority and power”). Fung calls this a “democracy cube,” and points out that participatory structures can increase justice by creating inclusive opportunities for participants’ investment and knowledge, by pressuring authorized officials or replacing decision makers with different public actors. Each of these three mechanisms are important criteria by which to compare a diverse set of actors and public spheres. Fung’s work is important too to visit for this dissertation for another reason. He argues, “public participation at its best operates in synergy with representation and administration to yield more desirable practices and outcomes of collective decision making and action” (2006: 66). Here Fung offers an opening to explore the synergism between multiple public spheres in public education in New York City.

Habermas, Fraser, Dawson, and Fung each offer a point of entry to discuss the complexity of education policymaking concerning school closings in New York City in the 21st century. While some have argued that “there is no better way to ensure the long-term success of public involvement than to institutionalize a decision-making role for that involvement” (Thomas, 1995: 163), others warn that the institutionalization of decision making roles dilute the pressure outside groups can leverage on the system. Like Anderson (1998), I acknowledge that the public sphere is a contested site that serves as collusion for dominant groups, but which also “contain transformative possibilities for the creation of more authentic approaches to participation” (p. 574). Ultimately, this study operates with the premise that more can be learned from the dynamics between multiple actors in multiple spheres, and from the interactions they have with one another – contentious and complementary - than by looking at each separately (McAdams et al, 2001).

1.5 Significance

This dissertation study assesses how a number of school and community leaders frame school closures in an attempt to influence school improvement discourse and policy. More than deliberative strategies, framings reveal their conflicting understandings of educational equity, accountability, and community engagement. It is these fundamentally different notions that can help explain the conflicts over school closure policy. Contrary to much research (both historical and contemporary), which characterizes all resistance to school closings as either emotional attachment or adult-based interests, I look at community and parents leaders who oppose school closings as part of a larger critique of the direction of public education. Moreover, while conflicts over school closings are also framed as a debate over market based reforms, I focus on central issue of the relationship between schools and communities, and locality.

From the standpoint of school closings, this study pays close attention to the new governance formation in NYC and particularly how the Portfolio Management Model is remapping the public sphere in public education to an ageographic configuration. Scholars writing about portfolio management model have underscored its key elements of governance including reducing a traditional top-down one-size-fits-all centralized school management approach in favor of contract arrangements that increase the autonomy of principals at the school level. In this study, I look more closely at how a new contracting regime (Henig, 2010) is unzoning the city. School district administrators worried about the correlation between poverty and school failure are remapping the school system so that it is independent of community school districts, and this study raises questions about the limitations of this approach.

The multi-level analysis that I have conducted illuminates how:

- 1) The current Portfolio Management Model and the new decentralization strategy mark a deviation from a long-standing tradition to both bureaucratic and localized school governance arrangements.
- 2) In a newly structured management arrangement in New York City, Superintendents are found to be proximal to members of the public, but do not have real input into decision-making. Additionally, Central Office administrators are found more proximal to the Portfolio Management Model at the same time that they are distanced from members of the public. I apply “*Decentralized centralism*” (Karlsen, 2000) to explain a dynamic in which the Central Office appears to be recentralizing at the same time it is allowing for more micro decision-making at the school level. I also apply it to explain differences between Central Office administrators’ and Superintendents’ framings of school closures.

- 3) In the school closing process families and members of the public are not clear on who will answer their questions. While network teams are now responsible for providing support services to schools, many parents and community members testify that they do not know who the network teams are and what they do. I argue that dynamics of the new governance strategy, what I am calling, *Delocalized Centralism*, can explain how the new management strategy decouples accountability from a local governance structure.

This study offers district and community leaders considerations for the impact of governance enactments in the public sphere.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I examine the conflict over the community's decision-making role in public schools in the United States. This study's literature review is divided into two major parts. The first part considers the history of school and community relations and how this has evolved in New York City. I historically situate the school and community relationships, and the emergence of bureaucracy and technocratic expertise, which dramatically changed the nature of these relationships and diminished local knowledge. I reexamine the community control experiment in New York City in the 1960's: how it reasserted a prominent role for the community in real decisions concerning schools (leadership, personnel, and budget); the key tensions and challenges it came up against; and how it posed a political solution to educational inequities. I then look briefly at the demise of the bureaucratic management model and mark the uprising of a market-based model in public education. At the heart of this model is an ideological faith in the American system of free enterprise to propel the United States education system forward in a competitive global economy. This has squeezed the role for local knowledge and participation in school decision-making and governance.

The second part of this literature review draws from the current school reform literature to understand how community engagement is currently defined, and to identify the reasons cited for the disenfranchisement of low-income communities, communities of color, and immigrant communities from traditional school political avenues. I argue that this literature generally focuses on the private role families play in their children's education, and as such severely delimits public participation in school decision making. Then, I look to the field of education organizing, distinguished by its focus on power. I pay particular attention to how organizing groups in New York City reframe the notion of accountability and demand "community control"

in the current era of mayoral control. Lastly, I look at the new marketplace model in education, which capitalizes on parents as private consumers of public education. Throughout the history of education governance there are three versions of school reform expertise: the community knows best; the experts know best; and the [free] market knows best.

2.1 The Historical Relationship of Schools to Their Communities

2.1.1 Community knows best: The origins of community control. Public schooling's early link to democracy and public participation was supported by its close relationship with the surrounding community (Dewey, 1916). Constitutionally, public education was created as a local initiative and was left up to the discretion of states and municipalities, taxpayers and families (Mann, 1947). Tyack (1974) wrote that during the nineteenth century schools belonged to their communities in towns across America. Schools reflected and shaped a sense of community, as they were "organically related in a tightly knit group in which people met face to face and knew each other's affairs" (p. 17). Rural families worked closely with teachers (most of who lived in the same community) and had little reason to think that the school was the domain of the professional educator - as such a person hardly existed. But this changed swiftly in the last decade of the 19th century, as demographic shifts and urbanization were remaking the country. Reformers searching for "one best system" to educate the masses sought efficiency and order. Tyack explains that the movement to take control from the local community and hand it over to the professional was part of a systemic change in American education, as cities were bureaucratizing the system to meet twentieth century challenges and an expanding public. Urban areas that were settling grounds for thousands of immigrants saw bureaucracy as a necessity to help people adapt to the modern world, or more likely, to help the world adapt to "new people" (Ravitch, 1974; Spring, 1991).

Social efficiency, Kliebard (1995) noted, held the promise of stability in the face of a changing world, particularly industrialization and immigration. Those newly arrived did not know “the American way,” and leading school officials in the nineteenth century reasoned that schools ought to train pupils in obedience and respect, as well as English and arithmetic. The expansion of the economy demonstrated technological advance and wealth, but also created deepening poverty, and both “had ominous implications for education” (Reese, 1995, p. 18). The school developed as a key institution in preparing youth for the new society’s hierarchical work structure (Larabee, 1997)⁹.

2.1.2 Expert knows best: The rise of the bureaucratic model. The process for imposing a business model in education was fairly standardized in the years 1900 to 1925 (Callahan, 1962). Ravitch (1974) wrote that school reformers turned to business because they saw in its “organization and techniques the potential solution to vexatious problems of the city” (p. 191). Across the country schools moved toward detailed procedures, prescribed content, authoritarian pedagogy, and hierarchical teaching structures to manage an engorged population (Katz, 1970). Tyack (1974) explains that as school-faring populations increased, reformers looked for routines to manage the operation of schooling: “the pressure of numbers was the main reason for the bureaucratization that gradually replaced the older decentralized village pattern of school” (p. 39). Deferring to business-like procedures however was “ominous” not just for the direction of education, but also for the community’s role and the role of local knowledge.

Callahan’s historical narrative (1962) is useful in explaining how business practices such as scientific management became normalized in schools. While the scientific management method was intended to increase worker productivity at manufacturing plants, education

⁹For a critique of economic motivations for restructuring the school, see urban education scholars Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Willis, 1977.

reformers in the early part of the 20th century applied its core components to the school: designing a factory structure, emphasizing workplace norms such as punctuality, and establishing *efficiency experts*. For the purposes of this study, the emergence of the technical expert (with a special emphasis on management) is particularly germane precisely current landscape of education places an emphasis on this particular form of expertise. Callahan documented that by 1914, efficiency experts or consultants were in abundance; they focused on either test construction that measured both teachers' and students' efficiency, or school surveys that looked at school efficiency. Both measurements had the effect of convincing school principals that the outside expert would be neutral. Essentially, experts used scientific management to assert a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1979): schools belonged to the administration not to communities, and the experts - and only the experts - would determine and measure what matters. This has reverberated in the school closing public hearings when NYCDoE administrators introduced school closing proposals.

As Smith (1963) testified in his case study of the tension over school governance in the town of Brunswick, Maine, the concentration of administrative authority and expertise took power away from local community actors, and superseded participatory structures such as town hall meetings and school boards. Smith concluded that, "the bureaucratic grasp for power under the guise of nonpartisanship, expertise, and administrative discretion promotes political apathy and threatens to disrupt allocation of decision-making throughout local politics" (p. 442). "What was the need for a board of education if the professional experts were to initiate most policies?" asked Tyack (1974, p. 145). As the schooling institution moved away from local residents to 'neutral' professional managers, it became "a specialized occupation with its own training programs, professional organizations, and career hierarchies" (Tyack & Hamsot, 1980, p. 295).

This movement “upward and inward” authorized a chain of command to make decisions on behalf of students and their families (Tyack & Hansot, 1980), further distancing and limiting the participation of families and communities, and also privatizing the decision-making process.

At the turn of the century, families and communities were finding themselves locked out of school decision-making. Specialists and technocratic knowledge diminished the need and role of community leaders and community knowledge in school decision-making. The larger school community’s knowledge, what has also been referred to as local knowledge (Geertz, 1983), resides in its familiarity and intimacy with the neighborhood and with the lives of young people. While complex and dynamic, local knowledge can be devalued by institutions which privilege technocratic or scientific knowledge associated with formal training and credentials. Yanow (2004) notes that local knowledge is often “associated with anti-modern traditionalism, with a backward parochialism than a forward-looking worldliness,” and as result is disparaged (p. S21). Historically, school organizations have emphasized efficiency and procedural expertise at the expense of a diverse community’s participation and local knowledge. In this business model of schooling, the professional best offers the questions, gives the answers, and dictates an appropriate course of action (Dimetriades, 2006); it also presumes parent, community, and student leaders are not competent enough to participate (Shipps, 2006).

Time and again, the bureaucratic school framework met with strong community opposition. The historical record shows that community leaders continued to assert an active role for the public in school decision-making despite restrictions set by school districts (Ravitch, 1974). Conflicts in school board meetings, where layman and school administrators clashed over power were numerous (Tyack, 1974). Nowhere were these stakes higher than in urban areas where the gap between rich and poor was widening, and in communities where members charged

that school and government officials did not adequately represent them. This was the case a half century later in New York City. In the late 1960's community leaders argued that schools were operated by a professional bureaucracy, and were unaccountable to the public (Gittell, 1971). This remains a major conflict in the 21st century, as community members argue with school administrators that school decisions should be left to those who know the kids best and not to system managers (Noguera, 2003; Perry, 2003). The school closing debate is not just a debate over the specific schools proposed for closure, but part of this ongoing debate over who gets to make decisions about schools, and ultimately determine the purpose of public education (Labaree, 1997).

2.1.3 The community control experiment: Further contestation over public, participation and power in NYC. The case of community control in New York City in 1960s is instructive for the lessons it offers for current day conflicts over school closings. In New York City, the community control movement received national attention when in the fall of 1968 teachers waged a 36-day strike in response to one local community board's decision to fire nineteen teacher-union members. "Community control" (Gittell, 1970) referred to a specific proposal for parents to have control over school policies in order to influence the curriculum and staffing at their neighborhood schools and impact school improvement. Similar demands for community control of public schools were an outgrowth of anger and frustration toward unresponsive and racist education bureaucracies. In urban cities across America, the community control movement highlighted that schools were unequally preparing students in all measures and demonstrated that Black and Latino leaders were serious about their leadership role in public education. While some have concluded that community control was ineffective, resulted in corruption, and did not have educational benefits (see for example, Schiff, 1976), recent scholars

have studied how under community control, civic leaders in collaboration with educators improved the quality of instruction and student achievement (see for example, Lewis, 2006). In this section, I briefly discuss the emergence of community control in New York City, the goals and rationale of the experiment, and the challenges and key tensions that arose.

Numerous scholars (Gittell, 1970; Perlstein, 2004; Podair, 2002) agree that the concept of community control predated the 1967 decision by the New York City Board of Education to experiment with “varying forms of decentralization and community involvement in several experimental districts of varying size” (Fantini et. al, 1970, p. 143). The term “community control” has been used interchangeably with the term “decentralization,” but Hagood (1969) stipulated that decentralization of schools is not the same thing as community control, an “educational strategy designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness on the part of schools by utilizing every opportunity to increase the possibility that the school will become an integrated component of the community” (p. 1). Hagood stipulated that within a community control framework, the school is a focal point of the larger community, not just devoted to the aims of the educational institution. Fatini, Gittell, and Magat also noted that administrative decentralization of government should not be mistaken as community control as it does not in and of itself ensure community participation (1970, p. 13). Discussions of community control as part of the school closing debates resurrect perennial discussions of the school’s relationship to and place in the community.

A more common use of the term community control refers to school officials’ direct accountability to parent and community members for school operations and outcomes (Hess, 1999). Fege (2006) traces parent and community demands for better education and government responsiveness to the national fight to integrate public schools in the 1950’s. The Supreme

Court's unanimous 1954 decision in *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka* helped to motivate parent demands for quality improvements for their children's schools. As has been widely documented, the 1954 court decision itself did not safeguard the decree nor thwart resistance and non-compliance by school districts, White citizens, and others across America. The *Brown II* decision in 1955 to devolve implementation to local authorities resulted in parents of color having to confront schooling authorities to ensure integration and quality schooling for their children (Barraclough, 1973; Schraft & Kagan, 1979).

Following the *Brown* decree, the New York City Board of Education announced its commitment to address racial inequality, but it took three years to initiate action and each of its various initial strategies (rezoning, voluntary transfers, school pairing, and grade reorganization) were unsuccessful. De Forest's (2008) detailed account of the 1958 school boycott led by the Harlem 9 (a group of 9 mothers who boycotted two junior high schools substandard conditions in their neighborhood of Harlem) is just one example of Black parents' efforts to challenge the New York City Department of Education to provide educational equity for their children. Others point to the protests in 1966 concerning the building of a new junior high school 201 to alleviate overcrowding in the neighborhood. Its location was proposed to be on 127 and 128th streets between Madison and Park Avenues and many protested that its placement in an all Black neighborhood would perpetuate de facto segregation. Many of these efforts did not receive widespread national attention because of their highly localized arrangement, but they served as a precursor to the larger community control movement in New York City.

As Fantini et al. (1970) put it, the community control proposal "was given almost no serious consideration until the late 1960's" (p. xiii) when Mayor Lindsay and Board of Education

selected three demonstration districts¹⁰ in New York City for an experiment in enhanced community participation in education, and allocated planning monies by the sponsoring grant-maker, the Ford Foundation. The goals of the community control experiment were to “demonstrate the role of the community in governing its own schools, particularly in the selection of administrators and teachers; to undertake new educational programs; and to create a positive new environment for learning...” (p. 155). Community leaders had long argued that the school system had been unresponsive to the needs of communities of color, and that community leadership would better ensure quality schooling for students systematically neglected and disadvantaged (Podair, 2002). This assertion that local control would yield stronger and more sustainable improvements to failing schools and ultimately better education for students, was a challenge to the dominant paradigm of school attainment on two levels: first, it challenged the culture of poverty explanations for the lower achievement levels of African American and Latino students; second, it attributed the failures of urban schools to the institutional and bureaucratic structures that had been set up as solutions.

While laudable, the community control experiment immediately came up against serious challenges. Teachers unions, such as the UFT, who were initially sympathetic to the plight of community activists, served as a resistance to community control once they saw that their interests to make educational decisions were in competition (Perlstein, 2004). The 36-day teacher strike in Ocean Hill Brownsville in 1968 as a response to one school community board’s dismissal of 13 teachers is the most visible display of this resistance. It is important to note as Fantini, Gittell, and Magat (1970) do, that the three demonstration districts were undermined in

¹⁰ The three districts were in East Harlem (I.S. 201 at its helm), Manhattan; Oceanville-Brownsville, Brooklyn; and the “Two Bridges” project, in a section of the Lower East Side, Manhattan, bordering Chinatown and in between Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. A fourth district’s proposal – a district on the upper west side of Manhattan “where white children still constituted more than one third of the school population” – was not approved (Fantini et. al, 1970, p. 143).

meeting their goals by three factors: the ambivalence of the Board of Education to fully implement the experiment even though they had formally approved it; the non-cooperation of school administrators and teachers unions; and historic and persistent economic impoverishment of the three districts.

On April 30, 1969, the New York State legislature passed a decentralization law¹¹ that reorganized the school system into 31 community school districts, preserving the right of the central board of education on all matters except the appointments of district Superintendents and principals. These appointments were to be made by 31¹² respective local community school boards. The bill also contained a measure that truncated the authority of the school boards' discretion on budget priorities, and staff selection. The former Community District Superintendent Luis Fuentes (1976) argued that the passage of the law "kept all 32 districts in the hands of the UFT and its organization Democrat allies" (p. 692).

On July 1, 1970, 279 local school board members assumed office in 31 local school districts (Gittell et. al, 1973, p. 91). While heralded as one of the first decentralization plans, historians seem to agree that the decentralization law failed to grant community school boards sufficient powers to operate schools, including power over personnel matters, including establishing qualifications for hiring, assigning, disciplining, and dismissing staff and power over other important decisions that impact educational quality: class size and programming.

The community control experiment exemplified the kinds of tensions that come into play when school and district administrators, teachers, and community leaders debate who should be at the helm of school decision-making. Racial tensions and economic gaps as well as contradictory understandings of what constitutes participation persist in the school closing

11 The law reserved the right for the mayor to appoint two of seven board members (Gittell, 1970).

12 District 16 was split into two districts, District 16 and District 32 a couple of years later. This split formed 32 community school districts.

debates. Understanding racial and economic divisions historically helps to illuminate the current school closing contests and the increasingly bifurcated appearance of NYC public schools where high performing schools are located in affluent neighborhoods, while others proposed for closure are home to lower income neighborhoods and populated by communities of color and recently arrived immigrant families. Additionally, understanding past clashes over the meaning of community participation, is useful to interpret current debates: history simply repeats itself.

Jerome Podair (2002) noted that residential and educational segregation in the 1960's in New York City, what he referred to as the "two New Yorks," heightened the stakes involved in the conflicts over decision about schools, as both lower-income Blacks and middle and high income Whites understood the school as an institution for social and economic advancement. What is clear from many accounts of the community control experiment in New York City is that profound race and class inequities do not just exacerbate tensions over governance, they constitute a significant tension in the fight over governance: power and control over the educational process.

Of all the books written about the community control debate in New York, Podair's account is most explicit about the racial conflicts between African-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Whites, but his analysis mischaracterizes the nature of this conflict. Podair contends that African Americans and Whites clashed over the cultural values. In his estimation, White Jews and Catholics honored individualism, equal opportunity, and colorblindness, while Black, Puerto Rican, and some White intellectuals and activists invested in the "opportunity theory," which promoted access to opportunity structures, and virtues such as community collaboration. Podair, however, does not recognize the significance of the role power plays in decision-making. Clarence Taylor (2004) noted this in his review of Podair's book. In Taylor's estimation and

mine, the major disagreement between Whites and Blacks and Puerto Ricans was not that they held different values. Equality of opportunity was not realistic, and color-blindness was not a viable solution to an entire tenure of inadequate and inequitable education for Black and Puerto Rican children. The clash over community control instead was, and continues to be, a fight over power – power to determine the direction of schooling and educational trajectories for students. Community control of education then was not just an alternative educational governance strategy; it was a political solution to education problems (Pilo, 1974). It posed that parent and community leaders knew better for their children, than professional educators.

The contested meaning over the term “participation” is also instructive in understanding current day debates over the community’s role in decisions about schools. Gittell (1971) wrote that during community control debates in the 1960s there was no clear consensus on what exactly was signified by the term *participation*, as the literature refers to both formal structures like elected boards and informal associations such as parent volunteer groups. Participation could mean access to decision making; it could also refer to lines of communication between the public and elected boards that represent them. Clearly, the community control phase directed more attention to who was included and excluded in school policy making; it actively sought the participation of Black and Latino leaders typically disenfranchised from school decision-making processes. Minority parents and community members were encouraged to establish their own structures as opposed to those participatory structures set up by the school system as they were “consistently thwarted by school boards controlled by Whites” (Pritchett, 2002, p. 226).

Finally, the community control experiment underscored how power shapes participation. The professionalization of the education field, and the widening gap between rich and poor and white and non-white, disregarded the importance of local knowledge and exacerbated an already

unequal representation in New York City school governance. Participatory bodies created by the school district were not perceived as neutral or representative of the community's concerns as Fraser (1992) pointed out. Rather than set up "counterpublics," however, community leaders in this movement sought influence through established channels, and focused on the ability to hire and fire personnel, design curriculum, and determine budgets — significant decisions that had the potential to create real change in schools. This power for the community — and particularly for political minority Black and Puerto Ricans members to determine the operation and direction of schools — was highly threatening as it envisioned a less dominant role for more dominant race and class members (Fantini et. al, 1970).

The next section compares ongoing battles over definitions of parent and community roles in school decision-making, and particularly at if, and how, power is discussed. But before I do, I briefly look at the turn to market reform in public education, which offers its own definition for parent engagement.

2.1.4 Market Knows Best: The emergence of the market model in public education.

A powerful ideology that emerged in the 1980s was that the United States education system was undermining the nation's capacity to be competitive in a global market. This message came through very strongly through the 1983 *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, a report commissioned by then President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education and Education Secretary, T.H. Bell. The report concluded that the public school system was failing to meet the national need for a competitive workforce. More consequently, it also argued that this failure was putting the United States at risk: "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (p. 5). In the report's first pages, the authors introduced the idea that

the United States was at risk for losing its competitive edge in the global market for ideas and products, but also that school failures had consequences beyond commerce and industry, consequences for the nation's security and civility. The report did not elaborate on how America's security was at risk, but contained language linking education mediocrity to an act of war: "if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p. 1).

Timar and Tyack (1999), reacting to the first wave of market ideology, wrote that the merging of school reform talk with talk of a global economy revealed an invisible market ideology that advocated for a diminished state role in public life, and in its place a role for privatization and market mechanisms to regulate education practice. These authors noted that market ideology presented education as a private and individual good, and constituted the antithesis of democratic ideology of schooling as a public and collective good. On the eve of the twenty-first century, market reforms such as charter schools, vouchers, and the use of privatized school management organizations were understood as "random specks in the fabric of school governance" (Timar & Tyack, 1999, p. 17), not the significant force they are thought of presently (Fabricant & Fine, 2012).

The second wave of market ideology is grounded in the same principles as this first wave, and has convinced its proponents and opponents that it is a mainstay in public education. Akin to the Nation of Risk report, a 2012 *U.S. Education Reform and National Security report*¹³ makes a connection between the educational crisis to the country's security risk. Recommendations in this report include structural changes to expand school choice, and interventions when schools

¹³ The report commission was chaired by Joel Klein, former Chancellor of New York City Public Schools and Condoleezza Rice, former US Secretary of Education under President George W. Bush. It is sponsored by a New Council on Foreign Relations.

are failing, such as replacing school leaders, and restructuring schools to offer better options (school closings).

Market advocates in public education insist that the problems facing schools are inherent in the monopolistic structure of public schooling (Moe, 2008). They argue that a free market system based on competition, minimal regulation and parent-choice would provide greater quality at a lower cost. The governance strategy of the market model in education is the *Portfolio Management Model* (PMM). PMM is an increasingly utilized school district model that seeks to offer students and their families a diverse portfolio of school types to choose from, and that also refocuses the Central Offices role to manage this portfolio through strategic investment in schools identified as successful and a divestment in low performing programs (Hill et. al, 2009).

Portfolio districts rely on three mechanisms:

- School choice and the competition for students,
- Ongoing assessment of school performance, and
- Decentralization of school support services

These mechanisms coalesce with the main components of a market-based model: supply and demand, and competition. Central to market based reforms is competition and the understanding that expanding choice will motivate productivity and also increase customer satisfaction.

Funding is also a key lever in this equation; the underlying belief of the market model is that if funding is tied to students, schools will have to compete for students and funds.

Supply reforms ease the rules and regulations of schooling structures to allow for more flexibility and autonomy. Decentralization can be considered a supply strategy (Ladd, 2002). In the PMM model, decentralization involves education contractors (Saltman, 2010). Weiler (1990) notes that the conditions for decentralization tend to be when there is a preoccupation with

quality and efficiency, along with disillusionment with centralization. He recorded that the prevailing arguments for decentralization include distributive authority, efficiency, and cost effectiveness.

Demand reforms have focused on increasing the number and kinds of schooling options available to families, encouraging families to consider and voice support for educational models other than their neighborhood school, and offering choice to families outside of their neighborhood district lines. States and districts have sought to increase the number of magnet, charter, and alternative schools available to families. Market optimists argue that parents will have authority over their children's education if they are effective consumers (Stewart, Wolf, & Cornman, 2007). The market model's equation of parent empowerment with consumer prowess stands in stark contrast to the democratic notion of parent empowerment as engaged citizenry, the active involvement in all decision making processes that impact the educational experiences of all kids (Pappas, 2012).

2.2 Current Battles over Defining Community Engagement in Public Education

Discussions of the public's role in public education in the larger school reform literature have been somewhat dominated by how parents, families, and to a lesser extent, the community take an active role in their children's school lives. In the education reform literature there is widespread consensus that partnerships with families are essential to the success of students and their schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) and that parental engagement in schools "improves the parent-child relationship in the context of the family, integrates parents into school programs, and builds a strong relationship between school, family, and the larger community" (see Henderson's meta-analysis, 1987). This section examines how scholars in the literature acknowledge differential race and class relationships between schools and families, larger

structural impediments to effective school family partnerships, and other forms and definitions of community engagement and leadership in urban education. I note that power is notably absent in the literature on traditional parent involvement forms in education.

The schooling institution, by replicating the structure of society, valorizes the tastes, orientations, and ways of seeing the world of white and middle to higher-income families (Bourdieu, 1986). Contemporary education scholarship has paid considerable attention to Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* (i.e. the social location everyone is born into and the ways this social location conditions individual and group intuitions) and *cultural capital* (i.e. the knowledge, experience, education levels which determine who is advantaged in society) to investigate how economically advantaged families exercise influence at their neighborhood school. Michael Apple (2001) argues that middle income and affluent parents often have more flexible hours and more reliable means of transportation to attend school meetings and conferences, and more revenue to supplement their child's educational experience at school (including homework tutoring, test preparation, arts and music education, etc.). Some of these resources are "hidden": for example, professional parents' comfort level approaching teachers and administrators about their own opinions, and insight into the schooling organization (Laureau, 1987). Children from affluent and middle school families are also advantaged by their socialization into literacy models that are more compatible with the school's literacy models (Brice Heath, 1970). Scholars have cautioned that privileged families in their quest to secure benefits for their own children can deny the same benefits to others (Brantlinger et. al, 1996).

Research on family and community engagement in school has had to confront racist and pathological stereotypes of families and communities that are economically poor, of color, and often immigrant. Research on Latino immigrant family involvement in education, for example,

has underscored their commitment toward and value for their children's schooling (Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz 2001; Valdes 1996). Research documenting additional burdens on families including inflexible work schedules, transportation difficulty, financial strains, and fears associated with documentation status (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Reese 2002; Stanton-Salazar 2001), has helped point out the larger societal barriers to immigrant family engagement that can go unnoticed by policymakers and administrators. Studies that have identified structural barriers for immigrant families' participation at the school, including lack of translation supports and lack of respect (Valenzuela, 1999) have more directly named the schools' and school administrators' responsibilities in creating positive relationships with families, and has taken the blame off of families for not being involved.

The school reform literature has increasingly concentrated on the linkages between parent involvement and student academic achievement. However, the literature as a whole has mostly defined this involvement in private and individual ways, such as the encouragement of parents and families to help with their own children's homework. Few scholars in this literature have described other forms of parent involvement. Joyce Epstein (2001) expanded the picture by charting six different forms of family involvement in the school: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. The field has concentrated on the first four, and has not paid enough attention to opportunities for parental decision-making over personnel, curriculum, and budget—as community control scholars and practitioners have done.

In 2002, Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp published a meta-analysis of the parent engagement literature encompassing 51 studies on family and community involvement; they assigned them to three broad categories—studies that documented the impact of family and

community involvement on student achievement; studies that outlined effective strategies connecting families, schools, and communities; and studies that highlighted parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools. Recognizing the actions of parents, community, and student leaders to address the systematic and collective challenges facing urban schools – such as under-funding and overcrowding – was a noticeable departure from the literature on community engagement in education. This third strand went beyond the family's involvement in the private home sphere, and beyond the family's private efforts to work with educators to support their own children's achievement. Studies in this field acknowledge the power of groups of parents and community leaders to come together and demand better educational processes and outcomes.

It is important to note that Henderson & Mapp's work (2002) was not only extremely influential in expanding the field's conceptions of parent engagement, but also in underlining the importance that the power to make decisions plays in the relationships between schools and communities. Henderson & Mapp were not the first researchers to advocate for a model of parent community engagement that addresses power. In 1993, Michelle Fine published a study in three urban districts – Baltimore, Chicago, and Philadelphia—concluding that struggles over power, authority, and control were at the crux of the conflict over what roles parents could have in school decision-making. Fine (1993) wrote:

Questions of power, authority, and control must be addressed head-on within debates about parental involvement in schools...the refusal to address power struggles has systemically undermined educational transformation. Rarely do [parents] have the opportunity to work collaboratively with educators inventing what could be a rich, engaging and democratic system for public education (p. 684).

Community organizing for school reform distinguished itself as a body of literature for its focus on the distribution of power in the debate over the community's role in school decision making, a subject to which I now turn.

2.2.1 Community organizing for school reform. While accounts that public participation has declined in all major sectors in American society remain salient (Putnam, 2000), parents, students, and community residents are leading broad based political movements in the educational arena. Community-organizing for school reform, or education organizing, refers to the efforts of local neighborhood leaders to identify school problems, strategize actions, and implement solutions. Before President Barack Obama was elected to the highest political office in the country, community organizing was rarely uttered in the popular media. Obama himself writing in 1990, remarked, "I've often had a difficult time explaining my profession to folks" (p. 35). But in the years it has taken to send a community organizer to the Oval office, scholarship has begun to mount on the significance that education organizing can provide to school reform and school reformers (Anyon, 2005). The final section of this literature review will discuss the history and emergence of education organizing, point out its major tenets, accomplishments and challenges, and outline how education organizing groups frame, discuss, and enact community engagement through a lens of power, and in doing so employ a radically different theory of the public and accountability than school districts.

2.2.2 History of education organizing. In tracing the history of education organizing, many scholars recall the work of community organizer Saul Alinsky in Chicago in the 1960's (Fisher, 1994; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005; Wood, 2002). Alinsky organized factory workers to confront horrific working conditions in the notorious 'Back of the Yards' neighborhood an area on the southwest side, home to Chicago's famous meatpacking industry. The Union Stock Yards

produced 18 million head of livestock annually (Elson, 2002), but began to decline in the 1950s with the rise of regional livestock centers. Alinsky and Joe Meegan, a local Catholic park director, organized the Catholic churches, neighborhood organizations, and union workers in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, as part of a Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council to address poverty (Miller, 2010).

Alinsky engaged those most affected by the issues to make decisions about those very same issues (in the case of the factory conditions, he organized factory workers) what is generally understood as the principle foundational to education organizing (Horwitt, 1992). Alinsky's methodology was also very concrete; he identified a series of specific techniques that ordinary people could use as a means of gaining power --- what he defined as the ability to act --- and he promoted the use of mass-based organizations as the avenue for a collective ordinary people to seize power. (In Chicago, this was the Industrial Areas Foundation that he founded.) Alinsky wrote, "Change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together" (1971, p. 113). At the foundation of community organizing is a theory that recognizes the centrality of power, to build common interests, and to make demands. In *Rules for Radicals*, Alinsky also outlined the role of the organizer as the coordinator of power building, one who "finds his goal in creation of power for others [leaders] to use" (1971, p. 63-81).

Not all education groups steep their work in the Alinsky tradition. Some have argued that the model he espouses is void of a race and gender analysis (Delgado, 1986; Stall & Stoecker, 1998); operates counter to the cultures, realities, and priorities of communities of color; and can risk emphasizing recruitment and campaign activities at the expense of in depth leadership development and experimentation with social change work (Su, 2009, p. 72). Sen (2003) lays out

additional antiracist critique of Alinsky's work that give rise to what she terms "new community organizing practices" which focus on developing the leadership of marginalized people rather than relying on white formal leadership and a separation between organizer and leader responsibilities; shaping campaigns specific to tackling racism and Capitalism; and defining action in diverse ways (for example, storytelling and "theater of the oppressed" (Boal, 1992). Many groups model these new organizing practices by, for example, seeking to develop the most marginalized members of society, grounding their leadership training in political education and an "intersectional analysis" (Crenshaw, 1995), and taking on issues that might not be winnable. Su (2007) analyzed how youth education-organizing groups utilize critical race theory¹⁴ and an intersectional analysis to tackle divisive issues such as race and class inequities within groups. Current organizing efforts are also much more sophisticated than just engendering agitation. They involve both immediate larger-scale mobilizations, and intensive small group leadership for longer-term campaigns. Despite differences between political analysis and strategy, organizing groups continue to have power at the center of their models; with each issue they are confronting, they assess who holds power and how to alter the power dynamics so that those most affected by the decisions are not the object of the decisions made.

2.2.3 Principles of community organizing. Organizing distinguishes itself from traditional notions of community engagement in four specific ways. Firstly, organizing operates from the premise that poor and working class people must address their own concerns. It privileges parent, youth, and community/ local expertise and experience to expert or technocratic knowledge. Education organizing is an intricate process that trusts community members to identify and address important school issues (Gold et. al, 2004). In addition to harnessing

14 For more on critical race theory in public education, see: Ladson-Billings & Tate (1993).

community expertise, organizing is also a process that builds the community's capacity to directly address these school issues (Lopez, 2003), supporting their ability to develop a critical analysis of the issues that affect them, and then to act. In school districts, parent and community engagement has not been equated with political action, the way it has in community organizing circles. A community's capacity to address school issues in turn holds school systems accountable and can simultaneously support the capacity of schools to change (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Secondly, organizing acknowledges the vitality of the larger community, and links the effectiveness of school reform to community revitalization (Anyon, 2005; Noguera 1996; Stone et. al, 2001; Warren, 2005). Some scholars have issued a strong critique to traditional school reform efforts for their narrow design (Payne, 2008) and fragmentation (Hess, 1999).

Organizing groups recognize that without changes in the economic structure in neighborhoods and cities, school change is illusory. Jean Anyon's work (2005; 2005b) best makes this point – as she continues to remind school reformers that efforts to improve schools that only involve educational solutions will fall short. Economic policies such as job wage, housing and transportation policies overwhelm the efforts of education policy, and Anyon suggests we need the reform of these public policies to realize stronger schools. Community organizing campaigns connect school improvement strategies to larger community capital initiatives. For example, many education organizing groups have sought to dismantle pervasive and institutional racism, as it corresponds with the lack of parity in funding and schooling quality for students of color from low-income neighborhoods. Community organizing groups also have been effective in mapping the inequality of resources in low-income, predominately African American and Latino neighborhoods, across the country; they have analyzed federal, state, and local policies that work

counter to equalizing education efforts including housing segregation, low wage work, and tax school funding.

Thirdly, education organizing groups take on issues of educational equity looking at the disproportionate impact of issues such as overcrowding, resource disparities affecting the distribution of high quality teachers, and access to college preparatory curricula for students of color and students living in low-income neighborhoods. Across diverse issues, education organizers draw connections between the failures of schools to the inequitable structures of the school system and inequitable resource distribution in society writ large. This strategy has evidenced that race and class discrimination continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Organizing groups offer a much different account of the problems plaguing schools, as well as a much different account of what interventions will have sustainable success.

Lastly, at the epicenter of the community organizing analysis and action is power—the role power plays in distributing equity, and the role power plays in transforming individual concerns into organized demands. Organizing reckons that injustice is the product of a power imbalance. In a 1988 *Illinois Issue* when he was a community organizer, President Barack Obama wrote:

[O]rganizing begins with the premise that the problems facing inner-city communities do not result from a lack of effective solutions, but from a lack of power to implement these solutions; that the only way for communities to build long-term power is by organizing people and money around a common vision (p. 2).

Organizing distinguishes between two forms of power: *power over* and *power with*. *Power over* reveals a hierarchical relationship that results in exploitation and dehumanization; in contrast,

power with encourages collective analysis and action, which aims to alter the governing dynamics, rather than just shift who is in charge. Community organizing's core strategy is to build power with, what some have called relational power (Cortez, 1993) as the foundation for action. Relational power is the process by which organizing groups "build relationships and collective responsibility by identifying shared concerns among neighborhood residents and creating alliances that cross neighborhood and institutional boundaries" (Gold, Simon, and Brown, 2003, p.12).

The seed for systemic power analysis can be found not just in recent community organizing history in the United States but also from anti-colonial movements around the globe. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, who is most known for his criticism of what he called "the banking method" of education, a hierarchical dynamic in which teachers wield power over students throughout the schooling process, first drew attention to the dehumanizing effects of education through the tenet of critical consciousness-raising. Critical consciousness or *conscientização* (Freire, 1970; 1990) refers to the process by which disenfranchised or oppressed peoples "learn to recognize social, political, and economic contradictions, and take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (1970, p. 19). Freire argued that in his homeland Brazil, colonization was grounded in economic exploitation and as a result "could not create the conditions for the development of the permeable, flexible, mentality characteristic of a democratic cultural climate" (1990, p. 21). Freire also noted that beyond the structural constraints, those without economic capital were also at a lack of political experience and as such were "carried along in the wake of change" (1990, p.7). *Conscientização* then is crucial as it represents "the development of the awakening of critical awareness" (1990, p. 19) to support the

ability of people to create change for themselves, what might be understood as an awakening of their power.

Many of the first writings on education organizing tried to articulate a theory of change that distinguished education organizing from other school reform efforts. The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform elaborated an “indicators framework” that outlined eight areas¹⁵ in which organized groups of people can act collectively to contribute to improved student learning (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002). Supported by case studies in five cities, these authors developed a theory of change that demonstrates how community organizing builds *community capacity* to improve schools. Community capacity is an umbrella term the authors use to describe how community organizing groups “augment social capital by bringing differently positioned stakeholders into public conversations on how to support school success (p. 17). They argue that community capacity interactively broadens public accountability.

As the body of education organizing literature has expanded, scholars have not revisited the theory of change. This is particularly significant, as current organizing efforts have become much more sophisticated in their attempts to impact policy and governance. Education organizing is now measuring its success by school outcomes. Multiple reports published in recent years assert the impact of organizing on school-level improvements and student achievement (see Mediratta et al, 2009). While some question whether organizing can be positively linked to student outcomes such as test scores or advancements in instruction and curriculum (Glickman & Scally, 2008), the field has legitimized organizing as a key strategy in transforming public schools, as well as strengthening neighborhood and community social capital.

¹⁵ The eight indicator areas include: leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, equity, school/community connections, high quality instruction and curriculum, and positive school climate.

Research on the impact of parent organizing has been particularly robust. Unlike parent involvement projects which focus on an individual child's or an individual school's success, parent education organizing efforts distinguish themselves by a focus on system change and accountability (Giles, 1998). Gold's (2004) case study in Philadelphia documented a parent organizing campaign achievements in working with teachers, school district representatives, and local elected officials to launch a safety campaign to hire crossing guards, and create a homework club to provide after-school enrichment activities. The Indicators Project profiled case studies of parent organizing campaigns in five cities, which successfully pressured school and district administrators for new school facilities, financial resources, and attention to inequitable schooling practices (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002). Mediratta et al. (2008) released the results of a six year study on an organizing campaign in Oakland, CA to improve under-funded, overcrowded schools evidencing that parent-led community organizing was the determinant to sustaining school reform through an \$80 million deficit, a state takeover, and reoccurring changes in the top education administrator position. The detailed account of the Community Collaborative to Improve School District 9 campaign in New York City by Fabricant (2010), also referred to as CC9, evidences how parent leaders were successful in working with teachers and education officials including the United Federation of Teachers to establish a lead teacher program as a way to improve schooling in the Bronx.

2.2.4 Challenges to organizing. The kinds of victories that organizing groups secure are not without cost. Local campaigns face challenges on a number of levels, including lack of resources, leadership turnover, and strained relationships with schools as leaders continue to be “locked in non-productive struggles with school administrators” (Fruchter, 2009, p. 90). As organizing groups have expanded their work, they also have had difficulty developing a coherent

school reform agenda, and in following through with districts to make sure their wins are implemented properly (Anyon, 2005). In the Mayoral control governance system, education organizing groups are reconsidering their positioning to be able to counter system-wide policy. Particular to this study, I look at the challenges of organizing to expand its influence beyond their neighborhood boundaries, and to counter the district's "*decentralized centralism*" (Karlsen, 2000). There is widening appreciation among educators for the importance of engaging students, families, and communities as partners but as Mark Warren (2010: 17) points out, this appreciation "is less for engaging families and communities in political actions aimed at school reform." The national organizing effort to deliver the election for Obama has catapulted the status of organizing into public lexicon. But this has not changed the fact that the work of community organizing continues to be misunderstood.¹⁶ In public education, school districts remain hesitant to adopt its principles into their own engagement and reform efforts.

2.3 Conclusion

This literature review outlines major shifts in education governance in the last two centuries, one that moved from community knows best, to expert knows best, to market knows best. Throughout these shifts, there has been considerable conflict between school and community leaders over the role of families and communities in school decision-making, over equity (what decisions will best support the most vulnerable students) and accountability (who answers to whom). In New York City, this conflict emerged more forcefully during the fight over community control in the 1960s and has reemerged under the Mayoral control governance structure.

¹⁶ During Obama's election, several media sources printed unfavorable commentaries on the work of community organizing. See for example, this article in the Wall Street Journal, September 4, 2008. "The Community Organizer's New Clothes": <http://www.online.wsj.com/article/SB122054121296699899>

Correspondingly, there are three main frames for understanding parent and community roles in public education: traditional, community organizing, and free market. The school reform literature defines parent involvement in private and individual ways (e.g., asking parents to attend report card pick-up and parent–teacher conferences). While there is growing appreciation for strong school, family, and community partnerships, there is significant disagreement about whether parent engagement should be expanded to more public, collective, and political efforts to improve schools. Whereas traditional parent involvement tends to focus on individual children and individual schools, organizing re-defines parent engagement as work focused on widespread school transformation linked to community revitalization. Community organizing groups contend that educational solutions should come from the power of the people, not policy or experts. In doing so, they “situate their demands for educational equity within a larger vision of expanding democratic participation” (Mediratta et al., 2009, p. 16). A new form of parent engagement has been gaining steam: consumerism in a school marketplace. While the New York City Department of Education points to several mechanisms for parent engagement (see Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011), their primary strategy is to involve parents as individual consumers through the school choice process. This form of parent engagement emphasizes parents’ roles as market actors or consumers. The school closing process helps to further pull apart these distinctions in viewpoints of parent and community roles as well as the distinctive framings of what a school closing means. In the chapters that follow I will lay out the story of NYC school closings from the perspectives of school administrators, and community leaders, and in chapter five diverse publics. But first I outline the methodology of this study, my research design, methods, analysis, and reflections.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The summer before I officially started data collection, I received a copy of the television series, *The Wire*, on DVD. I became completely engrossed in this fictional television series about a city struggling to deal with its problems. What seemed unique and powerful to me about *The Wire* was that the writers had figured out how to tell a complex story about life in Baltimore in overlapping and interconnected parts. Episodes of the five season series were devoted to unwrapping a layered crisis in Baltimore, a city plagued as much by the institutions designed to solve problems, as the problems themselves: enduring cycles of poverty and greed, crime and punishment, racism and addiction, politics and corruption. The resulting destruction implicated an equally complex and diverse set of players - drug dealers, police officers, politicians, blue-collar workers, the media, and bureaucrats (each with their own codes and procedures for living in Baltimore). In telling their story, the authors managed to portray each set of players as the complex human beings that they are – none of them essentially more “bad” than the other, none of them essentially more “right”.

I modeled my dissertation after *The Wire*'s multi-sited ethnography. In her article on *The Wire* (which she is turning into a book), Williams (2011) notes that because single ethnographies do not have enough knowledge of enough worlds nor generally have enough time to show enough parts, they cannot reveal a whole system the way multi-sited ethnographies can. My goal was to hang out in distinct sites of education policymaking in NYC, what I liken to Habermas' “publics”: in the district office with people dressed in suits; at the City Council chamber, which requires a name tag with photo identification; in Laundromats with parents and grandparents; in church basements where activists meet; in union offices; in the very schools that were slated for closure] in an attempt to offer a multi-dimensional view into what has become a contemporary

phenomenon in New York City and across this country. My foremost objective in this dissertation has been to investigate conflicting understandings of education justice and school improvement through a case of school closings. Practically, looking at contradictory policy framings and actions in New York City meant investigating how multiple actors with multiple goals, strategies, challenges, and concerns operate in multiple publics in a system that is divided spatially –geographically and ideologically, politically and historically, racially and economically. I have aimed to capture and describe many school reform worlds in New York City, their codes and procedures, assumptions and priorities, and their entanglements in the larger public sphere of urban education policy and politics.

This chapter provides an overview of the multiple methods I utilized to interrogate these disparate worlds, and my reflections on the strengths and challenges involved in this research design. What follows are descriptions of (1) the exploratory phase; (2) data collection overview encompassing interviews, observations, documents, and surveys; (3) data analysis; and (4) reflexivity (reflections of my own participation in this study), challenges, and limitations.

3.1. Exploratory Phase

Ethnographic projects necessitate an exploratory phase in which the ethnographer familiarizes herself with the field (LeCompte, 2002). This phase allows the researcher to consider the relevance of the research questions and begin to identify, or as in my case, to narrow themes to explore. I began my exploratory phase in September of 2009 and over the course of three months met with both school administrators and education organizers to discuss the relevance and usefulness of my proposed research: looking at distinct theories of school reform encompassing equity, community engagement, and accountability. My original thinking was that

focusing on practices of community engagement would allow me to also interrogate notions of accountability and equity.

At the New York City Department of Education, I met with then co-directors of the Office of Community Superintendents (OCS). I originally approached this office because under the reauthorization of the S5887 legislation, (the act to amend the education governance law and extend mayoral control in New York City until 2015), Superintendents were directed to provide school closure information to the public, and respond to parental comments and concerns. Superintendents were also written into the new governance legislation as facilitators between the NYCDoE and the public in the school closings process. The Co-Directors of the Superintendent's Office I met agreed that their office would cooperate as it was interested to learn "if the new policies (particularly superintendents overseeing schools within the geographic space of their district) assist in addressing the disenchantment on part of the public and if parents still feel [that] there is a disconnect" (fieldnotes, September 15, 2009). The Co-Directors helped me to arrange preliminary interviews with community district superintendents in the winter of 2009.

With permission from both the Graduate Center IRB, and the Department of Education Office of Research, I conducted interviews with five Superintendents about their understanding of the new school governance law, their role and responsibilities related to supporting local decision making, as well as their past and current experiences with community engagement, its successes and challenges. Two district Superintendents, in particular, spoke at length about active parent and community leaders who had created pressure for a community presence at the decision-making table and ultimately changed both the process and outcome of policymaking (fieldnotes, October 26, 2009; November 13, 2009). All Superintendents spoke about the work

they anticipated doing with respect to engaging parents and the public in difficult conversations such as school closings. At this time, I also interviewed an additional four department level administrators responsible for broader community engagement work for the New York City school system—through the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy.

During this exploratory stage, I also spoke with eight community organizers and community-organizing scholars in NYC and across the country about the goals of my dissertation study and specifically how my work could contribute to the literature on education organizing. In New York City, I met with three organizing and advocacy groups, attending one of each of their organizational meetings. As I became more interested in the topic of school closings, it became clear that the New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ) was the best match for my study interests. Shortly after the Panel for Education Policy voted to approve all nineteen school closing proposals in January 2010, CEJ called for a moratorium on school closings until an independent review could be conducted. My initial conversations with CEJ informed my study design as their executive staff encouraged me to look beyond the issue of community engagement to issues of equity, as they identify as “an education justice organization, not a community engagement organization” (fieldnotes, October 6, 2009). I revised my proposal and indicated I would pursue two areas of study under the same umbrella of school governance: the larger community’s role in decisions about schools and the decisions to improve schools themselves. Based on my own experiences in separate school reform worlds, my assumption was that school and community leaders would think very differently about both, and I wanted to learn more about the differences.

Overall, the exploratory research stage helped me to refine my research questions and to identify a tangible issue through which to study my questions. Observing escalating tensions

during the initial round of public hearings at schools proposed for closure in late 2009 convinced me to select school closings as my case study.

When I began to officially collect data (in January, 2010), I had intended only to interview, observe, and survey New York City Department of Education administrators (chiefly Superintendents, but also Deputy Chancellors and other policymakers) and parent and community leaders who were part of the Coalition for Educational Justice coalition. However, at the legendary ten-hour January 26-27th 2010 PEP meeting and vote, I observed other leaders that were vocal in opposition to school closing proposals. I subsequently amended my IRB at the Graduate Center to include interviews and observations with the United Federation of Teachers representatives, elected officials, school administrators, educators and other advocates and activists over the age of 18. While considerable attention was collected with UFT, elected officials, and school principals and teachers, this data was not appropriate for the conceptual design of this dissertation. Therefore, it is not included at this time. Table 3.1 on the next page outlines steps in my data collection process.

| Table 3.1 <i>Stages of Data Collection</i> |
|--|
| <p>Stage 1: Initiating Study (September 2009-January 2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write up short description to introduce study goals • Make contact with each organization to introduce project/explore interest in organizational participation in the research • Submit and Defend Proposal • Follow IRB guidelines |
| <p>Stage 2: Collect Documents (January 2010-June 2011)</p> <p>Review of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position and Press Statements • Website information and email notification • Reports and publications • Meeting agenda and materials • News media and reports |
| <p>Stage 3: Observe Public Hearings (November 2009-June 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation of select number of school closing public hearings • School closing hearings at individual schools • Panel for Education Policy meetings of school closing votes • Community Education Council Meetings, District Leadership Team Meetings, Community Board Meetings that discuss school closings • Additional hearings called by Elected officials |
| <p>Step 4: Direct Observations of Organizational External and Internal Meetings (Feb 2010-May 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press conferences, demonstrations and protests • NYCDoe meetings as given permission • CEJ meetings as given permission |
| <p>Stage 5: Arrange and Conduct Interviews (Feb 2010-May 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative interviews • (minimum 15) one hour interviews with a variety of NYCDoe administrators at multiple levels (central office, community district, school) • (minimum 15) one hour interviews with a variety of CEJ leaders at multiple levels (city wide, community district, school) • (minimum 10) one hour interviews with UFT leaders at multiple levels (central, borough/district, and school) • (minimum 10) one hour interviews with elected officials at multiple levels (city wide, local, and state when appropriate) • (minimum 20) one hour interviews at select schools proposed for closure with teachers and staff, families, and school partners and allies |
| <p>Stage 6: Design and Conduct Surveys (May 2010, 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online surveys of Community School District and High School Superintendents • Online surveys of CEJ group organizers and leaders |

3.2 Research Design

This study blends a phenomenological framework with a case study approach. Case study research is presented as both a methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and a choice of study (Stake, 2005). Yin (2003) writes that a case study is an empirical inquiry that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). What distinguishes case studies from larger phenomenological studies is their bounding, including participants, structures, and processes (Creswell, 2003).

School closing conflicts in New York City was an appropriate multi-sited case study for my interests in competing visions and practices for educational equity and the role of communities in decisions about schools. While this study involved me interviewing and surveying individuals as well as observing their actions, my unit of analysis was the organization. I took a maximum variation sampling approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in order to capture multiple and conflicting perspectives from various school reform organizations. I selected the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) and the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) because they represented traditional district and organizing perspectives on school improvement.

Yin notes that evidence for case studies may come from six sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts (2003, p. 83-83). In this study, data was collected through four primary sources:

- *Interviews* were conducted with school district administrators, community organizers and parent leaders primarily, and additionally with union representatives, elected officials, as well as school administrators, teachers and staff, and parents.

- *Observations* of public hearings and select organizational meetings were conducted of the actions of New York City Department of Education and the New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ).
- *Surveys* of community district superintendents who oversaw school closing hearings and CEJ members about the school closing process were conducted.
- *Documents* including press releases, reports, media, meeting agenda and materials, handouts, flyers, and other physical artifacts were analyzed.

Below I briefly explicate each method, and then I situate each method across the two organizational participants in the study.

3.2.1 Data sources.

3.2.1.1 Interviews. The purpose of interviews was to study how each actor makes sense of school closings and interprets the influence of their own work and that of other actors. I used open-ended semi-structured interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) as “conversations in which both participants – teller and listener/questioner -- develop meaning together” (Riessmann, 1993, p. 55). Interviews were structured to allow participants to create narrative accounts of their experience and interpretations of the school closing process in NYC. The purpose of city-wide or central office level interviews was to talk with individuals who have a systemic (national, state, and city) perspective of school closure policy. District or neighborhood level interviews provided perspectives of communities. Finally, the purpose of school interviews was to give a grounded and localized account of the impact of school closings. I conducted 120 formal interviews, ranging from ten minutes to two and a half hours. (Average length was one hour.)

I audio-taped each of these interviews and transcribed 75% of them. In three instances, I took handwritten notes because the interviewee preferred that I not audio-tape. Interviews served as

the prime source of data collection for this study; an analysis of the interviews provided an initial look into framings of school closure policy. Conducting interviews across the NYCDoE and CEJ organizations and levels allowed me to collect a plurality of perspectives that this study necessitates.

3.2.1.2 Direct observations. While interviews helped to ascertain how individual actors framed school closures, they did not capture how these same actors developed their framings, interpreted contradictory framings, and enacted their positions on school closure policy. I observed NYCDoE meetings primarily through the Office of Superintendents, and CEJ internal strategy sessions and public actions. I attended a select number of press conferences hosted by other actors such as the UFT, elected officials, and other advocates; and more than twenty public hearings where these organizational actors collided. My observations included attending internal organizational meetings, which helped me to understand how each conceptualized their own positions on school closings, and attending external organizational meetings to focus more on each organization's framings in the public sphere. Lastly, I attended public hearings where all groups were present, and vying for control. These provided me an opportunity to understand how actors attempted to influence and each other.

Across observations I asked how each organization framed and discussed school closure policy, as well as what how they articulated their theories of school reform (equity, engagement and accountability). I also asked how organizations sought to influence policy. When I was permitted to audio-tape internal organizational meetings, I did. I relied on handwritten notes in cases when I was not permitted. When I was asked by any organization not to include information that I collected, I respected that request.

3.2.1.3 Documents and surveys. Table 3.2 shows the specific documents collected across organizations. Documents helped me to triangulate the data I collected in interviews and observations, as did surveys. Surveys were piloted, and then distributed to each group of leaders at the end of the year. They offer specific evaluations from Superintendents and CEJ leaders on the school closing process. The next section will describe each organizational participant and the specific methods I used. Following the descriptions, I also provide this information in two separate tables (See Tables 3.2 on page 73 and 3.3 on page 74).

3.2.2 Organizational participants.

3.2.2.1 New York City Department of Education. The New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) consists of over 1600 schools serving 1.1 million students. The NYCDoE operates on three levels: central, district, and school. According to the NYCDoE organization website, the central office sets the relevant laws, regulations, and requirements for the entire school system.¹⁷ Collecting data in the central office of the Department of Education (from now on referred to as Tweed, as it is housed in the courthouse named after the former politician “Boss” Tweed¹⁸) focused on interviews with central office administrators, namely deputy chancellors overseeing school closure policy, and at the district level with Community District Superintendents¹⁹; observations of Superintendents meetings, which took place centrally, as well as a select number of other central office meetings I was permitted to observe; and two online surveys of Superintendents on the school closing process for years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Again, I concentrated my data collection of NYCDoE in the Superintendent’s Office because

¹⁷ The Department outlines its mission and basic organizational structure on its website: <http://schools.nyc.gov/default.htm>

¹⁸ William “Boss” Magear was elected head of a New York City Democratic Party political organization, Tammany Hall and as a member of the New York House of Representatives in 1852, and eventually convicted and sent to prison for embezzlement and political corruption.

¹⁹ As of 2003, Mayor Michael Bloomberg eliminated 32 school local districts and replaced them with 10 regional offices in his first reorganization of the school system. In a subsequent reorganization in 2007, Mayor Bloomberg abolished the regions. Superintendents remain in the state governance law and along with District Family Advocates who report to them, are the only district level administrators for the Department.

community school district superintendents were delegated to work with the public on school closings, including meeting with school communities and presiding over hearings concerning school closings. Given this mandate and my clearance to attend Superintendent meetings, I focused my data collection through this office.

3.2.2.1.1 NYCDoE interviews. I concentrated central level interviews with Deputy Chancellors and administrators in four offices²⁰ that coordinate efforts on school closings (Division of School Support and Instruction, Division of Portfolio Planning, Division of Accountability, and Division of Family Engagement and Advocacy) for a total of 12 interviews with central office administrators. I conducted an additional 11 interviews with Community District Superintendents through a fifth office, the Office of Superintendents.

With respect to specific schools proposed for closure, I requested to interview individual Network Leaders (“the new Superintendent in town” – fieldnotes, December 12, 2010) responsible for instructional and operational supports to schools.²¹ I found that this group was the most difficult to secure interviews with – under increasing pressure to deliver support services to schools, and scrutiny for support services they were delivering, it was clear that interviewing network leaders overseeing schools proposed for closure was not welcome. Only one Network Leader working with a school proposed for closure spoke with me and it was an off-the-record phone conversation for ten minutes. However, I was able to speak informally with other Network team members that were not working with schools proposed for closure, as well as interview two directors overseeing the work of network teams.

I had better fortune at the school level – in the case of three of the four schools proposed for closure that I visited, the principal and/or assistant principal agreed to an interview. In the

²⁰ All offices have changed names.

²¹ I discuss the change in management strategy and the evolution of the network structure in Chapter 4.

fourth, the principal had been removed. Teacher interviews were set up generally through one educator in the building. I was able to make at least three visits to each school with the exception of one school – the only school I did not visit more than once. Table 3.3 (see page 73) offers a detailed breakdown of all interviews I conducted of in the New York City Department of Education.

3.2.2.1.2 NYCDoE observations. Superintendent meetings generally took place at Tweed and often included presentations by central administrators from across the NYCDoE. These meetings served as a lens into how the NYCDoE understood school closings and its larger school reform framework. At the central office, I also was able to attend one meeting concerning school closures at the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy. Finally, I was invited to listen to then Chancellor Klein give his Back to School pep talk inside the Tweed rotunda to staff – just one month prior to his departure. On one occasion, a Superintendent invited me to a meeting convened at one school proposed for closure, and there I was able to get a view into education policymaking behind closed doors – school administrators, network team members, school leadership team members, as well as NYCDoE central administrators who attended this meeting discussed the school’s progress to date. I also sought access to observe school closing proposal meetings conducted by the Office of Portfolio Development and Planning but was told that, “given the political sensitivity of school closings, researchers would not be welcome at such meetings” (Fieldnotes, October 20, 2010).

3.2.2.1.3 NYCDoE surveys. Using SurveyMonkey, I constructed two online surveys for NYCDoE Superintendents to glean information about the school closing process and particularly the public hearings from a larger subset of Superintendents I was not able to interview. Because surveys were anonymous, I also anticipated they might reduce social desirability (Sue & Ritter,

2007) and as a result I might gain perspectives I might not have gotten in interviews. At the end of school year 2010, 25 out of 37 Community School District and High School Superintendents I administered the survey to completed the protocol (68%). I decided to administer a shorter version of the same survey at the end of school year 2011. For the second survey, I sent the new version to 20 of the original 25 Superintendents that had completed it (in the time that had elapsed, 5 Superintendents had left the post) and of the twenty, 14 Superintendents participated (70%). I chose this sampling strategy because I planned to assess if Superintendents evaluated the second school closing process in 2010-2011 any differently than the 2009-2010, and therefore it did not make sense to send to new Superintendents. However these comparisons were not possible in the way the online survey was set up. All surveys contained both open-ended and closed questions.

3.2.2.2 NYC Coalition for Educational Justice. The New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ) is a collaborative of community-based organizations and unions whose members include culturally diverse parents, community members, students and educators. Formed in 2006 from three regional organizing entities, CEJ sees its mission “to organize a movement to end the inequities in the public school system”.²² Collecting data in CEJ’s sphere was primarily focused on observations of their “*Fix Our Schools, Don’t Just Close Them*” campaign. Between February 2010-May 2011, I observed CEJ’s organizing work against school closure policy, which included their drafting a resolution for the passage of a School Transformation Zone in place of closing schools and passing it unanimously in the City Council; convening a coalition of allies across an array of education activists, policymakers, and practitioners called the Save Our Schools Coalition; organizing parents and others at schools

²² CEJ’s mission appears on its website: www.nyccej.org

proposed for closure; and conducting several actions against the NYCDoE including civil disobedience outside Tweed and “shutting down” two Panel for Education Policy meetings. I conducted more than 100 hours of observations of more than 60 meetings, trainings, and actions. Primarily CEJ operated as a counterpublic – what Fraser (1990) described as “parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67). But CEJ also maneuvered in traditional policy arenas – meeting with NYCDoE administrators and alongside elected officials and UFT representatives. The uniqueness of CEJ’s interwoven organizing strategies is not the focus of this dissertation, but it will inevitably come into conversation.

3.2.2.2.1 CEJ Observations. In addition to observing their press conferences, coalition meetings, and other public actions they took, CEJ allowed me to observe their internal strategy meetings. CEJ has two specific internal structures in their organization for parent leaders to make decisions: campaign meetings and steering committee meetings. These two internal structures are advantageous for seeing how CEJ as an organization identifies education problems they want to address, formulates their positions, and develops strategies. Table 3.2 (see page 73) shows a breakdown of the variety of meetings and events CEJ conducted that I was able to observe. I regularly observed the steering committee meetings during my data collection, and attempted to observe as many campaign meetings and organizer meetings as possible.

Steering committee meetings occur once a month on a Saturday for four hours where lunch, translation services, and childcare are provided. Attendance averaged 30 persons, making the conference room where the meeting takes place feel excitingly packed. Steering committees have a family feel, as members greeted each other with embraces, laughter, food, as well as

developed their personal relationships. Steering Committee meetings are also important because they constitute the body that votes on all campaign decisions. CEJ's internal governance structure stipulated that two representatives of each participating organization vote, and voting is by consensus. Parent leaders take turns facilitating the meeting in cooperation with CEJ staff. The practice is that an English-speaking parent and a Spanish-speaking parent will lead the meeting together so that the meeting unfolds in both languages, rather than translated in one direction.

Campaign meetings are where details are worked out, but sometimes are spaces where members can generate ideas that get brought to the steering committee meetings. There really is no one direction between these two structures - the two are "in conversation." Campaign meetings are generally held every other week, usually during a weekday evening for two hours. Dinner, translation service, and childcare are also provided. Attendance is smaller – usually about 8-12 people. Generally, CEJ staff direct these meetings with specific questions to parent leaders about how the campaign is going and how it should proceed. Sometimes campaign meetings need to be held more frequently (in the height of campaigns); additional conference calls are held, or task forces form.

CEJ also convenes meetings for organizers once a month and I was able to attend a few of these and hear more from organizers about their own viewpoints and evaluations of campaign work. Generally in campaign and steering meetings, organizers tend to step back so that parent leaders talk more. Finally, CEJ holds a monthly staff meeting with all CBO executive directors – a year into my research I was invited to attend this meeting, but due to scheduling conflicts I was unable to see it in action.

CEJ encompasses eight community-based organizations (CBOs) and while I was not able to spend significant time at any one CBO, I did attend a select number of member group meetings as pertinent to specific school closing proposals. On a few occasions I visited schools proposed for closure, or at risk of closing, when I learned CEJ leaders were going to make presentations or hold meetings.

3.2.2.2.2 CEJ interviews. While the CEJ component of this study was primarily based on observations, I conducted a total of 14 interviews with organizers and parent leaders. I conducted these interviews as campaign work was underway, and I was unable to schedule sit down interviews with additional members. To get a wider representation of members' perspectives and experiences, I conducted what I call "pulse reads" or ("pulse"). These are check-ins with parent leaders during campaign decisions and actions, synonymous to informal member checks. I conducted an additional 16 "pulse reads" with sixteen different people. I wanted to get a sense of the depth of CEJ as an organization and make sure my interpretations were correct, but these also served as mini-interviews, as they gave me a window into individual members' framings of school closing work. At the school level, I also interviewed two more parents who were brought into school closing work in coordination with CEJ organizing efforts at two different schools. Finally, I sought to interview education activists who were active in school organizing and justice work, and who could give an outside perspective on CEJ and the role they were playing in education policymaking.

3.2.2.2.3 CEJ surveys. At the conclusion of the *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, I designed a survey for CEJ leaders who had active participants. This survey had a few purposes: to ascertain a wider variety of CEJ members perspectives on this work, to assess CEJ members' evaluations of the campaign, and also to compare CEJ leaders experiences with

those of school leaders. (The survey contained a few common items with the survey I had sent to Superintendents: on parent and community engagement; school closing hearings; and the school closing process and participant demographics and backgrounds.) I worked with a translator to provide the survey to CEJ leaders in both English and Spanish languages. Twenty-five out of 40 CEJ members (organizers and leaders) I sent it to completed the protocol (62%). Of the 25, 20 completed the survey in English, 5 in Spanish.

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 on the next two pages outline my four methods of data collection by organization. A third column in each includes additional persons I collected data from including UFT, elected officials, education advocates, and school administrators and teachers. I did not analyze these interviews in depth for this study but they did help me contextualize my understandings of NYCDoE and CEJ. I present an overview of documents, observations and surveys I collected in Table 3.2 on page 73, and interviews in Table 3.3 on page 74.

| Table 3.2 <i>Methods of Data Collection by Organization</i> | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Research Question: How do school and community leaders frame school closure policy and enact their positions on school closings in New York City? | | | |
| Research Method | NYCDoE | CEJ | OTHERS |
| DOCUMENT ANALYSIS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press Releases • Reports • School Closing Proposals (education impact statements and fact sheets) • Hearings Summaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyers • Meeting Agenda • Meeting • Materials • Press Releases • Reports • School Closing Public Hearing Statements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UFT Press Releases • Elected Officials' Press Releases • Newspaper Articles/Media |
| OBSERVATION | School Closing Public Hearings | | |
| Internal Meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chancellor's Address • Office Superintendents Mtgs • Office Family Engagement & Advocacy Mtg | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaign Mtgs • Organizer Mtgs • Steering Committee Mtgs • Summer Retreat | N/A |
| External Meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chancellor Town Hall • Citywide Council HS • Panel for Education Policy (PEP) Votes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition Mtgs • Press Conference • Protests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UFT press conferences • City Council Public Hearings • Public Advocate Town Hall Mtg • Activist Protests |
| School 1 (Elementary) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement Mtg • School Closing Hearing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Mtgs • Press Conf | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Press Conference |
| School 2 (Middle) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement Mtg • School Closing Hearing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Mtgs • Press Conf | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected Officials Press Conference • Rallies |
| School 3 (High School) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement Mtg • School Closing Hearing | N/A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected Officials Press Conference • Protests • Youth performance |
| School 4 (High School) | N/A | N/A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Press Conference |
| SURVEY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendents (25/37 completed) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEJ leaders (25/40 completed) | |

| Table 3.3 <i>Interviews Conducted by Organization</i> | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| INTERVIEW | NYCDoE | CEJ | OTHERS |
| Central/ Citywide Level [44] | - Deputy Chancellors (4) - Division of Accountability (2) - Division Family Advocacy & Engagement (4) - Division of Portfolio Mgmt (3) - Division of School Support & Instruction (3) Total= 16 | -Executive Dir -Lead Staff Organizers(4) -Partners (2) Total=7 | - UFT Officials (11) - CSA Officials (1) - City Elected Official (2) - Panel for Education Policy representative (3) - Citywide High School parent representative (1) - Parent Activists (2) Total=21 |
| District Level [25] | - Superintendents (11) Total=11 | -Parent Leader (6) -Parent Organizer (4) Total=10 | - UFT Borough Office Representatives (4) Total=4 |
| School 1 (Elem) [10] | - Teacher (3) - PTA President - Parent (3) Total=5 | -Parent Organizer (2) Total=2 | - City Council Member - UFT District Leader - UFT Chapter Leader Total=3 |
| School 2 (MS) [14] | - Principal - Asst. Principal - Guidance Counselor (2) - Teacher (3) - PTA President - Parent (2) Total=10 | -Parent Organizer (2) Total=2 | - Assembly member - City Council Member Total=2 |
| School 3 (HS) [15] | -Principal -Parent Coordinator -Security Officer -Teacher (6) Total=9 | N/A | - Assembly member - School Partner - Senator - Parent Representative - UFT District Leader - UFT Chapter Leader Total=6 |
| School 4 (HS) [12] | -Principal -Asst. Principal (2) -SLT Member -Teacher (5) -Guidance Counselor -Parent Coordinator Total=11 | N/A | - UFT Chapter Leader Total=1 |
| Total=120 | | | |

3.2.3 Data analysis. Case study research relies on both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation of data (Stake, 1995). Yet, given the likeliness of replication in case study research (Yin, 2003), I began analysis with one case to develop understanding, and then moved to the next case to identify similarities and differences. The data I collected encompasses key informant interviews, direct observations of school closing campaigns, government and community documents, and a survey of superintendents and parent leaders and organizers. I conducted a two-level narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994) to showcase how multiple actors (primarily NYCDoE school administrators and CEJ community leaders) frame educational equity and the community's role in decisions about schools, including the implicit theories, contextual factors, and social forces, which underlie these discourses. Narrative policy analysis compliments case study methodology and an interpretative policy analysis framework as it recognizes processes of social construction, where actors devise the meanings of events, data, opinions of opponents, and draws attention to how a group of people makes sense of substantive policy issues in a specific place at a specific time.

Interpretative policy analysis (Yanow, 1996, 2000) akin to narrative policy analysis was an ideal procedural map to follow for this study's intention to uncover distinct lines of discourse that leaders develop in framing school closure policy. Yanow argues that an interpretative approach asks what a specific policy means to different stakeholders and constituencies. Whereas traditional policy analyses focus on objective costs and benefits, an interpretative policy analysis "explores the contrasts between policy meanings as intended by policy makers and the possibly variant and other incommensurable meanings made of them by other policy-relevant groups" (2000, p. 9). Yanow outlines that interpretative policy analysts look at differences as alternate ways of seeing, understanding, and doing, and helping all parties understand differences

underlying each other's positions. As Yanow's work demonstrates, interpretative policy analysis also allows researchers to focus on all actors as experts, thereby lending credence not just to technical expertise but also to subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980).

Yanow was a most helpful guide. At times when I was tempted to focus on the facts in question (e.g. variance in reported graduation statistics), I was reminded to look at these wildly different reports as distinct framings and to assess these reports for which parts are given attention, and which are ignored. I was also reminded of each organization as a distinct interpretative community. My job as an interpretative policy analyst is to identify the meanings between and among distinct interpretative communities, and probe the underlying conflicts behind those meanings—differences that result not just from different values and beliefs but also from sitting in very different places.

My analysis involved two stages. In the first level of analysis, I wrote a narrative text for each school closing campaign, focusing on significant discursive moments where actors “describe the point of their story, orientation to other actors, as well as to time, event sequence, and evaluation” (Riessman, 2008). I used open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995) to establish salient themes across the data in the interviews, observations, and surveys. Some of these codes (i.e., definitions of and assumptions about equity, accountability, and community engagement) derived from the literature review and research questions. Open coding allowed novel themes to emerge from the data. This first level of analysis produced an interim text that outlined the basic argument and context of each narrative of school closing policy. Surveys and documents helped to triangulate the data I collected via interviews and observations. They lent texture to framings of school closure policy and were also useful in examining the policy context and broader aims of each organization school improvement work. The second level involved a

closer analysis of interview transcripts, observation field notes, and documents. Within each broader code I analyzed the different framings (meta-commentaries, slogans, and metaphors) that each organization used to describe school closings.

In Chapter five, I discuss results from fine-grained analysis of three public hearings concerned proposed school closings. I follow a separate process of analysis. Given the length of public hearing transcripts, they were coded with Atlas TI software. I coded transcripts by speaker, or how individuals who testified introduced themselves at the microphone.²³ For those speakers that did not introduce themselves, I coded them “NI” or non-identified. I also coded transcripts for assertions provided by each speaker. Summaries of the multiple assertions which speakers made were coded using an open coding framework (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). On my initial close reading of the three transcripts, I generated more than 125 codes of specific phrases, sentences, or passages of the testimonies given. It took me several more runs of the transcripts to pare this list down. Eventually, I was able to identify 25 main assertions across all three hearings, and then collapse these 25 codes into 5 larger categories. These are: (1) Not Failing Schools, (2) No Support has been Provided, (3) Lack of Accountability in Process, (4) Closing is not a Solution, (5) Other Motivations (than “failing schools”) propel School Closings. A second level of coding was informed using critical public discourse analysis (CDA), to interpret and explain the ways in which “discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and gets represented by the social world” (Malanacharuvil-Berkes, 2005, p. 366; Fairclough, 1993). CDA’s historical roots have been attributed to social theorists such as W.E.B. DuBois (1903) who drew attention to the dominant paradigm of white European and American scholarship that perpetrated paternalistic viewpoints, and analysts who use this as a methodology

²³ See Appendix F

are expected not just to uncover the conditions of inequality but to transform them. In the tradition of CDA, power is recognized as both a tool for domination and liberation in the social process of language. CDA is an appropriate method for evaluating public challenges to NYCDoE validity claims (Habermas, 1984), as well as assessing the public sphere in the ways that Fraser (1990), Dawson (1995), and others insisted – namely, whether the public sphere can hold marginalized discourses and counter-narratives, and whether counterpublics can assert a framework of analysis that will influence state power.

3.3 Research Reflections

3.3.1 Reflexivity. A researcher is an instrument in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1998). There is a long tradition in qualitative research on the importance of reflexivity – or researchers’ awareness of their own subjectivity. Whatever the method, research is not an objective pursuit of knowledge – all researchers are positioned not just by categorical identification (age, gender/sex, race, class, sexuality, income, religion, political affiliation) but by philosophical leanings, psychological dispositions, and our own assumptions, codes, and ways of being in the world. Fine et. al (2003) wrote that the relationship between researcher and subject has often been “obscured in social science texts, protecting privilege, securing distance, and laminating the contradictions” (p. 72). Behar (1993) points out, that researchers often hide behind a cloak of neutrality. I revisited both of these insights continually to examine my position throughout the research process.

First and foremost I must reveal my biases. I tend to favor of democratic decision-making processes, and I took on this study knowing that the decision process concerning school closings would likely play out in ways in which I would not personally agree. I personally believe that families ought to have genuine opportunities to shape all decisions that affect their children’s

schooling, and that school districts and schools should devote considerable resources to training themselves on how to partner with families and communities in meaningful ways, including learning about anti-racist education policymaking. I have also spent many years working in organizations like the NYC Coalition of Educational Justice, which try to create change from outside the system. That said, I also value work that takes place from within the system and I have worked for and with school districts as a consultant. What I found fascinating from working in both “spheres” was how separate they were/are. I took on this study to more scrupulously understand more about how school and community leaders think about school improvement differently, and to explore if there are potential areas of overlap.

I also do not subscribe to those theories that explain the recent directions in school reform such as the portfolio management model as being solely market-driven. It is fairer to say that committed professionals in the field of education, frustrated with a lack of improvement, have congealed with privatization interests. The New York City Department of Education, like most school districts, struggles to recognize and access the knowledge families have about their own children and schools and communities. Part of this is simply because administrators are in a habit of thinking they are right. Part of it is because these same administrators continue to have limited interactions with families, which would challenge their righteousness. In NYC part of this is also due to the fact that the Mayor in his control of the school system has not prioritized the work of creating partnerships with families, nor valued the perspectives of families when they contradict his own. In referring to parents raising umbrage with school closings, the Mayor uttered these unfortunate words: “Unfortunately there are some parents who just come from — they never had

a formal education, and they don't understand the value of education" (May, 2011).²⁴ These words like countless others from the Mayor have set the wrong tone.

It has been very challenging to walk the interpreter policy analyst line during a very ugly time in public education, politics, and governance. When Ani DiFranco released her remake of the United Mine workers song²⁵ "Which side are you on?" I found myself pressed to be bold in reporting my findings in the battle over school closings. Certainly it is very easy to paint a picture of school districts and administrators as evil privateers, and community leaders, educators, and parents as benevolent crusaders. I've struggled with the grays in the otherwise black and white picture of school closings: protesting school closings when indeed some schools are operating in very dysfunctional ways; the simultaneous realities of union scapegoating and union membership protection; the sad reality of public education as a civil rights irony; and conducting a study of community engagement and accountability in an era of Mayoral oligarchy. I attempt to give each of these realities credence in my writing.

My identity as a white woman researcher cannot be overlooked. As a white woman, I reap the benefits of a dominant status group in urban education and in educational research. Surely, white men are in more positions of authority, but white women constitute a significant mass in these fields. Through this study, I found that I was privileged as an invisible actor. Much that has been written about invisibility has looked at how racially marginalized peoples of color have been rendered invisible -- not afforded recognition or recourse. I experienced invisibility with the opposite effect: a blanket acceptance. I had a fairly easy time securing interviews with elected officials and administrators at the NYCDoE and UFT. Having a previous identity through the Cross City Campaign and with the University of Washington study meant that I was already

²⁴ <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/mayor-is-criticized-for-comments-on-parents-at-poor-schools/>

²⁵ Written in 1931 by Florence Reece, activist and poet songwriter

connected to individuals I wanted to interview. But my race privilege no doubt granted me access to additional interviews. I also found easy entry into each organization's security points – I was hardly stopped or questioned while I was observing. At busy public hearings I stood with my hand held microphone in the media section (without a media pass). I was only once told I could not eat my food in the auditorium during a public hearing – a rule that applied to all. I had become accustomed to walking in and out of the public sphere unquestioned that in that moment I found myself surprised that I was not allowed an exception, and then later chagrined.

Being a younger woman must have advantaged me in ways that are constructed from the representations of younger people and particularly younger women not being threatening. I surmise having a student identity also opened up many doors for me, as did my institutional affiliation with the City University of New York – generally perceived as a public university, not elite nor with a reputation of commandeering public space. In general, a student identity assigned me an innocuous posture. In a sea of reporters, I was at least someone who was not looking for a sound bite that would air on the 11:00 news. Being a researcher has many advantages over being a reporter but getting to report findings in a timely manner is not one of them.

Like Huxaby (2010) who described her work to honor all participants' knowledge as well as any requests they had concerning how their knowledge was represented, I sought to be conscious of my researcher privileges and responsibilities throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing phases of this study. I outlined my primary responsibility to the individuals who offered to share their perspectives and stories with me, rather than the perspectives and stories they were sharing. In data collection, this meant allowing each individual to determine the course of our interaction, requiring that I be patient, not overzealous, and accepting of the amount of time, place and time, and knowledge participating individuals and organizations chose

to give. It also meant that I saw myself primarily as a student of all of the participants in this study. As a graduate student and relatively recent transplant to NYC, I had a lot to learn from school and community leaders who have been in school improvement work for some 20-30 plus years! In analysis it meant to me being prudent in the use of data, striving to understand the meaning of words rather than striving to use them as quotations; and being open to the lessons in the data I collected, rather than plugging data to make a specific argument. Lastly in writing, it meant to me asking participants in my study that the information provided could be shared and not relaying information that had been revealed to me in confidence or by error. After I compiled my draft, I sought representatives from both the NYCDoE and CEJ to read my writing and check my interpretations.

3.3.2 Challenges. With over 1600 schools and 1.1 million students, school governance in New York City is an extremely large and complex entity to study. It is important to underscore why I collected data in multiple publics, when clearly it would have been informative just to look at one of these organizations: NYCDoE or CEJ (or the UFT or elected officials for that matter). Again, the purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to investigate differences in understandings of educational equity, accountability, and community engagement; 2) to consider the enactments of their respective theories in and on the larger public sphere. While cumbersome, I found that collecting data in multiple publics allowed me to realize and better explain how the landscape of public education is being remapped.

Data collection across organizations was challenging for four reasons. First, it demanded physically being in different publics, and often at the same time. I based my choices primarily on trying to be as “even” as possible in my data collection – but sometimes I had to make decisions because of location and time (I was collecting data in four of five NYC boroughs and travel time

within and between each borough can be extensive). Second, it was difficult to both track each organization's framings and enactments at the same time that I was trying to compare framings and enactments across organizations. I did keep separate notebooks for each organization, but I was not able to shut off the conversations I was listening to in one public when I moved to another. Third, collecting data in distinct publics where there are extreme ideological differences was also challenging as it forced me to grapple with these differences and to do so in a fair way. In moments when I did not trust that I was being fair (or advisors and colleagues who listened to my thinking and pointed out my biases) I reformulated my analysis – which of course belabored my process. Fourth, throughout the study, I felt tension in studying competing ideologies. At times I was overwhelmed not just by the complications facing NYC public schools, but the complicated relationships between the institutions. I had to often remind myself that although uncomfortable, studying conflict would be pivotal to my learning about distinct theories and practices of school improvement.

Fourth, the difficulty of data collection in a large and diffuse system was compounded by the fact that each organization operates at multiple levels: citywide, district, or neighborhood. Collecting data at each of these levels helped me to better appreciate the complexity of education policymaking in the New York City school system. While organizations present their positions as uniform, I found that they do not represent one belief or position. As I will discuss in Chapter six, differences within the NYCDoE organization were found to be associated by their levels: central office and district.

I also encountered complications in data collection simply because I had different access to each organization. As I discussed, the Coalition for Educational Justice granted me access to monthly steering meetings, where their member organizing groups vote on campaign decisions;

bimonthly campaign meetings, where members develop and strategize their campaign plans; and bimonthly meetings for organizers. In comparison at the NYCDoE, I only had access to monthly meetings run by the Office of Superintendents, several of which designated time for school closing discussions, and which included visits with administrators from other offices that were involved in school closing decisions. Given that I conducted more direct observations of CEJ's work, I sought to interview more NYCDoE officials to achieve more balance of perspective.

Additionally, what made this study unique and challenging was that school closings policy was unraveling as I was collecting data. This meant that I was capturing actors' understandings and experiences as they too were emerging. At times it meant that I interacted with participants more than once — over the course of the 18 months I was in the field — and when that occurred I was pressed to compare if, and how, their understandings had evolved. This was not an objective of this study, but happened anyway. Conducting research while the work is ongoing is challenging – it meant trying to document a moving target. For example, it was difficult to identify which schools proposed for closure to select for my sample for school year 2010-2011. I intended to design my sample to include schools proposed for closure where organizing efforts were present and not present, but announcements were made late and CEJ was not sure in which schools it was going to organize. I did end up including schools in my sample where organizing was happening but I had to come up with another schema for identifying schools for my sample – one that was more convenience driven and less intentional than I would have preferred.

3.3.3 Limitations. This study is complex in its dimensions. I struggled with having a narrow enough lens. Equity, accountability, and community engagement are each important to study in their own right, but I found my interviews, observations, surveys, and document

collecting had to cover too much ground. I also interviewed too many people, attended too many meetings, and collected too many documents. I did not intend to interview more than 100 persons, attend more than 100 meetings, and collect more documents than I could count, but I found myself somewhat swept up in the phenomena of school closings, intoxicated by how many different narratives existed, devoted to too many questions, and at times committed more to capturing as many perspectives as possible than to my research questions. At some point it seemed bottomless, and I found myself overwhelmed and unable to record interpretations effectively. It was then that I realized that entering case study research without clearer boundaries was creating more of a problem for myself. On that note, it was also difficult to determine an end boundary for this study. With no clear resolution in sight for the controversy of school closings, I elected to establish an arbitrary deadline – of course, after which I lamented not being able to collect more data.

Since the time I collected data, the debates have become even more ideologically divided. At the time of this writing submission in 2012, the UFT had filed a third lawsuit to stop school “turnaround” closures; CEJ had altered its organizational structure to allow for more flexible organizing (as I will discuss in Chapter 7); and a new organization StudentsFirstNY²⁶ had emerged to continue former Chancellor Joel Klein’s vision. A new coalition of community organizations and labor groups, called New Yorkers for Great Public Schools had also emerged²⁷.

Despite the scope of this study, there are perspectives I was not able to include. I missed some key NYCDoE officials, CEJ activists, as well as other influential and important voices. Getting IRB approval to conduct interview with students under the age of 18 was daunting and something that I had little capacity to do, along with everything else. I had thoughts to include a

26 For more on StudentsFirstNY, see: <http://www.studentsfirst.org/pages/state-action/new-york>

27 For more on New Yorkers for Great public schools, see: <http://www.nygps.org/petition?splash=1>

youth organizing campaign, and to interview young people 18 and older who were active in it, but by the time I learned of one such campaign, I was far along into my data collection efforts and I determined I could not do it justice. As a result, this study lacks authentic youth voices. To me this is a considerable limitation since school closings directly affect students more than any other actor. Most regrettably, I was not able to include my analysis and writing of interview data I collected with UFT officials in this iteration. This data will be included in my future work.

There are benefits and drawbacks of survey research. Online surveys in particular are cost effective and efficient, and were useful to me to reach a larger sample of both groups I surveyed. But they are time consuming to create, not accessible to persons without use of a computer, and it is difficult to verify who is taking the survey (Alrech & Settle, 2004). I included a box on each survey for participants to verify their consent. Both surveys were considerably long (as I erred on the side of comprehensiveness) and participants did not answer some open-ended questions. The Superintendent survey was too broad, and would have been considerably more useful with more focused questions. I also aired on the side of caution with the Superintendent survey, avoiding asking questions that were more political in nature, such as about mayoral control. In the way the online survey was set up I could neither track Superintendent's responses within each year nor from year to year. This limited my analysis. The CEJ survey asked the same questions for organizers and parent leaders, and in retrospect it would have been advantageous to design separate shorter surveys for each. I would have maximized learning about their differing perspectives.

Finally, this study does not formally evaluate the criteria by which school closing decisions are to be made, or follow students who attended schools being closed to find out what impact closure has on their educational experience and outcomes. I cannot empirically determine

whether school closings and their replacements provide better opportunities and outcomes for students. While this is not this study's research purpose, this is the most significant limitation of this study to me. Given that school closure policy is proliferating, there is an urgent need for this kind of research. Its contribution in hindsight seems fairly narrow – it can only serve as a vehicle to understand distinctions in school and community leaders' understandings of and efforts in school improvement at a certain point and time. But it does offer practical considerations, and naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 1995).

The chapters that follow present data from my eighteen months observing school closing deliberation– each organization's framings, enactments, and their points of contestation. In the next chapter, I outline a history of the major reforms that lend the context for school closings. Chapter five offers an analysis of diverse publics' challenges to school closure policy in three public hearings in school year 2009-2010. Chapter six offers an analysis of NYCDoE's framings and enactments. Chapter seven offers a description of CEJ's *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, and an analysis of their framings and enactments. In the conclusion chapter, I consider the distinctions between framings and enactments and the shifts that have occurred in governance terrain. I argue that through its theories of equity, accountability, and community engagement, the NYCDoE has remapped school governance into an ageographic marketplace, leaving parents and community members concerned about their kids education without any places or clear persons to go to with their questions. I also note that education organizing is remapping its strategies in response, shifting from a mostly neighborhood-based model to a hybrid model that includes a freelance component to garner more parent and community leaders in neighborhoods across the city that are being impacted by school closures.

Chapter 4: The New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) and the Precursor to School Closings; An Overview of Children First Reforms and the Institutionalization of the Portfolio Management Model Under Mayor Bloomberg

...we have only climbed halfway up the mountain, and halfway isn't good enough. We want all of our children to see the view from the top, to see the world of possibilities that stretch out before them. Now, getting there won't be easy. The climb gets steeper the higher you go. But we cannot allow fear of what lies ahead to stop us, we cannot allow obstacles to slow us down, and we cannot allow those who prefer the comforts of the base camp to the exhilaration of the summit to hold us back. We have to charge ahead. Our children deserve to make it to the top of the mountain. And we owe it to them to help guide them there.
-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, January 12, 2012

4.1 Introduction

In January 2012, Mayor Michael Bloomberg delivered his “state of the city” address on the state of New York City public schools. Speaking from Morris High School Academy in the Bronx, Bloomberg vowed not just to continue with his education reform agenda but to put his foot on the gas. The Mayor highlighted his administration’s efforts to increase graduation rates, provide parents with more schooling choices, and close failing schools.²⁸ Morris High School Academy was an appropriate setting for the Mayor’s education speech as it stands as a symbol of the signature policies of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) over the past decade; Morris, once one of the city’s largest and more troubled schools, with a graduation rate of 27% when Bloomberg took office, now operates as a campus of four small schools that boasts that two-thirds of its students graduate in four years.²⁹ While the Mayor acknowledged recent protests, rallies and the overall controversy generated by proposals to close schools, he fortified

²⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/14/nyregion/bloomberg-focuses-his-legacy-on-education-reform.html?_r3&hpw

²⁹ Morris was one of seven large high schools to be restructured as part of the Bronx New Century High Schools, a small school initiative with 7.5 million in funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society Institute, and matching funding from the New York City Board of Education. The first small school to open was Bronx International High School in 2001. The transition from Morris to four new small schools took place over a period of four years, six months prior to Bloomberg taking office.

his commitment to accelerate closings by exclaiming, “we cannot accept failing schools, or accept excuses for inaction or delay.”

Under mayoral control, the New York City public school system has undergone a sweeping series of renovations during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Throughout his three terms, Mayor Bloomberg has been unapologetic in promoting school choice, opening new schools, and closing schools as strategies to generate better schooling outcomes for students. School closings have constituted a significant part of the reform pattern in the past decade, but with the support of the federal government, they now operate as the cornerstone of the education reform strategy in New York City. From 2002-2009, Bloomberg and then-Chancellor Joel Klein closed 91 schools³⁰. Following Secretary Duncan’s announcement for the “Race to the Top” Initiative, which encouraged school districts to close the bottom 5% of low performing schools, Bloomberg vowed to close 10% of the lowest performing schools in the remaining years of his third term in office. Between school years 2009-2011 (the years in which this study took place) the Mayor proposed to close another 47 schools, and with the approval of the Panel for Education Policy, these schools have begun their phase-out processes.

This chapter offers a historical account of the major reforms that have been instituted by the New York City Department of Education, under Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein in school years 2003-2010 that provide the foundation for school closing proposals. I focus on three reforms in particular in the years 2006-2010: the choice process, the accountability system, and the new *empowerment* management strategy that the Department employs (named to signify the school Principal’s *empowered* role as the school’s top administrator, but which also involves a new relationship between schools and the Central Office via a new structure of

³⁰ See Appendix A.

external school support providers, called Children First Networks, or networks). The Department understands its new management approach as a “decentralization” strategy (the transference of administrative power from the Central Office to local entities, or schools) but I will refer to it as the “neo-decentralization” and ultimately, will argue, that it can be better understood as “decentralized centralization” (Karlsen, 2000).

Together the choice, accountability, and empowerment reforms can also be understood as the pillars of an emerging school district management approach, called the “Portfolio Management Model” (PMM). Increasingly, urban education scholars are writing about PMM as operationalized by school districts to move from “bureaucratic compliance” (Stone, Henig, Jones & Pierannunzi, 2001) to a “contracting regime” designed to enhance efficiency and innovation (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010). This has meant states and districts creating greater flexibility and autonomy for school decision-making, redesigning human capital systems (Odden & Kelly, 2008), and taking new approaches to school district management, drawing directly from thinking and successes in the private sector. School closings are a core function of PMM as Hill et. al (2009) explain, the thrust is “for continuous improvement via expansion and imitation of the highest performing schools, closure and replacement of the lowest performing schools, and constant search for new ideas” (p. 1).

The school closings process in New York City, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, offers much insight into the Portfolio Management Model, and the assumptions underlying its tenets of choice, accountability, and empowerment.³¹ This chapter will lay the groundwork for the Department’s rationale for school closings in alignment with the portfolio

³¹ Empowerment is the term used by the NYCDoE to describe the objectives of its new management strategy, to transfer administrative control from the Central Office to local schools. This includes new roles for principals, a new contract between principals and the Central Office, and a new support structure in place of the Central Office called network teams.

management model, as well as arguments regarding the limited equity, accountability, and community engagement prospects of school closings as presented by the larger public through school closing hearings in Chapter five and as enacted in a “*Fix Our Schools, Don’t Just Close Them*” campaign by the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice in Chapter seven. Data from NYCDoE documents, interviews, and select observations were used to detail this account and further explore NYCDoE’s rationale for the three pillars of its Portfolio Management Model, as the NYCDoE understands them each as imperative to providing educational equity.

4.2 Children’s First Reforms and the Making of a Portfolio Model

In 2002, the New York State legislature turned the New York City public school governance, which had previously been under the control of the school board, over to the control of the Mayor. Michael Bloomberg had successfully made a case that the school system lacked accountability, and that its entrenched bureaucracy could not possibly serve the needs of students because it was too focused on serving the needs of its employees. Bloomberg received a special waiver from the State Commissioner of Education to appoint Joel Klein as Chancellor.³² While he had minimal experience in the field of education,³³ Mr. Klein represented the antithesis of bureaucracy; his fierceness as a litigator bringing landmark cases against Microsoft, Sprint, American Airlines, and General Electric proved him as a leader who as Bloomberg remarked “never shies away from the tough and sometimes controversial decisions that are necessary to implement change³⁴.” Mr. Klein’s appointment was also emblematic of the school reform strategy the Department was about to embark on. As one administrator put it, “the genius of what Bloomberg did is he didn’t hire an educator, he hired the country’s leading anti-trust litigator

³² These waivers were not uncommon pre-Mayoral control.

³³ Joel Klein was a school teacher at an Intermediate School in Brooklyn from September-October 1968.

³⁴ Chicago Tribune, July 30, 2002. “ExAnti-trust Chief to Lead NYC School System” http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-07-30/news/02073002411_antitrust-teacher-shortage-joel-klein

because he understood that there was so much vested adult interest around the system” (interview, July 7, 2010). Indeed, Klein’s work in the Department of Justice’s antitrust division, where he protected the rights of consumers and the integrity of America’s commercial markets, was his roadmap for fixing public education. Bloomberg and Klein aptly termed the launch of their reform efforts “Children First,” to distinguish interest on behalf of children from interest on behalf of adults. In its introductory brochure, NYCDoE explicated that “Children’s First” meant “putting children ahead of the special interest politics and bureaucratic inertia that too often drove decisions and got in the way of quality learning in the past” (2008, p. 3).³⁵

New York City Department of Education administrators have consistently emphasized that the three core principles underlying the Children’s First Reform Initiative are choice, empowerment, and accountability. These principles are parallel to the three objectives of the Portfolio Management Model and can be understood as its pillars:

- To offer a diverse array of schools (choice and competition)
- To grant schools autonomy over budgeting and hiring (empowerment)
- To hold schools accountable to common performance standards (accountability).

I will now turn to detail each one. First, I describe the mechanisms for choice and competition as implemented by NYCDoE. Second, I describe the accountability system that the NYCDoE has designed. Lastly, I discuss the Department’s *empowerment* reform. This initiative represents an entirely new management strategy: its focal point is an accountability contract between school principals and the Central Office that revises its relationship significantly, and includes a prominent role for external partner organizations, called Children’s First Networks, or networks to provide customized supports to schools.

³⁵ http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/51C61E8F-1AE9-4D37-8881-4D688D4F843A/0/cf_corenarrative.pdf

4.2.1 Pillar one: School choice and competition. At the core of the Children’s First reforms and the Portfolio Management Model are mechanisms for choice and competition. The school choice process involves parents and students as individual consumers, facilitating student and family selection of schools across the city, and then allowing monies to travel with students to schools. NYCDoE and other school choice proponents argue that giving parents the choice of where to send their kids for school, as well as allowing schools to compete for students and funds, will create “performance pressures that raise the quality of schools available to everyone” (Hill, 2010, p.2). To the NYCDoE, school choice ensures families have more control for what education looks like for their children, recalling the first advocates for a market-based system in public education. In 1990, Chubb & Moe wrote that markets had an incentive to be responsive to a clientele of parents and students who also had an ability to exit at any time, certifying a “natural selection” where “schools that fail to satisfy a sufficiently large clientele will go out of business” (p. 33). While Chubb and Moe agreed that the market system was imperfect, they advocated for its governing role for education. The market system was a better alternative to the democratic system which they argued, had led to the governing of public schools by a diverse interested constituency in which parents and students had no particular standing. NYCDoE having made significant progress toward a market model, increasingly recognize parents as customers who seek services from their organization, and reason that competition will motivate schools’ responsiveness to family needs (Deming, 1994).

The NYCDoE along with other choice advocates have emphasized freedom, individual rights, and deregulation (Ravitch, 2010). They have also argued that choice can be an equalizer amidst race and class inequities in public education and in the larger society. Throughout his tenure as Chancellor and currently as CEO of News Corp, Klein maintained that traditionally

only families with financial means have been able to opt out of failing schools (Klein, 2012)³⁶. Since the desegregation era, school choice policies have been implemented to address neighborhood school segregation. Affording families' choice is thought to level the playing field, and counter entrenched and resilient disparities in income and wealth that are also geographically safeguarded. Choice has been touted as a more equitable school enrollment strategy to a default strategy based on government imposed neighborhood-school boundaries, which tended to isolate poor children in bad schools (Smith, 2004, p 116).

Early research focused on whether certain kinds of capital were necessary to exercise choice (Fuller & Elmore, 1996), and fifteen years later critics continue to argue that choice merely extends educational stratification for the most savvy consumers (Lipman, 2011). Market theory, by contrast, presents a neutral mechanism that is an outcome of choice and competition (Oplatka, 2004) and a neutral relationship between suppliers (schooling institutions and their authorities) and demanders (families and students) – a point to which I will return.

Over the past decade, NYCDoE has worked on both the “demand” and “supply” side to offer more quality choices (Corcoran & Levin, 2010). Reforms on the “demand” side have aimed to encourage families at large to participate in the choice process. Families can rank Pre-K programs, participate in choice governed by the community district for elementary and middle schools, and choose from over 400 high schools across five boroughs. Reforms on the “supply” side have focused on creating new schools and charter schools, as well as closing large comprehensive high schools. Motivated by the logic of competition and choice, Bloomberg has sought to break down large comprehensive high schools into smaller themed schools³⁷, arrogating the successes of social justice education movements to create personalized learning

³⁶ <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/harness-power-school-choice-article-1.1049166#ixzz1q23r5UiC>

³⁷ “Small schools” serve 550 students or less students.

environments for students (Klonsky & Klonsky, 2008, p. 24). Additionally, grade expansion and reconfigurations of schools were conceived to allow more students to benefit from existing successful options. Overall, creating a larger supply of schools is seen to increase the number of school options for students and conceivably, the likelihood of matching students with their preferred choices.

In 2003-2004 the NYCDoE significantly revamped the high school choice process and eliminated attendance zones. In the previous system, while students had an option to apply for up to five high schools, the majority of students attended their neighborhood school. The revised policy required all 8th grade students to rank up to 12 choices. Currently, there are eight distinct selection methods by which students gain entry into a particular school or program. 1) The most competitive and often highest performing schools admit students based on their scores on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), an exam that is offered annually to students in the fall of their eighth grade year. 2) There is a grouping of visual and performing arts schools, which require students to audition. 3) “Screened” schools (or screened programs within a school) rank applicants based on performance criteria such as seventh grade academic grade point average and standardized test scores, but also consider attendance and punctuality. 4) The majority of new small high schools created since 2002 fall into the category of “limited unscreened” schools. They do not have grade or test score requirements for acceptance but give priority to students who attend a school information session. MDRC, a non-profit research organization which has produced several reports on small schools under the tenure of Bloomberg and Klein refer to these limited unscreened schools as “small schools of choice” or SSCs. MDRC argues that SSCs are distinct from small schools created before 2002 which were academically selective, but critics do not concede this point, as I will discuss. 5) Educational option (EdOpt)

schools choose students according to a Bell Curve whereby 16 percent of students accepted are in the high reading range, 68 percent are in the average reading range, and 16 percent are in the low reading range. 6) Zoned schools are large comprehensive high schools that give priority to students who live in their geographic catchment area. 7) Unscreened schools have no admissions requirements; a computer randomly selects students for admission based on available seats. This process continues to be hotly contested, as is the algorithm the NYCDoE uses for this process (Abdulkadiroglu, A., P.A.Pathak, & A.E. Roth, 2009). 8) Finally, charter schools conduct their own separate lotteries³⁸. In 2010, at the time that this study took place, eighth grade students could apply for 678 programs in 377 high schools (Corcoran & Levin, 2010). The Department does not release data on families' listed choices and placements.³⁹

New York City has received both adulation and disparagement for its emphasis on school choice. The Brookings Institution (2011) ranked New York City first of twenty-five school districts on an Education Choice and Competition Index (ECCI) it created. NYC was ranked high on three of the thirteen categories: 1) its assignment mechanism, which maximizes student and parental preference; 2) its posting of relevant performance data (including graduation rates, gain scores on district assessments, credit accumulation, performance in advanced courses, attendance rates, and disciplinary reports); and 3) its willingness to publish declining enrollment as one criterion to close schools, as well as its willingness to close schools with declining enrollments. NYC did not score well on the measure of availability of alternative schooling including magnets, charters, and private schools. Brookings calculated that the ideal district would have 45% of its total enrollment of students in alternatives to traditional public schools,

³⁸ Charter schools are independent and autonomous schools that operate independently of existing schools and districts. In New York City, as of school year 2011-2012, 142 charter schools enrolled approximately 47,000 students (4.3%) of New York City total student population (Charter Schools Institute, State University of New York).

³⁹ The Department does release some broad data on how many families received their top three choices.

and NYC counted well below that at 16%. A recent report of MDRC heralds the efforts of NYCDoE to triple the number of small high schools, again what it calls small schools of choice or SSCs (Quint, J., Smith, J., Unterman, & Moedano, 2010). MDRC subsequently published a separate report that documented that enrolling in SSCs had a positive effect on students' high school graduation rate (Bloom, Thompson & Unterman, 2010).

The graduation rates of the small schools in New York City are relevant to school closing debates because the Department refers to these statistics when it calls for the closing of large comprehensive high schools and replacing them with new small schools, charters, and other school models. The Mayor and NYCDoE officials have consistently pointed to significant increases in graduation rates as a result of school restructuring efforts, comparing graduation rates of low performing high schools that were closed and the small schools that replaced them. They have also showcased higher graduation rates across the city. In 2011, according to the Department's measure, the city set a record, as 65.5 % of its high school students graduated in four years (Goldman, 2012). But critics charge that small schools have not sustained higher graduation rates, and that the Mayor put a "rosy spin" on 2011 numbers that actually showed stagnation from the year before (Decker, 2012). Additionally, a number of critic argue these increases did not represent the most vulnerable students as small schools did not enroll students classified as English Language Learners and Special Education (Advocates for Children, 2009; Flores & Chu, 2011; Iatarola, P., Schwartz, A.E., Stiefel, L. Chellman, C. 2008; Kolodner, 2012). This study does not clarify graduation rates in New York City but it does probe such disparate reports.

While researchers debate the numbers, they also debate the merits of choice as an equity reform. Studies continue to demonstrate that certain kinds of capital are necessary for families to

participate in a choice-based process. Already active and informed parents are better equipped in the choice process, as are parents who can make their child's application process a full-time or second job (Murrow, 2012).⁴⁰ NYCDoE encourages families to research schools and attend school fairs to inform their participation in the application process (MDRC, 2012), but encouragement alone is not enough support for families to navigate a complex enterprise. While choice initially involves selecting schools from a large list, it also includes attending multiple meetings, signing and submitting paperwork, and engaging in discussions with school personnel. This can be cumbersome for families that work multiple jobs, and/or do not have formal education or experience in U.S. institutions. Sattin-Bajij (2011) found that the NYCDoE failed to recognize the extent of low-income Latin American immigrant families' needs for guidance, translation and interpretation services in the choice process. She argued that the Department's lack of understanding of these families' life circumstances disrupted their efforts to establish a choice process that was indeed equitable. Similarly, Perez (2011) found that the high school choice process required significant parental monitoring and in-depth knowledge of schooling options, and as a result favored families with cultural and financial capital, echoing early school choice research concerns (Ball, 1993; Elmore & Fuller, 1996). It is also important to note that the while navigation skills can be an indicator of parental engagement in the choice process, not having those skills is not a valid indicator of parental non-engagement in the choice process. In other words, fulfilling all requirements of the choice process does not equate with parental commitment to a quality education.

Choice critics raised additional concerns with it as an equity reform, including that choice itself is not sufficient. Two recent reports by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2012)

⁴⁰ <http://www.schoolbook.org/2012/05/23/school-choice-new-york-style-for-some-more-than-others/>

and the Schott Foundation (2012) find that poor and students of color in New York City have fewer opportunities to attend the city's best schools because of where they live. They argue that despite the Department's best efforts to expand school choice, demographics still largely determine student success. Arguably, these studies could be understood to support the notion that localism limits educational opportunities for students living in impoverished neighborhoods. However, these studies advocate for supporting excellent neighborhood schools as a solution to impoverished neighborhoods. Additionally, as I will also take up in Chapter four, education advocates have consistently voiced that the NYCDoE's commitment to choice ideology has eclipsed the impact of its own assignment policies that protect selective enrollment schools, and overburden other schools with students with the most needs (see Annenberg, 2012; NYC Budget Office, 2011; Urban Youth Collaborative, 2011; Parthenon Report, 2005⁴¹).

The conversation in New York City has progressed to consider the importance of good options not just options; with many NYCDoE schools rated not proficient, it is not clear there are enough good schools for families to choose from (Edvox, May 3, 2011). This distinguishes choice out of scarcity from choice out of abundance – a critical distinction for an equity reform. There are also questions about likening empowered consumerism with empowered democratic action. Lipman (2011) writes that, “neoliberal discourse rearticulates democracy to participation in the market” (p. 137). Certainly, the choice process engages parents as individuals focused on the best school for their child and in New York City, like in other locales, this has resulted in parents competing against one another (Pappas, 2012). An important question brought to light by

41 In 2005 the NYCDoE contracted The Parthenon Group, a business consultancy, to analyze the performance of its high schools. The group produced an internal report that was subsequently leaked, analyzing the effects of both large school size and concentration of students' by low proficiency on high school performance. The report found that in high schools of more than 1500 students, where there is more than 40% students scoring “1s” and “2s” (lower range proficiency scores on the 8th grade ELA and math tests), graduation percentages were significantly reduced. The group made recommendations to alter student assignment policies so to reduce concentrations of high needs student in large schools either by closing or dividing large schools and starting new schools to absorb displaced numbers of low proficiency students.

the school closing debates concerns the decoupling of schools from their neighborhoods. There are functional considerations for families when considering schooling options that tend to be ignored in the larger choice debate, such as familiarity with the neighborhood, and the ability to forge relationships and connections. Familiarity and relationships are facilitated by proximity.

As I will discuss in Chapter five, members of the public expand the criteria for measuring good schools by including its relationship to the neighborhood. In Chapter six, I discuss how the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) defines NYCDoE's answerability to parents through providing good neighborhood schooling. Eliminating some attendance zones⁴² was a key move in shifting from a zone-based system to a system that advocates for choice in a school marketplace and question remains concerning what students gain and lose when their neighborhood schools are no longer an option.

4.2.1.1 Summary. Expanding parental choice and diversifying a portfolio of schooling options for students (via small schools and charter schools) represents to the NYCDoE a way to better serve families as customers. Moreover, allowing schools to compete for family consumers is conceived to stimulate performance. The main evidence that NYCDoE officials use to certify that choice and competition are successful levers for school improvement are the graduation rates of the small schools that have been opened under the Bloomberg/Klein administration; over the past decade NYCDoE documents a significant jump in students who have graduated high school. However, critics consistently argue that the new small schools (and charter schools) can boast better outcomes because they do not serve students facing the most challenges to succeed in school. Critics also dispute that all families are positioned to exercise choice in the same way. Ongoing concern about choice as an equity strategy is that it does not benefit the intended

⁴² There is still zoning at the elementary level and for much of the middle schools.

recipients; already privileged families rather than those least served are better positioned to maneuver the choice system. Moreover there is concern that there are not enough high quality schools for families to choose from. Finally, while choice advocates fundamentally argue that the traditional district arrangement has “sentenced students to the worst neighborhood schools” (fieldnotes, 2010), this study questions the wisdom of replacing neighborhood schools.

4.2.2 Pillar two: Test based accountability. At the time that Mayor Bloomberg took office, former President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 into law, shepherding in a new era of educational accountability following the Nation at Risk report.⁴³ NCLB supports standards-based reform for all schools with the premise that setting standards will incentivize performance. The NCLB Act, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), introduces an increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools alongside greater choice for families and students, and more flexibility for states and local educational agencies in the use of federal education dollars. The policy identifies schools based on a set of formulas designed by each state to measure proficiency in graduation, and requires states to implement accountability systems covering all schools and students. Assessment results must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English language proficiency measures. On March 13, 2010 President Barack Obama released the federal government’s current blueprint for the reauthorization of the ESEA Act, which included more funds to school districts to implement rigorous interventions in the lowest performing schools.⁴⁴ Education Secretary Arne Duncan (2009) argued that “school

43 The prominent 1983 report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education alarmed the United States about the performance of its school system in relation to other countries, and included somewhat exaggerated language, eg. “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people” (p. 2).

44 <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/obama-administrations-education-reform-plan-emphasizes-flexibility-resources-and>

districts have a moral obligation to close schools,” and assured school districts they would gain funding if they committed to do so.

Over the past few decades, the use of high stakes testing as a policy tool has been fiercely debated (Darling Hammond, 1994). Proponents praise No Child Left Behind for holding districts and schools responsible for educating all children. Critics argue that this policy has had the most consequences for the most vulnerable students, holding them responsible for the larger system’s inequalities by:

Layering onto a grossly unequal school system a set of unmeetable test score targets that disproportionately penalize schools serving the neediest students, while creating strong incentives for schools to keep out or push out those students who are low achieving in order to raise school average test scores” (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 246).

The question at large concerning high stakes testing is whether as Fullan has deduced, a focus on rewards and punishments are simply “the wrong drivers in school reform” (2011).

There is a plethora of research on unintended consequences of high stakes testing including the illusion of improvement, often referred to as gaming the system, including exempting students from tests (Jacob, 2005), and “education triage” which describes a concentration for the improvement of some students at the expense of others (Booher-Jennings, 2005). There are also concerns about a narrowing of curricula away from critical thinking (Foote, 2007) and toward lower-order cognitive skills (Koretz & Barron, 1998), particularly for schools already struggling (Diamond & Spillane, 2004; McNeil, 2001). An enduring criticism with accountability systems as a whole is that they perverts the incentives; instead of schools aiming to provide all students quality education, and using test scores and other data to inform educational decision-making, the test scores themselves become the goal (Bird, 1961; Berliner &

Nichols, 2007). Many argue that policymakers have lured states and districts into testing mechanisms in exchange for much needed money (McDermott, 2005; Valenzuela et. al, 2007). Others argue that high stakes testing is popular among policy makers because it is a low-cost strategy for monitoring schools (Natriello, 2000). Despite enormous admonition, the tide in favor of standardized testing as a means to raise achievement is strong.

In 2007, NYCDoE released a new assessment system to measure proficiency and growth, a model that the federal government and other states are now moving toward. NYCDoE prides itself on using a metric system that weighs student progress as the indicator of school success in an attempt to focus on what schools actually contribute to students' learning. It shifts the definition of a good school from one that *has* good students to one that *makes* good students [italics mine]. Researchers, however, note, "that poorly designed growth models are no better than poorly designed proficiency models" (Jennings & Corcoran, 2009, p. 635) as they have their own technical challenges (the difficulties involved in capturing "growth" as an example⁴⁵). They also caution that while growth models can offer more sophisticated analysis of performance, they can be overly complicated for families and the larger public to understand.

NYCDoE's accountability system includes Progress Reports (PR), Quality Reviews (QR), and Learning Environment Surveys (LES), currently referred to as the NYC School Survey. The NYCDoE says that it develops and manages these tools to both hold schools accountable for student achievement, and provide parents with information about school performance⁴⁶. In addition to the release of these tools, NYCDoE also invested in an 80 million dollar data collection, analysis, and reporting system, the Achievement Reporting and Innovation

⁴⁵ Jennings and Corcoran point out that growth models need accurate calculations for measurement errors and scaling. They also point out that growth does not necessarily occur in a linear fashion and testing architects will need to take these factors into account.

⁴⁶ <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/default.htm>

System (ARIS); it is designed to provide parents and teachers online access to student achievement data.⁴⁷

The Progress Report (PR) is a cumulative measurement that evaluates schools with a letter grade [A-F] on three separate areas: school environment, school performance, and student progress. *A school's environment constitutes 15% of its overall grade*, reached by measuring student attendance as well as analyzing survey responses from parents, students, and teachers on their perceptions of school culture. The Learning Environment Survey now referred to as the NYC school survey, covers four broad areas: academic expectations, communication, engagement, and safety and respect. For school year 2009-2010, the NYCDoe reported that 922,694 surveys were completed for all NYC schools. *Student performance accounts for 25% of the overall grade*, and is based on the percentage of students scoring above average (3's and 4's) on the New York State ELA and math tests for elementary and middle schools, as well as graduation rates for high schools. *Student progress constitutes a majority (60%) of the overall grade* and is measured by credit accumulation, course passing rates, and Regents exam completion. The Progress Report is intended to measure performance and growth on a year-to-year basis for the school in relation to its peers.⁴⁸ Principals all over the city argue that the peer

47 <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/CC11A5DC-1B56-4A67-B767-60B40BEEC5AF/80695/WhatsNextinARIS122109.pdf>

48 Schools are judged based on how their students' performance compares to that of students in their peer schools. Peer Schools are schools that serve similar populations in terms of grade span, demographic composition, and/or average incoming State exam scores. To determine the peer groupings, all elementary and middle schools are divided into one of four grade spans: (1) Grades K-3 (2) Grades K-5, (3) Grades K-8, and (4) Grades 6-8. Elementary and K-8 schools are ranked by a "peer index," which is the weighted average of the percentage of students at the school eligible for free lunch (the Title I Free Lunch rate) (30%), percentage of Black/Hispanic students (30%), percentage of the student population with Individual Education Plans (30%), and percentage of the student population made up of English Language Learners (10%). This creates a single score that can range from 0%-100%. Middle schools are also ranked by a "peer index," which operates on a 1.00-4.50 scale and is calculated using the following formula: Average student proficiency (based on the students' 4th grade ELA and Math State test scores) minus (2 times percentage of students with IEP's) High schools are sorted by a peer index, which operates on a 1.00-4.50 scale and is calculated using the following formula: Average student proficiency (based on the students' 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Math State test scores) minus (2 times percentage of Special Education students) minus (2 times percentage of Self-Contained special education students) minus (percentage of over-age students, or those students 16 years or older, as of December 31st of their ninth grade entry year.) An elementary school, middle, or high school's peer group consists of the twenty schools above and twenty schools below it in the same school type category when ranked by peer index. A K-8 school's peer group consists of the fifteen schools above it and fifteen schools below it in the same school type category when ranked by peer index.

http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/4015AD0E-85EE-4FDE-B244-129284A7C36C/0/EducatorGuide_EMS_2011_03_10.pdf

<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2733E43B-8B84-4FCC-9E17-6C68A1E65555/92488/>

horizon index is speculative, and that the schools in their peer group are those to which they cannot be fairly compared (fieldnotes, 2010). Researchers point out that slight variations in the peer index can lead to large variations in a school's Progress Report rating, particularly for elementary schools (Hemphill et. al, 2010), and that the way peer schools are grouped does not take into account elements such as size and school expenditures, putting large schools at a disadvantage when it comes to this type of evaluation (Pallas, 2009).

In 2008, the Chief Accountability Officer at the time, James Liebman, announced annual Quality Review rubrics, on-site reviews of classrooms that would be conducted by Cambridge Associates, an investment research and consulting service based in England.⁴⁹ Subsequently, the Department has trained its own administrators (including Superintendents) to conduct 2-3 day Quality Reviews at schools. Quality Reviews were intended to provide a qualitative driven and more comprehensive evaluation to compliment the quantitatively and narrowly measured Progress Reports. Quality Reviews assess the coherence of a school, “measuring how well it is organized to meet the needs of its students and adults, as well as to monitor and improve its instructional and assessment practices.”⁵⁰ Schools are graded with four distinctions: “well-developed”, “proficient”, “developing”, or “underdeveloped”.

Both the Progress Report and Quality Review rubrics have been under incredible scrutiny from the time they were introduced. As has been well documented, in the initial release of the city's accountability report card, less than 5% of schools received an “F” and almost one fourth of the schools received an “A”⁵¹ In the following year (2008), nearly 60% of schools were

EducatorGuideHS_2010_11_03.pdf

49 Cambridge now has eight offices, four of them in the United States: <https://www.cambridgeassociates.com/>

50 <http://schools.nyc.gov/accountability/tools/review/default.htm>

51 http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2007-2008/20071105_progress_reports.htm

reported to move up a letter grade or maintain an A grade.⁵² And in 2009, a total of 84% of schools earned an A, up from 38 percent from the preceding year.⁵³ In stark contrast to these inflated grades, students attending NYC public schools saw their scores plummet during the summer of 2010 when New York state recalibrated the state exam scores revealing that the cut scores were too low⁵⁴. Other criticism with NYCDoe's system has concerned elementary and middle schools using 85% of their grade linked to two high stakes exams (English Language Arts and Math), and the discrepancy between the evaluations by the city and the state. Discrepancies in evaluations have resulted in schools receiving drastically different ratings by the city and state, causing mass confusion.

What is most pertinent to this study is that the closure of schools based on both Progress Reports and Quality Review scores has received a lot of disparagement. Some schools on the closing school list had up until its closure designation received "proficient" measures on the Quality Review. NYCDoe administrators attributed this to two main reasons. First, they did not provide "sufficient training for reviewers," and thus did not have very good inter-rater reliability. Second, the four point QR rubric had only articulated three of four columns, essentially becoming a three-point rubric and created a bell curve, with the "proficiency" rating capturing too broad of a range, from schools scoring a D to B. The Department accordingly sought to provide monthly trainings to norm reviewers' ratings of what constitutes academic quality and build out the fourth column of the four point QR rubric (interview, November 19, 2010). As will be discussed, members of the public wanted to know how schools that had received bonuses for reaching performance targets on state tests in the past couple years could be designated as failing

52 http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/20082009/20081112_hs_pr.htm

53 http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/20092010/20090902_ems_progress_reports.htm

54 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/29/education/29scores.html?pagewanted=all>

and proposed for closure.⁵⁵ They also asked why other schools with lower graduation rates did not make the closure list.⁵⁶ As I will demonstrate in Chapter five, members of the public did not experience the process of identifying schools for closure as transparent.

NYCDoE administrators maintain that they undertake a comprehensive process for identifying schools for closure, beginning with a list of schools to consider based on summary outcomes: any school receiving a D or F on the most recent school progress report; a school receiving three consecutive C grades or rated as “below proficient” on their most recent Quality Review; and any school labeled persistently low achieving (PLA) by the state. This expansive list of schools is then narrowed via additional data points, what the NYCDoE considers as either “performance data” or “demand data”. Considering performance data allows elementary and middle schools with English language arts (ELA) and math scores above their district average to be removed from the list of possible closures. Similarly, high schools with graduation rates above the city average, any school with a Quality Review score of “well developed”, any school that has just received its first ever Progress Report grade, and schools with brand new principals can be removed. Other performance data considered includes credit accumulation overall, the percentage of students receiving 10 or more credits in their first year (the Parthenon Report), and Regents graduation scores. Demand data assesses how many applications a certain school gets per seat it has available. This assessment like the Progress Report grades is supposed to be based on a school’s peer group. But it appears as if the Department compares a school’s demand data to a citywide average it has calculated; at the beginning of calendar year, 2011, this number was 8.1 applications per seat (interview, Office of Portfolio Development, January 7, 2011).

The other criteria used in determining which schools ought to be proposed for closure are

⁵⁵ <http://gothamschools.org/2009/12/21/spike-in-anti-school-closure-protests-begins-to-heat-up-the-winter/>

⁵⁶ <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/09/graduation-rates-show-closing-schools-not-always-the-worst/>

quite subjective, and was described by one administrator from the Office of Portfolio Development as “more art than science” (interview, January 7, 2011). This administrator from the Office of Portfolio Development, which coordinates the school closing process, said several offices weigh into the process, such as the Office of New Schools, Office of Enrollment, Office of School Safety, and the Office of Special Education. It was not clear what weighing in consisted. The representative also said the Office of Portfolio Development leverages feedback from both Superintendents and Network Leaders to offer a larger narrative of the school including the quality of teaching and staff culture. From my interviews, I gleaned that the NYCDoE considers the “turnaround capacity” of the school, and in particular the turnaround capacity of the school leader. It also purports to take into account an assessment of potential replacement schools, and an assessment of school and school community needs. It is not clear what the exact process of decision-making is, but the final school closure list is determined in the Chancellor’s leadership cabinet. Once the list is released, and education impact statements are created and are hearings conducted, a final list of schools to be closed is presented to the Mayor’s Panel on Educational Policy for approval.

While the NYCDoE expresses its confidence in a comprehensive and growth based evaluative system, the process of school closing reveals that the larger public holds more distrust than appreciation for the complexity of the tools. Yet despite the distrust expressed, the NYCDoE does not hesitate to utilize these metrics to identify schools for closure. It also defends the need for constant adjustment.⁵⁷ In 2012, the Independent Budget Office concluded that the Progress Report offered the most sophisticated analysis of school performance than ever before

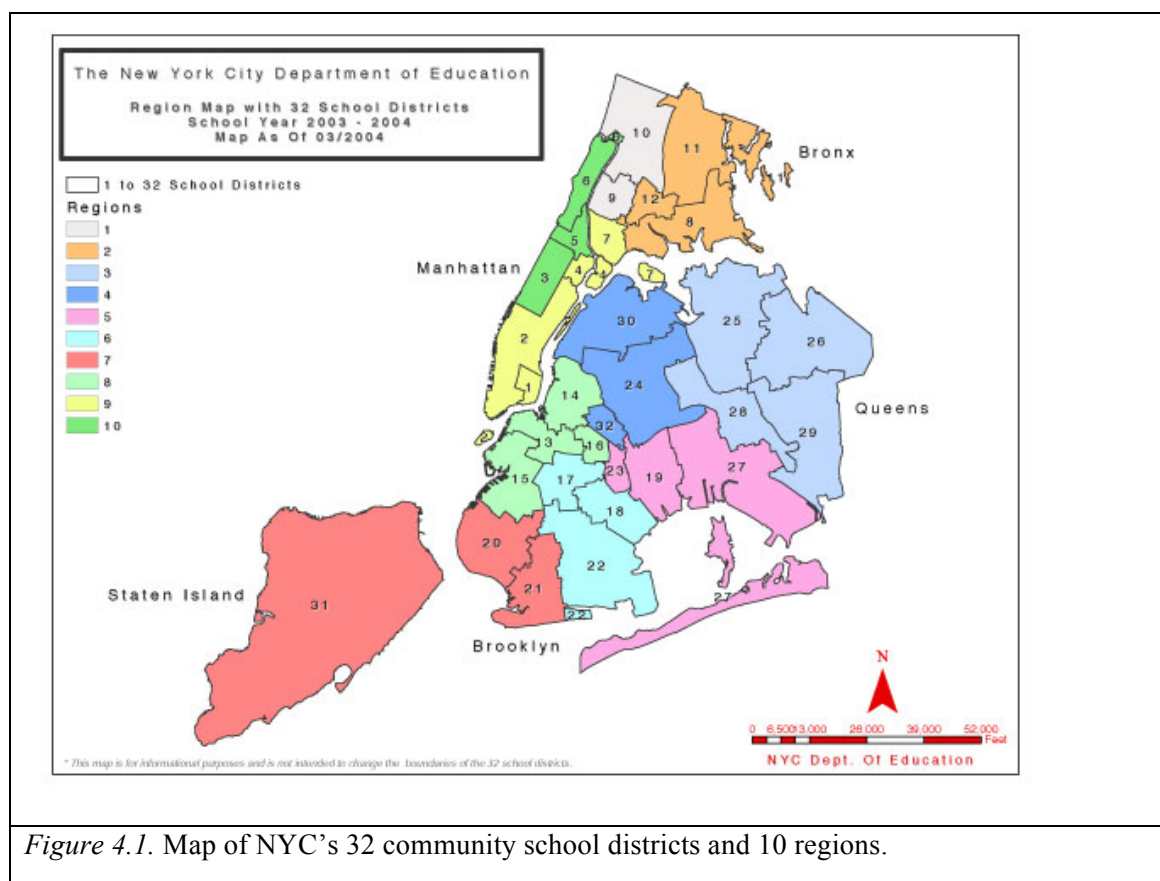
⁵⁷ <http://www.edwize.org/the-importance-of-the-school-progress-debate>

but that the scores had to be interpreted with caution. One thing is for certain. While the data is up for grabs, schools are now conditioned to being graded.

4.2.2.1 Summary. NCLB policy set the tone for mandating school districts and schools to report test results. Reporting scores of students in the aggregate was considered a way to keep track of students previously not counted. Test-based accountability assumes rewards and sanctions will motivate performance, but critics argue that there are numerous unintended consequences for schools and students, instruction, curriculum, and classroom culture. They also argue that the test scores do not necessarily reflect a quality of learning. NYCDoE continues to insist that the tools they have developed are an objective way to measure school, student, and teacher performance; they emphasize that their model measures growth and offers a more effective measurement than the models used by the state and federal governments. As will be discussed, members of the public in the school closing public hearings argue that the accountability tools do not offer an accurate picture of schools.

4.2.3 Pillar three: Empowerment. When the New York state legislature instituted mayoral control in 2002, it simultaneously eliminated the 32 elected community school boards that were created in 1968 as a result of citywide protests by Black and Hispanic leaders, who argued that the Board of Education was unresponsive to their needs. The 1968 legislation termed “decentralization” was created to facilitate local control of parent and community leaders in decisions about their children’s schools (via their election to the board). Each board appointed their local Superintendent, who was the chief educator for their respective particular district, and had a staff, to oversee schools. They also had powers to veto or approve Superintendent appointment of principals. Opinions about the success of this form of decentralization are clearly mixed (Hess, 1999). While some have pointed to an increase in test scores (see for example,

Rogers & Chung, 1983), Mayor Bloomberg convinced the state legislature that community boards were more concerned with their own political gain than academic achievement. In 2003, as their first matter of business, Bloomberg and then Chancellor Joel Klein consolidated the city's 32 school districts into ten regions in an attempt to streamline the bureaucracy. Klein also reduced the number of central office staff, dismantled the regional operating centers, and minimized the responsibilities and the role of the Superintendents. Figure 4.1 below outlines both the 32 community school districts and the 10 regions by number and color respectfully⁵⁸.



4.2.3.1 Empowerment as neo-decentralization. Early on, NYCDoe stipulated that principals were in the most critical school leadership position, and as such needed “to be

⁵⁸ This map was originally designed by the New York City Department of City Planning. It was redesigned for the Center for NYC Affairs by Aeolite Media in 2010.

empowered to make informed decisions and take smart risks.”⁵⁹ At the end of the 2004 school year, then Deputy Chancellor and education veteran Eric Nadelstern piloted a program for approximately 25 schools called the “Autonomy Zone”. In this program, participating principals were given expanded control over personnel, curriculum, and budgets, with additional discretionary funding in exchange for signing contracts where they vowed to meet specified performance targets.⁶⁰ The rationale behind this initiative was to enable more decision-making, innovation, and problem-solving at the school level. It was also understood to facilitate the Department’s transition from a compliance-driven organization to a performance-driven one. As a result, the Initiative was designed to shelter schools from the central office, which architects believed exerted unnecessary compliance demands. As its chief architect recently recounted, the strongest belief undergirding the Autonomy Zone was “that principals and teachers should not be called out from school buildings during the school day when students were present” (Nadelstern, 2012).

The Autonomy Zone, at its core, offered an alternative management strategy from the traditional top-down one-size-fits-all central office management model. It signaled the school as the locus of control and the principal its strongest leverage point. Its philosophy aligns with a “decentralized” governance strategy: transferring administrative control from the Central Office to schools for purposes of achieving efficiency and better outcomes. The strategy does more than recognize principals as empowered leaders; it revises the relationship between schools and the Central Office. For one, it recognizes schools as autonomous units, autonomous from the Central Office. It also replaces the role of the Central Office in providing school supports with external support organizations, currently referred to as Children’s First Networks or CFNs. With the

⁵⁹ <http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/childrenfirst.htm>

⁶⁰ Participating schools in the Autonomy Zone were not exempt from state exams.

neodecentralization strategy, school supports became the responsibility of these outside consultants, or networks in coordination with schools. The Central Office's shifted its role to monitor and evaluate school performance. The challenges become that the Central Office serves as an evaluator without systematic direct contact with schools. Currently its oversight of networks teams and implementation is unclear. Each of these components of the new management strategy (principal empowerment, the new central office, and school support organizations or networks) deserves more attention.

4.2.3.2. *Principal empowerment.* Under the Autonomy model, “principal empowerment” sketched the district’s new decentralized management approach (Gyurko & Henig, 2010), one that emphasizes autonomy in exchange for accountability. The NYCDoE has highlighted that empowerment means giving leaders the tools they need to do their jobs well. NYCDoE has identified these tools as affording principals flexibility in hiring, budget, and school support decisions. In 2006-2007, the Autonomy model was expanded to 321 schools and bore a new name: “Empowerment Schools”. Empowerment encapsulated the Department’s understanding for how the Central Office could best manage schools: seeing [their] legitimate work “to find the right principals, to support them, but not to tell them how to do better” (fieldnotes, 2010).

Just one year later, in 2007-2008, the NYCDoE took this model system-wide emphasizing that all school principals would have control of their budget, hiring personnel, and school support organizations in exchange for meeting accountability targets. In his 2007 State of the City Address, Mayor Bloomberg announced that the NYCDoE would no longer dictate decisions for principals:

We’ve always known that great principals make great schools...but until now we haven’t always given them the full authority that they need in order to lead...for

example, important decisions about teacher professional development get made by regional offices – whether the principals like it or not. Beginning this year... no one, not outside consultants, or the DOE will be able to force such decisions on principals. The principals will be in charge of what’s best for their students, always (January 17, 2007).

In the Children’s First initial principal performance contracts, principals agreed that “students will benefit when they have clear performance goals to which they are held accountable, greater authority over the key decisions affecting their school communities, financial resources to support the specific needs of their students, and greater discretion over these resources.”⁶¹

The new contract and revised relationship had implications for other parts of the system as well.

With this reform, the Mayor announced that that the regional offices established four years prior would be eliminated and that the 32 community school district Superintendents would report directly to the Chancellor. While Superintendents remained in their community school district offices, they were no longer responsible for providing support to schools, nor directly responsible to schools in their districts. As the school support organizations took on that responsibility, their role became a rating officer and supervisor of principals. Klein and his legal team went to court to argue that the efforts to move toward the new decentralization were undermined by Superintendents who had too much control. Klein lost this appeal as the court recognized the rights and authority of Superintendents as conferred by the governance law. The Department has gotten around this by distributing Superintendents responsibilities to others. Superintendents no longer oversee instruction, curriculum, and professional development. As will be discussed, while the 2009 mayoral control reauthorization directs Superintendents “to provide assistance and direct support to parents in accessing information, addressing concerns,

61 http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/732BDC3F-01C8-416F-9414-ABBAE719B591/24798/CHILDRENFIRSTSTATEMENTOFPERFORMANCETERMS_FINAL_Jun.pdf

and responding to complaints related to their child's education that cannot be resolved at the school level,"⁶² Superintendents report that they did not have jurisdiction to answer parents questions concerning the school closing process.

4.2.3.3 *The advent of school support organizations (SSO's).* In New York City, as in many school districts across the country, the central office historically had deployed its staff into geographically-based offices. Bloomberg and Klein's plan to expand empowerment and accountability across the school system however did not fall along the lines of neighborhoods or community school districts. By 2007, the NYCDoE had completely replaced the regional support structures with ageographic school support organizations or networks. In its online literature that describes its new support structure, the Department explains that it moved from a geographical support structure to the network structure because it needed flexibility to help schools determine the best ways to ensure student success: "Instead of being required to work with support staff that happen to be located nearby, principals now choose the network team they believe best support their needs."⁶³

Initially in the new management and support arrangement, schools were required to purchase services from three types of school support organizations: Learning Support Organizations (LSO), Partnership Support Organizations (PSO), and Empowerment School Organizations (ESO). The School Support Organizations were quite different from one another. Four educators, who had served previously as regional Superintendents, operated the four LSOs.⁶⁴ The NYCDoE selected six non-profit groups to operate as PSOs.⁶⁵ The ESO included

62 <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S5887-2009>

63 http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/8F733B71-7392-4E60-BA56-85446DFD50EB/0/AboutSchoolSupport_English.pdf

64 The four LSOs names were Community Learning Support Organization, Integrated Curriculum and Instruction Organization, Knowledge Learning Support Organization, and Leadership Learning Support Organization.

65 These six groups included Academy for Educational Development, Center for Educational-Innovation-Public Education Association, City University of New York, Fordham University, New Visions for Public Schools, and Replications, Inc.

integrated teams of instructional and operational staff. The school support organization models and membership costs also varied. LSOs were the most expensive of the three ranging from \$33,750 to \$66,675 a year for membership depending on basic, premium, and elite packages and stressed customized support. PSOs were approved through a RFP process and included non-profit organizations with experience running schools in the NYCDoE. Costs for PSOs ranged from 25,000-147,000 (varying on student enrollment). ESOs charged schools approximately \$29,500 year. ESO stressed that principals knew best what services they would need, and “were empowered to self-affiliate” with a network team, which would provide customized, school specific support (Empowerment Schools Department, 2008). In 2008-2009, some 745 schools selected one of four LSOs, 145 schools selected PSOs, and more than 500 schools selected Empowerment.⁶⁶

Metaphorically speaking, with the advent of the school support organizations, the umbilical cord between the Central Office and the schools was cut. Schools were now mostly independent from the Central Office, as they would work with an external school support organization of their choice. NYCDoE had assessed that the traditional district school relationship was prone to special interests, bureaucratic inertia, and politics. The new management arrangement held the promise of moving authority to the school level, and with that flexible and context specific decision-making. With the creation of a marketplace of school support organizations, Klein enthusiastically stated “we are transforming a school system based on compliance and top down decision-making to one that empowers principals to make key decisions about what’s best for students and their school communities” (New York City Department of Education, 2007, p.1).

⁶⁶ For more on Empowerment schools founding, see: http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/51C61E8F-1AE9-4D37-8881-4D688D4F843A/0/cf_corenarrative.pdf

At this time, school support organizations had not completely replaced the role of the Central Office in managing school support. The Central Office was still providing assistance to schools including academic standard setting, legal assistance, budgeting, and teacher recruitment. The Integrated Services Center (ISC)⁶⁷ continued to function as borough-based centers, with staff in operations, compliance, human resources, transportation, academic intervention, youth development, etc. In 2008, however, one network was piloted to cover both the functions of networks and the ISC. Children's First Intensive (CFI) employed a team of 13 staff, which took over all functions of the ISC for schools so they would have no dependence on the central office. This was a significant increase from the small teams that Empowerment had originally designed: the Network Leader, Achievement Coach, Business Services Manager, and Special Services Manager. To the Department, this trifold expansion would realize complete autonomy, as network teams could deliver a range of instructional and operational supports that schools need to function. Soon the Department was looking to convert all networks to the CFI model. It quickly expanded from the pilot to four to twenty.

At the start of 2009, just months before the NYCDoE announced its largest number of school closing proposals, the NYCDoE began its fourth reorganization (in six years) under Bloomberg and Klein. The borough based ISCs were dissolved, and LSOs and PSOs converged with the ESO model. All school support organizations were collectively renamed Children First networks (CFNs), to which all schools were assigned. During increasingly difficult financial times, Department administrators explained that in order to create efficiency across the board they had decided to consolidate two operational entities (ISCs and the networks) that, up until that point, were each making operational decisions for schools. They also recounted the

⁶⁷ ISC were formerly regional operating centers or ROCs

importance of integrating instructional and operational work under one board: “to leverage operations in furthering instructional goals and having instructional people understand operational implications” (interview, May 25, 2011).

In 2010, the DOE consolidated from 72 to 60 Children First Networks (CFNs). While the numbers of network teams decreased, the scope of their work had expanded. Based on the original Empowerment Schools Organization model, all schools were to receive “localized, relevant, and practical support” (Principal Guide to School Support Organizations, 2008). Network teams with staff of up to 15 persons were responsible for wrap-around services to up to 30 schools, holding all operational functions, and becoming “the epitome of the integration of operational and instructional work” (fieldnotes, 2010). In the words of one administrator, “we asked what a school system built around needs of a single school would be, and then built that out from 28 schools to 48, then to 321 and then 535, to all of the schools, and now all of the schools for both instruction and operational support” (interview, September 22, 2010).

In advocating for the shift of school services from a one-size-fits-all infrastructure at the Central Office to individual and tailored support structures, the NYCDoE inferred local context mattered. The notion that network teams would be able to offer customized support (to 25-30 schools no less) but were not geographically situated has not seemed to strike the NYCDoE as ironic. One way to understand this is to recognize that Department officials understand that their equity strategy has to be ageographic. The words of one administrator demonstrates endorsement of this belief: “we believe services are best performed by an integrated service team than a large geographically based service center, who at a different time could revert back to political system since all politics are geographic” (fieldnotes, 2009).

The creation of Children's First Networks has helped to re-spatialize school support structures (and, as I will discuss, the governance landscape). Network teams do not have one geographic home. They work with schools that hire them; conceivably they can work with up to 25-30 schools across all five boroughs in New York City.

In 2010, the NYCDoE organized network teams into clusters. Clusters were considered to provide personalized support to each network team as well as provide opportunities for collaboration. Network teams were grouped into one of six clusters, and supported by cluster leaders, field managers that supervise networks' day-to-day operations (fieldnotes, 2011). Figure 4.2 below represents the Children's First Network team configuration in 2010. It illustrates a kind of anonymous homogeneity of school support teams detached from traditional geographic lines. As the school closing process demonstrates, detaching school support teams from neighborhoods has created a big shift in terms of what local control, accountability, and even community means.



4.2.3.4 The new central office. NYCDoE administrators largely explain their new decentralized management approach as a principal empowerment strategy, and the larger policy conversation in NYC has also focused on the authority of principals. Much less attention has been given to the new formation of the central office in the new management arrangement. Lake

& Hill (2009) point out that the Portfolio Management Model requires school districts to take on new roles, namely, assessing the performance of individual schools, as well as assessing an entire portfolio of schools available to determine “whether a different mix of schools might serve the community better” (p.8). Each of these new ways of operating significantly accentuates the central office’s role as an evaluative structure.

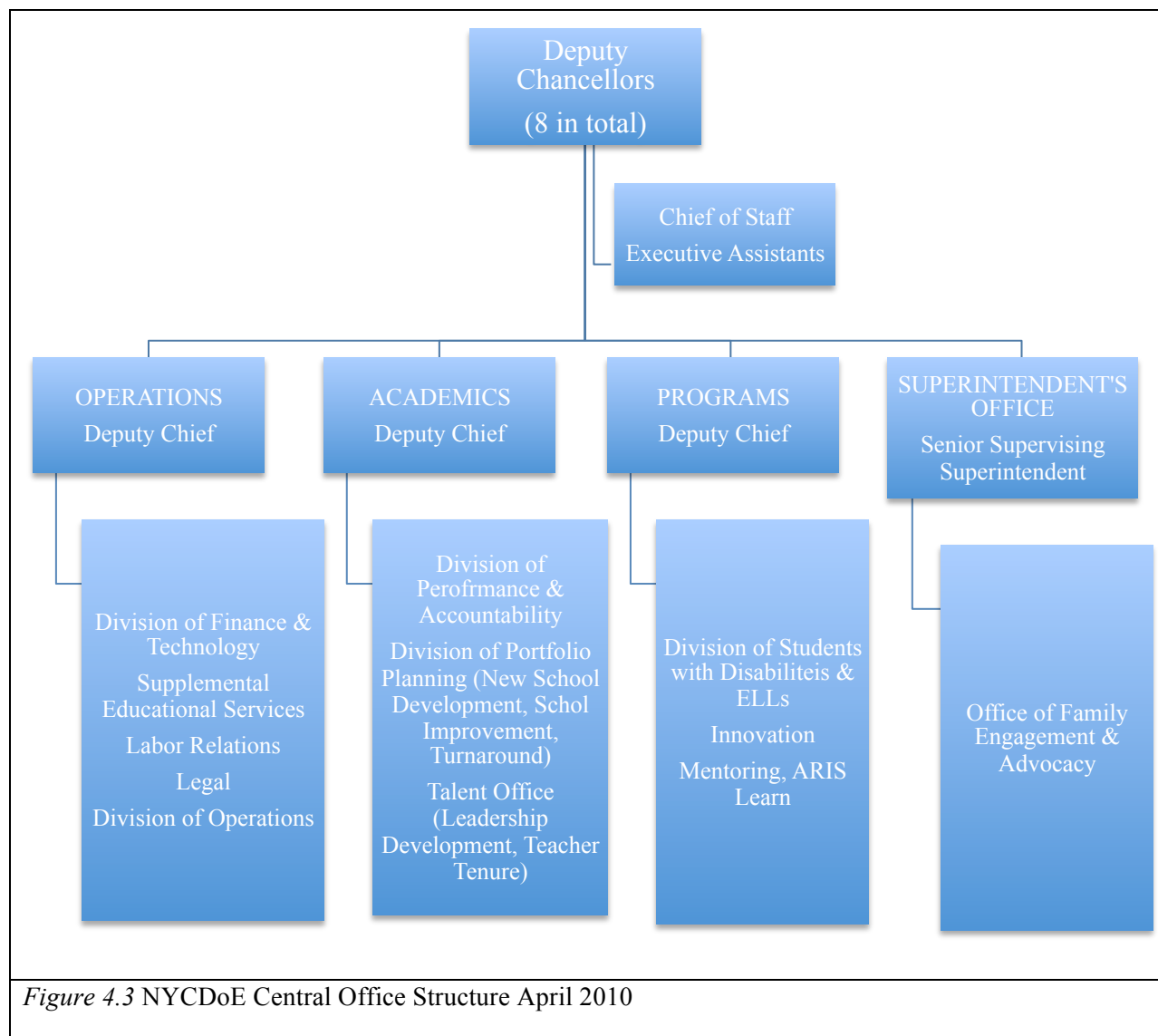
NYCDoE’s shift from a centralized support structure to its new network structure is supported by research demonstrating the centrality of principal leadership in improving school performance (Bryk et al, 2010; Childress & Clayton, 2008, 2012; Dillon, 2011; Hill et al., 2009). NYCDoE central leadership expressed that decisions were best made by principal leaders in schools, whom they referred to as “those closest to the students” (Children’s First Brochure, p. 7-8). It is also supported by research on central office transformation as a driver for district-wide teaching and learning improvement (Honig et al., 2010)⁶⁸, which represents a paradigm change in thinking about the role of the central office in school change. This new research advocates that central offices restructure from dictating change to supporting schools to build collective capacity for improvement (Honig, 2009). Honig & DeArmond (2010) argue that this restructuring demands the central office operate in new ways. These new ways chiefly include the central office partnering with groups outside the district to expand schooling options, using data to hold schools accountable for reaching performance targets, and managing the closure of schools deemed chronically failing.

For all its efforts to decentralize however, the NYCDoE has in many ways created a new set of super structures that run counter to the logic of its new management strategy. While Departments such as Teaching and Learning and School Improvement were dismantled, a new

68 The author of this dissertation worked as a research assistant for this study.

conglomeration of leaders took office at NYCDoE headquarters at 52 Chambers Street in Manhattan.⁶⁹ In April 2010, Chancellor Klein announced “more internal adjustments aimed at improving the Central Office’s administrative support of schools” (press release, April 26, 2010). At that time, Chancellor Klein’s leadership team contained a Chief Operating Officer, eight Deputy Chancellors overseeing eight divisions (Division of Finance and Technology; Division of Performance and Accountability; Division of School Support and Instruction; Division of Portfolio Planning; Division of Operations; Division of Talent, Labor, & Innovation; Division for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners; and Division of Community Engagement); an Executive Director for External Affairs; an Executive Director for Public Affairs; a Director of Strategic Partnerships; a Chief Family Engagement and Advocacy Officer; a Press Secretary and a General Counselor. Figure 4.3 below provides an overview of Central Office divisions in 2010.

⁶⁹ 52 Chambers Street is the address of the NYCDoE’s central office.



It is important to point out that the new divisions and structures at the Central Office produce macro policies that affect all schools (such as the Chancellor's Regulations that govern schools, new curriculum mandates such as the Common Core, etc.). As a result, a re-burgeoning central office creates a tension for the new network structure. A checklist of 50 compliance mandates for principals is just one example of a burden that has returned to principals (fieldnotes, 2012). Ironically, it is this set of burdens that the network structure was designed to mitigate. It is not entirely clear how or why this happened—maybe the NYCDoE underestimated the extent to

which they relied on centralized decision-making. As I will discuss, the school closing process offers a lens into how the NYCDoE maintains macro control while advocating for decentralization. Karlsen (1999) calls this dynamic “*decentralized centralism*.” The school closing process also indicates a remapping of the school system into a marketplace, what I am calling, *delocalized centralism*.

4.3 Children’s First Reform Summary

The major reforms in the last nine years of the Bloomberg/Klein control of the school system have emphasized choice and competition, accountability, and a significant shift in the district management strategy, starting with principal empowerment (affording principals more administrative control at the school level), but also initiating network teams that take the place of the Central Office in providing school supports. The NYCDoE restructured its entire school system to a Portfolio Management Model of more than 1700 schools in a relatively short period (three years) with three principles on three pillars. First, they have significantly expanded the school choice process. Second, they have designed a comprehensive and rather insular test based accountability system. Third, they have adopted a new decentralized management strategy, shifting the responsibility of school and student outcomes to schools and networks. In total, the NYCDoE’s application of the Portfolio Management Model has remapped the school system from a traditional zone school system to a marketplace of schools.

In the chapters that follow, I consider significant questions that were raised through the school closing process, particularly with respect to empowerment, the Department’s new management approach. The Department understands its management approach to have achieved decentralization, but I will argue that it can be better understood as “*decentralized centralism*”

(Karlsen, 2000); in Chapter six, I will argue that the Central Office (the center) of the NYCDoE still very much exists.

I will further argue that the school closings reveal the Department's strategy to delocalize the school system into an ageographic marketplace of schools. A critical element not immediately visible in NYC's Portfolio Management Model is this delocalization of the school system. One way to understand this is that it appears that school leaders understand removing geography as critical to increasing equity and accountability and improving school and student achievement. School choice in an open marketplace decouples schools from neighborhoods and children and their families from neighborhood schools. Moreover, the Department's commitment to school choice does not hold them accountable for maintaining great schools in all neighborhoods. Additionally, the Children's First Networks, the new school support structures are ageographic – they are not located and cannot be found in neighborhood communities. This approach appears to have created an accountability block – the network team buffers the central office from answering questions from families and the larger public, and further clouds the lines of authority about who is accountable for providing supports to schools and students. I am calling this dynamic “delocalized centralism.”

I now turn to the specific questions members of the public had regarding school closing proposals in 2009-2010. An overview of three of the largest public hearings illuminates the landscape of diverse publics in NYC and their concerns about and challenges to school closure policy.

Chapter 5: Mandated Public Hearings and Communicative Action Concerning School Closings in New York City

In early January 2010, thousands of persons packed school auditoriums across four boroughs in New York City—the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens—to contest school closure proposals announced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and then School Chancellor Joel Klein. Parents, teachers, students, community residents, union representatives, elected officials, and school alumni unanimously testified against school closings, arguing that they would harm students and communities, and that they did not constitute an effective school improvement plan. Primarily using a Habermasian framework (1962, 1984, 1996), I examine school closing public hearings as adding up to a “public sphere” (1962), the testimonies of the public at these hearings – as counter assertions and as evaluations of the NYCDoE “validity claims” (1984), and the relationship of these claims to subsequent policy decisions and actions – or in Habermas’ language, “the legitimacy of the influence that public opinion has on the political system” (1996, p. 362). I draw upon the theoretical work of contemporary civil society scholars such as Fraser (1990) and Dawson (2006) to contemplate how counterpublics⁷⁰ manage to produce and circulate counterframings in the public hearings, as well as the limits of the public sphere to hold the state accountable. In the case of one school that was removed from the school closure list, I consider whether certain arguments hold more salience in the current marketplace of education. Ultimately, I consider a public sphere more complicated than the one Habermas theorized initially; I argue that school closing hearings represent an interstitial public sphere – a sphere for the state (NYCDoE) to reassert its authority in school decision-making, as well as a sphere for multiple actors to challenge the NYCDoE’s legitimacy in education policy-making.

70 Fraser (1990) defines counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67)

This chapter provides analysis of the transcripts from three of the largest school closing hearings in New York City during the 2009-2010 school year.⁷¹ It follows the democracy cube framework posed by Fung (2006), answering who participates (“participants”), how participants exchange information and make decisions (“communication and decision mode”), and how these conversations are linked to larger policy or public actions (“authority and power”). The chapter is organized in five parts. It begins with contextual background leading to the NYCDoE school closures and reviews Habermasian public sphere and validity claim concepts. Part two of this chapter focuses on the assertions of the NYCDoE as presented through school closing proposal introductory statements. In the transformation of the public sphere, Habermas did not address the validity claims of the State, but I consider the efforts of the NYCDoE to convince the public of school closing proposals’ legitimacy here in this chapter and throughout this study.

The third part is descriptive, answering who participates in the public comment period, and includes a fine-grained analysis of counter assertions participants make with respect to school closing proposals. Public testimony reflects the totality of concerns raised about school closings proposed in 2009-2010, and coalesces around five major assertions: 1) schools proposed for closure are not failing schools; 2) reasons other than academic improvement motivate school closing proposals; 3) school closings are not an effective school improvement plan; 4) no support was provided to schools; and 5) the school closing process lacks accountability. Analysis of these assertions demonstrates a disjuncture in how the public understands school closure proposals in contrast to the NYCDoE. It also explicates the public’s challenges to the NYCDoE’s validity claims.

⁷¹ Public hearings testimony analyzed for this hearing took place on the following dates: January 7, 2010 and January 11, 2010. A third hearing also took place on January 7, 2010. I do not include names of schools in keeping in line with confidentiality for this study but instead refer to schools as A, B, & C.

In the fourth part, a chi-squared test is performed to investigate whether the assertions made at the public hearings differ by school community. Assertions were found to be independently associated with each school community, revealing separate publics and indicating that a larger collaboration across publics would face difficulty. I take a closer look at the particular assertions made among members of the community of School C to remain open. In contrast to Schools A & B who argued about the community significance of the school to the neighborhood, School C argued about the market significance of their school. With School C's removal from the school closing list, I consider whether certain lines of discourse are more salient within today's market based education policymaking sphere.

5.1 Background and Context of School Closing Proposals 2009-2010

During the bitter cold end of 2009, some six months after Mayoral control legislation had been re-authorized by the state legislature, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) announced the closure of 20 schools including 15 high schools.⁷² The proposals were distributed across four separate announcements in one week's time. On the morning of December 2nd, NYCDoE announced the closure of four schools – two high schools and two middle schools. At the end of that same workday, they announced the closure of four more high schools. Five days later, on December 7th, the Department announced the closure of an additional nine schools (six of them high schools), and a week later they announced the proposed closure of three more high schools, bringing the total to twenty (13 more schools proposed for closure than 2008). In an email to reporters, NYCDoE spokesman Will Havemann wrote that the Department was proposing to phase out schools that had “failed to advance student learning,” and that in accordance with the new governance law each proposal would be followed by a public comment

72 See Appendix B, C, and D which include the list of schools proposed for closure, their respective enrollment rates as of 2009, graduation rates in 2008-2009, and their Progress Report, and Quality Review scores from years 2007-2010.

period of 45 days.⁷³ See Appendix A for list of all schools proposed for closure in 2009-2010.

The public hearing process concerning school closures is itself a recent development in New York City school governance. In 2009, in response to demands issued by a citywide coalition of community groups, the Campaign for Better Schools (C4BE)⁷⁴, and widespread concerns about the lack of transparency, access to information, and opportunities for input for parents and the larger community, the New York State legislature amended the Mayoral control law to ensure more community input in school decision-making. The new governance law⁷⁵ requires the Chancellor to prepare an educational impact statement⁷⁶ regarding any proposed school closing or significant change in school utilization⁷⁷ (including a phase out⁷⁸, grade reconfiguration⁷⁹, re-siting⁸⁰, or co-location of schools⁸¹), and to conduct a public hearing⁸² about the proposal with the impacted community district education council.⁸³ In addition, the new law requires the NYCDoE to officially submit all proposals to the Panel for Education Policy (PEP), the Mayor's advisory body, for approval.⁸⁴ School closing public hearings ratcheted up the

73 <http://gothamschools.org/2009/12/02/city-announces-plans-to-shut-four-failing-public-schools/>

74 <http://gothamschools.org/2009/02/06/communities-must-be-involved-in-school-governance-group-says/>

75 N.Y. EDUC. Law 2590-e (McKinney's 2007). (codified as amended at N.Y. LEGS. Chap. 345 (2009)). This involves "the phase out, grade configuration, re-siting, or co-location of schools, of any public schools" in the New York City school system.

76 EIS statements are to include: the current and projected pupil enrollment of the affected school, the prospective need for such school building, the ramifications of such school closing or significant change in school utilization upon the community, initial costs and savings resulting from such school closing, the potential disposability of any closed school; the impacts of the proposed school closing or significant change in school utilization to any affected students; an outline of any proposed or potential use of the school building for other educational programs or administrative services; the effect of such school closing or significant change in school utilization on personnel needs, the cost of instruction, administration, transportation, and other support services; the type, age, and physical condition of such school building, maintenance, and energy costs, recent or planned improvements to such school building, and such building's special features; the ability of other schools in the affect community district to accommodate pupils following the school closure or significant change in school utilization; and information regarding such school's academic performance including whether such school has been identified as a school under registration review, requiring academic progress, a school in need of improvement, or a school in corrective action or restructuring status.

77 School utilization refers to how space in school buildings is used.

78 Phase out refers to the process of reducing the grade levels each year to close the school.

79 Grade reconfiguration includes either the expansion or truncation of grade levels served at a school and may be initiated by the Department or the schools that wishes to reconfigure.

80 Re-siting means that a school will be located in a different building than the building it is currently located in.

81 Co-locations refer to the practice of putting multiple small schools in one building. As of 2012, 895 of the city's more than 1,700 schools share space in 328 buildings.

82 Public hearings allow all interested parties an opportunity to present comments regarding the proposed school closing or proposal regarding a significant change in school utilization.

83 For more on community district education councils, see: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/CEC/default.htm>

84 <http://docs.nycenet.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-341/A-190%20FINAL.pdf>

Department's requirement for consultation; the previous iteration of the governance law required the NYCDoE to consult with the affected community district education council before closing or substantially changing schools. The public hearings analyzed in this study are the result of the governance legislation amendment.

5.1.1 Validity claims & communicative action in the school closing public hearings.

Through his theory of communicative action (1984:8-22, 168-85), Habermas distinguished between two concepts of rationality that shape knowledge and ultimately guide discussion and action: cognitive-instrumental rationality aimed at a strategic win, and communicative rationality aimed at mutual understanding. Privileging the second, Habermas noted that the goal for achieving mutual understanding did not preclude dissent or disagreement; however, Habermas underscored that certain conditions best guide a path toward achieving understanding in communication. For example, in the public sphere, Habermas explained that participants best direct speech authority through making moral, critical, and rational appeals – what he called “validity claims.” Validity claims were a moral-practical reasoning situated in the everyday experiences of individuals, and according to Habermas, in order to be effective, ought to cover four dimensions: claims to intelligibility, truth, normative rightfulness, and sincerity. In the process of communicative action, speech acts can also be rejected under each of the four aspects [ibid, p 307].

These four criteria for Habermas realize ‘an ideal speech situation’, and best assure that deliberation not fall to self-interest, prejudice, or political affiliation. Intelligibility refers to semantic clarification but also contextualized knowledge so that all participants understand the language spoken (p.89). Truth refers to assertions and explanations that reflect reality. Normative rightfulness recognizes prevailing norms, and sincerity reflects an expression of intention (p. 90-

91).⁸⁵ By Habermas' accounting, a collective agreement is achieved if all participants would, if asked, answer yes to each criterion, and any policymaker attempting to communicate with the general public would not achieve understanding unless his or her validity claims are fully accepted. Even if a policymaker subjectively believed that his or her position is valid, mutual understanding would not be achieved to the extent participants disagree with any of the validity claims.

Applying this to the public hearings on school closings assumes that the intelligibility claim would be challenged if some could not understand the content of the proposal. The claim to truth would be challenged if some could not agree that the government's information about a school closing and its potential impact is accurate. The claim to normative rightfulness would be challenged if some believed school closing proposals were socially or culturally inappropriate from their standpoint. The claim to sincerity would be challenged if there was not trust in the policy's or policymakers' expressed intentions. Table 5.1 below outlines four classes of validity claims, their domain of focus, and challenges as distinguished by Habermas and first introduced in Chapter one.

| Criteria | Domain of Focus | Challenge |
|------------------------|--|------------------|
| Intelligibility | Contextualized Knowledge/Comprehensiveness | Not intelligible |
| Truth | Facticity | Not Factual |
| Normative Rightfulness | Positional Authority | Not Authorized |
| Sincerity | Intention of Truth (or Deceit) | Not Sincere |

5.2 Analysis of Opening Statements

⁸⁵ see Chapter 1, pages 18-20

At the start of each public hearing in 2009-2010, the Deputy Chancellors of the New York City Department of Education who presided over the hearings read a brief statement introducing each school closing proposal.⁸⁶ Introductory statements were the only statements that NYCDoE representatives made at the public hearings and they offer a glimpse into how the Department framed school closings. The statements differ slightly across schools but largely retain the NYCDoE's main message: school closings are an opportunity for students and for the schooling institution. Excerpts from the introductory statements concerning the three school closing public hearings discussed for this chapter are displayed in Table 5.2⁸⁷ on page 130. Following the table, a brief analysis of school closing framings, as presented by the NYCDoE, is offered. This analysis highlights the Department's introduction for each school closing proposal, use of criteria to identify failure, and mention of replacement plans. A more elaborate analysis of the Department's framings of school closings as part of the Portfolio Management Model is presented in the following chapter, Chapter six.

⁸⁶ Full introductory statements are included in Appendix E.

⁸⁷ Again, these three hearings were selected for analysis because they represented the largest number of individuals who testified in the public comment period.

| | School A | School B | School C |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Proposal Introduction | “This is a proposal to transform a school from one that is not graduating many children to one that is achieving this objective.” | “Over the past six years the Department has phased out over 90 schools, and we have opened 335 new schools that have demonstrated remarkable success. This proposal will continue that important work.” | “This is not a proposal to close the school building; it is a proposal to change the way the building is organized.” |
| Criteria Referenced | | | |
| Graduation Rates | Graduation rate is low | Graduation rate is low and is declining | Four-year graduation rate is well below citywide average |
| Progress Report | Failing Progress Report grade | | Failing Progress Report grade. |
| Enrollment | Less than 100 students listed the school as their first choice on this year’s high school application. | Enrollment is declining over the past four years | Applications to school have declined .6 points |
| Peer School | Peer schools serving similar students are “getting dramatically better results.” | School is not achieving the same results as peer schools serving similar students | |
| Other | Students are falling behind early on. Just under 50% of freshman earned 10 credits. First year students have to earn 11 credits in their first year to graduate on time. | Organizational culture learning environment are deeply troubled.” Only 65% of students reported they feel safe in school survey. Attendance rate is among the city’s lowest. | Attendance rate is low. It is below the average for majority of schools in NYC. |
| Replacement Plans | New schools will replace this school over time, first taking a 9 th grade and then growing as this school phases out. All students currently enrolled will have the opportunity to graduate from this school. All new schools would serve ELL & students w/ Special Education needs. | No plans right now for a replacement school for September 2010. What we will do over next year is work w/ you and the larger community to plan for a replacement. All students enrolled will have the opportunity to graduate. | Smaller schools will replace this school over time, first taking in 9 th grade, and then growing as this school phases out. All students currently enrolled will have the opportunity to graduate from this school. All new schools serve ELL & Special Ed. students. |

88 Confidentiality: In accordance with IRB, I do not include actual school names or statistics as cited in the transcripts so as to not identify the three hearings sampled for this chapter.

As Sunderman & Payne (2009) point out, when districts propose school closings, there are certain assumptions regarding the policy's aim and outcome. In this case, these assumptions are that school closures will provide better choices, better results, and more accountability. At the start of public hearings in 2009-2010, NYCDoE administrators introduced school closing proposals, explaining that school closings will address the problems of low academic achievement as measured by graduation rates, state test scores, and internal department metrics. They also reason that schools proposed for closure are not benefiting enough students, and new schools and programs are simply a wiser investment than those failing to meet the expectations outlined. Both the rationale that school closings are an effective solution for struggling schools, and the criteria the NYCDoE uses to assess school performance and success represent significant points of departure from the understandings offered in the public comment period of the hearings.

In the opening statements, administrators presented school closings as providing better student outcomes, specifically providing better opportunities to graduate, as referenced in statements for schools A & C. Administrators also presented school closings as an opportunity for the schooling institution, indicating institutional transformation, as referenced in the statement for school A; opportunities for district school partnership in the creation of a replacement school, as referenced in the statement for school B; and an opportunity to change the way the building is organized, as referenced in the statement for school C.

In all three introductory statements, Department administrators refer to choice to support school closing proposals. While the term "choice" does not appear in all the statements, the Department's reference to enrollment data signifies parent and student choices. In schools A and

C, it is stated that “students and parents are not electing to attend the school” and in the statement for school B, it is stated that enrollment is significantly lower compared to four years ago.

The criteria cited in opening statements, varies slightly; however each criterion is used to evidence failure. Low graduation rates are cited in all three statements, but are reported differently (as “low” in School A; “low and declining” in School B; and “low in comparison to the city wide average” in School C). Graduation rates is the one consistent criteria named in opening statements. The NYCDoE references poor Progress Report grades for Schools A and C, but not for School B; freshman credit accumulation percentages in School A but not for Schools B and C; and the quality of organizational culture in School B, but not for Schools A and C. Organizational culture is not defined; the use of the adjective “troubled” and the reference to students’ perception of safety as reported on the learning environment survey⁸⁹ does not provide clarity. The Department also references peer schools serving similar groups of students that are getting different results in comparison to Schools A and School B.

The replacement plans mentioned in each of these opening statements are not detailed; in these opening statements, the Department mentions new schools that will in time replace school A, no replacement plans for school B, and smaller schools that will in time replace school C. The term “replacement”, while indistinct, is used to signify a better opportunity. In all opening statements, Deputy Chancellors indicate that students currently enrolled in schools proposed for phase out can graduate from the school. In schools A and C, Deputy Chancellors underscore that new school replacements will serve a variety of students including those students designated English Language Learners (ELL) or with Special Education needs. There is no such emphasis made in the opening statement for school B.

⁸⁹ The LES survey contains four main sections: academic expectations, communication, engagement, and safety and respect. The section labeled “Safety and Respect” asks students 20 questions. Citywide survey responses are reported by percentages. For more on the survey, see: <http://schools.nyc.gov/accountability/tools/survey/default.htm>

In summary, NYCDoe's opening statements underscore its beliefs that school closings will provide better choices, outcomes, and accountability. The next section provides an analysis of public testimony at the school closing public hearings. This analysis reveals contradictory understandings of school closings, as well as explicit challenges to NYCDoe validity claims. For purpose of this chapter, it is important to understand the rationale and criteria presented by the NYCDoe as well as the "validity claims" made to assert legitimacy of the proposals and their own discretion in policymaking. Again, validity claims as outlined by Habermas (1984) are a framework that situates reason as part of everyday life. What reasoning does the NYCDoe offer for school closure policy, and how does this reasoning compare with that of the larger public? Challenges to the Department's validity claims help illuminate why members of the public participate in a process deemed foregone⁹⁰ and fight against the Department's plans to close low performing schools and open better ones.

5.3 Analysis of Public Comment Period: Participants and Their Assertions

Following the introductory statements at the start of school closing public hearing in 2009-2010, NYCDoe Deputy Chancellors read instructions on how the public hearing public review period would function, stating that the "purpose of the public hearing was for members of the public to provide comment," and that "each individual who signed up to speak would have two minutes when called."⁹¹ Table 5.3 categorizes individuals who provided testimony at the public hearings by the way they identified themselves at the microphone and by school. From 57 different speaker identities, twelve more generalized "speaker" categories (column labeled "speakers" in Table 5.3) and five overarching "speaker groups" categories (column labeled "speaker group" in Table 5.3) were created.

90 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/05/nyregion/05winerip.html>

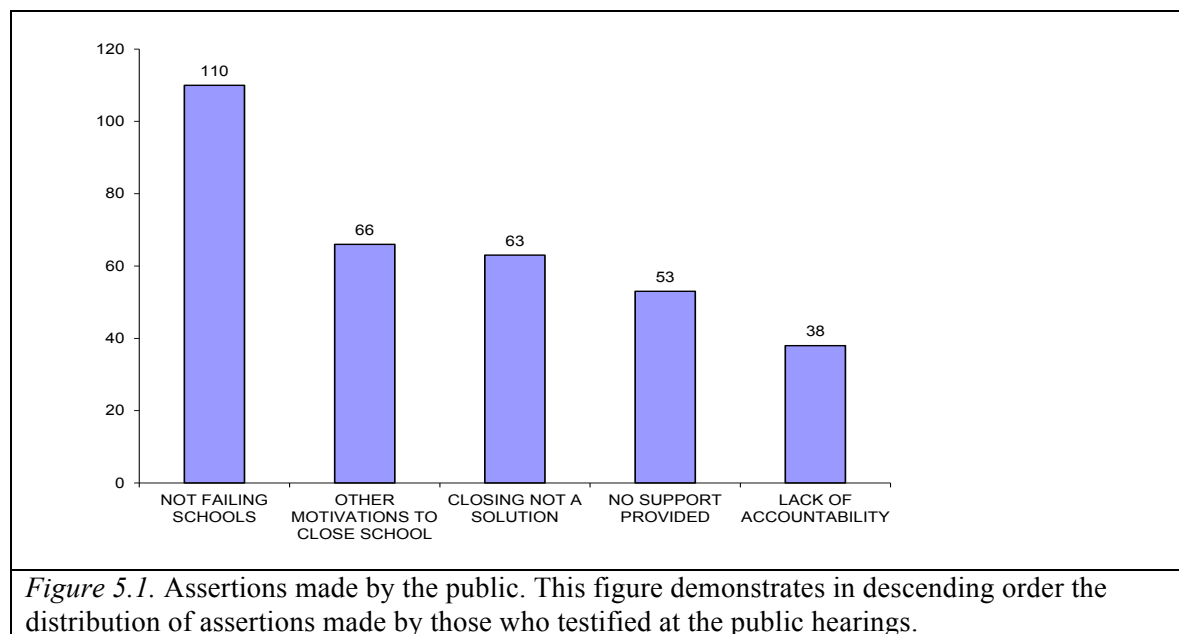
91 Fieldnotes, School B

| Speaker Groups | Speakers | School A | School B | School C | Total | Total % Speaker Groups |
|---------------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| Students | Current Students | 10 | 4 | 16 | 30 | 32% |
| | Alumni | 14 | 9 | 21 | 44 | |
| School Staff | Administrators | 0 | 1 | 8 | 9 | 28% |
| | Staff (i.e., Guidance Counselor, Coach) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| | Teachers | 14 | 18 | 21 | 53 | |
| Families & Community | Parents/Family | 5 | 3 | 4 | 12 | 10% |
| | Community Members | 3 | 8 | 0 | 11 | |
| Organizational Partners | Community-Based Organizations/Businesses | 3 | 5 | 6 | 14 | 11% |
| | School Councils Members | 8 | 3 | 1 | 12 | |
| Representatives | Elected Officials | 5 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 9.5% |
| | Union Representatives | 5 | 2 | 2 | 9 | |
| | Community Activists | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | |
| N/I | Non Identified (N/I) | (10) | (7) | (5) | (22) | 9.5% |
| | Total | 77 | 66 | 88 | 233 | |

As depicted in Table 5.3 above, of the 233 speakers across the three hearings analyzed, 74 identified as either current or former students (32%) and 64 comprised staff at the schools proposed for closure including administrators, teachers, guidance counselors and coaches (28%). Thirty-three speakers identified as families of students or community members (10%). Twenty-six persons were labeled as school partners, including school council members, and organizational partners such as businesses and community based organizations (11%), and 18 individuals identified themselves as United Federation of Teachers (UFT) representatives, elected officials, or activists (9.5%). An additional 22 persons (9.5% of total) did not identify themselves at the microphone.

While Habermas initially conceived of the public sphere as a discursive arena where any and all participants can introduce an assertion, in later work he noted that as the public sphere “expands beyond the context of simple interactions, a differentiation sets in among organizers, speakers, and hearers” (1996, p. 363). These categories of speakers and speaking groups lay out the differentiation among those members of the public that testified at the school closing public hearings. Alumni and current students at 32% and teachers at 28% constitute the largest speaker groups who provided testimony. The categorization of speakers also demonstrates multiple publics that are operating within the same larger public sphere. A diverse public overall participated in the public hearing process in 2009-2010: more than 13 speaker categories.

The next part of this section provides a fine-grained analysis of the five major assertions that are made across all three school hearings, by members of the public that testified: a) These are not failing schools; b) There are other motivations to close schools; c) Closing is not a solution; d) No supports were provided; and e) Lack of accountability. In Figure 5.1 on the next page I demonstrate in descending order the distribution of assertions made by those members of the public who testified at the three public hearings profiled in this chapter. I also provide an analysis of public assertions as challenges to the validity claims implicit in the school closings proposals introduced by the NYCDoE. I demonstrate how members of the public challenged the NYCDoE according to each of the criteria of validity claims outlined by Habermas--their intelligibility, truth, normative rightfulness, and/or sincerity.



5.3.1 “These are not failing schools.” The largest assertion that emerged from the public school hearings was “These are not failing schools.” One hundred and ten incidences of this assertion were coded across all three hearing transcripts, constituting (47.6%) of all assertions made. The larger public debated whether the data provided by the Department was accurate, and if the NYCDoe evaluation accurately captured the quality of their school, achievements and progress of their school. The larger public suggested the NYCDoe utilize a different set of criteria to assess schools including student success over adversity, teacher dedication, and the significance of the school to the community and neighborhood. Finally, members of the public testified that schools proposed for closure were schools disproportionately charged with serving “high needs” students, or those students requiring the most services. This particular assertion motivated a subsequent investigation by the Independent Budget office. In debating whether schools were indeed failing, the public challenged the facticity of the NYCDoe’s school closing proposals.

5.3.1.1 *The data is wrong.* In school closing hearings, members of the public testified that both the data used by the NYCDoE to evaluate schools and the data they used to support school closings were wrong. In Schools A and B, members of the public challenged the statistics cited by the Department in school closing proposals. Fifteen speakers who testified in the public hearing for School A disputed graduation statistics reported by the Department. In School B, members argued that the way NYCDoE calculated its Progress Reports, and particularly Peer Review, was wrong. One member of the School Leadership Team in school B, reading a statement that the entire team had put together, remarked that the NYCDoE “got the formula for high schools dead wrong so that the more high needs self-contained special education population [goes] up, the grades go down.” This speaker accentuated that of the 12 peer schools to which it was being compared, four served no students in self-contained special education classes⁹², and the remaining eight served less than 5% students in self-contained special education classes.

Members of the public in Schools A & B deemed the NYCDoE school accountability system “not credible,” pointing to wide variations in evaluations given. Individuals in all three school hearings referenced recent Quality Reviews in which schools proposed for closure were given “proficient” and “well-developed” grades (Schools A, B, and C) as well as bonuses for meeting standards (school B). These individuals read aloud from the actual Quality Review reports, reciting the evaluator’s remarks that the school was effective in its planning and goal setting for school improvement (school A, B, and C). Members of the public also argued that the NYCDoE evaluation system was limited in its ability to provide accurate assessments in that it did not take into consideration the complex lives of students nor the extent of work that schools did with them. A guidance counselor recounting her work described that students often were

⁹² This is a placement for students with academic and/or behavior management needs who require specialized instruction. http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/0797E0DD-0BD0-4734-9D50-1F5453198287/0/Parent_Guide_English.pdf

confronted with circumstances that made it difficult for them to graduate high school in four years (School B). Three individuals suggested the NYCDoE consider a five or six year graduation rate for students who just needed more time.

5.3.1.2 *You're looking at the wrong data.* Public members who testified at the hearings argued that the NYCDoE consider data other than test scores to evaluate schools. They relayed stories of successful students who had graduated and then enrolled in college, as well as those who were persevering amidst difficult circumstances. Alumni credited schools with their acceptance to, persistence in, and graduation from college. In the case of School C, 31 individuals credited their school with equipping them for the workforce (a point to which I will return). In all three schools current students credited their schools for helping them grow, and individual teachers for helping them “get through tough times”, eliciting cheers and sobs from the audience (fieldnotes, January 7, 2010). In addition to successful student profiles, many speakers evoked images of close-knit communities and loving relationships, and at all three hearings, speakers used the word “family” to describe their school.

Additionally, members of the public testified that the NYCDoE take into account the place of the school, its relationship to the surrounding neighborhood when making decisions about the school's fate. They spoke of the importance of the school's standing in the neighborhood, its historical significance, and its legacy. In School A, speakers referred to the school as a landmark, recognizing not just the 118 year history of the school, but also the long relationship it had with many people throughout that long history. An alumnus commented that he was one of over 100,000 graduates of this school and said, “Don't get rid of [this school]. It's part of the city's history and its part of individuals' histories” (School A). A local historian said, “The reason why this school is a landmark is because of what it has meant to the community.”

He added, “The DOE was not established to interfere with the fabric and social makeup of communities.” A parent remarked, “put yourself in these children’s shoes, and [see] how much this school means to the minorities that live in this neighborhood” (School A).

In School B, speakers also reiterated that the “school isn’t a building. It is a home.” Three alumni spoke of the significance of the name of the school itself, after a Civil Rights activist. One alumnus referred to it the school as “a pillar in the community,” and recognized it just having celebrated its 20-year anniversary. A community member argued that schools should be looked at as an integral part of communities, not as “real estate assets.” A parent reasoned that it was important that students be educated in their own neighborhood, so that they would then feel a sense of responsibility to “give back to it.” In the hearing for School C, speakers talked about the importance of tradition, and the school “offering hope” in the community but in the context of providing jobs (a point to which I will return). Overall, testimonies about the school’s relationship in the neighborhood emphasized the importance of place in education reform (Gruenewald, 2003), and pushed against measurements of school success as determined by test scores, and against the goals of schooling as strictly academic (Labaree, 1997).

5.3.1.3 *The data is thin.* In contrast to NYCDoE’s presentation of its accountability metric and data as comprehensive, members of the public argued that “what’s on the books doesn’t necessarily reflect the quality of the school” (School C). They challenged the Department’s evaluation that schools were failing by calling into question how the Department was evaluating schools. To make this point they focused particularly on school enrollment demographics across schools. Speakers in Schools A and B overwhelmingly testified that their schools were disproportionately serving students with the most needs, as one administrator put it, “embracing students no other schools would” (School A). Ten speakers at School B’s hearing

testified that its school had received an extraordinary number of over-the-counter students, including students that were new to the country, over age, or under credited students. Here members of the public argued that the Department was only taking into account the results but not the process.

5.3.1.4 Summary. In asserting that schools were not failing, members of the public rejected the validity claims of the NYCDoE based on Habermas' criteria of truth. Members of the public debated the accuracy of the statistics and also disputed that the data accurately reflected their schools. They also drew attention to a lack of fairness in comparisons being made between schools given very different populations. Their testimonies represented other criteria the Department should consider when evaluating schools: student and school perseverance, and the schools' relationship to and standing in its community. To the public, proposals to close schools based on inaccurate, inconsistent and incomplete evaluations were wrong. Here they retorted, "we are not failing, the DOE is failing us."

5.3.2 "Other motivations for closing schools." Sixty-six persons (30% of all speakers) across the three public hearings disputed that the purpose of school closings was to improve school performance. Members of the public argued that there were other motivations for school closings that had nothing to do with academic success, including motivations for profit and privatization in the form of charter schools, preferences for small schools over large comprehensive and technical high schools, neighborhood gentrification, racial re-segregation and racism. Members of the public also charged that data had been manipulated to feign failure and to provide an appearance of scientific analysis, and that schools identified for closure were determined by whether or not the affected school community was perceived to be equipped to

fight back. With each of these assertions, members of the public challenged the NYCDoE's claims of *sincerity*.

5.3.2.1 Motivations for privatization. Members of the public who argued that school closings were motivated by other reasons than school performance namely accused the NYCDoE with a deliberate plan to dismantle public education in the interest of privatization. In the words of one community member: "This is all about dollars. It's a move to privatize education and turn our system into a money generating machine" (School A). The majority of speakers who argued that school closings were in the interest of privatization spoke specifically about charter schools that needed building space. As articulated by one school staff member, the move to close schools was a master plan to make room for charter schools:

I wish the Department would admit to their master plan. The master plan [is] that they needed a big facility...centrally located, where they could house their so-called charter schools in because we all know there's limited buildings in the city for these types of schools. (School A)

An activist who attended school closing hearings elaborated that the privatization plan included plans to take away jobs from teachers that belong to unions: "It's about taking away our pensions to have cheaper labor in these charter schools" (School C).

5.3.2.2 Motivations for small schools. Speakers also believed that closing schools was motivated by the NYCDoE educational philosophy that smaller is better. When speakers made assertions that the NYCDoE preferred small schools to large schools, these same speakers doubted the efficacy of the small schools themselves, especially for special education students:

The DOE claims that smaller is better, and everyone knows that when you're going to open your small schools, 99 percent of the time you do not service kids

that need the services. The 15 to 1s, the 12 to 1s, where are you going to put them? (School C)

5.3.2.3 Motivations for neighborhood gentrification. Fifteen percent of speakers who made assertions that there were other motivations for school closings drew attention to the impact of school closings on communities of color and poor communities. Across all three hearings, members of the public articulated concerns that the “majority of the schools the Chancellor is closing are in minority neighborhoods” (School C). “I haven’t heard of any school closings in rich neighborhoods,” remarked one teacher (School B). “They’re not closing the schools in predominantly white neighborhoods,” remarked someone who identified both as a parent and community member (School A). Testimonies suggested that school closings either coincided with or helped produce racialized re-spatialization of neighborhoods:

[Our borough] is ready to a massive change for [this neighborhood]. The demographics, the cultural demographics consist of those habla solamente español, those who speak Patois, who are Indian-speaking, who are of Asian descent...it would be perfect to target this school to make this a new economic development...taking these cultures and sending you back where you came from... (School A)

Speakers were not hesitant to accuse the NYCDoE of sinister and racist practices. One community activist said that school closings was an institutionalized racist policy as it closed out educational opportunities for children of color rather than opened better ones: “there is a stench of racial pathology in the Department of Education concerning the rights and well being of the children that live in our community” (School B). Another community member accused the NYCDoE of weighing community resistance before identifying which schools to identify for

closure. A former PTA President stated that administrators targeted areas with families who do not speak English and who do not typically have political representation via the electorate:

“Because they think you’re not aware of what’s going on!” (School A).

5.3.2.4 Data manipulation. Ten individuals accused the NYCDoE of devious behavior, manipulating school data to assist a privatization scheme. Here, members of the public read school closing proposals as a “manufactured crisis” (Berliner & Briddle, 1996), a practice of feigning poor performance to help justify school closings decisions and to shepherd in charter schools. A community leader said “[The Department of Education] has to come in with fake reasons, make us look like we’re not doing the right thing, call us failures, give us Ds when we don’t deserve them because they have to use our buildings for charter schools. They can’t build their charter schools elsewhere” (School A).

5.3.2.5 Summary. In summary, members of the public disputed the NYCDoE’s sincerity: that school closing proposals were indeed in the interest of improving school performance. In contrast, members of the public argued that the NYCDoE had ulterior motives to open charter schools and preferred small schools to large schools. They also argued that closing schools were in the service of both privatization and neighborhood gentrification. Members challenged the Department’s sincerity by accusing it of a secret agenda and deception, intentionally manipulating data to support its plan to close schools. A refrain emerged from the hearings that the NYCDoE was “closing schools by design,” that the NYCDoE had a plan to close schools independent of the individual school’s performance.

5.3.3 “Closing schools is not a solution.” More than 65 individuals or 28% of speakers at these three school closing hearings challenged the NYCDoE’s claim that closing schools was an effective solution for schools that had not met standards set for them. While the NYCDoE

rationalized that school closings would ultimately benefit students (by increasing opportunities for graduation) members of the public argued precisely the opposite—that closing schools would harm students themselves, school communities, and surrounding communities. In the absence of clear and detailed replacement plans, they saw little evidence that school closing proposals were in the interest of children. Here they challenged the intelligibility of school closing proposals and the Department’s claims of sincerity. Lastly, the justification for closing schools that were not resourced, were in the perspective of members of the public not justified. They challenged the Department’s claims of normative rightfulness.

5.3.3.1 Harmful effects. Overwhelmingly, individuals testified that closing schools would harm, not help students – especially those young people not currently excelling in school. Students, teachers, and community members asserted that school closings would have harmful consequences. In the words of one student, closing schools was “not creating opportunities but diminishing them” (School A). Parents and community members projected increased drop-out rates, increased jail or prison rates, and the message that “we are turning our backs on students” (School B) as additional areas of harm.

Additionally, speakers expressed concerns about harmful effects on surrounding school communities, including exacerbating overcrowding and disproportionately concentrating students in need of the most services in adjacent schools. In the words of a school council member, closing schools “will have a negative impact on neighboring schools... overcrowding them and diverting large numbers of students with great academic needs to them” (School B).

5.3.3.2 *Incomplete replacement plans.* Given the lack of a comprehensive replacement plan presented at the hearings, and in the educational impact statements,⁹³ members of the public at all schools repeatedly asked where students currently attending schools proposed for closure would go, and if they would be guaranteed a seat at the new replacement schools. “Where will the students go” was a common question asked at the hearings. No answers were provided by NYCDoE officials, leaving room for those members of the public who could speak from personal experience of going through a phase out. One teacher testified said that promises made were made by NYCDoE administrators who subsequently left. He said: “I’m bringing you greetings from the graveyard...I could tell you all the broken promises made to students and parents in closing schools, the people who made those promises are now gone” (School A).

5.3.3.3 *Closing schools don’t fix the problem.* With concerns about harmful effects and incomplete replacement plans, members of the public challenged the justification that school closures would fix school performance and rehabilitate struggling schools. Another area of disconnect between members of the public and NYCDoE school leaders concerns the divergent ways of thinking about how to fix schools. Department officials framed school closure policy as a fix but this did not make sense to members of the public. As one parent summarized, “You’re saying the school needs to be closed because they’re not performing. They’re not performing because they don’t have enough help.” Closing schools was not to the public a way to increase school success. More than 90% of speakers who stated that closing schools is not a solution suggested that the NYCDoE work with each school community to “fix the school,” investing more money and providing it with the resources needed to succeed.

⁹³ *Mulgrew v. Board of Educ., School Dist. of New York*, 902 N.Y.S. 2d 882, 889 (2010) finds the Department does not provide an adequate assessment of the impact of the school closure on the school community nor provide detailed plans for how replacement schools proposed will serve students better.

5.3.3.4 Summary. Members of the public rejected the Department’s claims that school closure was a school improvement and equity strategy, improving outcomes for students, and the schooling institution’s efficacy overall. They rejected this claim on three of Habermas’ criteria. First, they challenged the *intelligibility* or comprehensibility of school closure plans. Public members mainly disavowed the Department’s intelligibility claims on the fact that the replacement plans were incomplete, not clearly outlined or detailed. In addition, they assessed that school closures would negatively and disproportionately impact the most vulnerable students, leading them to drop out; and that surrounding schools would be negatively impacted by increased overcrowding as a result of closures. With regards to these points, members of the public again challenged the Department’s *sincerity*; they simply did not trust that students that were attending the closing schools would be afforded the opportunity to attend new schools that would eventually replace them. Finally members of the public challenged the normative rightfulness of the closing proposals for schools that had not been resourced properly. They chanted: “Fix Our Schools, Don’t Close Them.”

5.3.4 “No support provided.” Connected to the claims that schools are not failing and that closing schools is not a solution, were specific assertions made about the lack of support that the NYCDoE had provided to schools that have been struggling. Members of the public did not accept the NYCDoE’s premise that schools had been adequately supported to meet academic standards, challenging them on the grounds of *sincerity*. Speakers asserted that schools had lost resources and supports in recent years. They had questions about who from the Department had been to the school, and what supports had been provided recently. Lastly, speakers noted that the schools proposed for closure were schools that historically had been neglected. There were more

than 50 incidences of the assertion that schools did not have proper supports, about 21% of the assertions overall in the public hearings.

5.3.4.1 Subtracting resources. School staff, students, and elected officials testified that schools did not have the necessary resources to provide students with an optimal learning environment. In contrast to NYCDoE’s measurements, these speakers calculated a subtraction of resources. Students counted “a loss of AP courses” and teachers tallied “programs that were whittled away” and a “decrease of support staff” (School A). One teacher in particular talked about her class size increasing at the same time that the school could not afford a paraprofessional (School A). Comments about diminishing resources were not just made by school staff and students. A Borough appointed representative of the Panel for Education Policy asked why financial resources had not been provided prior to the school closing proposal. This larger argument about the deprivation of material resources and professional support challenged the *sincerity* and *normative rightfulness* of the Department of Education as a Central Office to provide schools with the support needed to achieve their goals. A failed school, speakers reasoned, was a school that had not been given opportunities and tools to succeed (School B).

5.3.4.2 The DOE support structure is lacking. Members of the public expressed confusion about how exactly the NYCDoE was newly structured to offer support to schools. Parents and community members repeatedly asked about the Superintendent’s role and what specific ways he/she had assisted the school, signaling that many members of the public were not just confused, but uninformed of the substantial changes to the NYCDoE’s management structure⁹⁴ (School A). An alumnus expressed that he did not understand how the NYCDoE was

94 As reviewed in chapter 4, in accordance with the Portfolio Management Model, the Department had adopted a new management strategy. Principals have new contracts with the Central Office, and agree to be responsible for school outcomes in exchange for more administrative control. One of the new areas of administrative control is the selection of school support organizations that have replaced the support infrastructure previously provided by the Central Office and community district Superintendents.

structured and observed that the NYCDoE “reshuffling” of its support structure was not helping schools (School C).

Only United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) union representatives spoke explicitly about the Department’s new configuration of school supports. CSA representatives who testified at each of the hearings raised concern that “some of the schools are being held accountable while the apparatus that supports them is not,” and recommended the NYCDoE “lay bare the process” by which they determined schools for closure, including an analysis of the roles of the Superintendents and school support organizations in providing school support. A UFT borough representative mocked the Department’s answer to how schools were provided with support. ““We let [schools] pick a school support structure.’ Well, woopy-do!” He continued, “And when [schools] pick one that didn’t work, what do you do? You’re going to close them down!” (School B). A UFT central office representative attending all three hearings asserted that the NYCDoE had failed to provide the necessary resources, and that struggling schools were the product of their “persistently failed management”. He passed out buttons with that phrase (fieldnotes, January 7, 2010).

5.3.4.3 Historic deprivation. While many members of the public were not aware of the exact configuration of the new support structure, they expressed frustration that schools had been left without adequate support to succeed. This particular assertion about lack of resources was often threaded with analysis about historic and persistent racial and economic school inequities. One parent pleaded with the Department to come to the aid of the school, which he said had been abandoned. He was not explicit about his analysis of why the school had been under-resourced, but he recounted one lesson passed down from his own parents that he wanted to bestow upon the panel before his speaking time expired:

One last thing I want to say, is that my mother said, so listen to this, this is very good. My mother said people ain't nothing but people. And my father said there's only one race and that's the human race because God made us all. Now let's help each other as New Yorkers, stick together for our children. (School B)

This parent was not the only one to intimate that resources had been allocated differently on account of students' racial classification. Another parent remarked that resources were allocated based on a perception of students' abilities. She commented that schools like the one her son went to needed more resources, because students "were no less capable than those at high performing high schools like Stuyvesant" (School B). The overall insight among the public that schools on the closing school list had been neglected for years challenged the sincerity of the Department's claims that schools had been assisted to meet standards.

5.3.4.4 Summary. Members of the public asserted schools were not supported to succeed, and rejected the sincerity and normative rightfulness of its claims that there had been strong enough and sustained attempts to help schools succeed. They argued that schools, classrooms, teachers, and students did not have adequate support, and they tied this neglect to systematic race and class inequalities. Their comments suggested that the new support structure as implemented by the Department to individualize school support was not transparent or accessible to them, and they raised questions about the new structure's effectiveness. They refuted the Department's sincerity and normative rightfulness, that the only way to improve the school was to replace it with another; from their perspective, the schools had not been provided the right management and support.

5.3.5 "Lack of accountability." In total, there were 50 assertions about a lack of accountability in the school closing process, which accounted for 21% of all claims made. Where

NYCDoE leaders professed that school closings proposals ensured school accountability for educating children, members of the public countered that school closings and the school closing process had no accountability to the larger public. Members of the public defined accountability in two ways: how they were being heard, and how the process was answering to them. Outrage over a lack of accountability was targeted at NYCDoE administrators who presided over the hearings but it was also directed to then Chancellor Klein and Mayor Bloomberg, neither of whom was present at the individual school closing public hearings. In highlighting their physical absence at the public hearings and in pointing to what they experienced as ongoing disregard of parent and community input under Mayoral control, members of the public rejected the NYCDoE claims of positional authority, or normative rightfulness.

5.3.5.1 *This process does not hear us.* Across the public hearings, members of the public commented that they were shut out of decisions made to close schools, and that they were not being heard in the hearings themselves in the larger school closing decision-making process under the New York City Department of Education and City Hall. Across three hearings, many speakers lamented that the hearings were representative of a larger school governance structure that “ignores students, parents, and teachers” (School B). Others testified that the process was not objective.

5.3.5.2 *This process does not answer to us.* Members of the public expressed outrage that the school closing process did not answer to them. They commented that policymakers indicated a disregard for members of the public by not presenting full proposals and by not fully explaining their rationale. A councilmember testified that the Mayor “did not make the case” that schools should be closed, but was going forward with school closing proposals anyway (School B). Likewise, a community member and retired teacher remarked that DOE officials were

“barely able to articulate the reasoning” of school closing proposals. Members of the public also commented that NYCDoE policymakers also demonstrated disregard by not being present at the hearings themselves: “Where are Mr. Klein and Mr. Bloomberg?” jibed several individuals. “They stand doing whatever they feel like” said a representative of a elected state official’s office (School C). “This is why I voted against Mayoral control,” concluded a state elected official (School A).

Without the Chancellor or Mayor physically present at the hearings, speakers at the microphone singled out NYCDoE representatives who presided over the school closing hearing. An assistant principal asked, “Where is the accountability of the superintendent?” (School B). One parent asked a DOE spokesperson: “What accountability will the DOE take?” (School C). And, in what would become a common reference to the perceived willful disregard and disrespect of NYCDoE representatives who were physically present but not otherwise present at the hearing, one alumnus shouted at a deputy chancellor: “Get off your Blackberry!” (School A).

Claims about a lack of accountability were not just specific to the school closing hearings but to the larger governance structure managing schools in New York City, but to the nature of closing schools itself. “Breaking up the high school” in the words of one speaker “dilutes accountability rather than increases it. It makes the community less willing to invest in education” (School A).

5.3.5.3 Summary. Members of the public rejected the legitimacy of the hearing process even while they participated in it. They argued that the hearing process as part of the larger governance structure set up through Mayoral control was unaccountable; that it represented a lack of transparency, genuine opportunities for input into decision-making, and answerability to those most affected by school closings. They also argued that the hearing process itself was

authentic as school closing decisions was already “a done deal”. These counter assertions challenged the Department’s *normative rightfulness and sincerity*.

5.3.6 Counter assertions and validity challenges summary. Members of the public issued five major assertions in opposition to school closing proposals. The five major assertions in order of frequency in the testimony given at three public hearings were: 1) These are not failing schools; 2) Other motivations to close schools; 3) Closing is not a solution; 4) No supports were provided, and 5) Lack of accountability. As I already indicated, these assertions counter NYCDoE claims that schools are in fact failing; that school closing proposals are in the interest of improving school performance; that closing schools will benefit students; that schools have been given proper supports to succeed; and that the school closing process as part of larger school governance system under Mayoral control is one that hears and is answerable to the public.

Counter assertions indicate the criteria by which the public is challenging the NYCDoE statements. As reviewed in the introduction and beginning of this chapter, Habermas distinguished between four classes of validity claims: *intelligibility, truth, normative rightfulness, and sincerity*. Members of the public challenge NYCDoE school closing proposals on all four classes of validity claims, but place the most emphasis on sincerity and normative rightfulness. Table 5.4 shown below provides an overview of the public’s validity claim challenges to NYCDoE school closing statements, including the specific types of challenges they issued, and counter statements they made.

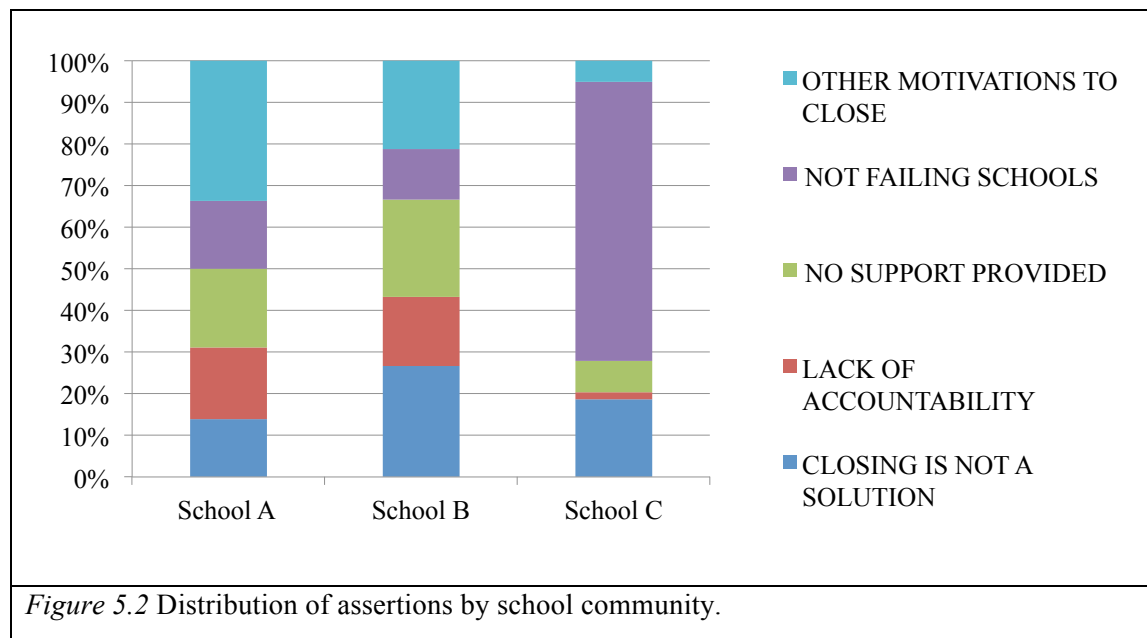
| NYCDoE Statements | Validity Claim Challenge | Specific Challenges | Public Counter Statements |
|--|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Schools are Failing | <i>Truth</i> (<i>Are things really as you say?</i>) | -Data is Wrong -It's the Wrong Data -Thin Data/Unfair Comparisons | “The DOE is failing us” |
| School closures are in the interest of improving low performance | <i>Sincerity</i> | -Ulterior Motives -Data Manipulation | “Closure by Design” |
| Closing Schools will remedy low school performance | <i>Intelligibility/Sincerity</i> | -Harmful Effects -Incomplete replacement plans -School Closings Don't Fix the problem | “Fix Our Schools” |
| Schools have received proper supports | <i>Sincerity/Normative Rightfulness</i> | -Subtracting Resources -The NYCDoE Support Structure is Lacking -Historic Deprivation of Support | “Persistently Failed Management” |
| The Hearing Process | <i>Sincerity/Normative Rightfulness</i> | -This process does not hear us -Mayoral control does not answer to us | “This is a Done Deal” |

The five assertions the public made throughout the three hearings analyzed for this chapter offer insight into how members of the larger public contest the Department's validity claims. That is, this public contested NYCDoE claims that schools are in fact failing on grounds of truth; contested that school closing proposals are in the interest of improving school performance on grounds of sincerity; that closing schools will in actuality improve schools on grounds of intelligibility; that schools have been given proper supports on the grounds of sincerity and normative rightfulness; and that the process itself is one that is accountable on the grounds of normative rightfulness. In total, the counter assertions of the public revealed clear challenges to the legitimacy of the NYCDoE proposals to close schools. They also revealed a public sphere

able to hold counter-narratives. The question I attempt to answer next is how robust each challenge is.

In the fourth part of this chapter, I look closer at the distribution of assertions across schools to investigate support for assertions in the public sphere. Figure 5.2 below represents the distribution of assertions made by each school community. A chi-squared test of independence was performed to examine the relationship of claims to school community. The relation between these variables was found to be significant: $\chi^2(10, N=330)=130.386, p<0.001$. School communities make distinct arguments in their battle with the NYCDoE over school closing proposals.

5.4 Analysis of Assertions across Hearings



As Figure 5.2 demonstrates, in School A, speakers coalesce around the assertion that there are other motivations to close the school. School B as a whole articulated three assertions fairly evenly: that the school had not been provided support, there were other motivations for closing the school, and that closing the school was not a solution. School C by and large made

the assertion that the school was not failing, and specifically that the school was credentialing students for living wage jobs. In the next and last section of this chapter I will look at this last assertion more closely to consider whether certain arguments have more salience in the current marketplace sphere of public education.

5.5 Looking Closer at School C's School Based Assertions.

At the close of individual school closing hearings in 2009-2010, NYCDoE officials removed School C from the school closure list – the only school that was removed from the schools proposed for closure in 2009-2010. While School A and B made a moral arguments for why schools should not close (closing schools have not been given adequate support, and closing schools will harm students and communities), School C made an economic argument (this school is helping students secure jobs). More than 30 speakers stated outright that the school was equipping students for living wage employment after graduation, and that the school was supporting the larger economic infrastructure. In doing so they argued, as put cleverly by an alumnus and current carpenter, “we believe in building schools, not closing schools down.”

School C offers a different school model than the comprehensive high schools model Schools A and B offer; it is a vocational school that trains and provides a certificate for students in the trades. Assertions at School C's public hearing coalesce around the themes of employability and living wage jobs, as well as job creation and larger societal economic revitalization. These are clearly not assertions school communities A and B could make given the school model that they offer; but a closer reading of the assertions made at School C's public hearing provides some insight into how the type of argument can be influential (beyond Habermas' criteria) in communicative action.

5.5.1 Employability. Administrators, teachers, and students at School C highlighted that training and credentials provided by the school ensured students employment in a faltering economy. One assistant principal asserted that students leaving the school with a certification in their trade area had a boost over their competitors: “[Un]like so many [who] have found themselves desperately seeking job opportunities since September 11, the education our students receive has prepared them to face these challenges.” A business partner of the school agreed: “in this economic climate of turmoil where professionals can’t get jobs, the needs for skilled, technical trained people is essential. [This school] provides that service.” A business partner concluded, “we cannot afford to close a vocational school that’s creating real career opportunities for our young people.”

This importance of directly employable skills was pronounced for economically disadvantaged students attending the school. Two teachers who testified emphasized that the school was in one of the poorest congressional districts in the country and that the school was providing students with better opportunities. “Our students who graduate with [these] skills at 18 or 19 years old make more than the median income in [the borough],” noted one teacher. Another commented that the school’s certified career and technical education program allows “economically disadvantaged students to get hands-on instruction in their trade, thereby providing a way out of the poverty cycle.” The student body president asked, “rather than force minorities in this community in an endless pattern of seeking public assistance and earning minimum wage pay, why not break this inevitable pattern and provide education for young men and women in high school?” A former teacher of plumbing, now 80 years old said bluntly, “this is not a time to close out school when finding jobs is so important.”

5.5.2 Living wage. School administration, staff, students, alumni, and community partners stressed that the school not only gave students jobs, “but a living wage job that supports families...” Several alumni testified that the certificate they received from the school was “paying off”, sharing how it computes in terms of hourly wages and salary figures. An alumna and car technician reported he grossed \$30,000 part-time while attending college. “That’s pretty good, if you ask me,” he added. Another relayed he made close to \$90,000 a year as business owner. Some alumni spoke about what earnings meant for a standard of living. As one plumber exclaimed, “I also bought my condo last year because of this school!” Others talked about it in terms of self-respect. A current student said that the school “provides minorities not only the chance of obtaining a job, but a career.” In the words of another alumna, the school “represents our refusal to accept lower wages.”

Students not yet employed but approaching graduation expressed confidence that they would be advantaged in the job market, because the school was credentialing them. As one student reasoned,

It takes five or six years in a dual program in college to get a master’s degree. And at [this school] you get a certificate that says that you’re certified in your field so that you can work in a trade right out of high school. So you graduate you’re looking at making \$50 plus an hour. When you graduate from a regular high school, you’re looking at McDonald’s, and Wendy’s, or Burger King. You can’t make a living on that, I’m sorry.

5.5.3 Economic revitalization. In addition to speakers testifying that the school was preparing students for living wage jobs, speakers also testified to the importance of the school’s contribution to the larger economy. An assistant principal testified that the school was doing its part to provide skilled workers to fields in need: “in today’s

economy the need for auto technicians and building trade workers may be more pressing than ever.” A teacher added “our school provides a unique and valuable service to the community by offering both live auto mechanics and collision repair services.” An assistant principal said, “Of all the infrastructure projects going on in New York City right now you have here in the audience graduates that are working on these projects.”

In opposing the proposal to close the school, speakers at this hearing asserted that closing would dampen efforts in support of economic revitalization in the United States. “It makes no sense to us,” a business partner asserted, “...especially for low demand occupations that will never leave this country that will never go offshore.” A student asked, “How is the economy supposed to recover? Don’t you need people to have jobs?”

Several business owners came forward to praise the school for teaching automotive, carpentry, electrical engineering, and HVAC, “skills that will always be needed.” They testified that they “rely on talented recruits,” and reminded the NYCDoE that they had contracts with the city. One small business owner brought to the hearing a list of emails and letters he had collected from businesses across the city. He read the names of billion-dollar companies and company owners, whom he said, “recognize the value of what’s being taught here and how valuable it is...” and “refuse to let [the closing] happen to the school...” A representative from a world-renowned car company came forward to say that they had 15 students working in two dealerships locally and that his company had worked with over 30 students interns in the course of their relationship with the school.

Finally, speakers testified to the importance of the trade economy itself. They referenced the history of the United States in building knowledge of the trades business. One student equated closing the school with “closing down on the country’s infrastructure.”

A closer analysis of School C's specific contestation to school closings revealed a counter assertion that the school is making students employable, providing them with living wage jobs, and contributing to the economic growth in the larger society. This assertion is distinct from the assertions made in Schools A and B. While Schools A & B argue that the NYCDoE ought to consider schools relationships to communities, School C argues that the NYCDoE ought to consider the school relationship to providing jobs in the community and supporting the larger societal economic infrastructure. While Schools A & B assert that their school stands as a landmark and pillar, School C's larger argument is that this school is giving hope because it is giving jobs. The loss of this school then is calculated in market terms. A student summarized this by remarking that closing the school would be "deteriorating our school, our opportunities, and our careers."

School's C assertion overall challenged the validity claims of the NYCDoE that the school was failing. More than challenging the validity claims of the NYCDoE, School C presented alternative criteria for measuring school success (student's employability and economic revitalization). In essence, School C appears to provide a counter-narrative, beyond countering the NYCDoE's narrative. While NYCDoE administrators stated that feedback about the school's relationships to businesses in the community had convinced them to reverse course, the reasons for School C's removal from the school closing list are not entirely clear.⁹⁵ Presenting an alternative, as we will see again in Chapter seven, (looking at the NYC Coalition of Educational Justice's "Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them" campaign) however appears to be linked to a public's effectiveness.

5.6 Conclusion

⁹⁵ Other factors could account for School C's removal from the school closure list in 2009-2010 including consistent and prime newspaper coverage.

This chapter provided an analysis of initial framings the NYCDoE and the larger public made at the school closing public hearings in 2009-2010. Opening statements by Deputy Chancellors framed school closures as offering more choices and better graduation outcomes. In the three hearings analyzed for this chapter, 233 speakers from the public testified in opposition to school closing proposals. They represented more than 13 different roles in education, demonstrating multiple active publics in the larger public sphere of education policymaking.

Members of the public issued five major assertions in opposition to school closing proposals. The five major assertions in order of frequency in the testimony given at three public hearings were: 1) These are not failing schools; 2) Other motivations to close schools; 3) Closing is not a solution; 4) No supports were provided, and 5) Lack of accountability. These assertions counter NYCDoE's claims that schools are in fact failing; that school closing proposals are in the interest of improving school performance; that closing schools will benefit students; that schools have been given proper supports to succeed; and that the school closing process as part of larger school governance system under Mayoral control is one that hears and is answerable to the public.

In total, the counter assertions of the public revealed clear and strong challenges to the validity of the NYCDoE proposals to close schools. Challenges to validity claims shows a public that does not trust the accuracy of the data (truth), the intentions of the Department in proposing closing schools (sincerity), and the fairness of the school closing process (normative rightfulness). Initially, the public hearings reveal a public sphere able to hold counternarratives – the result of counterpublics operating within the larger public sphere, rather than in their separate counterpublics (Fraser, 1990; Dawson, 2006). Werner (2002) argues that counter-narratives are

only effective to the extent they can be developed into a full campaign and I find evidence of this in my observations of CEJ's "Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them" campaign in Chapter 7.

Upon second look, the public hearings demonstrate that school communities make fairly distinct arguments in their battle with the NYCDoE over proposed school closings. In School A, speakers coalesce around the assertion that there are other motivations to close the school. School B as a whole articulated three assertions fairly evenly: that the school had not been provided support, there were other motivations for closing the school, and that closing the school was not a solution. School C by and large made the assertion that the school was not failing, and specifically pointed to the school's credentialing students for living wage jobs. School C's removal from the school closure list raises a question of whether the "force of the better argument" is determined by the kind of argument, rather than validity claim criteria as outlined by Habermas. Overall, distinct assertions demonstrate publics uncoordinated on strategies and fragmented on interests and goals.

In the next chapter, I explore how NYCDoE administrators hear and represent assertions made in the public hearings by members of the public. I focus on differences in framings between Central Office administrators and Superintendents and I theorize these differences as evidence of "*decentralized centralism*." I then review NYCDoE framings as they align with the Portfolio Management Model and its three pillars (choice, accountability, and empowerment). My analysis concerns itself with the impact of PMM as a governance strategy. I consider whether NYCDoE's school improvement strategy through school closings is delocalizing the public sphere.

Chapter 6: School Closings and Discursive Openings: Reframing, Recentralizing, and Delocalizing of the NYCDoE through the Portfolio Management Model

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I further analyze the framings used by administrators in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) to explain school closure decisions. First I investigate how NYCDoE administrators read, represent, and respond to opposition voiced at public hearings and essentially reframe the critiques of the public. Second, I examine the ways that the NYCDoE's framings of school closings reflect the three pillars of the Portfolio Management Model: choice, test based accountability, and empowerment. Reframings are aligned differentially based on proximity of administrators to the Portfolio Management Model framework and to the public. I argue that the school closing process reveals the Department's recentralization and delocalization via its new management structure as part of the Portfolio Management Model.

While the Department asserts that its new management structure has shifted authority from central office to schools and their networks, I question whether this restructuring has in fact recentralized the Department, as well as helped to delocalize the school system. The data I utilize comes from interviews with [16] administrators at the central office, including four deputy chancellors, as well as administrators in four offices involved in school closures (Accountability, Family Engagement and Advocacy, Portfolio Development, and School Support & Instruction⁹⁶). These administrators answered questions about their rationale for school closings and their experiences at the public hearings, particularly what they heard and understood about concerns voiced by the public. I also refer to data from eleven interviews and up to 16 surveys

⁹⁶ Interviews with Deputy Chancellors are referred to as A 1-4; staff from the Office of Accountability as B 1-2; staff from the Office of Family Engagement & Advocacy as C 1-4; staff from the Office of Portfolio Development as D 1-3; and staff from the Office School Support & Instruction as E 1-3).

with Community School District and High School Superintendents.⁹⁷ As reviewed in chapter four, in the NYCDoE's revised management structure, Superintendents no longer oversee schools' academic performance. That responsibility has been transferred to the network teams. Superintendents, however, were delegated to facilitate parental engagement and to preside over school closing hearings. Their perspectives offer insight into the concerns raised by families.

This chapter is organized in two parts. In part one I investigate how NYCDoE administrators frame the opposition to school closing proposals, as well as the public hearings process itself. On the whole, Department leaders interpret the opposition to school closings as self-interested, adult-driven, and as an attempt to protect the status quo. Central Office administrators frame the opposition to school closings as driven primarily by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in its agenda to retain job security for its members. They also frame conflicts over school closings as the tension between the narrow concerns of individuals (parents, students, and teachers concerned about individual schools and students) and the broader concerns of school district administrators for all school children. While the NYCDoE is often understood as a uni-vocal organization, there is much variation in perspective across the levels of its organization. As my analysis will demonstrate, the degree to which assertions of the public were offset by differences in insight into the concerns of the public and the shortcomings of the school closings process itself exhibited at different levels of the NYCDoE administration. Superintendents offered a more balanced view of assertions made by members of the public in the public hearings, lending particular credence to concerns about the supports available to schools and about the lack of transparency for and engagement with the public throughout the process.

⁹⁷ Interviews with Superintendents are indexed F 1-11. As discussed in the methods chapter, the online survey design did not allow for individual categorization.

The differences in framings are associated with two distinct poles. One pole represents the proximity of administrators to families, school communities and the public. The other pole represents the proximity of administrators to the Portfolio Management Model and its principles for choice, accountability, and empowerment. Central Office administrators' framings demonstrate an allegiance to the Portfolio Management Model and that commitment prevents them from fully hearing the concerns of the public; Superintendents, by contrast, in their positions have more direct dealings with families and tend to factor in the concerns of those constituents. My study demonstrates that the information that Superintendents had however did not affect school closing decisions. When taken together I argue that this suggests a dynamic of "*decentralized centralism*"⁹⁸ (Karlsen, 2000).

In part two of this chapter I briefly point to how the New York City Department of Education Central Office administrators' framings of school closings reflect the Portfolio Management Model (PMM) pillars of: 1) choice; 2) accountability; and 3) empowerment and I raise questions about assumptions undergirding these framings. Researchers studying PMM have explained it as a school district strategy to close low-performing schools and add promising new schools (Lake & Hill, 2009). My analysis approaches this from the reverse angle: probing how the NYCDoE frames school closures as a choice equity reform, providing students and their families better schooling options; and an accountability reform, holding individual schools responsible for meeting academic standards. My analysis suggests that the Department's promulgation of the PMM model ties school improvement to a delocalizing strategy. School closings, like school choice, decouples schools from neighborhoods and communities. The

⁹⁸ While centralization is understood as a top down change strategy and decentralization is understood as a bottom up change strategy, *decentralized centralism* coined by Karlsen (1999) refers to the dynamic interaction between the two.

ageographic structure of the NYCDoE's new support structure, the network teams, is unclear and inaccessible to families in the school closing process.

Lastly, I review that NYCDoE Central Office administrators reasoned all schools had adequate support to meet their performance targets. Expressing great faith in their new management strategy, these administrators reaffirmed that school success or failure was in the hands of schools themselves. I will come back to the PMM model and the underlying principles of NYCDoE's school improvement work when I look more closely at the NYC Coalition of Educational Justice's *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign in Chapter seven that follows.

But first, I review two critical announcements following the PEP vote to approve 19 school closures on January 27, 2010.

6.2 Mulgrew v. Board of Education, School Dist. 902 N.Y.S. 2d, 882, 889 (2010)

On February 12, 2010, a lawsuit was filed in the New York Supreme Court by the United Federation of Teachers, along with local 2, American Federation of Teachers, the AFL-CIO, the Alliance for Quality Education, the New York State conference of the NAACP, along with 17 individual city council members and activists.⁹⁹ The lawsuit charged that the New York City Department of Education had failed to comply with 52-A of the Education Law §2590-h and instead had crafted a “thinly veiled” pretense of compliance in four areas: issuing boilerplate education impact statements for schools proposed for closure, disregarding the statutory requirement to schedule joint public hearings and with school based community councils, and

⁹⁹ Individuals who who signed onto the lawsuit included ten NY State Elected Officials Scott Stringer, Eric Adams, Bill Perkins, Hakeem Jeffries, Alan Maisel, Robert Jackson, Charles Barron, Eric Martin Dilan, Mark Welprin, and Lewis A. Fidler. Seven additional individuals include Theodore Garcia, Vanessa Wallace, Hector Nazario, James Devor, parents of students enrolled in NYC public schools and Presidents of the Community Education Councils for their respective districts; Belinda Brown, a parent of a student attending one of the schools proposed for closure; and Stephanie Siegal and Dan Simoes, teachers at schools proposed for closure. Four additional names were added to the caption but were never formally added as petitioners James Brennan, Rubin Diaz, Jr., Marty Markowitz, and Zakiyah Ansari.

failing to adhere to notice and conduct requirements of those hearings. On March 26, 2010 Judge Lobis of the Supreme Court of the State of New York found significant violations of the law. She said that NYCDoE had failed to provide a detailed analysis required for Education Impact Statements (EIS), and had failed to provide EIS hard copies for parents, what she assessed was “meaningful information regarding the impacts [of school closures] on students.” NYCDoE lawyers had argued that it should be permitted to devise its own compliance guidelines within the statutory guidelines (fieldnotes, March 13, 2010), but the Judge ruled that argument was “trivializing the whole notion of community involvement in decisions to close or phase out schools” (p. 12). Lobis’ decision deemed schools proposed for closure in 2009-2010 null and void, and she ordered a reissuing of EIS for any schools that would be proposed for closure.

This meant that high school students who had been notified that their school was closed and had been given a new set of school options (some of which had already begun enrollment procedures), would have to be notified that their school was not closed. The NYCDoE quickly filed an appeal but on July 1, the Appellate division of the Supreme Court upheld Lobis’ decision.¹⁰⁰ By court order, the 19 schools proposed for closure would remain open.¹⁰¹¹⁰² Without any other recourse, the Department mailed letters to parents encouraging them to enroll their children in other schools.

Both court rulings pertained to the procedures of the school closing process, not to the policy of school closures. Subsequently, the Department would engage a more rigorous process to meet the letter of the law, so it could continue with its plans to close schools it deemed low performing (fieldnotes, September 2010). Beyond meeting the technical requirements of the law,

100 http://www.courts.state.ny.us/courts/ad1/calendar/appsmots/2010/July/2010_07_01_dec.pdf

101 <http://gothamschools.org/2010/03/26/court-overtums-closures-of-19-city-schools/>

102 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/nyregion/27close.html>

the NYCDoE had more work to do to frame school closure policy as effective for all students and part of that work would entail discrediting their critics. The NYCDoE's framings of the opposition to school closings as well as its framings of school closings along the pillars of the Portfolio Management Model can be seen as efforts to regain legitimacy and to garner more support for school closing proposals.

6.3 Central Office Hearing the Public

In the previous chapter concerning communicative action during the school closing public hearings in 2009-2010, I analyzed data on two dimensions: distribution of speaker groups and content of assertions made. In this chapter, I demonstrate how NYCDoE Central Office administrators focused more on speaker groups' vested interests than on addressing specific arguments raised. On the whole, Department leaders dismissed the opposition to school closings as self-interested, adult driven, and a protection of the status quo. I provide analysis of two sets of frames: how the NYCDoE frames different stakeholders' opposition and motivations, and how within the NYCDoE there are different readings of and responses to assertions made by members of the public.

Central Office administrators interviewed perceived opposition to school closings to be driven primarily by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and activist allies fighting a larger political battle with the NYCDoE. Other opposing factions and motives named were individual teachers protecting their jobs; current students and alumni emotionally attached to their schools; elected officials upset by Mayoral control and by the fact that they no longer had political authority over schools; and parents who were either misinformed, ignorant, or duped by the UFT. My analysis specifically focuses on framings of the UFT, parents, and teachers, because NYCDoE administrators spoke most frequently about these three stakeholder groups and

because they provide an interesting contrast. NYCDoE administrators discuss parent and teacher opposition to school closings as individualistic and immediate and UFT opposition as collective and strategic in the service of a broader agenda. In all three cases, NYCDoE positioned itself as being the only advocate for all children.

Analysis of differences between NYCDoE administrators centers on framings provided by Central Office Administrators and Superintendents. Superintendents interviewed and surveyed provide a counterpoint to the framings provided by Central Office administrators. I argue that the differences that emerge can first be explained as differentiation in proximity to the families and the larger public. The differences can also be explained as the foundational principle of Miles Law: “Where you stand depends on where you sit” (Miles, 1978).

6.3.1 Central Office administrators’ framings of UFT opposition.¹⁰³ When asked about their understandings of the opposition expressed in response to school closings at the public hearings, Central Office administrators answered that the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) was both the mastermind and purse strings behind the opposition of the PEP hearing on January 26-27, 2010. Seven Central Office administrators interviewed referred to the UFT paying for bus transportation to the public hearing. Additionally, NYCDoE administrators commented that the UFT had provided the power points presented during the public comment period (interview A1, September 21, 2010); paid “for a big TV screen outside and a big rally before” the hearing (interview B1, November 19, 2010); and had treated the hearings “like a community organizing exercise” (interview D2, December, 7, 2010).

Central office administrators offered slightly different explanations of the motivation of UFT opposition to school closures: one set of explanations pointed to job concerns at the school

103 UFT leader interview data was collected as part of this study but was not fully analyzed to be included in this dissertation.

level, the other set pointed to a larger UFT agenda around job protection. Both were characterized as adult-interest. One administrator in the Office of School Support and Instruction supposed that UFT management was being “increasingly pressured by membership frustrated with having to look for jobs in other schools when closure plans had been made” (interview E1, May 25, 2011). An administrator in the Office for Family Engagement and Advocacy agreed that the UFT’s foremost concern was job protection: “[the UFT] were caught off guard the first couple of times. Then they saw what was happening and it was like wait a minute, we can’t let this thing happen. What’s going to happen to all these teachers? We’re losing our jobs, we’re being displaced.” (interview C2, August 10, 2010).

Three of seven administrators who attributed the opposition to the UFT explained the UFT’s motivation as a larger agenda the Union had around job security, and an ongoing battle that the UFT and the NYCDoE were having over contract negotiations including teacher wages and tenure. One Deputy Chancellor regarded the conflicts as “a fairly classic management labor discussion in times of a resource shortage” (interview A4, March 16, 2011). A second described the confrontations that surfaced in the school closing hearings as the clashing of diametrically opposed ideas regarding seniority. Referring to the PEP hearing that had lasted 13 hours, this administrator said:

What’s happening now is a combination of the new President who is going to be tough for his members and I think the sense on the part of the Mayor and the Chancellor that they got to push the envelope around the role of seniority in civil service in public education and those two ideas in particular wind up reverberating through the system in ways where there are increasing numbers of confrontations, and that night thus far was the most obvious example (interview A2, February 11, 2010).

In assessing the motivations of the UFT's opposition to school closings to be about job security, Central Office administrators underscored that school closings themselves were not the priority of the Union. One administrator from the Office of Accountability accused the Union of using school closings as "another leverage point in a political chess game" (B2, May 26, 2010). This administrator discredited the popular notion that the UFT was opposed to school closings because of their members' job displacement:

They have some self-interest, given the politics of their membership in preventing closures in certain instances because people are displaced from their positions...they don't lose their jobs, but they have to go to other schools and people don't like that. But I don't think, in terms of the trajectory of their work, it's a core priority. It was just a convenient political weapon for them in a larger debate they were having with the administration (interview B2, May 26, 2010).

To provide more support for their argument that school closings was not the UFT's main concern, these same administrators noted that in previous years Department leaders had worked with UFT leaders to discuss and carry out school closing plans, negotiating behind closed doors, but more recent conflicts had precluded a similar way of working. This same administrator from the Office of Accountability added, "This past year was unusual because the union invested over 3 million dollars in organizing protests around the closures in a way that they hadn't before. In prior years we've closed similar numbers of schools and there was always local resistance in a similar form...it never resulted in big protests, because there wasn't resource driving that organizing."

6.3.2 Central Office administrators' framings of UFT pretext. Like members of the public who argued that the NYCDoE was deceptive in its agenda to close schools, Department

administrators argued that the UFT was deceptive in its agenda to oppose school closings. All four Deputy Chancellors interviewed for this study commented that the UFT had manipulated other actors to oppose school closings. Deputy Chancellors each named different actors they believed the UFT manipulated to oppose school closings. Three Deputy Chancellors spoke in particular about the UFT's corraling other parties to attend the school closing hearings in force. A fourth remarked that the UFT had manipulated actors to join the lawsuit against the NYCDoE's school closures.

Three of four Deputy Chancellors interviewed remarked that the UFT had corralled other parties to contest school closure policy. One Deputy Chancellor formulated that the UFT recruited teachers who in turn recruited parents to speak on their behalf:

It was something that was engineered by the United Federation of Teachers. They are the ones that hired the buses to bring the teachers out there... The teachers are the ones that are going to get the parents to these meetings as well... they bring them in to talk about only how devastating it is that they are closing the school. Any parents that spoke were all fed by the teacher. The parents that spoke, spoke about the teachers losing their jobs... its horrible that they're feeding that to the kids and the parents. That to me is again, adults using kids and parents in a way that was not appropriate. (interview A1, September 21, 2010)

A second commented that the UFT had brought out alumni to the hearings: "these big schools have very strong chapters, very strong union representatives, and they prey on the alumni that haven't been back in thirty years... they dig up four kids that did graduate and went to a decent college" (interview A3, May 3, 2011). A third Deputy Chancellor reasoned that while

some individuals had expressed their own legitimate concerns, the majority of individuals who had spoken out against school closings were connected to and facilitated by the UFT:

I think there are always people that have legitimate interests of their own; there are groups that are sort of factions representing various people. It is sometimes very hard to tell how they are related to the Union and how they're not, but I think by in large it's fair to say the union has the most money, they have the best resources, and they're in the best position to organize people, so whether they're paying people to do it, whether they're just giving donations for people to do it, whether it's just themselves doing it, or whether they've brought people together to be part of doing it, they're generally connected in some respect to the Union.

Perhaps sensing that this assessment was exaggerated, this Deputy Chancellor, added, "But that's not to discredit people who come out and have genuine questions" (interview A4, March 16, 2011). A fourth Deputy Chancellor focused on the UFT taking a leadership role in the lawsuit against school closures, emphasizing that that the UFT had manipulated the NAACP chapter to join:

The UFT partnered with the NAACP around their lawsuit. They used to use ACORN for that purpose...they obviously can't use ACORN at the moment because there's national antipathy toward ACORN but they, you know, they found this branch of the NAACP in Queens, and I think in a very disrespectful fashion are tarnishing the NAACP, by...manipulating them as politically as they have...that's my sense of it" (interview A2, February 11, 2011).

In summary, Central Office administrators attributed the opposition to school closures primarily to the United Federation of Teachers. While these administrators agreed that the UFT opposition

to school closures had less to do with school closures themselves, they disagreed on their motivation. Two administrators named job displacement at the school level as the UFT's concern; four named a broader agenda having to do with job protection and seniority. All four Deputy Chancellors interviewed argued the UFT had manipulated other actors to oppose school closings.

These framings of top-level NYCDoE officials recast the appearance of a multi-fronted opposition to school closures as stemming from the United Federation of Teachers. Solely ascribing opposition to the UFT, however allowed NYCDoE to dismiss the concerns from other concerned parties, namely parents.

6.3.3 Central Office administrators' framings of parents. When urged to acknowledge the concerns that individual parents and community members made on behalf of their own interests at the public hearings, NYCDoE Central Office administrators framed parents as narrowly focused on their own children's success at the expense of the larger student population, unaware of the consequences of school's performance, or as a small group of individuals with ideological differences with the Department that were not directly affected by school closings. In spite of these rather limited framings of parents' concerns, NYCDoE administrators expressed regret for not hearing from more parents.

Central Office administrators generally described the conflict over school closings as a tension between those parents who were focused on their individual kids' needs, and administrators who had the responsibility of educating all students. In this paradigm, parents who testified at the public hearings against their child's school closing were framed as solely looking out for their own children. A representative from the Office of Engagement and Advocacy said that parents were not thinking holistically about school closings: "I think that the temptation to

... speak about my son, my class is overwhelming... my son is doing so well that I can't believe you're phasing out his school, he wants to graduate at whatever high school. "A lot of what I heard at the PEP was just about one kid" (interview C4, August 1, 2010). An administrator from the Office of Accountability assessed that parents who expressed opposition at the hearings did so at the expense of others, "It's rare that the kids or the parents who are failing are the ones who show up at those meetings. It's the most active parents, the stronger students, so their experience is actually different to the ones that the work is intended to impact" (interview B3, November 19, 2010). Both of these framings suggested that parents who testified against their child's school closing were selfish.

Two administrators in the Office for School Support and Instruction, framed parent opposition to school closings as ignorance of the importance of academic achievement and what constitutes school success. One administrator critiqued parents' concerns about the school's relational quality or generational continuity. Recounting past protests, this administrator stated "there were people who wanted the diploma that was the same as their mom and their aunt and their grandfather, and were not at all perturbed about the fact that was going to be a completely meaningless piece of paper, that was going to prepare them for nothing at all (interview, E2, May 25, 2011). A second colleague in the office agreed that parents were focused on the wrong criteria for evaluating schools, saying "how do you handle the lack of parent education without being completely insulting... meaning [parents] not truly understanding what college readiness means and what they're going to lose" (interview, E3, May 25, 2011). Both comments suggested that parents could not advocate for the educational needs of their children.

A couple of Central Office administrators interviewed indicated that they wished they had heard from more parents, assessing that the hearings were dominated by elected officials and

teachers (interview D2, December 7, 2010). One administrator expressed confusion in meeting parents who were opposed to school closings, asking “if your kid is in a failing school, why don’t [you] care about that?” (interview A3, May 3, 2011).

As a whole, NYCDoE administrators did not regard parents and families as a forceful presence at the public hearings. An administrator in the Division of Portfolio Planning remarked: “Parents are never the largest stakeholder in all of this. Maybe a handful will come out, in some cases more than a handful, but for the most part they don’t have a huge presence during the public hearings and in fact, numerous schools we did, not a single parent showed up” (interview D3, September 26, 2011). This representative added that it is the school’s responsibility to engage families in the school closing process, and parental non-presence at the hearings was an indicator of the school’s lack of success. Comments offered by Central Office administrators regarding parental presence and non-presence at the hearings suggested that parents were not considered valid critics of school closure policy. They also suggested that the Department had a calculated a threshold of parents to be considered valid.

Interviews of staff at the Office of Family Engagement and Advocacy (OFEA) offered a slightly nuanced framing of parents, and an important view into the Department’s parent involvement structures. Three OFEA staff interviewed, who as part of their job attended school closing public hearings, concurred that 90% of the people who showed up at the hearings were teachers and students, not parents or community members. Attendance at the hearing seemed to be a measure of parents’ concern for the issue of school closings, but one OFEA staff member suggested that parent involvement may have been low because no one had gone out to ask parents what they thought. And in fact, OFEA, the office responsible for coordinating parent involvement for the Department, was not called upon to facilitate parent engagement in the

school closing process (fieldnotes, August 2, 2010). That responsibility fell more to Superintendents, as I will discuss in the following section.

As one might expect, the majority of OFEA representatives interviewed expressed faith in the Department's parental involvement structures but one OFEA representative voiced some frustration with NYCDoE's parent involvement operation, referring to the need to have a better mechanism to reach the "unspoken masses, cause they're out there and we don't know what their issues are because they don't come forward" (interview C1, August 1, 2010). This staff member calculated that the percentage of parents that OFEA heard from was between 1-5% and offered two explanations for why parent engagement with the parent engagement office was so low: 1) OFEA office's resources were consumed by "frequent flyers who were not representative of the greater parent constituency" and 2) The Department had some apprehension "about being fully transparent" with families. The other three OFEA representatives interviewed believed that the parent involvement structures were designed well to elicit parent feedback. One staff member explained the office's low level of engagement with parents as a signal that parents were satisfied: "if the system was crumbling, then our office would get far more calls than it does. Folks would be seeking us out, more than they do." (interview C3, August 1, 2010)

Four of sixteen Central Office administrators interviewed acknowledged the criticism that families and the larger public had not been afforded a genuine opportunity for input in high stake school closure decisions. Referring to the raucous PEP hearing in 2010, one administrator said, "what we as a group have not done is heard, allowed ourselves to hear the opposition, and to respond respectfully" (interview A2, February 10, 2010). Another said explicitly, "the grievance that people didn't have a voice in it is a fair grievance" (interview B1, November 19, 2010). Others expressed regret that they did not make a strong enough case to parents that school

closings offered better educational opportunities for students. For example, a Deputy Chancellor lamented that the Department had not emphasized enough that closing schools was about opening new schools, adding that “for a parent, the distinction should be I have more choices” (interview A3, May 3, 2011). A representative from the Division of Portfolio Development assessed that the Department could improve its engagement efforts, but did not have ideas on how the Department could do that:

We haven't done a good job of engaging parents over the last eight years. That's been a challenge and I'm not sure how you do that, because we're trying to create policy for an entire system. A parent only cares about their child, right? And wants and thinks they know what's best for their child...so you're never going to be able to please them.

(interview D2, December 7, 2010)

The NYCDoE's understanding was that while it might not have gotten interactions with parents right, it was doing right by kids.

In summary, Central Office administrators did not experience parents as vocalizing strong opposition to school closures. Public hearings were the barometer by which Central Office administrators assessed the size of opposition to school closings, and parents were not counted in large numbers. Those parents who did testify at the hearings against school closings were framed as individually focused on their own child's success at the expense of other children.

Two administrators attributed parent opposition to school closures as ignorance of what constitutes academic success, parents not knowing enough or not judging well with respect to decisions affecting their children's schooling. These framings suggested that even if there had been masses of parents who had showed up to the hearings, their views would not have been counted as legitimate; they would be regarded as not knowing any better. Regardless of the

NYCDoE's admitted shortcomings in interaction with parents regarding schools proposed for closure in 2009-2010, Central Office administrators did not doubt the rationale for school closings.

6.3.4 Central Office administrators' framings of teachers. Central Office administrators generally spoke about teachers and school closings in two different ways: teachers' opposition to school closures as illustrative of low expectations, and school closures as a way to get rid of bad teachers. Two administrators lent some credibility to the concerns teachers raised about school closings, but still heard teachers' comments as expressions of their interest in maintaining the status quo: namely, schools functioning by the same regulations regarding seniority and tenure. To the Department this sounded like protecting adults not kids.

6.3.4.1 Low expectations. Central Office administrators attested that individual teachers' vocal opposition to school closings at the public hearings sounded to them like low expectations for students. One Deputy Chancellor commented, "The refrain you hear from teachers over and over again, and it's a little sad, is send us better kids. We'll show you what we can do" (interview A2, February 11, 2010). A second Deputy Chancellor agreed that teachers' comments sound like low expectations: "when person after person comes in and says these students are low performing and need an additional two or three years to graduate...that means that your expectations are not high enough and to me that just confirmed that we should be closing [the school]... it is that kind of mentality that we need to change" (interview A1, July 28, 2010). A third administrator from the Office of School Support and Instruction who had not attended the hearings also conveyed that teachers opposing school closures had low expectations, "there are the stories where teachers stand up and say my kids can't learn, that's what they honestly

believe, and that's the culture that doesn't need to continue" (interview, E3, May 25, 2011).

What administrators heard at the public hearings reaffirmed their sense to close schools.

6.3.4.2 *Bad teachers.* Seven of sixteen Central Office administrators talked about school closings as a way to get rid of teachers that were not successfully educating children. Four were very explicit about school closing as a strategy to remove "bad teachers," emphasizing that the current contract with the UFT prevented principals from firing teachers. Three talked about changing the composition of staff in school buildings as a structural reform. These three administrators expressed frustration that the larger public did not understand how schools improve, and particularly did not appreciate the need for structural reforms such as staff change.

NYCDoE administrators were explicit that school closures afford the Department an opportunity to replace ineffective staff. Two administrators plainly commented that school closures are a way to "get rid of bad teachers" (D2 interview, December 7, 2010; E3 interview, May 25, 2011). Two other administrators emphasized that the current system protected bad teachers and school closure provided a way around those protections. An administrator from the Office of Accountability said, "You can't get rid of bad people if you're in a school in New York City. It takes one year unless they're untenured then it's different. So, given that reality, this is most likely the best option available to us. It's a strategy to bring to the table a new group of educators that are going to work with that community's kids in a different way and are not constrained by the existing relationship from the existing structure (interview B2, May 26, 2011). An administrator in the Office of Portfolio Development argued that the Department had been forced into school closure policy because current regulations did not provide any other option: "We have to close schools because we can't fire teachers. So if we could fire teachers, if we had a way of actually getting rid of bad teachers, then maybe we could turn these schools around, but

until you do that it doesn't make sense to pour more money into [failing schools] when you can start new schools, get new leadership, get new teachers" (interview D2, December 7, 2010).

These framings suggested teachers were the main reason schools were failing. They also suggested that staff replacement was at the heart of the Department's school improvement plan.

6.3.4.3 Structural reforms. Three administrators expressed frustration that members of the public did not appreciate the criticality of structural reforms such as replacing staff for school improvement. They argued that members of the public misunderstood the levers they could access to spark improvement. Two of these three administrators explained school closings as a fresh start, a way to open new schools with a different configuration of educators that would work with students in a more effective way.

An administrator from the Office of School Support and Instruction said, "People have not understood and regularly miss that structural reforms lead to instructional change....size is one, composition of adults is another one...not because adults are bad, but because dysfunctional schools are bad for adults and kids, and a group of adults not working together needs to be jiggled" (interview E1, May 25, 2011). Another administrator from the Office of Accountability agreed, "It is virtually impossible to take a school that's fallen into a dysfunctional set of relationships and for a school that has lots of very weak teachers and quickly get to a different set of outcomes" (interview, B1, November 19, 2010). A Deputy Chancellor stressed that the answer to improving schools was structural reforms, not more money. Referring to testimony given at the public hearings, this Deputy Chancellor pointed out that the public's chant *support the schools don't close them* "ignores half a century of efforts to reform public schools, where we've thrown millions of dollars" (interview A2, February 11, 2010).

A couple of Central Office administrators acknowledged specific concerns that were raised by parents and teachers but dismissed them as a protection of the status quo. An administrator from the Office of Accountability said, “the parents that came out or the teachers that came out really had a desire to keep the school open and they had very specific issues that to them were salient, you know, sometimes there was a leadership concern, sometimes there was a resource concern, sometimes there was wanting more time because they felt that there was progress being made, but the emotional, driving force was wanting to protect what was there” (interview B2, May 26, 2011).

In summary, Central Office administrators heard teachers speaking at the public hearings communicating low expectations for students. Seven Central Office administrators spoke about school closures as a way to replace ineffective staff. Some staff referred to this explicitly as the removal of bad teachers. Others referred to this as a structural reform, suggesting that it was part of a larger strategy. NYCDoE’s framings revealed their analysis that bad teachers were the main reason for school failure, and that staff removal was the one of the only school improvement levers they had at their disposal. While members of the public had argued that schools needed resources to improve, Central Office administrators reiterated that school closures was really the only way to fix failing schools.

6.3.5 Summary. Central Office administrators spoke first in response to the individuals who testified at the hearings, and secondly in response to the assertions made. Administrators framed the UFT as more committed to teacher tenure (adult interest) than school success (student interest) and illusory in their opposition of school closings. Additionally, administrators framed parents in opposition to school closures as narrowly (and selfishly) focused on their individual children’s success and incapable of advocating for their children’s academic success. Lastly,

administrators framed teachers who expressed opposition to school closings as having low expectations for kids, and as the main reason for school failure. With these three framings, the Department positioned itself as the only true advocate for all children. This framing gave the Department the momentum it would need to continue its reform path despite large opposition. In acknowledgement of the opposition to school closings, an administrator for the Office of Portfolio Development said, “We don’t kid ourselves, this is not about making friends” (interview D4, May 16, 2010).

In the next section I look at Superintendents’ framings of school closures and show how they are different from those of the Central Office administrators. While Superintendents support school closure as a school reform strategy, they acknowledge a variety of critiques of the public, particularly having to do with the lack of support schools have had and the lack of opportunity for parents and members of the public to participate in decisions about schools. In comparison to Central Office administrators, Superintendents focused more on specific assertions members of the public raised, rather than speaker groups’ vested interests. I argue that the differences in these framings are aligned differentially based on proximity of administrators to families and the larger public. Differences in framings also reveal the NYCDoE’s recentralization through the Portfolio Management Model.

6.4 Between Center and Public: Superintendents’ Framings

Eleven Superintendents interviewed and up to twenty-six Superintendents surveyed on school closings in school year 2009-2010 offered slightly different framings of school closings than NYCDoE Central Office administrators. While Superintendents were advocates for school closing policy they were not uncritical advocates. They recognized flaws in the process as well as the ways in which the Department had not met the public’s needs. Survey data is analyzed for

both Superintendents' alignment with Portfolio Management Model principles and concerns made by members of the public. Superintendents validate the public's assertions that they did not have sufficient opportunity to provide input into the process. Superintendents' also express some apprehension about whether schools had been provided adequate support, and if students would be better served attending schools not in their neighborhoods. Interview data corroborated survey findings and lent additional support for members of the public's concerns about the clarity and accessibility of the network team support infrastructure to schools.

Differences between Central Office administrators and Superintendents can be explained by the Superintendent's position in the system. By contrast with Central Office administrators, the Superintendent position offers regular points of contact with families. The governance law stipulated Superintendent's responsibilities concerning school closings to both inform school communities of the rationale and impact of school closure decisions as well as to hear the concerns of community members. In 2009-2010 Superintendents visited school communities before and after school hearings, and presided over the hearings themselves.

6.4.1 Superintendents' framings of school closings. Superintendents held fairly similar views of the purpose of school closures as Central Office administrators. An overwhelming majority (17/18) of Superintendents surveyed indicated that they agreed with closing low performing schools as a strategy to improve educational opportunities and outcomes. Furthermore, Superintendents as a group agreed with Central Office administrators that school closure policy was intended for a majority of students who were not succeeding in schools. One Superintendent's written comment summarizes this: "When looking at whether a school should remain open, I ask the question of the group I am speaking too: how long should we wait to

change what we are doing before we decide enough students have been hurt by the lack of success of the school?”

However, while Superintendents surveyed agreed that it was necessary to close schools demonstrating low performance they were less confident that schools had been adequately supported to meet performance benchmarks. They also were divided as a group in whether closures would adversely affect students. Survey questions below in Table 6.1 show the distribution of Superintendents that agreed, disagreed, or neither agreed or disagreed with these statements. Eleven of 16 Superintendents thought students would be better served attending higher performing schools that may not be located in their neighborhoods. Six agreed that closures would adversely affect students. Only seven of sixteen Superintendents were confident that schools had been adequately supported. One Superintendent wrote in that there needed to be “more accountability for network teams to publicly state how they support schools.”

| | Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Disagree | Total Responded |
|---|-------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| It is necessary to close schools that chronically demonstrate low performance | 14 | 2 | 0 | 16 |
| Students would be better served attending higher performing schools that may not be in their neighborhood | 11 | 2 | 3 | 16 |
| Low performing schools have received adequate support to meet performance indicators | 7 | 6 | 3 | 16 |
| School closures/ phase outs can have an adverse effect on students who live in the neighborhood who attend/would attend the school proposed for closure/phase out | 6 | 8 | 2 | 16 |

6.4.2 Superintendents' framings of public opposition. Superintendents surveyed were asked whom they heard voice opposition at the hearings, about the kinds of arguments they heard the hearings, and whether those arguments heard deserved more consideration. Similar to Central Office administrators, Superintendents indicated that they differentiated among speakers at the hearings. They also echoed Central Office administrators' concerns that opposition to school closures voiced at the hearings came more from teachers than parents and students. However in contrast to Central Administrators who named the UFT as vocalizing the most opposition to school closures, of ten Superintendents who answered the survey item which asked them about which stakeholder vocalized the most opposition to school closings at the hearings), six named teachers, and three named parents. Only one Superintendent of ten named the UFT.

Table 6.2 indicates how Superintendents evaluated assertions made at the public hearings. From a list of statements, Superintendents could have responded affirmatively that they heard the argument, and that the argument deserved more consideration. The first column provides a list of assertions. The second indicates the number of Superintendents who indicated that they heard the assertion at one of the public hearings. The third column indicates the percentage of Superintendents who both heard the statement at the hearings, and thought it merited consideration. The fourth column shows the number of Superintendents who did not indicate that they heard the statement at the hearing but did think the assertion deserved more consideration. The final column labeled "response count" indicates the number of Superintendents that responded to each statement. Of the 26 Superintendents that took the survey up to 12 Superintendents answered this grouping of survey items.

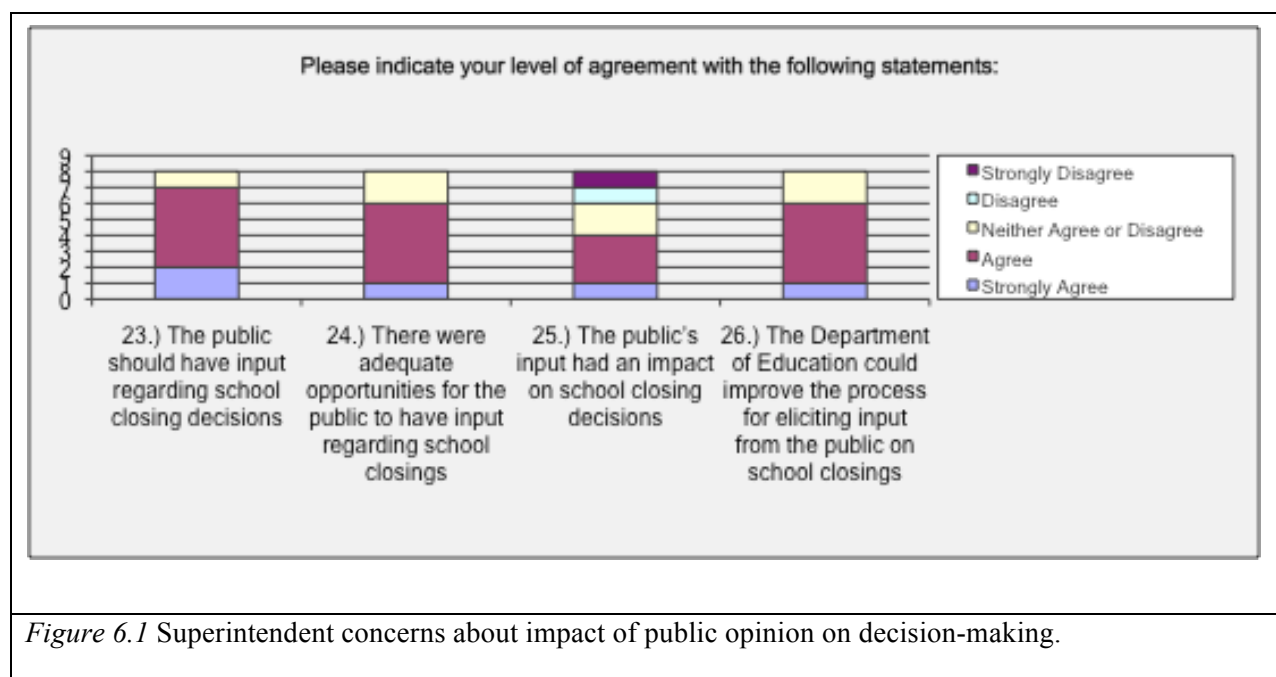
| Table 6.2 <i>Superintendents were asked to respond to the following statements:</i> | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| Answer Options | Heard this particular statement at school closing hearings | Heard this particular statement at school closing hearings & thought it deserves merit | Think this particular statement deserves merit | Response Count |
| Accountability criteria is problematic | 6 | 1 (17%) | 3 | 8 |
| Department of Education is motivated by a desire to open charter schools | 6 | 0 (0%) | 1 | 7 |
| Department of Education provided no support to school proposed for closure | 8 | 0 (0%) | 0 | 8 |
| Department of Education has not provided a sufficient alternative for students attending school proposed for closure | 8 | 1 (13%) | 2 | 9 |
| Racism | 7 | 0 (0%) | 0 | 7 |
| School proposed for closure had been making progress | 5 | 0 (0%) | 4 | 9 |
| School proposed for closure has uniquely vulnerable student population | 7 | 1 (14%) | 4 | 10 |
| School community was not engaged in the school closing decision making process | 7 | 1 (14%) | 5 | 11 |
| School is cornerstone in the community | 6 | 1 (17%) | 3 | 8 |
| <i>Note.</i> N=26. Twelve Superintendents answered these particular questions and the remaining fourteen Superintendents who participated in the overall survey did not. | | | | |

At a first glance at the table above, it appears that arguments heard by Superintendents in the school closing process in 2009-2010 generally were not identified as meriting consideration. However a closer look reveals there are a few assertions to which Superintendents afforded slight recognition. Five of twelve Superintendents thought that school communities were not engaged in the school closing process and that deserved further consideration. Four of twelve Superintendents recognized the public's assertions that the schools proposed for closure had been making progress, and that they were working to support a uniquely vulnerable student population.

Individual Superintendents' written comments on the survey also acknowledged assertions made by the public. With respect to the assertion that other motivations exist to close schools, one Superintendent lent credence to assertions about racism as well as preferences for charter schools that were voiced in the hearings. This Superintendent wrote in: "the issue of racism arrives because of the location of schools proposed for closure and a perception among the public that DOE wants to open charter schools and these schools have a quasi-private feel so people don't see them as DOE schools." Additionally with respect to the assertion made by members of the public that schools were not failing but instead had been set up to fail, one Superintendent wrote in that the NYCDoE had "set the school up to fail by not sending students that had foundations to be successful and making the school a dumping ground for the most difficult students." Combining the written responses and these survey items shows that Superintendents validated a variety of assertions made by members of the public.

6.4.3 Public input into school decision-making. Eight Superintendents who presided over school closing hearings in 2009-2010 answered questions about whether they thought the public should have input into school closing decisions, whether there were adequate

opportunities provided for the public to provide input, and whether the public's input had an impact on school closing decisions. Survey questions in Figure 6.1 below demonstrates Superintendent concerns that the public's input has an impact on decision-making. There is general agreement among these eight Superintendents that the public should have input (7/8 agree or strongly agree) and that there were adequate opportunities for the public to give input (6/8 agree or strongly agree). But there was less cohesion on whether the public's input had an impact on school closing decisions. While four agreed that public input had an impact on school closing decisions, two Superintendents neither agreed nor disagreed, one Superintendent disagreed, and one Superintendent strongly disagreed.



6.4.4 Utility of public hearings. Eighteen Superintendents answered questions on the utility of public hearings. This open-ended survey question revealed more that Superintendents believed that that the public ought to have opportunities to have input into the school closing process, but that opportunities provided were insufficient. Thirteen of the 18 Superintendents

responded that the public hearings ought to provide an opportunity to the public so that they could have input into the decision-making. They described the public hearings were “crucial,” “essential,” and “important” for “disseminating information,” “gathering feedback,” and because “transparency is paramount.” A closer look at these seemingly positive comments about the hearings shows them to be about the ideal of the public hearing, not the public hearings that took place. For example, one Superintendent wrote, “the public should have opportunities to express their views on the closings of schools.” A second wrote, “communities must feel that they had an opportunity for input.” A third wrote “communities should be made aware of the potential for a school closure when a school is at the point of needing to change or be closed. This way, communities could actively work to better the schools before closure is necessary.” All three of these comments suggest what Superintendents thought were missing pieces in the public hearings.

The remaining five Superintendents surveyed on this item provided direct commentary on the public hearings as they were implemented as part of the school closing process. They unanimously agreed that the hearings as implemented were not useful. One Superintendent described the hearings as “long, ineffective, and tedious” and as only capturing “anxiety and frustration.” A second Superintendent commented that the hearings “should be a more controlled process absent of screaming, cursing, and other theatrics.” Two more Superintendents offered that the public hearings were not useful because they were not comprehensive, not having provided enough information on the issues that warrants closure, and not having provided enough information on replacement schools if closure is pursued. One of these two Superintendents, for instance, wrote “[The hearings] do not clearly establish to the public the in depth need to close the school...there needs to be a more lengthy process wherein parents have a

number of in-house meetings to look at what is actually going on at the school, and what will happen to their children if the school closes.” The fifth Superintendent acknowledged that hearings were not useful because “the perception is that the decisions were a done deal prior to the public hearings.” In total, 20 Superintendent’s reflections on the school closing public hearings demonstrated their assessment that the hearings had not provided the public an adequate opportunity for input into decision making that they thought the public deserved.

6.4.5 Superintendent interviews. Interview data corroborated survey findings. Across all eleven interviews conducted, Superintendents offered a balanced perspective between the Department’s concerns about maintaining the school system as is, and concerns by members of the public who questioned the intelligibility, normative rightfulness, and sincerity of school closure proposals. While Central Office administrators explained conflicts over school closings as ideological differences between the DoE and the UFT regarding job security and tensions between parents concerned about their own children and Department officials concerned about all children, Superintendents generally assessed that the conflicts over school closings were the result of lack of communication between the NYCDoE and families, and a lack of trust between the larger public and the Department. Superintendents discussed their frustrations with school communities that were not taking their share of the responsibility for their dismal outcomes but they also discussed the need for the NYCDoE to have a better way of working with families and communities in its plans to improve schools.

Eight of the eleven Superintendents interviewed attributed the conflicts over school closings to the lack of communication between the Department and the public. Two of these eight Superintendents did not temper their own criticism of the Department’s engagement efforts. One Superintendent commented that the process had depreciated the importance of

school leaders and parents working together to ensure children have an excellent education: “because of the process and procedures that we use and the communication, lack of communication...we must do a better job of engaging the community in a meaningful way. It can’t be just engaging after the fact and saying, okay, this is what we’re going to do, now you know, and that’s it” (interview, F2, January 31, 2011). Another stressed that parents did not have good information regarding critical information about what was happening to their children’s schools. This Superintendent held the Department entirely responsible for the lack of communication: “when you study communication we always say...if the message doesn’t get across, you can’t blame the person receiving the communication. It means there was no packaged well enough, it was not communicated often enough, it was not communicated in diverse ways” (interview F7, April 19, 2011).

Superintendents also discussed conflicts over school closings as an issue of trust. Five of the eleven Superintendents interviewed commented on a long history of distrust between the NYCDoE and the larger community. One Superintendent summarized this mistrust as mutual: “the community does not trust the department. The department, while we say that we’re being transparent, we don’t really trust the community to make high-level decisions for what’s best in their schools. It’s about distrust, yeah, and in both ways” (interview, F1, March 25, 2011). Similar to Central Office administrators three Superintendents interviewed discussed the conflicts over school closings as a tension between Department administrators who were setting policy for all children and parents, teachers, students, and others who had individual concerns about schools. One Superintendent said, “I do believe that the public whether they are for or against decisions are interested in the best interest in their child. The DOE is in the position that they have to think what’s in the best interest of all children” (interview, F11, April 11, 2010).

This Superintendent reasoned out that parents and the larger public frequently expressed a more narrow perspective because they did not always have the bigger picture.

Individual Superintendents validated concerns some members of the public made about the lack of clarity and accessibility of the network support structures for schools. As discussed in the previous chapter concerning public hearings, families and the larger public asked many questions about how schools had been supported and who was accountable for providing supports. In the hearings, members of the public directed these questions to the Superintendent, not to Network Leaders or team members responsible for providing those services. Superintendents' comments affirmed that parents and the larger public did not know about or understand the new support structure the NYCDoE had implemented. A couple of Superintendents reported frustration in their attempts to answer parents questions when instructional work was no longer in their purview. Superintendents recommended that Network Leaders be more clear and detailed with school communities about what supports they had provided.

Seven of eleven Superintendents interviewed provided commentary that the public was unclear about the new network structure, the role and responsibilities of Network Leaders and their teams. Most Superintendents described that this was a major communication breakdown that became apparent in the school closing process. As articulated by one Superintendent:

At the public hearings it was clear that [parents] didn't understand what the network did, who the Network Leader was, what was the role of a Network Leader. So that piece didn't seem to, you know it fell apart. From my view of what I saw happening was lack of understanding of our system and not knowing what has been done (interview F4, November 24, 2010).

Another Superintendent said,

Parents were not sure who to go to for their concerns, parents want to know, well who is supervising? Who's the boss here? You know? I come to the Superintendent and the Superintendent says to me, speak to the Network Leader. Who's this Network Leader? Most of the parents don't even know who the Network Leader is and are just learning about this position between the Superintendents and the principals. (interview F1, March 25, 2011)

Superintendents reported that it was also difficult to explain to parents that while Superintendents were charged with working with public, they no longer had purview over schools:

When there's a situation such as a phase-out or when parents have an issue, they always look to the Superintendent and it's very hard to say to them that I don't have purview over that at this time (interview F2, January 31, 2011).

Four of seven Superintendents who discussed the public's lack of information about network teams noted that perhaps in some cases part of the confusion lay with the fact that network teams had not given detailed and clear information about what kinds of supports they had provided the school. In these cases, they suggested that Network Leaders could more clearly explain their roles and outline how they were accountable to the larger school community in providing support.

The network team has to have conversations with the school community, this is the weaknesses, and making the community aware, this is what we've done in area of PD, capacity building, the curriculum we brought in, experts we brought in for ELL...a conversation has to take place first about the reality and then about the support and the

planning. Those two pieces...from the feedback I get from parents and community leaders didn't know (interview F7, April 29, 2011).

Another Superintendent thought the school community members were aware that the school was struggling but not about the steps that had been taken to help the school before the decision to close it was made:

School were told for so many consecutive years, two or three years, [they had] a graduation rate of this...the data about their performance... but what was not clear to the community was, these are the steps that have been taken prior to making this decision (interview F3, June 15, 2010).

A lack of communication is one way to explain why school communities did not know who the network teams members were or even did not know that some members that were providing support were indeed part of the NYCDoE new management structure. But it does not explain everything. In the next section, I theorize that other factors also help explain this.

6.4.6 Summary. In total, Superintendents framings of the public assertions differed considerably from Central Office administrators. Their analysis did not focus exclusively on the UFT as did the NYCDoE Deputy Chancellors. In fact, the UFT was mentioned in only one of eleven Superintendent interviews. Differences also emerge in framings of parents' opposition to school closures. Whereas Central Office administrators framed parents as self-interested, ignorant, or duped by the Union, Superintendents recognized a multitude of their concerns with the school closing process. As Superintendents pointed out, the hearing process was not comprehensive, parents did not have sufficient information regarding the failures of their child's school and what had informed the NYCDoE decision-making, nor sufficient information regarding replacement plans. Superintendents recognized that this left parents at an extreme

disadvantage to make sound educational decisions for their children. Overall, Superintendents showed that they had an appreciation for both sides of the school closing debate, straddling the worlds of the NYCDoE and school communities.

6.5 Administrators' Positions in the Public Sphere

How can we understand such divergent framings within the same organization, and in an organization generally understood as having one message? One way to understand these differences is a differentiation in proximity to members of the public. In the school closing process, Superintendents understood their responsibilities to work with families and school communities to ensure they understand the impact of these decisions and to understand their concerns. Their framings of school closings take into account the varied assertions made by diverse members of the public.

Differences between Central Office administrators and Superintendents can also be explained by the Superintendent's position in the system. By contrast with Central Office administrators, the Superintendent position offers regular points of contact with families. The governance law stipulated Superintendent's responsibilities concerning school closings to both inform school communities of the rationale and impact of school closure decisions as well as to hear the concerns of community members. In 2009-2010 Superintendents visited school communities before and after school hearings, and presided over the hearings themselves.

The differentiation in framings between Central Office administrators and Superintendents also suggests evidence of the dynamic of "*decentralized centralism*." Central office decision-making processes are in the center ring offset from the public. It is not clear how the Central Office is accountable to the larger public in this configuration. While the Superintendent is positioned closer to the public, it is not clear this position affords them the

ability to influence decision-making. Their input is certainly not considered at the same level as the Central Office.

Figure 6.2 below indicates how the NYCDoE operates at multiple levels. Community District and High School Superintendents (represented by white polka dots) are positioned between the Central Office and the public. In comparison to the Central Office they are more proximal to the public, situated to hear parent concerns more clearly. Central office administrators' position in the center ring is distanced from the public, not as well situated to hear members of the public. Network teams (represented by the blue polka dots) as external partner organizations have proximity to schools but it is not clear how proximal they are to members of the public. They work with schools across all five boroughs in New York City, but their formation is not along geographic lines. One explanation for the public's unfamiliarity with the network teams is that this ageographic formation has prevented them from being identifiable or accessible to families.

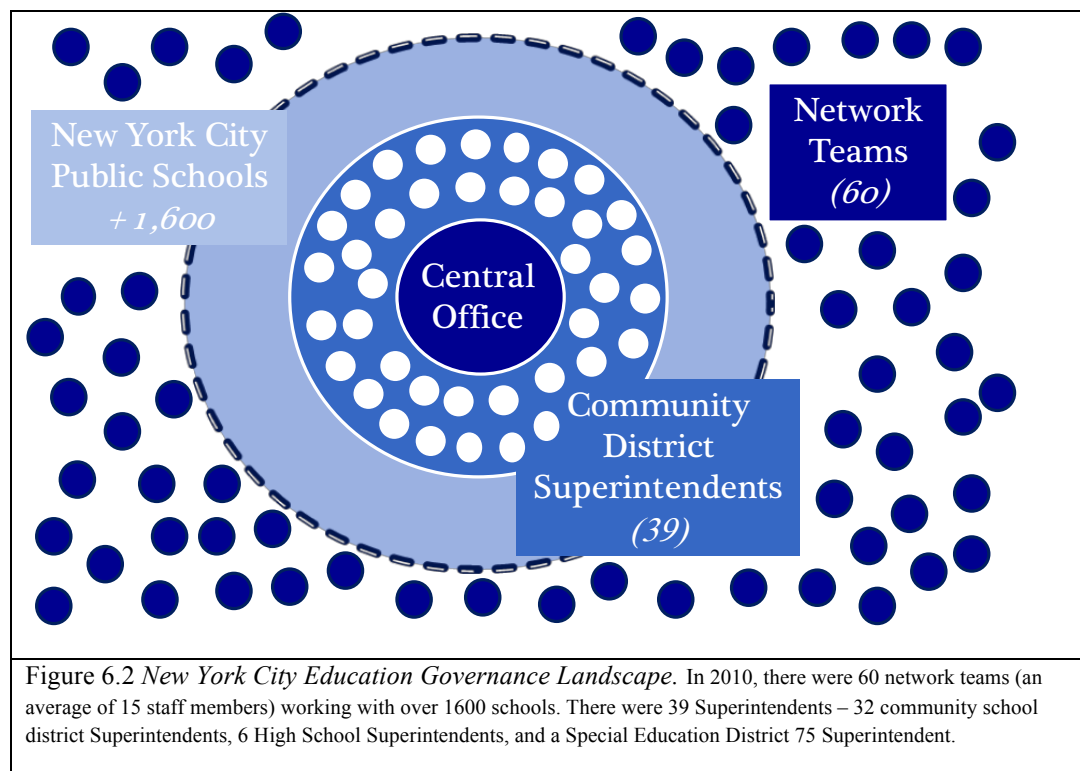


Figure 6.2 *New York City Education Governance Landscape*. In 2010, there were 60 network teams (an average of 15 staff members) working with over 1600 schools. There were 39 Superintendents – 32 community school district Superintendents, 6 High School Superintendents, and a Special Education District 75 Superintendent.

6.6 School Closings and the Portfolio Management Model

Look, nobody wants to close a school and replace it, but in the end there comes a time when if a school doesn't get results we got to try something different. We're doing that, we're getting better results. Not perfect by a long shot. We've closed down some 90 plus schools in this city, opened up over the last eight years... 400...the Mayor announced a commitment to close the bottom 10% and to open up 200 new schools, 100 traditional publics, and 100 charters. Let me make this clear it's not about charter versus traditional publics, they're all public schools, what it's about is good schools for our kids, give families choices, lets create some competition so everybody's held to a very high standard.

(fieldnotes, Chancellor Klein's address to staff, September 28, 2010)

6.6.1 Introduction. In the second part of this chapter, I briefly look at how NYCDoE Central Office administrators evoke the PMM pillars in their framings of school closings. NYCDoE administrators frame school closures as a choice equity reform, providing students and their families better schooling options; and as an accountability reform holding individual schools responsible for meeting academic standards. NYCDoE central office administrators also tout empowerment as justification to close schools; they reason that all schools are adequately supported to succeed. These framings demonstrate Central Office administrators' proximity to the ideological framework of the Portfolio Management Model (PMM). Even while Central Office administrators acknowledge inconsistencies within each of the PMM pillars, they embrace PMM as a school improvement framework.

6.6.2 Framing school closings as a choice equity reform. Market advocates in education argue that choice and the competition created by it will motivate and ultimately increase school performance. They also contend that choice will ensure that consumers (families) will determine what kind of education is produced (Richman, 2000). Eight NYCDoE Central Office administrators explained school closure as a choice equity reform. Closing failing schools was discussed as a way to insure better schooling options in public education, and as a way to influence families to make good schooling choices for their children.

A Deputy Chancellor said that “the tenet of this administration has been choice and about higher quality options for kids” (interview, A3, May 3, 2011). Some Central Office administrators’ language conflated closing schools with providing better options. For example, a representative from the Division of Portfolio Development said, “closure makes sense because you’re providing better options...” (interview D2, December 7, 2010).

6.6.2.1 School closings facilitate options outside of the neighborhood. In the expressed views of the NYCDoE administrators, offering families schooling options outside of their neighborhoods would expand families’ decision-making power rather than limit it by economic standing or neighborhood boundaries. Two NYCDoE administrators interviewed about school closings emphasized the importance of choice as an equity reform that was not subject to neighborhood boundaries. Recognizing that families who live in wealthy neighborhoods tend to have access to better-resourced schools, these two NYCDoE administrators stressed that equity reforms offered great potential benefit to families in low-income neighborhoods who historically had not been afforded the same access to better-resourced schools. One Deputy Chancellor said:

I think historically we’ve diluted the parents in the poorest communities, the most rational choice for their kid is the school closest to where they live and I think that’s a problem. I think that strips parents of the opportunity to exercise a lot of their decision-making power authority around the kind of education they’d like to see for their kid, and it’s incumbent on us to restore that kind of empowerment to parents. (interview A2, July 7, 2010)

School closures were framed to benefit those families living in low-income neighborhoods who historically had not been provided with a choice of schools, or with schools of particularly high quality. Moreover, choice was framed to grant families power over their children’s schooling.

6.6.2.2 Choice as power. As was discussed in the first part of this chapter, Central Office administrators tended to dismiss parents who opposed school closures on the grounds of being self-interested. However, they framed school closings as a choice reform to harness those same self-interests. Choice was discussed as the most appropriate way for parents to exercise influence in the schooling process; other ways were perceived as out of reach for most parents. One Deputy Chancellor said: “It’s very hard for parents to go into an existing school to try to change either the culture, or the curriculum, or the pedagogy...the system of choice ought to be the way parents exercise opportunity by selecting schools with a curriculum and instructional approach that they’re most comfortable with” (interview A2, February 11, 2010). Another reasoned that choice allowed parents to best advocate for their children. As one Deputy Chancellor put it, “Parents only care about their [own] kids. They don’t care about the system. They don’t, and why should they” (interview A3, April 28, 2010).

Framings of parents as self-interested affirmed for Department officials that they were the only adults looking out for the interests of all kids, and led Department officials to conclude that parents need to be better educated on what good schools are. NYCDoE administrators did not realize that as much as they expressed frustration that parents were self-interested, their own framings constructed parents’ self-interest. Moreover, choice policy encouraged parents to assert their rights and interests as individuals. This was made evident through the school closing process, especially when the Department attached new school proposals to school closing proposals. Parents from the same communities, disproportionately low-income and of color, came to heads over their interests for their child’s access to an excellent education (Pappas, 2012).

6.6.2.3 Tension of choice policy. More tensions of choice policy surfaced when Central Office administrators discussed the disproportionate number of academically struggling students enrolled in schools proposed for closure. Three administrators conceded that the schools proposed for closure typically served a higher percentage of students labeled Special Education and English Language Learners than the citywide average, but argued they were unable to mandate an equitable distribution of these “harder to serve kids” between new and existing schools because that conflicted with existing selective admissions practices in many well-resourced, high-performing schools. In this way, the limits of choice as the foundation of district policy were revealed. A families’ choice of a particular school could be usurped by that school’s choice to not address particular learning needs.

Three NYCDoE Central Office administrators interviewed lent credibility to concerns on behalf of the public that schools proposed for closure were disproportionately serving those students who needed the most supports to succeed. Each of these administrators pointed to policies that preserved selective enrollment schools. An administrator in the Office of School Support and Instruction agreed that students who were most struggling had been concentrated in the same schools that had been ignored for decades:

One thing that has felt as a fair critique of us is that we have historically had a set of policies that exempted many schools in the system from serving hardest to serve kids... Kids in our large comprehensive schools have been lacking for decades. But I think that’s not a message that we were at liberty to convey. [The Chancellor] was never going to stand up and say yes we’ve been ignoring schools, now it’s time to close them (interview, E2, May 25, 2011).

Two additional Central Office administrators acknowledged an unevenness in enrollment practices, but deemed the politics involved too difficult to tackle. One administrator said,

The politics of removing the screens are very tense so what we've done is instead of fighting those battles is allowed the schools that have academic screenings, in general, to retain them, but in those other 70% of schools we've systematically tried to create options that are unscreened that are high quality (interview, B1, November 19 2011).

Another agreed, "there still are these schools that have these historic policies that haven't been pushed and trying to push on them is politically complicated because they tend to be rooted in constituencies that will fight to the death for them" (interview, B2, May 26, 2010).

As one administrator from the Office of Portfolio Development summarized, "we want families to have options and, the minute you give them those options, you cannot just dictate the types of students a school is serving" (interview D3, March 25, 2011).

There are inherent tensions and limits involved in choice process, especially as it relates to creating more equitable enrollment practices. First these framings point to a tension between the choice to enroll and the school's choice to exclude. It is not clear that families being encouraged to choose were told the ways that their choices would be limited. Second, NYCDoe administrators appear more willing to take on the political risk in upsetting families who want their children to attend their neighborhood schools, than upsetting those who want their children's schools to remain selective enrollment. In this way there are limits imposed on choice participants by parts of the system that the NYCDoe appears unwilling to disrupt. NYCDoe administrators seem to be saying that offering choice is more important than providing a safety net for those students who are at a greater risk of being disadvantaged. A third limit in the choice process is that families do not have the choice to not have their school closed.

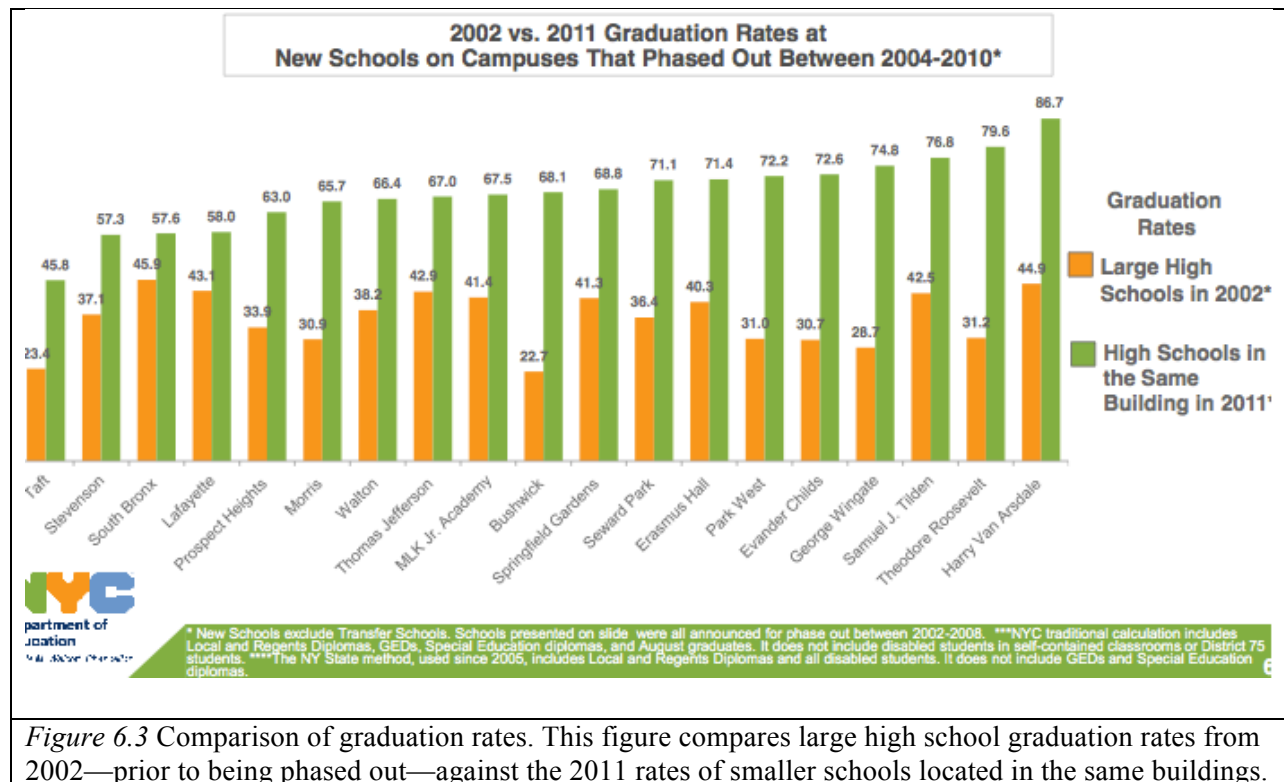
6.6.3 Framing school closings as an accountability reform. The standards movement and high stakes testing present both opportunities and risks to those students who have been least served well by schools. Proponents claim that accountability will ensure that these students are counted. Critics assert that these students will be disproportionately harmed. The debates concerning accountability also concern how reliable tests and tools are in evaluating school, teacher and student performance. Testing advocates have confidence in high stakes testing to monitor, assess, and incentivize performance; they utilize tests to categorize schools and to measure failure. Critics of testing raise a number of concerns about the capability of tests to measure academic success, and emphasize that higher scores on tests do not necessarily test scores do not always reveal learning – specifically, lower test scores are not necessarily an indicator of lack of learning. In doing so they raise caution about the use of tests for high stakes decisions such as school closings.

The school closing process in New York City continues these two debates: whether the most vulnerable students are safeguarded or harmed by an emphasis on test based accountability and whether there is validity and reliability of the NYCDoE assessment tools to base high stakes decisions like school closings. As discussed in Chapter five, there were many questions raised in the public hearings about how schools had been identified for closure and much criticism that the Department was inconsistent in criteria for identifying schools for closure. Several members of the public articulated that the data presented by Department officials was inaccurate. Members also argued that the accountability tools did not provide an accurate picture of their schools. In contrast to the public's framings, (namely that measures calculated were wrong, and that the wrong measures were calculated), NYCDoE administrators framed school closing decisions based on what they believed was an objective and reliable accountability system. To assert the

fairness of their accountability system, NYCDoE administrators stressed the comprehensiveness of the accountability tools, the capacity of the tools to measure growth not just proficiency, and their attention in modifying the evaluation and assessment system in an ongoing way.

To provide evidence that school closings will better serve students, administrators pointed to higher graduation rates of small schools.

6.6.3.1 Past school closings provided better outcomes. In the absence of clear replacement plans, NYCDoE administrators framed school closings (and openings in their place) as achieving better school and student outcomes. NYCDoE administrators referred the public to the graduation rates of the new small schools that had replaced large comprehensive schools during the years 2002-2011 to lend support to school closing proposals. At the culminating meeting of the Panel for Education Policy (PEP) on school closures in 2010-2011, NYCDoE projected the figure below (see Figure 6.3); it compares graduation rates of large high schools that were operating in 2002 with smaller schools currently operating in the same buildings in 2011 (fieldnotes, 2011).



NYCDoE administrators accentuated the [30-40%] jump in graduation rates to argue that school phase-outs would provide better results. Critics argued that that the increases did not capture students who were academically struggling, and students who had dropped out. No one challenged the district that no N's were provided to adequately assess percentile gains. Without raw numbers of students that graduated, it is impossible to gauge the rate of increase in graduation.

6.6.3.2 Progress instead of proficiency. Two Central Office administrators expressed their confidence in the NYCDoE's accountability tools precisely for their ability to assess how schools contributed to students learning (what the NYCDoE terms a "growth model"). NYCDoE administrators explained that the city's accountability formula was more fair compared to the one provided by New York State for the very reason that it sought to measure progress, not proficiency. An administrator in the Office of Portfolio Development said,

The way we assess schools, fundamentally, is fair in the sense that the state has a sheer proficiency clause; if you're below 60% graduation rate for three years as a high school, you're a persistent lowest achieving high school and you then have to get one of four interventions. We think definitely that our [system] is more fair. In the Progress Report scores, 65 out of 100 points are based on the progress you make and we take it a step further and say that if you have an ELL student or a special education student, you get additional credit for making progress with those students (interview D3, March 25, 2011).

6.6.3.3 Tension of accountability policy. When New York state recalibrated the test scores and New York City scores plunged in the summer of 2010, the Department argued that the solution was not to abandon test-based accountability policy. NYCDoE administrators defended the merits of its accountability system in the face of enormous criticism by asking, "Do you not want accountability?" One administrator from the Office of Accountability said,

Honestly, we have to come back to the fact as parents do you want the principal to have no accountability for student learning? Is that the solution or is the solution to keep on working to get a sharper clearer more fair more accurate picture of what's happening in terms of student progress? (fieldnotes, October 22, 2010)

There was a limit to NYCDoE administrator's responses to public criticism raised. NYCDoE officials were not willing to reconsider whether their tools measured were reliable and valid. The choice Department officials presented was either accept the accountability system as is, or abandon good efforts to help schools and accept "no accountability" instead.

In asserting that its evaluation system was accurate and reliable, administrators were able to frame school closings as fulfilling a moral obligation, and as a common sense solution for

schools failing to meet the targets set for them. Several administrators said that they “would be abdicating [their] responsibility if [they] didn’t close failed schools” (interview A2, February 11, 2010). One powerful narrative that circulated in the Department of Education central office, and made its way onto school leaders and eventually elected officials was “Would you send your kid to this school?” The implication being if you would not send your kid to the school, you should either support school closing proposal or not stand in its way. This framing afforded the NYCDoE to position themselves as putting children first.

6.6.4 Framing school closings as empowerment. Administrators framed school closings as a just consequence by reasoning that all schools have adequate supports. Several administrators pointed to principal empowerment and the new network structure to substantiate that schools were well equipped to meet the targets identified for them. In contrast with public testimony that school communities needed more support to improve, Department administrators referred to the new management system they designed to be responsive to individual schools’ needs. A Deputy Chancellor said, “we have networks that are close to schools, and we allow schools to say ‘these are the supports I need’” (interview A4, March 16, 2011). Another Deputy Chancellor commented that schools well understood their performance expectations and had the ability to determine who it would work with in order to reach those expectations:

Every single school gets the money to buy the services from a school support organization. We’re not telling you who to go and get to be your support organization. You go and get them. You know what your outcomes are. You know what your annual yearly progress is supposed to be. You know that you’re supposed to get a B or better in your Progress Report. You know that you need a proficient or better on your Quality Review (interview, A1, July 28, 2010).

NYCDoE Central Office administrators' framings assumed fully functioning network structures are in place. This was a different sense of network team efficacy than those Superintendents who provided conflicting perspectives with respect to the clarity and efficacy of the network structure.

6.6.4.1 Tensions of Empowerment. While NYCDoE administrators reasoned that school principals had the support of network teams to reach performance standards and retained the authority to dismiss any network teams that were not meeting their expectations, the data I collected suggests otherwise. A select number of interviews with principals as well as interviews with Superintendents evidenced that some principals were not exactly sure how to hold the network team accountable for support services.

Three principals whose schools were proposed for closure were reluctant to publicly grade their network team but assessed that the network support services they had received up until the time their school was proposed for closure were inadequate. Two of these three principals recognized that the professional development and special education services their current network teams were providing were effective, but also commented that this attention and support had come a little too late. One principal said, "Now that we're closing, we have more support. We also have less kids, so the support goes farther. Its great but it would have been helpful if it came sooner" (interview, May 15, 2011). Across all three interviews with principals there was a general acknowledgment that even strong network teams could only support the school so much. One principal said,

With respect to professional development where they'll send somebody through to either train me, train my cabinet, or train teachers on literacy or differentiated instruction, any of the pedagogical skills that needs to be improved, that's there. Somebody to call if there's a question that needs to be answered and you don't know exactly how to proceed

with something, that's there. Once that's all done, that's only going to skim the surface of what a school needs (interview, December 13, 2010).

Two Superintendents interviewed recalled conversations with principals who were not entirely clear about how to hold Network Leaders accountable for their supports to schools.

Both Superintendents recalled that for some principals the importance of evaluating the network team had not become clear until their school landed on the school closing list. In the words of one Superintendent:

Some of [the principals] said I learned so much from [the school closing process]. I now know my network has to be accountable to me and my school. My parents were asking me 'did I hold anyone accountable and who's responsible? I now know that they have to work for me, so I am now changing my network so I make sure I hire someone that can meet my needs.

This Superintendent added, "I don't think principals saw it that way until this whole process went through (interview F3, June 15, 2010). Apparently, the school closing process was a learning process for not just parents, but some principals on the NYCDoE's new accountability structure.

Principals do formally rate Network Leaders annually but this data is not publicly available. It is not clear whether there is ongoing evaluation of network team services. A representative from the office that oversees networks said that more detailed information about how networks were evaluated was available on its website (fieldnotes, May 31, 2011) but to this date, that information could not be located. In 2009-2010 it is notable that five Network Leaders were responsible for 13 of 20 schools proposed for closure. (One person was listed as the Network Leader for four of the schools proposed for closure; a second was listed as the Network

Leader for three schools; and three different Network Leaders were each responsible for two schools for closure). Five Network Leaders out of 72 that year is a significant number. More independent research is needed on the kinds of tangible supports network teams provide, how effective these supports are as evaluated by principals and teachers, and how equitable the distribution of effective networks are across schools.

Anecdotally, some data I collected suggested that network teams in general were stronger in supporting schools operationally than they were in supporting schools pedagogically, and in that case the number of support staff that network teams can hire with instructional expertise seems critical. One administrator commented that the NYCDoE has tried to make adjustments and increase network staff from 13 to 15 members to “bolster the instructional capacity of networks” but added that “bolstering the academic piece is less about bolstering because there was a need unmet and more about a more ambitious instructional agenda that we’re rolling out, and that we need to resource accordingly” (interview E2, May 25, 2011). This administrator would not agree that network teams may not be operating at an optimal instructional capacity.

Lastly, informal conversations with Network Leaders who were not associated with schools proposed for closure suggested that in a system that prioritizes principal empowerment (the interpretation being the “principal is always right”) Network Leaders may not know how to insert themselves to encourage principals to make different decisions (fieldnotes, January, 2011). The most compelling evidence of a tenuous accountability arrangement is this convoluted relationship between the principal and the Network Leader.

6.7 Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter I outlined responses of NYCDoE administrators to members of the public as reframings of school closings. Department leaders were challenged

significantly by a diverse set of actors and sought to reframe the school closure debate to gain legitimacy and support for school closings. NYCDoE Central Office administrators' reframings position the UFT as the enemy of progress, parents as individuals only concerned about their own children, and bad teachers as responsible for school failure. These three reframings have allowed the Department to advance its agenda without really hearing parents, students, teachers, and community leaders.

NYCDoE administrators' framings differed based upon position. While Central Office administrators focused more on opponents issuing assertions, Superintendents focused more on assertions raised by opponents to school closure proposals. Moreover, Superintendents expressed a more balanced view of the multitude of concerns raised by diverse publics. Superintendents find particular credibility to concerns about the lack of family and community input into school closure decisions, the lack of documentation of supports provided to schools proposed for closure, and the lack of accessibility of network teams to parents.

Differences in administrators' framings reflect *decentralized centralism*. Though Superintendents are more aware of the concerns of members of the public, they do not have jurisdiction over school closure decisions. Administrators at the central office are isolated from the public but maintain macro control over school decision-making.

Overall, administrators at the central office frame school closures in alignment with the pillars of the Portfolio Management Model: choice, accountability, and empowerment. In the rapid shift to the Children First Networks, few parents are aware of the new management and support system for NYC public schools. However many tensions, discrepancies or contradictions arose did not alter NYCDoE's allegiance to the Portfolio Management Model.

The Department presupposes that affording parental choice in the determination of school enrollment, diversifying a portfolio of schooling options for students, and allowing schools to compete for family consumers will better serve families, as well as raise the level of school performance. Additionally, NYCDoE administrators reason that the accountability tools they utilize measure school performance fairly and accurately, and that all schools are adequately supported to achieve success.

The NYCDoE has restructured its own accountability relationship with schools, shifting school supports to external networks, and empowering principals to take the onus for school outcomes. This restructuring has taken an ageographic configuration. The shift to a delocalized system appears to have displaced the accountability structure. Looking at school closures through this lens indicates a broader strategy to remap the school system. School closures appear to be in the service of a new school open marketplace. In the next chapter, I look at how community organizing has begun to recognize the shifts in the governance landscape and alter their strategy correspondingly. They spend a lot of effort putting forward a coherent vision for a centrally managed school improvement plan (the School Transformation Zone) in place of school closings, and they soon realize that they will have to break out of a tried and true neighborhood based structure to adopt a burgeoning delocalized reality.

Chapter 7: *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them*: The New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), and Its Organizing Campaign Against School Closures

...only 1 in 3 NYC Black and Latino students are reading and writing at state standard, compared to 2 out of 3 White children. Nearly 4 out of 5 of all NYCDoe graduates were not ready for college once they entered community college and had to pay for remedial courses. About half of all students graduate in 4 years with a Regent's diploma, which is the only valid diploma now. We have a Mayor who has pushed for reforms that do not help our children. We have seen the outcomes. We know it is not working. (June, 2012)

7.1 Introduction

In June of 2012, parent and community leaders from the New York City Coalition of Educational Justice (CEJ) held a meeting for over 200 parents in downtown Brooklyn. While Mayor Bloomberg has touted his administration's efforts to increase graduation rates, provide parents with more schooling choices, and close failing schools, CEJ has argued that the Mayor's reforms have produced dismal results. CEJ presses for a different direction than the one advocated for by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoe): one that advocates for an investment in schools in all neighborhoods, rather than choice in an open marketplace; one that recognizes school supports and collaboration as a means to drive improvement, rather than competition; and one that engages parents in leading school change efforts alongside teachers and administrators, rather than just through the provision of school choice. As we will see, while the Mayor and NYCDoe officials frame school closure policy as a remedy for individual schools that are failing, to CEJ, school closure policy represents a short-sighted, ineffective, and ultimately harmful solution for struggling schools and students. As school districts across the country increasingly rely on school closures as a school reform strategy, CEJ argues that schools need research proven and sustainable efforts aimed at improvement.

Over the past fifteen years parent-organizing groups have emerged on the education policy scene (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002), frustrated that education policy is based more on the new ideas and whims of policymakers than on sound research, and infuriated because their children are most affected. Parent organizing efforts excavate the deep knowledge parents have about their kids, neighborhoods, and neighborhood schools, and also encourage the moral authority of parents to define what counts as school success. In Fraser's language, education organizing groups represent "counterpublics" that articulate their own values, interest, and priorities apart from the state.

This chapter provides a case study of one of the most influential, if not the most influential parent-led education-organizing group in New York City, the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ). It both outlines the distinctions in CEJ's framings of school closure policy from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE), and charts CEJ's shift in organizing strategy in years 2010-2011 from a mostly neighborhood based strategy to a more flexible or freelance strategy. Over the past six years, CEJ has engaged thousands of parent and community leaders in several large school improvement campaigns. CEJ builds on the victories of its founding collaboratives that achieved a middle school success fund of almost \$30 million to support comprehensive school reform in low performing middle schools across New York City, and a \$444 million capital commitment from the Department of Education to build science labs in every middle and high school by 2011. In 2010, CEJ took on an additional challenge in its organizing, launching a city-wide campaign "Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them" in response to the New York City Department of Education's (NYCDoE) proposal to close nineteen schools it deemed low-performing. What made CEJ's campaign challenging was that schools proposed for closure were not located in CEJ neighborhoods.

This chapter is organized in two parts. The first part of this chapter situates CEJ in a larger conversation about education organizing in terms of the kinds of solutions organizing groups pose for schools and students that are distinct from those posed by school district organizations. I offer a brief history of parent-led education organizing in the Bronx, and focus on CEJ's formation, revisiting the gains and shortcomings of its three founding organizing collaboratives and highlighting their collective lessons for the need to combine efforts and to build a grassroots parent coalition across New York City.

I also situate CEJ's campaign against school closings as part and parcel of an ongoing fight for equitable resources for low-income neighborhoods. CEJ has been actively involved in school improvement work since 2006, but many of its parent leaders have been active in education reform efforts in New York City for decades. CEJ parent and community leaders are many of the same leaders that called attention to the challenges facing schools in low-income neighborhoods across New York City for many years, but to no avail. Community leaders consistently argue that the opportunity to receive a quality education is not distributed equally. This has meant that children living in poor neighborhoods, disproportionately Black and Latino, immigrant, and from single parent households, are set up for failure, facing what many now refer to as the "opportunity gap" (DeShano da Silva, Huguley, Kakli, Rao, 2007; Putnam, 2012).

While there is growing awareness of these kinds of gross inequalities, the fact that school district administrators are now focused on struggling schools has not yet provided common ground for collaborative school improvement efforts. School and community leaders have distinct visions for how schools improve, and disagree fundamentally on what decisions will best facilitate school improvement. In this chapter, I explore these differences as CEJ directly

confronts the NYCDoE's imperative to close schools it has identified as persistently low-performing.

The second part of this chapter looks specifically at CEJ's *Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them* campaign and the kinds of strategies that organizers and leaders developed to counter the plans of the NYCDoE to close schools it deemed failing. CEJ began its campaign pushing for a School Transformation Zone (STZ), an alternative school improvement plan. From March-May of 2010, CEJ worked to build a broad constituency of support for the STZ, and in doing so raised the visibility of both the problems of school closures, and the promises of alternatives to school closure policy. At the conclusion of this period, CEJ leaders reflected that they had to shift their strategy to organize parents inside schools proposed for closure. The shift meant moving from a mostly neighborhood based coalition strategy to a more flexible or freelance strategy and was not without complications, as I will discuss.

Throughout the campaign, I focus on how CEJ frames school closure policy in opposition to the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE). Drawing upon CEJ documents, interviews with organizers and leaders, and observations of CEJ meetings, I explicate how CEJ fundamentally challenges the application of the Portfolio Management Model in public education: its tenets for choice and competition in an open marketplace as the means to drive improvement and to engage families in the public education system, and the use of test based accountability as a way to evaluate school, student, and teacher performance. At the time of this research, CEJ did not challenge the NYCDoE's new management strategy in its framings, although it most certainly came up against it in its organizing efforts, as I will discuss in the epilogue. CEJ's *Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them* campaign offers both lessons and

dilemmas for education organizing in the rapidly changing landscape of urban school governance.

7.2 A Brief History of the Growth of Education Organizing In New York City

Parent organizing for school reform in New York City (NYC) emerged in the 1990s, propelled by the frustrations and failures of parent association efforts to organize political power and address chronic schooling inequities. In the 1990s, some community-based organizations began to focus on individual schools that were failing in their neighborhoods (Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001). Their initiation was boosted significantly by the landmark decision “Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc. v State of New York.” In 1995, the Court of Appeals concluded that New York State was failing to provide all students with the “opportunity to receive a sound basic education.” The decision acknowledged a lack of resources to provide an adequate education for New York school children and awarded New York City five billion dollars to rectify under-funding.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

In the early 1990s, the Bronx was a hot bed for organizing. At least four parent-organizing groups seized the opportunity to build better schools for their children. Mothers on the Move (MOM) and New Settlement Apartments (NSA) tackled schools in community school districts 8 and 9 (respectfully) where test scores were the lowest in the city, school principals were most ineffective, and the larger school system was unresponsive. The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) confronted overcrowding and declining school facilities in the neighboring community school district 10. South Bronx Churches (SBC) was working on the creation of small public high schools in districts 7 and 9. These neighborhood based community groups achieved remarkable success in their entry into education organizing

104 Campaign for Fiscal Equity Inc. v. State, 86 N.Y.2d 306 (1995) For more on the history of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity 13 year legislative battle, see: http://www.cfequity.org/static.php?page=our_history&category=about_us

105 Some advocates have argued that the lawsuit never clarified whether the award was an entitlement for disadvantaged young people or for ratcheting up funding up for all kids (personal correspondence, Raymond Domanico, Senior Education Advisor, IAF, 2009). This marks a distinction between equity and adequacy.

work: MOM applied sufficient pressure to remove an ineffective principal and Superintendent, NWBCC helped the district allocate 14,000 more seats (IESP, 2001), and SBC encouraged the district to build new buildings to house new small schools¹⁰⁶. Education organizing efforts proved successful not just in engaging parents directly in school governance and policymaking, but in influencing District leaders' priorities in school improvement work (in these three cases, the evaluation of school principals and the allocation of resources).

Yet there were limits to the efficacy of neighborhood organizing efforts, due in part to the limited power that individual groups could generate in isolation. Three factors, however, prevented larger collaborations. First, although they faced similar challenges, neighborhood groups were often too overwhelmed with the local expression of their struggles to think about how they might combine their efforts. Second, groups lacked the funding and staffing to work beyond their neighborhood, district, and borough lines. Third, historic clashes between union and community groups had produced mistrust that undermined the possibility of alliances.¹⁰⁷ As a result of these three factors, neighborhood-organizing groups were limited in their quest to build sufficient political power to advance their school-improvement plans.

In 2001 several of the city's leading education organizing groups and their primary support provider, the Community Involvement Program (CIP) – at the time affiliated with New York University and now affiliated with Brown University – came together to create a new model for community-led school reform (CEJ working papers, 2005). They formed the first neighborhood-based education organizing collaborative in the South Bronx, the *Community*

106 Small schools were the creation of progressive educators frustrated with traditional pedagogy and schooling. In the 1980's South Bronx Churches and East Brooklyn Congregations were among the first community groups to petition the Board of Education to sponsor three new small high schools, the same time that New Visions small schools were forming in NYC. New small schools were proposed to replace failing schools, and in this era community groups worked to close schools that were not functioning in their neighborhoods.

107 The dispute between leaders on the new community controlled school board and the United Federation of Teachers in the 1968–1969 Ocean Hill–Brownsville conflict is the most studied example of this.

Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools, more commonly known as *CC9* or *CCB*. Shortly thereafter, the Brooklyn Education Collaborative (BEC), and the Brooklyn-Queens 4 Education Collaborative (BQ4E) were also formed. Each of these three collaboratives organized for a more equitable distribution of resources, greater accountability from the school system, and improved student outcomes in their combined areas, predominantly low-income and immigrant communities of color, and with high concentrations of schools that were struggling. The brief synopsis of each of these collaborative's campaigns that follows evidences the kinds of gains organizing *collaborative* efforts had, as well as their limitations.

7.2.1 The Community Collaborative to Improve District 9. Under the umbrella of the *Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 (CC9)*, six groups¹⁰⁸ worked in partnership to build a comprehensive school reform agenda for one school district in the South Bronx – District 9. Its immediate goals were to improve academic achievement for students in that district through building strong school and community partnerships (Fabricant, 2010). But it also established longer-term goals to form “a city-wide movement of parents that would have the capacity to impact each level of the New York system” (Zachary as cited by Fabricant, 2010, p. 52). CC9 led a powerful District 9 coalition with the New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) and with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to initiate NYC's first lead teacher program in ten schools in 2004. This program created a new “lead teacher” job title, securing funding to staff schools in poor neighborhoods with experienced educators who in turn, mentored and trained new and less experienced teachers. Based on its initial success, the lead teacher program was then expanded to 100 of the city's lowest-performing schools in 2006.

108 The six groups included New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee, Citizens Advice Bureau, Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, Highbridge Community Life Center, ACORN, and the Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition.

CC9 the architects of this program, however were not invited to participate in the design of its expansion. Parent and community leaders involved in CC9 saw their efforts realize a substantial change for schools, only to be cut out of the program moving forward. CC9 leaders learned that it was not enough to have a collaborative win because ultimately it could be taken away from them.

7.2.2 The Brooklyn Education Collaborative. The Brooklyn Education Collaborative (BEC)¹⁰⁹ focused its organizing on improving middle-grade education in East Brooklyn. In the fall of 2005, BEC secured a \$120,000 commitment from the NYCDoE to provide science instructional supports (science supplies) to all forty-five schools with middle grades in three school districts in Brooklyn with whom it was working, what it called the BEC Learning Zone.¹¹⁰ Parents and community leaders conducted an investigation of how many schools did not have science labs and how much the installation of new labs and upkeep of existing science labs would cost. BEC brought parents and community leaders to speak before a delegation of city council members representing the Borough of Brooklyn to speak about the importance of science labs in their schools, especially because 8th graders were required to take a science test with a lab component, and many had not had experience using science equipment, let alone working in a science lab. Elected officials expressed interest to partner with BEC on an initiative to fund state-of-the-art science labs in twenty-nine middle-grade schools that had no labs in BEC districts as well as throughout the borough of Brooklyn but ultimately they did not push the agenda forward. BEC had won science supplies for their children's schools, but it was not able to pressure the city council delegation in Brooklyn to commit to the initiative. Like CC9, BEC's inability to

¹⁰⁹ BEC groups included Brooklyn ACORN, CHAFE, 1199 Childcare Fund, and UFT Parent Outreach.

¹¹⁰ District 18, 19, 23. District 17 schools were added to the proposal a year later.

implement its win fully was a catalyst for understanding the significance of building citywide power.

7.2.3 Brooklyn Queens for Education Collaborative. The third parent collaborative, Brooklyn Queens for Education Collaborative (BQ4E)¹¹¹ started meeting regularly in early 2006 and focused on the most culturally and linguistically diverse neighborhoods in New York City, home to hundreds of thousands of immigrant students in the NYC public school system. Its mission was to identify and fight for school-improvement initiatives targeted at the needs of immigrant students and their families and to form a home base for immigrant groups. BQ4E arranged parent visits at middle school in Brooklyn; provided political workshops for parents on middle schools models, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, and other general education issues; and conducted surveys of parents around accessibility of after school programs. Lessons from CC9 and BEC were already in process by the time BQ4E was born, so from the onset BQ4E leaders were looking through a citywide lens.

In many ways BQ4E was well positioned to move to a citywide formation. As it was initiated, BQ4E linked organizing efforts across two boroughs, and two member groups in BQ4E were already thinking about their work beyond the neighborhoods in which they were located. The New York Civic Participation Project was a citywide operation from their inception. Make the Road by Walking had been involved in citywide policy issues; at that time, they were looking at a merger with the Latin American Integration Center, understanding the need to organize on a larger scale.¹¹² Additionally, BQ4E's focus on education issues specific to immigrant students was conceptually a citywide issue.

111 BQ4E groups included ACORN, Latin American Integration Center, Make the Road by Walking, and the New York Civic Participation Project. Queens Congregation United for Action joined BQ4E soon after its initial formation but subsequently left because it did not have the capacity to take on education organizing to the extent that was required.

112 Their new name became Make the Road New York.

7.2.4 Merging collaboratives to form the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ). In a short time, CC9, BEC, and BQ4E had each achieved significant success in uniting stakeholders to improve their local schools and to redistribute resources to communities historically underfunded and underserved. But they were limited in their power, particularly with respect to sustaining their accomplishments. While the collaboratives had achieved more than the neighborhood groups, at the conclusion of each of the collaborative campaigns, leaders realized that they needed to unify collaborative organizing efforts to build a parent-led campaign across the city. By 2006, organizers' sense of how they were going to win had shifted; they were no longer seeing school problems as belonging to individual schools. Thinking about education organizing beyond the local was the milieu.

The new education governance structure in New York City had also intensified the need to build citywide power. Five years into Mayor Bloomberg's tenure of the school system, community leaders noted that the Mayor's reforms had "eclipsed student, parent, and citizen participation" in school system policy (Fruchter & McAlister, 2008). Organizers believed that a mayoral controlled governance structure ought to be coupled with a powerful citywide grassroots coalition that could both demand accountability from the Mayor and help sustain education reform (personal correspondence, Zachary, 2010).

The Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) was formed in November of 2006, as the union of the three regional organizing collaboratives¹¹³ to build greater parent power and influence system-wide education policy in New York City, organizing the power of parents and grassroots communities to create a more equitable education system. Initial goals for CEJ also included sustaining and strengthening strategic alliances and essentially scaling up the successes

113 The Community Collaborative to improve Bronx Schools (CCB), the Brooklyn Education Collaborative (BEC in Regions 5 and 6), and Brooklyn Queens Education Collaborative (BQ4E in Region 4).

of the collaboratives' work. It was conceived that if CEJ was successful in expanding this force, parent and community leaders would have significant input into school improvement work across New York City, and in alliance with other key constituencies, would be able to represent the demands of educationally underserved communities (CEJ working papers, 2006).

7.3 The New York City Coalition for Educational Justice

The New York Coalition for Educational Justice includes community groups across the city in a wide variety of formations: local development corporations, multi-service organizations, networks of union and community groups, and organizing organizations embedded in public education work. Collectively CEJ member groups serve and organize thousands of New York City residents on education issues, but many also organize around issues of housing, employment, and environment issues. At the time of this study, CEJ encompassed eight member groups, as outlined below:

- Multi-service agencies that are neighborhood based:
 1. Highbridge Community Life Center (Highbridge)
 2. New Settlement Apartments (NSA)
- A collaboration of labor unions and community groups that organize union members in neighborhoods:
 3. The New York Civic Participation Project (NYCCP)
- City-wide groups:
 4. Make the Road New York (MTR)
 5. New York Communities for Change (NYCC)
- Local Development Corporations:
 6. Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC)

7. Cypress Hills Advocates for Children (CHAFE)

- A Parent-Teacher Committee:

8. The United Federation of Teachers Brooklyn Parent Outreach Committee

A ninth group, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University serves as the primary support provider. CEJ's formation as an umbrella coalition that brings together a diverse group of community-based organizations is unique.¹¹⁴ CEJ provides an opportunity for various groups to join in a larger fight for quality education for all kids.

At the beginning of 2006 and for the four years that followed, each CEJ member organization situated its work primarily in the neighborhood where it is located, although three member groups (Make the Road, New York Communities for Change, and New York Civic Participation Project) were already organizing in multiple neighborhoods throughout the city. CEJ member groups focused on building a local base of parents and developing strong parent leadership in their neighborhoods to address school inequalities, but as part of CEJ, they also strategized on how to respond to and in some cases counteract citywide education policies that have an impact on all New York City public students and their families. The *Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them* campaign in 2010 precipitates CEJ's organizational shift from a mostly neighborhood-based coalition model to a hybrid model that included a freelance component. Freelance organizing allowed CEJ to organize in schools outside of their neighborhoods, those that were demographically similar to those neighborhoods in which they are based, but that did not have any organizing groups present. I argue that this shift while crucial for organizing groups to expand their power is part of a larger dynamic occurring in remapped school governance terrain, what I'm calling *delocalized centralism*.

¹¹⁴ CEJ's formation is also somewhat unique in that most adult organizing groups are based on congregational models, such as the IAF or PICO or dues-paying models, such as ACORN. 100% of CEJ's funding is provided by foundation money.

Figure 7.1 shows a NYC map that indicates where the headquarters are for each of these CEJ's eight member organizations.¹¹⁵ The points on the map are labeled: A) New Settlement Apartments (NSA); B) Highbridge Community Life Center (Highbridge); C) The New York Civic Participation Project (NYCPP); D & E) Make the Road New York (MTRNY); F) The United Federation of Teachers Brooklyn Parent Outreach Committee; G) Cypress Hills Advocates for Education (CHAPE); H) Abyssinian Development Corporation (ADC); and I) New York Communities for Change (NYCC).



Figure 7.1 CEJ member organization locations (2006-2011)

7.3.1 CEJ's organizational structure for 2006-2011. At the onset, CEJ leadership conceived that its larger coalition would build on the local work of its member groups. Each organizational member group had already decided which school issues to take on, as well as which schools to work within its neighborhood jurisdiction. CEJ planned that community organizations would then come to the larger CEJ coalition and steering committee meetings to discuss their common concerns and potential areas of work city-wide. Composed of parent representatives from each CBO, the steering committee serves as the vehicle through which representatives across organizations identify and discuss issues of concern, and then makes

specific decisions on CEJ's organizing work through consensus. Facilitated by a rotating pair of parent leaders, the monthly steering committee meetings are characterized by high levels of attendance from all of the member organizations (generally 40 parents one Saturday a month from 10am-2pm). Each meeting includes sessions for analysis and strategic planning sessions and small and large group discussions, with deliberate time for community building and solidarity over lunch. Because CEJ members speak both Spanish and English, translators are available at each meeting and all members wear headphones to facilitate conversation for about three quarters of the group who are not bilingual.

In its coalition work, CEJ has had to be mindful of several complexities. First, CEJ has had to balance neighborhood, collaborative, and citywide layers of work without spreading parents and organizers too thin or affecting the quality of their work. CEJ has addressed this challenge by crafting campaigns that have collaborative dimensions at the local and citywide level and by reducing the intensity of the collaborative layer of work to balance competing organizing demands (organizer interview, July 27, 2010). Second, CEJ has worked hard to maintain parents in leadership positions, while building alliances with other key leaders such as elected officials, religious officials, union administrators, and other education advocates. Lastly, seeing their organizing work and collaboration work in tandem, CEJ has been deliberate in seeking a suitable balance between building constituency pressure to formulate demands, and seeking collaboration with UFT leadership, elected officials, and others advocates, as well as NYCDoE administration.

When Mayor Bloomberg and then Chancellor Joel Klein announced 20 school closing proposals in December of 2009, none of CEJ member groups were dealing directly with school closings in their neighborhoods. Still to CEJ, school closings immediately signaled a short-

sighted and destructive policy that would harm students, especially students most struggling in school. CEJ members' analysis was twofold. First, there was a sense among parent leaders that "the system is sort of abandoning these schools" (field notes, March 3, 2010) and that school closings policy was in lieu of school improvement policy. Second, CEJ members understood school closure policy as another set of actions implemented by the Mayor and NYCDoE that did not include the input of those most impacted by it (students and families). CEJ was poised to articulate an alternate vision for school improvement and school decision-making but would have to consider what it would mean to challenge school closure policy when none of their member groups were directly dealing with school closings in their neighborhoods.

As I presented in the previous chapter, NYCDoE administrators framed school closings as an equity reform connected to choice in an open marketplace, and as an accountability reform that was holding individual schools responsible for not meeting the academic standards set for them. NYCDoE administrators also framed school failure as the responsibility of schools themselves, having great confidence that all schools were supported with its new management strategy. As will be discussed, CEJ framed school closings in direct opposition to each of the framings of the NYCDoE. Whereas the NYCDoE has framed school closings as providing better options, opportunities, and outcomes for students, CEJ draws attention to the fact that school closure policy as a school improvement strategy is not supported by research. Whereas the NYCDoE has framed school closings as justified consequences for individual school failures, CEJ reframes school closures as a consequence of the Department's systematic failure to provide adequate supports to struggling schools. Like other critics, CEJ questions the equity of sanctions for schools that they argue, have been neglected historically. Lastly, whereas the NYCDoE has defined accountability to parents through school choice, CEJ argues that accountability to

families and communities is through providing quality neighborhood schools and mechanisms for ongoing parent input into decisions affecting schools. These framings will be discussed in the next part of this chapter where I provide a case study of CEJ's *Fix Our Schools Don't Just Close Them* campaign. My data comes from interviews with parent leaders and organizers active in this campaign, as well as direct observations.

7.4 Case Study: Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them

On January 26, 2010, there wasn't an empty seat in the Brooklyn Technical High School auditorium. The Panel for Education Policy, the Mayor's advisory board, was set to vote on 19 schools¹¹⁶ proposed for closure – the most proposed at any one time during Mayor Bloomberg's tenure (up to that point¹¹⁷). Thousands of people were already standing, chanting, and booing when then Chancellor Klein read prepared comments to the Panel for Education Policy introducing the proposals to close 19 schools he said were “not meeting standards necessary for our kids” (fieldnotes, January 26, 2010). Members of the public questioned the data school closing decisions were based on, and argued that closing schools would harm not help students who were struggling academically.

Public outrage at the proposals to close schools continued for more than eight hours as more than 250 speakers (including elected officials, union representatives, community leaders, teachers, parents, students and alumni) blasted New York City Department of Education (NYCDoE) officials for condemning and not supporting schools. Individual CEJ leaders recalled being numbered among the last 100 people in the room at 3:30 a.m. on January 27, 2010 when

116 Originally there were 20 schools on the proposed school and grade closure list in 2009-2010. As discussed in chapter five, the NYCDoE removed one high school on the list before the PEP vote.

117 NYCDoE proposed 26 school closings in 2010-2011, and 23 closings in 2011-2012.

the majority¹¹⁸ of the Panel for Education Policy members voted unanimously in favor of all 19 closings despite overwhelming public opposition. Weeks later, the consensus at CEJ, the most prominent parent-organizing group in education reform in New York City, was that the PEP hearing was “a huge missed opportunity for organizing” (fieldnotes, February, 2010). CEJ had observed that school closings proposals had galvanized thousands of NYC residents in opposition to the school closing agenda set by the NYCDoE, but that no organizing groups, including theirs was prepared to mobilize that opposition into a force that could challenge the NYCDoE’s unilateral education policymaking.

7.4.1 Demanding a moratorium on school closings. In early March 2010, on the steps of the NYCDoE central office, most commonly known as “Tweed,” CEJ leaders along with elected officials and allies held a press conference calling for a temporary moratorium on school closings¹¹⁹ until an independent analysis of the impact on school communities could be provided. CEJ challenged the NYCDoE’s premise that school closings were necessary to provide better education opportunities for students, and that closure proposals would remedy schools struggling to graduate 50% of it students. To CEJ, many schools had been failing for the entire tenure of Mayor Bloomberg’s control, and some had been failing for decades. One CEJ parent leader began her opening remarks at the press conference by outlining the stark distinction in the diagnosis and prognosis for struggling schools put forth by the DOE and by parent and community leaders:

118 As expected, all eight Mayoral appointees of the PEP voted in favor of all schools proposed for closure. Four of five of each of the Borough President’s appointees voted against all schools proposed for closure. Along with the Mayoral appointees, the Borough appointee for Staten Island voted in favor in favor of all schools proposed for closure. The 2009-2010 school closure list did not include any school on Staten Island.

119 CEJ also called for a moratorium on co-locations, the practice of placing multiple small schools in one building, until an independent review of co-location proposals could be conducted.

We're here today to tell the DOE to fix our schools and don't close them, and to say that the schools that have been persistently failing have been under their watch for the last nine years. The DOE is responsible and should be providing them with supports and resources...we are here today to turn around Tweed so they can begin to do the right thing on behalf of our children (CEJ, 3/5/2010).

“School turnaround” was the phrase that the U.S. Department of Education introduced to signify efforts to restructure failing schools. “Turnaround Tweed” became a significant motto to represent CEJ’s attribution of school failure to the failure of the system, and the failed leadership and policies of Mayor Bloomberg and the Chancellor, rather than to the schools themselves. To embolden this point, CEJ “marked up” the Educational Impact Statement (EIS) template NYCDoE had issued to all schools they proposed for closure. In CEJ’s version, the EIS cited NYCDoE for its “continued failure to provide a college and career preparatory education to tens of thousands of Black and Latino students,” and called upon them to implement “an aggressive educational strategy beyond simply closing schools” (CEJ, 3/2/2010). CEJ’s analysis was that the NYCDoE was shirking its responsibility to support struggling schools. The refrain “Fix Our Schools, Don’t Close Them,” then was a way to define the NYCDoE’s accountability to all schools through providing resources and support.

To CEJ, school closings were not just the result of Mayor Bloomberg’s failure to provide adequate support, but of his failures to lead a transparent decision-making process, to build partnerships with school and community leaders, and to be accountable to the larger public throughout the tenure of his control over the school system. A second CEJ parent leader who spoke at this press conference explained that a moratorium on school closings was required because there was not clear or sufficient information available for families on closing proposals

concerning their children's schools. This parent leader underscored that parents deserved clear answers:

There are far too many questions about how decisions have been made, about the data closings are based on, about what has been done to support and nurture and improve the schools serving our neediest students, and what will happen to students if the schools are closed. We need answers...these are our children; they are not pawns in a chess game.

Fix Our Schools Don't Close Them (CEJ, 3/05/2010).

Like other members of the public, CEJ members asked questions about the data NYCDoE was using to identify schools for closure. They also asked how schools and students had been supported to succeed, and how replacement schools would be more successful. As active parent leaders in the education policy arena, CEJ's parent leaders challenged the NYCDoE's assertion that it knew what is best for children. CEJ parents were essentially asking, "Accountability, for whom?!"

CEJ did not host the press conference alone. They reached out to elected officials, religious and civic leaders, and other education advocates who were similarly raising umbrage with the Department's plans to close schools despite vociferous opposition at the public hearings. CEJ sought to partner with a diverse group of stakeholders who together could issue a stronger challenge to the Department's school closing proposals. At the conclusion of the press conference, Councilmember and Education Committee Chairman Robert Jackson announced that he would submit a request for a resolution in the City Council supporting CEJ's call for a moratorium on school closures until an independent analysis could be conducted. CEJ's next step was to announce its own set of solutions in opposition to the structural alterations the Department had been making to transform public education. CEJ's education platform was

named the *School Transformation Zone* and lays out its own five pillars for successful school reform. As I will discuss in the next section, The School Transformation Zone provides a lens into how parent and community leaders frame equity, accountability, and community engagement drastically different from school administrators.

7.4.2 The School Transformation Zone. As a way to offer an alternate set of school improvement strategies and to prevent further school closings, CEJ repurposed the educational platform for college readiness it had been developing since its middle school campaign victory.¹²⁰ CEJ's educational platform focused on five major elements:

- providing an opportunity for schools to redesign the school day and year, adding more academic time for students;
- supporting the implementation a well-rounded college preparatory curriculum for all students beyond test preparation that engaged students in hands-on learning, problem solving, and arts programming;
- attracting, training, and retaining excellent teachers and principals by providing leadership and professional development opportunities as well as more collaborative planning time;
- offering comprehensive supports for students that address students' social and emotional needs through a strong safety net of relationships and services; and,
- ensuring parents and community leaders have real input into decisions regarding their children's schools (STZ document, 3/2010).

¹²⁰ Over the course of 2009, CEJ member groups had worked with groups in the boroughs where they were located to hone an educational platform for school success for K-12 grades. Months before the school closing proposals were announced, CEJ had scheduled a meeting with then Chancellor Klein to share its platform.

CEJ's educational platform reflected its understanding that schools needed ongoing classroom supports to improve, and that improvement would be sustained by a larger community investment as well as effective school leadership.

CEJ packaged its platform in what they called a School Transformation Zone (STZ) in order to align it with the guidelines for school improvement models and accompanying funds as outlined by the federal government.¹²¹ In April of 2010, New York State received more than 308 million dollars¹²² for which school districts could apply to “turn around” persistently low achieving schools, naming one of the four intervention models: “turnaround”, “restart”, “closure”, and “transformation”. CEJ's *School Transformation Zone* was not the same as the model proposed by the federal government with the same name. CEJ was offering their Zone as a home-grown model alternative. Akin to the Chancellor's District created by former NYC schools chancellor Rudy Crew,¹²³ the Zone was conceived as a centrally managed zone of assistance for struggling schools. CEJ figured that schools receiving SIG monies to improve¹²⁴ could qualify to be part of such a zone. With the Zone, CEJ was arguing that school

121 In order to qualify for a combined eight billion dollars of Race to the Top Funds and School Improvement Grants, districts have to implement one of four prescriptive interventions: turnaround (replacing the principal and 50% of the staff); restart (transfer control to another school operator); transformation (replace the principal, and keep all staff); and school closure (close the school).

122 The funds were part of the 3.5 billion dollars as part of the Race to the Top program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

123 In 1996, Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew removed ten schools identified by the NY State Education Department as failing from the administrative control of their community school district authorities and placed them in a virtual district with a centralized management structure, uniform curriculum, and professional development. Eventually 58 elementary and middle schools were removed from their sub districts and placed under the direct control of the Central Office. CEJ's School Transformation Zone called for ongoing professional development for teachers, and oversight of a centralized management structure, but did not prescribe a uniform curriculum.

124 School Improvement Grants, authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA), are grants to State educational agencies to provide adequate resources in order to substantially raise the achievement of students in their lowest-performing schools. Under the final requirements published in the Federal Register on October 28, 2010 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-10-28/pdf/2010-27313.pdf>), school improvement funds are to be focused on each State's —Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III schools. Tier I schools are the lowest- achieving 5 percent of a State's Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, Title I secondary schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring with graduation rates below 60 percent over a number of years, and, if a State so chooses, certain Title I eligible (and participating) elementary schools that are as low achieving as the State's other Tier I schools (—newly eligible Tier I schools). Tier II schools are the lowest-achieving 5 percent of a State's secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds, secondary schools that are eligible for, but do not receive, Title I, Part A funds with graduation rates below 60 percent over a number of years, and, if a State so chooses, certain additional Title I eligible (participating and non-participating) secondary schools that are as low achieving as the State's other Tier II schools or that have had a graduation rate below 60 percent over a number of years (newly eligible □ Tier II schools). In the Tier I and Tier II schools an LEA chooses to serve, the LEA must implement one of four school intervention models: turnaround model, restart model, school closure, or transformation model. Tier III schools could only receive funds once all of the state's persistently lowest achieving schools had received funds.

improvement grants would be better spent as investments in existing schools than for closing and restructuring them.

Acknowledging the Department's emphasis on principal empowerment, CEJ stipulated that schools designated as low performing, would not be mandated to join the Zone. Instead, schools would have the opportunity to opt into the Zone and redesign teaching and learning with the guidance of an expert educator with experience improving chronically low performing schools, and with the assistance of the federal School Improvement Grants. Additionally, recognizing that schools needed more time to make genuine improvements, CEJ designed the STZ to afford schools three years to demonstrate progress in student achievement. Lastly, CEJ also built into the zone a structure to ensure parent and community leader input in the school improvement planning, a coordinating committee made of parents and students along with teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders who would select participating schools from those that chose to apply, and who would serve in an ongoing capacity to advise, implement, monitor, and troubleshoot the initiative.

To CEJ, the School Transformation Zone encompassed concrete steps that schools could take in a reasonable amount of time to improve. Because it was aligned to school improvement models that the federal government outlined, conceivably it was also fundable. Beyond multiple publics' contestations of school closing proposals, CEJ was articulating an alternative proposal for school improvement than closure. CEJ leaders were confident that others would support the Zone, but knew they would have to dedicate organizing power to garner that support. A week after the press conference in March, at the steering committee meeting, CEJ leaders started to consider how it could expand its campaign work and build support and momentum for the STZ. CEJ leaders identified four different strategies they could pursue:

- engendering the support of allies, including academics, activists, elected officials, religious leaders and others who would provide backing;
- recruiting the support of City Council members to vote in favor of the resolution Councilmember Jackson put forth;
- meeting with the NYCDoE officials to discuss their consideration of a zone of support for schools; and
- organizing parents and communities of schools in danger of closure, such as the 34 NYC schools named to the Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) school list by New York state.¹²⁵

This multi-pronged strategy was not new to CEJ, and exemplifies the kind of organizing CEJ believes necessary in the current political climate – a combination of inside-out tactics (working with school system administrators) and outside-in tactics (mobilizing constituency pressure). CEJ's inside-out tactics relied upon negotiations with NYCDoE administrators, namely from the Division of Portfolio Development, who were most responsible for establishing school closure policy in NYC. Its outside-in tactics included coalition-building with powerful individuals and groups: elected officials, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), and other advocacy groups alongside building a grassroots base of parent leaders. Organizing parents in PLA schools is given particular focus in the next section because this effort starts to give CEJ a sense of the challenges of moving to a city-wide strategy. The section that follows resumes with CEJ reflections on strategies they were taking as part of CEJ's multi-pronged strategy.

7.4.3 Organizing in PLA schools. In March during a campaign meeting, CEJ began to map out which PLA schools they were going to organize. Like the 19 schools voted for closure

¹²⁵ Schools that were named to the state's PLA list were identified based on three criteria: former status as schools under registration review, Regents test scores, and graduation rates lower than 60%.

by the Panel for Education Policy, schools on the PLA list were predominantly high schools and in neighborhoods outside of where most CEJ groups were located. While organizing in PLA schools made sense to challenge school closure policy and elevate the visibility of the School Transformation Zone, it had very practical considerations for organizing. CEJ member groups were trying to figure out how they would balance organizing in schools proposed for closure alongside the work they were simultaneously leading in their own neighborhoods.

The considerations involved in organizing in schools proposed for closure, however, were not simply practical. They raised larger questions about the scales and contours of organizing. For some of the CEJ member groups accustomed to neighborhood and geographic-based organizing, organizing in PLA schools and in neighborhoods where they did not have a base or history of relationships represented a significant shift. Leaders from these groups were concerned about the kinds of commitments their member organizations were making to the PLA school communities. Organizers and parent leaders were also perplexed about how to approach parents about the STZ given it was only in a proposal state. CEJ did not know if the Zone would be adopted by the NYCDoE and wanted to have frank conversations with parents that closure was still a very likely outcome. Discussions that happened within CEJ showed some leaders wondering if they should be organizing parents to demand input in any of the decisions made for the school, including those decisions made after the school was closed. As a coalition, CEJ leaders decided that at least initially they were outreaching to parents to educate them on the dire situation facing their children's schools, because the Department itself was not conducting outreach, as one parent leader described, "[they're] used to making decisions by themselves...they don't even think of the community" (Field notes, March 9, 2010).

CEJ organizing groups split up the list of PLA schools and determined that they would plan their visits to schools before and after parent teacher conferences scheduled in the spring, when at least some parents would be present at the high schools. Organizers contacted school-based Parent Coordinators, some of who were receptive to visits by CEJ leaders and some of who were not. At the schools, CEJ distributed fliers that read “Do you know your child’s school is at risk of being closed?” with the goal of making parents aware of impending decisions that would impact their children, and eliciting parent participation at a city-wide parent meeting they were holding in a couple of weeks. Organizers’ initial reports were that conversations with parents about school closures were difficult because of parents’ lack of knowledge of and accessibility to school policymaking. In many cases parents did not know the school was in danger of closure, nor what the designation “Persistently Low Achieving” meant.

Organizers also discussed that conversations were difficult because parents generally did not have a political consciousness of the educational crisis facing their children. One organizer talked specifically about the challenges facing immigrant families in navigating school systems. This organizer, an immigrant herself, and a bilingual Spanish-English speaker noted that Newcomers she worked with did not know how to ask critical questions about the school system in the United States: “because we come from a different system and we say at least [our kids] are going to school, and they are learning English...there’s not a need [for more]. When [parents] see the child is not learning to read, they see it as this is my fault. They do not have a system view” (field notes, March, 18, 2010). As leaders suspected, organizing against schools proposed for closure involved educating families on lots of issues concerning their children’s schooling.

On March 25th 2010 CEJ held a meeting at Trinity Church in lower Manhattan for parents whose children were attending PLA schools. Most of the 30 parents in attendance had

not heard of the PLA school list, but a few recalled receiving a letter from NYCDoE that indicated their kids could transfer to another school (fieldnotes, 3/25/2010). In the meeting, one CEJ parent leader provided an overview of the four prescriptive “turnaround” intervention models school districts would have to choose from to receive the federal school improvement grant money, also known as SIG money. This leader then introduced CEJ’s proposed School Transformation Zone, explaining that it was grounded in research proven school improvement strategies such as robust, embedded, and relevant professional development, comprehensive and coordinated supports for the whole student, and included a structure for parents to participate actively in the redesign process. CEJ shared with parents its plans to propose the STZ as an alternative solution to school closure, as well as build momentum up to a citywide mobilization in a couple of weeks. At the conclusion of the meeting, CEJ gave petitions to parents to take and distribute to their own school communities. The *Fix Our Schools, Don’t Close Them* petition read: “I stand with CEJ and call on the NYCDOE to immediately enact a moratorium on school closings until an independent analysis is conducted, and to establish a School Transformation Zone that would improve low performing schools and involve parents and other community stakeholders in decision making about the future of our schools” (CEJ petition, 3/25/2010). Immediately after the meeting, CEJ leaders took notice that their efforts to organize parents in PLA schools had proved more difficult than they anticipated. Leaders had hoped for a greater turnout at the meeting but they still felt a boost in confidence about the work they were doing from those parents who had come. The next section discusses further CEJ’s reflections on this strategy as well as its other strategies to build support for the School Transformation Zone. Through these reflections, CEJ provides an analysis on what it sees as the main differences between its theory for school improvement and the theory of the NYCDoE.

7.4.4 CEJ reflections. The *Mulgrew v. Board of Education* decision¹²⁶ served as additional encouragement for CEJ to continue its efforts. When news of the lawsuit decision reached CEJ, leaders expressed satisfaction that the court found that the Mayor and the Chancellor were not “above the law” (fieldnotes, April 2010). On April 10th, 2010 a parent leader began the steering committee meeting by presenting a visual that demonstrated the differences in DoE and CEJ visions for school improvement. The visual crystallized the conflict between Bloomberg and Klein’s principles for reform — what CEJ termed the “business model” — and CEJ’s underlying belief that schools need sustainable supports to improve. CEJ’s analysis was that the Department held schools solely responsible for their outcomes, what was named in the visual as “a sink or swim strategy.” CEJ leaders discussed that the NYCDoE was not offering schools adequate support and that by contrast the School Transformation Zone provided this. CEJ also discussed that the NYCDoE’s only solution to low performing schools was to close them, and promote new small school and charter school models in their place. To CEJ, small schools and charter schools replacements were not a systematic solution to school underachievement. While CEJ saw some of these new school models experiencing success, they questioned their sustainability. Furthermore, CEJ articulated that discussions of new school models tended to disregard the criticality of parent engagement to sustainable school reform efforts. While CEJ always knew their theory of school improvement conflicted with that of the

126 On February 12, 2010, a lawsuit was filed in the New York Supreme Court by United Federation of Teachers, the AFL-CIO, Alliance for Quality Education, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, along with individual city council members and activists. The lawsuit established that the NYCDOE violated the amendments to the law that governs school closures, designed for the Mayor to provide more transparency and accountability. Particularly the amendments required the Mayor to conduct an individual analysis of each school proposal, as well as facilitate a larger review process for members of the community to comment. The lawsuit charged that the DOE crafted a “thinly veiled” pretense of compliance, issuing boilerplate education impact statements for schools proposed for closure, disregarding the statutory requirement to schedule public hearings with school based community councils, and failing to adhere to notice and conduct requirements of those hearings. On March 26, 2010 the NY State court found that there were significant violations of the law (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/nyregion/27close.html?_r=2). The appellate court upheld this same decision. CEJ itself did not sign on as a coalition to the lawsuit as it did not have a consensus among member organizations to do so, but parent leader Zakiyah Ansari did.

NYCDoE, they were now seeing these differences clearer as they pressed forward with their “Fix Our Schools Don’t Close Them” campaign.

After discussing the incompatibility between CEJ’s and DOE’s school reform theories, CEJ leaders took turns reporting back on different actions they had taken in the past few weeks. CEJ discussed City Council Education Chair Robert Jackson’s efforts to introduce a resolution in the City Council, which called on the NYCDoE to establish a School Transformation Zone based on the model proposed by CEJ to prevent school closings. Plans were moving ahead for the resolution to be voted on in the city council at the end of April. CEJ as a whole was inspired with the resolution because it demonstrated that elected officials were endorsing its educational platform, but a few parent leaders noted that the city council did not have the power to enforce the NYCDoE to implement the School Transformation Zone. Still, the consensus was that passing the resolution would constitute a significant statement in support of an alternate solution to school closings.

CEJ leaders additionally reported ongoing progress with the sign-on letter they had drafted for prominent academics, education leaders, elected officials, community organizations, and other allies. The goal to obtain 100 organizational signatures was in motion. In this letter, CEJ listed its demands for an independent analysis of school closings and for the adoption of the School Transformation Zone. The letter started “We believe that an educational crisis requires a REAL educational plan. The availability of federal funds allows our city the opportunity to create such a plan in conjunction with the families and communities most affected by failing schools” (CEJ Chancellor Letter, 3/28/10). In the letter, CEJ leaders reiterated that schools would get support, be exposed to best practices, and have a reasonable amount of time to demonstrate

improvement: three years. The letter also outlined that the Zone should be governed by both a city wide school-based coordinating committee and NYCDoE Central Office staff.

CEJ members, who made visits to PLA schools, provided reflections on their initial parent organizing efforts. While some expressed concern about the demands this effort was placing on parent leaders, there was a lot of support at the meeting to continue organizing in the PLA schools, as they were understood as the “next school-closing list.” Some saw organizing in the PLA schools as critical to keeping momentum. As one parent leader put it, “we’re trying to work in our communities, and trying to work in these 34 schools as well, but it’s the only way to keep the train moving.” Many other leaders explained organizing in PLA schools as a moral calling. Notably, CEJ leaders who attested to this point asserted that while the PLA schools were not located in CEJ neighborhoods, their fates were just as important. One leader stood passionately to give her remarks, “We can’t just look at it as our children in our borough; it is about our children in the city as a whole. We need to advocate for all children, not just...say my community” (fieldnotes, April 10, 2010). An organizer echoed this sentiment, “even if not happening where you live, your school could be next, if we CEJ aspire to be the organization that speaks for parents and children in neighborhoods where there are low performing schools than we have to jump into this battle.” The consensus at the meeting was that while organizing at the citywide level at the same time as organizing at the neighborhood level was demanding, it was necessary.

After two hours of discussion it was time for member organizations to consider how many members they could turn out to the planned STZ press conference, how many people could sign the letter, and which elected officials they could approach about voting. The CEJ collective groups planned to turn out 200 people for the STZ conference in April 2010. CEJ had laid out a

very detailed organizing timeline for the rest of April but there were outstanding questions about what the campaign would look like past April 28th. In a follow-up campaign meeting, CEJ leaders discussed doing local actions in conjunction with parents and students in additional schools in danger of closing, as well as connecting the fight for the School Transformation Zone to a national day of protest against the business model for school reform.

In mid April, CEJ had an opportunity to meet with then Chancellor Klein to present their educational platform for a second time (CEJ had a first meeting with him the prior December), but now leaders could talk about this platform for specific schools the NYCDoE was considering closing. In the words of one parent leader, the purpose of the meeting was:

For Klein to understand that the solution is not just to close schools but to give schools the tools they need, the opportunity to correct themselves, and that we're the parents and know what our children need and we're coming to the table to discuss what he can do better and how we can help (pulse interview, 5/15/10).

After the meeting, CEJ leaders' reports were mixed. Some were encouraged by the Chancellor's request for more research and information on how the Zone would work, while others interpreted this request as a put off.

The meeting with Klein only further illuminated the distinctions between CEJ's school improvement model and the one advocated by the NYCDoE (fieldnotes, May 15, 2010). One key distinction lay in their respective understanding of the role for the Central Office. CEJ saw a centralized body responsible for making policy that was affecting all schools and saw the same body responsible to provide answers to students and their families and communities for those decisions. As a result the STZ called for a centralized district support structure. As described in the previous chapter, the NYCDoE was altering its management structure, so that schools could

make their own decisions about how to improve. The Department no longer recognized the wisdom of a centralized body in making uniform decisions, and had shifted the support infrastructure for schools to external partner organizations, or network teams. In my time observing CEJ's *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, I did not record CEJ discussions or analysis of the Department's new support structure (network teams).

But there were other key differences that emerged during conversations with Department officials concerning the School Transformation Zone. CEJ critiqued the NYCDoE for representing school closings as a “bold” intervention. CEJ challenged the boldness of school closings on two accounts. For one, CEJ doubted that school closures would precipitate significant or sustainable change in schools; to CEJ there was nothing bold about replacing a struggling school with a model that did not assure long- term success. In the words of CEJ coordinating organizer, “what changes schools is not flashy...but the day to day really hard work of the people inside the schools with the right coaching and support” (fieldnotes, April 20, 2010). Many CEJ leaders like many members of the public were not convinced that higher graduation rates at the new small schools evidenced that school closings would be effective – and like other critics argued that the most vulnerable students were not attending new small schools. Secondly, CEJ doubted the sincerity of school closing proposals as the remedy for schools struggling to graduate students, especially when historically school district administrators had not concerned themselves with schools in low-income neighborhoods. CEJ could refer back to its early organizing efforts in combating both low graduation rates and an unresponsive school system and took umbrage that the Department was insinuating that parents were not acting on behalf of children when they were opposing school closing proposals.

It was through conversations about the School Transformation Zone as well as organizing in PLA schools that CEJ acknowledged a need to clarify its opposition to school closing proposals. CEJ underscored that it was not taking the position that a school should never be closed; some schools, CEJ agreed, might need to be closed because they were damaging places to students. CEJ however, wanted it to be clear that closure did not constitute a school improvement strategy in and of itself. It was at this time that CEJ inserted the word “just” in its campaign motto to distinguish their position as a position against school closure as a school improvement strategy not a position against all school closings. CEJ campaign was now called: “Fix Our Schools, Don’t *Just* Close Them.” Its focus remained on the School Transformation Zone.

7.4.5 Focus on the School Transformation Zone. By the end of April 2010, CEJ had secured 72 signatures for the School Transformation Zone from academics, elected officials, union groups, and community based organizations. CEJ put all 72 signatures on a large poster board and held a press conference on April 28th on the steps of City Hall. CEJ leaders from all eight of their members groups stood with elected officials, union representatives, religious leaders, and education advocates and called for the NYCDoe to take notice of their unified presence. As a group they were opposing school closures as the remedy for low performing schools. A CEJ parent leader’s opening remarks honed in school closure policy as an indolent response from a negligent school system: “Our lowest performing schools where many of our neediest children attend have been left to flounder and fail and are then targeted for closure.” She continued, “low performing schools need a bold initiative to transform learning and improve student achievement” (CEJ, 4/28/10). The CEJ parent leader was using bold to refer to an investment in struggling public schools that many believed had never occurred.

Another CEJ parent leader then read a letter that CEJ had sent to Chancellor Klein which encouraged him to endorse the School Transformation Zone, arguing that some of the most prominent thinkers and actors in public education had signed on. CEJ continued to insist that the STZ would offer schools the kinds of guidance and additional resources they would need to improve. In addition, it continued to herald its efforts to generate the larger community investment required for sustainable school improvement as it drew support from varied sectors of education policymaking in NYC – something they pointed out the Department had not pursued in its education decision-making.

Following the press conference, CEJ devoted its organizing power to campaign for City Council members to vote in favor of the resolution put forth by Councilmember Jackson. CEJ leaders distributed STZ leaflets to council members on their way into office, made appointments to visit council members, and held a briefing for council legislative staff inside the City Council chambers. More than twenty City Council staff attended the briefing, as CEJ coordinators pointed to research supporting the effectiveness of components part of the School Transformation Zone and passed out a “Beyond School Closings” report. The report highlighted models around the country that had been successful: more learning time for students, more common planning time for teachers, intensive supports, a rich college preparatory curriculum, and active parent engagement. In closing remarks, one CEJ leader noted that the Zone did not just represent an alternative vision for improving schools, but that it modeled an alternative process for making school decisions:

This is a real statement, parents and community coming together around key issue of education. Where we're going with our kids especially in neighborhoods of color...there has to be an alternative vision, there has to be a way to bring back parent and community

involvement and engagement, sustainability, [so that] everyone buys into what happens.

We've been here, testified in front of city council...we'll be here when the Mayor's gone because we live in our communities. Our children will then take our place. This is a moment to make something different happen in our schools (5/20/2010).

At the end of the meeting, Councilmember Jackson's policy advisor announced that the City Council Speaker would be endorsing the resolution (which brought a round of applause) but CEJ parents pressed that all councilmembers votes would still be needed. Five days later on May 25th, the Speaker of the City Council introduced resolutions 156 and 157a in support of expanded learning time and a School Transformation Zone. The city council unanimously approved both resolutions.

There was much jubilation at CEJ, especially because a unanimous passage of any resolution in the City Council is spasmodic, but this was immediately tempered by the reality that these resolutions had limited sway. The NYCDoE did not have to adopt a School Transformation Zone just because parent and community leaders had come together to draft it, or because elected officials voted in favor of it. Mayoral control in New York City had continued to mean Mayor Bloomberg had unilateral authority of governing schools. Still at CEJ, it was a brief time to celebrate – a momentary glimpse of an alternative to an onslaught of school closings.

7.5 The End of School Year 2010: CEJ Evaluating its Organizing

The end of the school year 2010 seemed an appropriate time to reflect on the work CEJ had completed over the first few months of its *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign. CEJ articulated a vision for school reform radically different than the one proposed by the NYCDoE. While the NYCDoE defined failure as a function of schools, CEJ defined failure as the NYCDoE's inadequate support and resources for public schools so that they could

succeed. While the NYCDoE advocated for choice in an open marketplace as an equity reform that provided families an opportunity to opt out of their neighborhood schools, CEJ argued that the Department equity strategy be their investment in schools in all neighborhoods. Lastly, while the NYCDoE defined parent authority as choice, CEJ accentuated the need for real input. To CEJ, real input meant that parents would be engaged in an ongoing way in decisions about their children's schools. It meant that those ultimately responsible for decisions about schools would have to touch, not just be in touch with the parents and kids that their decisions would most impact. In the words of one CEJ parent leader:

The DOE they need to have real parent input in their system. They don't have it. The DOE departments, I think, they just highlight things, but it's not touchable... they feel like they can do things without any input...they just discuss how they are going to implement something, but without, you know, the ring, without reaching people from the neighborhood (interview, March 21, 2011).

This CEJ leader explained the importance of school improvement as a relational process – one in which school district leaders would touch parents and community leaders in the neighborhood, as well as one in which district leaders would be touchable.

7.5.1 Evaluating the School Transformation Zone. At its annual summer retreats in July 2010, CEJ evaluated the strengths of its campaign strategies to date, what they had accomplished, and what they believed they needed to do differently. CEJ leaders were cautious to call the School Transformation Zone resolution's passage a symbolic victory, but they did raise concerns that there was now nowhere to go with it. Similarly conversations about the Zone with the NYCDoE did not offer a lot of hope. After several communications, CEJ reported that NYCDoE seemed no closer to considering adopting the STZ. A month after the School

Transformation Zone resolution had passed in the City Council, some started to vocalize that school closures as a centralized policy required a much different organizing response than what CEJ had been prioritizing until this point. In a small group discussion among organizers, one organizer said:

I don't see how we do what we did this past year, which is to push an ideal platform while whole educational landscape is changing, and we're still on the outside. I don't see how we do that again. I think we have to be more on the inside. In these schools we have to be in there on the front lines finding these parents and mobilizing these parents, and not on the outside saying this is what should be happening in their schools. This is what should be happening in *our* schools. (CEJ, 7/8/2010)

His analysis suggested that the School Transformation Zone imposed a set of solutions, and that CEJ would be more effective if it was able to insert itself more directly in schools proposed for closure to be able to join parents in establishing the changes that would best improve their children's schools. His analysis, however, did not seem to acknowledge the difficulties that had become apparent in mobilizing parents in the PLA schools.

The consensus among organizers and leaders was that the experiment in the PLA schools had proved difficult because groups did not have a base nor relationships in those schools. Most agreed that it was the kind of shift in organizing strategy CEJ would need to make in order to more effectively challenge the Bloomberg and Klein school improvement agenda. One organizer shared his reflections that organizing in PLA schools had been challenging to his neighborhood-based organization, but he maintained it was what was required for the CEJ coalition to have more of an impact:

Our organization was challenged and a lot of the other [CEJ] organizations were challenged because everything was out of the neighborhood and a lot of us have been focused on neighborhoods and specific areas and so to be working with high schools that you don't work with, and then work out of the neighborhood is a real challenge, but if we're going to really try to do citywide work and address issues that are coming up and being able to push back against Bloomberg, how can we challenge ourselves to work out of our [neighborhood] regions and out of our areas? (CEJ, 7/8/2010)

Other CEJ organizers agreed that the locality of their organizing had remained their strength, but that this structure was not nimble enough to take on a system wide policy like school closings. Being defined by neighborhood boundaries was in many ways a hindrance to expanding a base and conceivably having a larger impact. But expanding their definition of local, and developing a more flexible organizing capacity would force CEJ to think differently about where to focus organizing efforts, and having to deal with the tradeoffs in shifting from a neighborhood based model to one that was freelance. For CEJ this would mean figuring out the right balance and local and citywide organizing work demands, and figuring out what long time organizing work would look like outside of CEJ neighborhoods. The tensions between local and citywide organizing work had been visible before but the *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign work had made these tensions even more clear. CEJ leaders reaffirmed their commitment to fight school closings, as they constituted “the heart of the Bloomberg and Klein strategy” (fieldnotes, July 17, 2010).

7.6 Conclusion

CEJ leaders began their campaign against school closures in early March 2010. Immediately after calling for a moratorium on school closing proposals, CEJ offered the

educational platform it had spent a year devising as an alternative to school closing. In addition to calling for an end to school closings (what many advocates, elected officials, union representatives and others who opposed school closure policy had done), CEJ put forward a concrete set of steps for schools to improve. In doing so, CEJ raised the visibility of alternatives to school closure policy.

CEJ's School Transformation Zone constituted a remarkably different theory of school improvement from the NYCDoE in four key ways. First, NYCDoE leaders' framings had revealed they did not believe schools could be improved with additional resources. In the STZ, CEJ defined comprehensive investments as quality teachers, and academic and social supports. With an emphasis on teacher training, mentoring, planning time, and support, as well as expanded learning time, CEJ was countering NYCDoE's assessment that schools could only be improved via structural reform, namely replacing teachers. Second, CEJ was pushing against the NYCDoE's underlying principle that competition drives improvement. CEJ argued that in addition to comprehensive investments, collaboration helped schools improve. The Zone created a community among struggling schools who would work with each other. Third, the Zone articulated that school improvement was best supported by a centralized support structure, a starkly different understanding from the Department who had restructured its centralized support structure with the understanding that schools would be better supported with customized supports from individual network teams. Fourth, the integration of an oversight committee of parent, community, and student leaders represented CEJ's underlying belief that school reform was sustained through school and community leader partnerships. The NYCDoE articulated in its framings that it saw parents primarily as individuals with individual concerns about their own children, and assigned parent involvement in school decision making to school choice.

CEJ efforts to enact a multi-pronged strategy were met with difficulty. Most of its focus was directed toward the School Transformation Zone. Despite building a broad constituency of support and passing a resolution for the Zone in the City Council, discussions of the School Transformation Zone with NYCDoE administrators proved fruitless. Organizing in the PLA schools also proved difficult. Neighborhood member groups were challenged to organize in schools where they had no base or relationship. Leaders met parents who had little information about the school or the school system. Moreover, groups were taxed to organize in PLA schools at the same time that they were organizing in their own neighborhoods. In an attempt to counter to school closure policy, CEJ had started to operationalize a shift from a coalition of neighborhood school model to a freelance model. CEJ saw this move necessary to the efficacy of its organizing but its continued shift to operate outside of its structure, as I will discuss further in the conclusion chapter met more complications. In the past couple of years the New York City Department of Education reorganized from a centralized structure to one that appears as a decentralized model. As part of the Portfolio Management Model, this reorganization has effectively uncoupled local accountability to neighborhood schools. Ultimately I argue that the challenges CEJ comes up against is a result of a changing education landscape and public sphere, what I am calling “delocalized centralism.”

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Comparing Framings and Mapping New Strategies in Response to *Delocalized Centralism*

8.1 Introduction

The work of transforming the lowest-performing schools has moved to the center of school reform policy and school reform debates. New York City continues to be looked upon as a national model for but questions remain as to whether an unwavering commitment to school choice, test-based accountability, and a new management structure are narrowing or actually widening school achievement gaps. Policymakers may be confident that reforms they are heralding like school closings will create the bold changes that are necessary for public schools, but what will be the measurement for whether or not these reforms are successful? Throughout this study I have presented data on how school and community leaders conceptualize and approach school improvement work. In this last chapter, I give emphasis to the differences between two fundamental and non-communicative visions of educational equity, accountability, and community engagement between the NYCDoE and CEJ and consider what these differences holds for the future of New York City public education.

In concluding, I also focus on the significance of governance shifts that have occurred in the public sphere of public education. *Decentralized centralism* helps to explain how the transference of administrative control from the Central Office to network teams and schools serve as a mechanism for tightening centralized decision-making at the same time as allowing for more decision-making at the school level. It also explains how the NYCDoE has simultaneously removed itself from the accountability structure to families and the larger public. The central finding of this dissertation is the role that *delocalized centralism* plays as part of decentralized centralism and as foundational to the Portfolio Management model, and the challenges it presents to the communities

it purports to serve. Delocalized centralism better explains how accountability has become de-placed and how families are left without actual places to go with their questions. The remapping of the school governance terrain does not just pose new challenges to families; it also poses new challenges to education organizing.

8.2 How do School and Community Leaders Frame School Closure Policy and Enact their Positions on School Closing Proposals?

In Table 8.1 below, I return to three focal terms in this dissertation (equity, accountability, and community engagement) to underscore essential differences in school improvement work. A focus on the contrast between NYCDoe and CEJ framings illustrates how these two organizations conceptualize common buzz terms in education in fundamentally different ways.

| Table 8.1 <i>Contrasting NYCDoe and (NYC)CEJ Framings</i> | | |
|--|--|---|
| | NYC DoE | NYC CEJ |
| <i>Educational Equity</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice • Competition/Natural Selection • School independence from the neighborhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic access • Comprehensive and ongoing supports for all schools • School interdependence with the neighborhood |
| <i>Accountability</i> | Centered on schools, based on test scores | Shared across inter-related stakeholders |
| <i>Parent and Community Engagement</i> | Parents as market agents choose schools best for their own children | Parent and community leaders in collaboration with school and district administrators make decisions about schools |

8.2.1 Educational equity. To the NYCDoe, educational equity is achieved through choice, competition, and independence from the neighborhood. According to their framework, school choice affords all families including those least served by the system, decision-making power to better determine their children’s educational experiences. It is important to note that in this model choice for those least well-served extends their options outside and beyond their immediate locale, a provision that families with monetary wealth have by virtue of their financial ability to move to

and live in neighborhoods with schools that they desire. In addition to providing families decision-making power, the NYCDoE understands that school choice will motivate schools to compete for parent and student customers. Competition is believed to facilitate a natural selection by which the best schools attract the most customers and the weakest schools go out of business.

Choice is conceived to deliver educational equity by leveling participation in the school selection process. But choice framed in this way is misleading. As discussed in Chapter six, some schools in NYC are not available to all students. A few NYCDoE administrators recognized that historic policies preserve selective enrollment schools but were resigned to accepting this as a policy for which they would not be able to garner support to change. The concentration of students who are excelling academically in some schools constitutes one form of segregation, and ensures another: the concentration of students who are struggling academically in other schools.

Department officials' hesitation to confront those families and communities who insist some schools maintain their selective enrollment status (and practices) suggests that choice in of itself cannot level participation in the school selection process, and that uneven school enrollment practices will continue without interruption.

NYCDoE administrators seem to support choice policy in part because they realize they cannot alter the larger economic infrastructure in society, and in particular the unevenness of distribution of economic resources between and among families living in various income neighborhoods. In this way, NYCDoE administrators are not insensitive to the struggles families without monetary supports have in selecting schools, but their equity strategy is short-sighted because it dismisses the importance of neighborhoods. Their model does not recognize, and it certainly does not put a premium on those families who live in low-income neighborhoods and who desire for their children to attend school in that neighborhood. The model also does not recognize

the importance of relational proximity and its representation as a form of control, authority, and power over school decision-making. Lastly, choice policy appears to relieve the NYCDoE from a commitment to ensure that all neighborhoods in New York City have excellent schools.

In direct contrast to the NYCDoE's conceptualizations of equity as choice and competition, CEJ's defines equity as democratic access and as comprehensive and ongoing support to all schools. Additionally, while the NYCDoE's choice model dictates educational equity is achieved by affording parents options to send their children to schools outside of their neighborhood, CEJ's school improvement model articulates that educational equity is achieved through providing all neighborhoods with great schools. School choice does not represent full nor ongoing input in school decision-making to those leaders who see unlimited potential for parent knowledge and expertise in school reform and policy, and who see parent and community expertise as instrumental to sustainable school improvement efforts.

Both the NYCDoE and CEJ recognize the role of neighborhoods in shaping school success, and more particularly a school's dependence on the functionality of the neighborhood in which it resides. School administrators however understand the larger neighborhoods in which many struggling schools reside as a deterrent to school success. This helps to partially explain why NYCDoE administrators have sought to restructure the school system in a way that operates independently of neighborhood boundary lines, and that detaches schools from their surrounding communities. By contrast, CEJ, like other community-based groups is dually committed to school and neighborhood regeneration; they see school improvement imperative to neighborhood revitalization as much as they see neighborhood health as a predictor of a school's functionality. As a result, it is crucial to CEJ that school improvement efforts be linked with larger social and

economic equity campaigns and address the life and security of the neighborhood (including enormous challenges like poverty, housing, jobs, etc.).

An additional point of disconnect between school and community leaders' theories of school improvement concerned their perspectives on schools as organizations. NYCDoE administrators were unequivocal that failing institutions would not be able to reinvent themselves, even with additional resources. By contrast, CEJ underscored that schools were failing because they lacked comprehensive supports and opportunities for collaboration. In the School Transformation Zone, CEJ outlined that comprehensive supports would be targeted toward both strengthening pedagogical strategies (teacher training and professional development) as well as creating structural changes to schools, such as expanded learning time. CEJ also imagined that participating schools would have regular opportunities for cross-school collaboration to share promising strategies and common challenges, and to form supportive relationships in contrast to the competition principle CEJ leaders referred to as "sink or swim." The NYCDoE also tended to gage a school's ability to turn itself around based on its evaluation of the school leader, whereas CEJ accounted for the principal's leadership, along with the leadership of teachers, families, and students.

The NYCDoE never acknowledged that schools on the closure list had been neglected for decades under its own watch. Its refusal to take responsibility for its role in schools failure has brought conflict on for itself. In the STZ, CEJ could have been more explicit about the difficulty of improving struggling schools, beyond allocating resources. Moreover, inviting a number of schools that were struggling into one zone would likely have exacerbated dysfunction. Interestingly enough, the following year after CEJ introduced the School Transformation Zone, the NYCDoE introduced one Children's First Network for all closing schools although its purpose was to provide schools support while they were phased out, not to facilitate improvement.

8.2.2 Test-based Accountability. NYCDoE administrators placed a heavy emphasis on how schools are performing based on graduation rates, as well as on the metrics they designed (Progress Report and Quality Review). These tools have indeed put a much-needed focus on how schools, administrators, and teachers are serving students. However the definition and measurement of performance as defined by these tools remains narrow and the NYCDoE has not developed the right mix of incentives and consequences in place to encourage authentic learning in the classroom.

At present, the evaluation system is neither accessible nor clear enough for educators and the larger public to trust it or the Department's intentions in advocating for it. At times, administrators have seemed more committed to perfecting their performance tools, than understanding the experiences of students and teachers in schools – what the tools are supposed to measure. The sophistication of the Department's accountability system has also helped to insulate itself. There are very few people that understand how the metric work or have the time to follow all of the changes to the tools themselves. The uniqueness of the NYCDoE evaluation system challenges any evaluation of it itself. Moreover, the NYCDoE accountability model places the entirety of responsibility for student success on the school itself, when decades of research show other factors, like poverty matter (Anyon, 2005b; Noguera, 2010; Orfield & Chungmei, 2005; Rothstein, 2004).

Feedback from school communities and the larger public during the school closing process was an opportunity for the Department to understand the limitations of their own thinking about how to measure school and student performance. That opportunity seemed to be largely missed; Central Office administrators tended to dismiss all considerations that school administrators and educators named, hearing them as excuses for schools' low-performance and as evidence of schools'

unwillingness to take responsibility for educating students. A standard Department's response to any challenge to its evaluation system was "do you not want any accountability?"

CEJ agreed that there should be rigorous academic standards for all children, but disputed schools and school leaders alone were responsible for students meeting these standards. CEJ drew attention to elements outside of the school that impede school and student success; their analysis pointed to historic funding inequities and systematic neglect of schools. While CEJ acknowledged the role of poverty, they did not see it as an excuse for not demanding high expectations of schools and students. Their school improvement platform elevated the need to provide additional supports to students so that they could succeed. The School Transformation Zone feature of a longer school day so students would have access to both academic and social supports is one way CEJ recognized the importance of providing additional supports. CEJ's School Transformation Zone did not constitute an anti-poverty approach however; it did not target the broader systemic policies that impact school and student performance (Anyon, 2005b). Instead it targeted interventions at the school level: increasing resources and supports for schools to improve.

In the School Transformation Zone, CEJ did not elaborate on alternative ways for measuring school and student performance or measuring principal or teacher effectiveness. It did envision that schools would provide a rich college preparatory curriculum rather than be most concerned with tests, and it prioritized ongoing supports to teachers to develop their everyday classroom practice. Without an alternative plan for measuring school improvement however, models like the School Transformation Zone would have to rely on those evaluation tools that school district leaders are currently using. But it is important to note that central to CEJ's design of the School Transformation Zone was the collaboration of a variety of stakeholders (parents, community leaders in education, union officials, advocates, etc.) who would help guide the school improvement

process alongside administrators and teachers. This core component of the School Transformation Zone reflects CEJ's vision for a shared responsibility for both school failure and school success.

Lastly, CEJ's School Transformation Zone did specify that schools would have three years to demonstrate improvement but did not outline what would happen if after that timeline, schools did not make improvement. School closings have come into prominence not just through market-trends in public education, but because of the reality of persistent miserable school failure. Although CEJ was explicit that they did not oppose all instances of school closings, they did not quantify (or qualify) at what point they would deem that sufficient resources were allocated to consider a school closure, beyond the three-year mark. School and community leaders must detail what benchmarks would need to be reached (along the way) to constitute improvement, what supports could be brought in to assist school efforts at various stages, and what steps would be taken for schools that are unable to meet benchmarks.

8.2.3 Parent and community engagement. NYCDoE equates parent engagement with school choice. School choice framed as providing families' decision-making power is misleading. Choice offers a fairly limited lever for parent control – it only concerns parents' selection of school models for their children. It does not afford parents additional control over their child's schooling experience. It is more appropriate to say that Department officials advocate choice because they reason it is a more appropriate and manageable channel for parent involvement (selecting school programs versus evaluating policy for an entire system).

In my study, I found that Department officials generally frame parents as self-interested actors concerned only about their own children who do not think holistically about the impact on all students and families. Central Office administrators' framings posited parents as irrational agents with ample information to make educational decisions, or ignorant pawns of special interest groups

such as the UFT. Department officials also generally understand parents' knowledge about schools and the schools system as limited. Choice is the cure-all medicine that the Department prescribes, but choice channels parent involvement in individualistic and narrow ways; it affirms parents have limited knowledge and only affords parents application of that limited knowledge in the interest of their own children.

Most significantly, the Department's choice policy puts the onus for student educational experiences on parents. It turns parents' attention away from demanding accountability of education administrators and policy makers to provide excellent schooling for all children. Ultimately, choice ideology communicates that a market model would best facilitate the self-interest parents naturally display in regards to their children's education. The Department's engagement model is void of discussion of community partners.

School choice does not have the same purchasing power among leaders who understand choice as a limited way for parents to impact the lives of schools and children, and who understand that choice process can only access a fraction of parent expertise of schools, neighborhoods, and children. CEJ parent leaders' very participation in school improvement efforts defies traditional notions of parents who only care about their own children, as well as traditional notions of parents' knowledge of education as limited. Throughout their *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* campaign, CEJ leaders repeatedly said that parents ought to "have real input" in the decisions that affect their children's schools. Often in discussions at CEJ, "real input" was juxtaposed to the processes instituted by NYCDoE administrators and Mayor Bloomberg, which CEJ argued systematically disregarded parent, community, and student input. Parent and community engagement to CEJ meant being engaged in what their children were learning, in what policies were

being adopted that would affect their learning, as well as being able to provide ongoing input into these decisions.

CEJ efforts in reframing and expanding parent engagement in school reform were directed more at defining parents as critical partners that ought to be included in critical decisions that impact students and schools, than in figuring out how parent’s input would be accessed or measured once they were seated at the table. In the School Transformation Zone, CEJ posed that parents, along with teachers, students, administrators, and community group leaders as part of school-based coordinating committees would make collective decisions about the design, implementation, and monitoring of the STZ. CEJ also posed that a citywide coordinating committee of top NYCDoE educational officials (the Chancellor or Deputy Chancellor), and representatives from community and union groups would monitor and troubleshoot the larger initiative. In a proposal the mechanism for integrating parent and community input could not be very detailed.

Table 8.2 below contrasts how NYCDoE and CEJ enactments: what they each identify as the problem and what they each suggest as solutions. I also underscore how they each understand the role and the responsibility of the Central Office in school improvement work.

| Table 8.2 <i>Contrasting DOE and CEJ Enactments (through the PMM and STZ)</i> | | |
|--|---|--|
| | NYCDoE | CEJ |
| | “if a school doesn’t get results we got to try something different...let’s create some competition so everyone is held to a very high standard” (Klein, 2010) | “we realize there’s an educational crisis but we believe an educational crisis requires an educational plan” (Parent leader, 2010) |
| What is the problem? | Schools’ inability to produce results | System’s inability to address inequities in and surrounding schools and to provide adequate support |
| Who is responsible? | School leaders (principals) and teachers are responsible for school outcomes | Districts, schools, and communities are responsible for school success |
| What is the role of the central office? | The Central Office is a manager of a “contracting regime” providing evaluation and monitoring external | The Central Office is a centralized structure providing direct support to schools, working with school and |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| | partners to provide support to schools | community leaders on designing and implementing a school improvement plan |
| What is the solution? | Close Failing Schools Redesign schools as part of an open marketplace | Provide Schools Support Build and maintain schools as part of communities |

8.2.4 What is the problem?/Who is responsible? School and community leaders now agree that low-performing schools are a problem, but they fundamentally disagree on what is the cause. The Department has successfully defined school failure as the result of schools themselves: school leaders’ (primarily teachers, but also principals) inability to help their students achieve better results. CEJ has defined school failure as a result of the system’s inability to address persistent schooling inequities. Again, this analysis focuses on the Department’s failure to address persistent inequities and to provide adequate supports. Whereas NYCDoE has positioned school-based individuals as responsible for school outcomes, CEJ positions the larger system (central office, schools, and communities) as collectively responsible for school success.

8.2.5 The role of the Central Office. The school closing process reveals differences in understandings DOE and CEJ leaders have about the ideal management structure for the school district. NYCDoE administrators discuss their new management strategy as “empowerment,” highlighting principals’ increased administrative control of schools, and network teams’ role in providing supports to schools. The Department, however, does not publicly account for the specific responsibilities of network teams to schools, or their own efforts in monitoring and evaluating networks. CEJ leaders contemplated that an emphasis on principal empowerment often came at the expense of parent and community leadership essential to long-term school success. In my time observing CEJ’s *Fix Our Schools, Don’t Just Close Them* campaign, I did not record any CEJ discussions or analysis of the Department’s new support structure (network teams). However,

through their campaign, and specifically the School Transformation Zone, I did note that some CEJ leaders realized a sharp distinction between the centralized role for the Central Office they were advocating in the STZ and the Department's emphasis on individual school principal's decisions.

The Department does not publicly account for the specific responsibilities of network teams to schools, or their own efforts in monitoring and evaluating networks. In the fall of 2012, the NYCDoE was asked to testify at the City Council about the efficacy of the network structure. Department officials acknowledged that they had not clearly or adequately explained the network structure to the larger public but argued that principals continue to be satisfied about the services networks provide their schools (fieldnotes, 2012). Principals are surveyed annually on network teams but this information is not released to the public. I will return to a discussion of network teams in the next section.

8.2.6 What is the solution. NYCDoE administrators offer school closures as a promissory note for better choices and outcomes. There is no consequence for school central office administrators who do not deliver on these promises or for the failure of any proposed reforms. School closings do not offer a guarantee for better school replacements and better schooling experiences. Arguably, in this equation families have more to lose in having their neighborhood school seats taken away from them, even when neighborhood schools are struggling. CEJ has consistently argued that school closure policy does not provide a targeted or comprehensive strategy to improve schools. Its School Transformation Zone elevated the visibility of alternative models for school improvement, but Department officials have not shown any weighty consideration to alternatives. This is true across the country, not just in New York City. In this next section of the conclusion, I argue that the realization of school closures is made through the Portfolio Management Model pillars of choice, test based accountability, and decentralized

centralism. I will then argue that school closings and the new portfolio management model in urban school reform rest on a principle that I am calling *delocalized centralism*.

8.3 Recalling Decentralization and Clarifying Decentralized Centralism

8.3.1 Decentralization. The term “decentralization” has no precise meaning but refers to movement from center to periphery (Brown, 1990). Historically in governance systems, decentralization has been used to describe a transfer of authority in management. Interest in decentralization developed in the 1970s with the reformulation of governments in both Western and Eastern Europe (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). That reformulation favored a reduction of the role of central government, and an increased role for the market to manage problems.

Across the globe and across sectors, decentralization as a management strategy has emerged in response to general and widespread frustration with the archetypal “top down” management model. The consensus has been that centralized management strategies, in which a central operator sets policy and collects and redistributes resources is inefficient, compliance-driven, expensive, and outdated. In contrast to centralization, decentralization has been generally understood as an efficient, innovative, and responsive form of governance. It is purported to allow for better mobilization of resources at the local level because of more familiarity, more hands on deck, and more careful and better use of funds (Weiler, 1990). Decentralization management strategies have also been considered more effective as they are more performance-driven than compliance-driven.

Decentralization in the public education sector has followed a similar line of thinking. Throughout the first part of the 20th century, school systems generally followed Weber’s (1922) classic bureaucracy and civil service model characterized by a hierarchical organization, delineated lines of authority, and organizational rules. However, as the school system expanded it weakened the capacity of a centralized system to maintain quality. Decentralization strategies were thought to

better manage a bulky system that was not making enough progress. Weiler (1990) noted that the conditions for decentralization tend to include a preoccupation with quality and efficiency, along with a general disillusionment with centralization.

During the 1980s, 60% of the nation's school districts with 50,000 or more students, decentralized due to a convergence of forces: demands from diverse constituencies for input into school decision-making; a general consensus that massive bureaucracies were not effectively responding to widely varying needs of schools and school communities; a growing competition for public school dollars from school choice and privatization advocates; and concerns that schools were not keeping pace with a changing society (Stinnette, no year¹²⁷). Decentralization also came into prominence alongside the marketization of public education, where private sector principles were beginning to be adopted for the management of the school system (Wolhsetter & McCurdy, 1991).

In the 1980s, decentralization generally took the form of school-based management (Ornstein, 1989) or community control (Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, & Sebring, 1993). Malen et al. (1990) elucidated that school-based management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures, "a form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvement might be stimulated and sustained" (p. 290). The argument in favor of school based management models was that empowering school administrators and teachers would give them greater control of school outcomes. The argument in favor of community control was that decentralizing decision-making authority to parents and communities would ensure decisions best reflect the priorities and values of those local

127 <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envmmnt/go/go0dcent.htm>

communities (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998). Charter schools emerged in the early 1990s as a decentralized management strategy in the form of self-governing schools (Wohlester et. al, 1995).

As reviewed in Chapter four, the rationale for decentralization in current day New York City is three-fold:

- 1) **Context:** NYCDoE administrators have stressed that schools have individual and particular needs. Subsequently, there is an understanding that a centralized management strategy could possibly respond to so much variance with uniform set of answers, as no one set of answers would be effective for all schools.
- 2) **Efficiency:** Decision-making at the school level by the principal is understood to yield more effective results. Increased flexibility and autonomy are considered to better situate and aid principals to lead school and student success.
- 3) **Accountability:** In the Children's First Reforms, autonomy is granted in exchange for accountability. Principals sign performance contracts to accept their sole responsibility for school outcomes. It is important to recall that NYCDoE Central Office administrators consistently refer to principal autonomy (their control of budgetary and staffing, as well as their self-selection of network teams) to attribute failure solely to the school, and to justify school closing decisions.

As one central administrator summarized, "we have a system of accountability...we've given principals autonomy over their schools and, in exchange, we're holding them accountable" (interview D2, December, 7, 2010).

8.3.2 Decentralized centralism. As Karlsen (2000) has outlined, decentralized centralism is a more accurate framework for understanding the dynamic process between centralization and decentralization that occurs in an educational decentralization process. I look at decentralized

centralism in the school closing process by looking through a lens of power and authority (differences among NYCDoE administrators' framings, and differences in levels of authority). As Karlsen theorized, decentralization of administrative control does not necessarily realize a shift in power from the central office to the school level. While affording schools some micro level decision-making, the Central Office of the NYCDoE has retained macro level decision-making power. Second, decentralized centralism appears to have "a conflict-reducing function" (Karlsen, p. 533) for the Central Office. Network teams appear to buffer the Central Office from any direct answerability to schools or school communities. I focus on both of these points further before discussing a particular form of decentralized centralism that has become evident through the school closing process: *delocalized centralism*.

8.3.2.1. Decentralization of administrative control does not necessarily realize a shift in power to the local level. The core premise of empowerment is that principals are given the tools to make strategic choices for the benefit of their students. Empowerment gives the impression that principals have autonomy and control over all aspects that will impact school and student performance. The school closing process however raised questions about how much authority has been moved to the school level and whether principals indeed have more autonomy in this new arrangement.

The most vivid example of this concerns school enrollment. Many schools on the closure list argued that they were serving a disproportionate number of students who needed more supports, and that their resources were not sufficient to adequately support all of these students. While NYCDoE administrators often explain any patterns of school enrollment as a function of choice, enrollment formulas and procedures are directed by the Central Office. A major theme that emerged through the school closing process was that school enrollment decisions are outside of the school's jurisdiction. Principals of schools proposed for closure talked about being "punished for doing what

was morally right,” accepting all students who walked through their doors, their data suffering as a result. Other interviews substantiated that even successful school leaders are not clear how the central office facilitates the matching process between student and school choices (fieldnotes, 2011).

Department officials interpreted schools’ assertions that they were serving a disproportionate number of vulnerable students as an excuse and as a euphemism for “send us better kids,” and in some cases, that interpretation may be correct. Schools, principals, and teachers may be blaming students themselves for not being able to achieve academic success, and may not be taking responsibility for their inability to help students to succeed despite their struggles. But there is fair scrutiny on behalf of principals, teachers, and the larger public that schools are set up differently in working with students. The recent report from the Independent Budget Office report (2012) confirmed that schools on the closure list in 2011-2012 have been serving students with greater needs compared with other schools, and that the percentage of students in special education or in temporary housing attending these particular schools has been increasing at a faster rate than schools across the city as a whole.

A second example concerns the Central Office operation as the sole evaluator of schools’ performance. Currently there is no oversight of the Central Office’s setting of performance targets for schools, of devising accountability tools to measure performance, or of evaluating school performance in general. Each of these practices is the sole jurisdiction of NYCDoE administrators to which school level administrators and teachers have no input. The sophistication of the Department accountability system has also helped to insulate it – its uniqueness is not something the federal or state government can easily assess.

8.3.2.2. Decentralization appears to have “a conflict-reducing function.” In the new decentralization, schools are autonomous units. Their autonomy is realized in their separation *from* the Central Office. While this has relieved schools from having to respond to the Central Office in ways previously required, it has also meant schools cannot rely on the Central Office in the same ways that they had for support. The question that surfaced consistently throughout the school closing process, and which in turn raises questions about the revised relationship between schools and the Central Office is how the new system of accountability works.

In the school closing process, the Central Office repeatedly asserted how it holds schools accountable for reaching standards, but additional questions remain as to how the Central Office is accountable for providing schools support. With the introduction of the network teams, it appears the Central Office has completely written itself out of direct accountability to schools for academic and operation support services. The data I collected throughout the school closing process evidenced that families were not aware of the Department’s new management and support structure; families did not know who or what the network team was or did. Moreover, it appears that it is up to individual network teams to design avenues through which families can ask them questions. There is no structure for family and community engagement within network teams. While Network Leaders’ names are listed on each school’s website, to my knowledge the Department is not doing anything more to facilitate families’ connections to those administrators now responsible for providing their children’s schools with support.

My data also suggested a tenuous accountability relationship between Network Leaders and principals, as in some cases neither knew how to hold the other accountable. Network Leaders are hired by principals, and therefore can be severely restricted in their feedback to those same principals. At the same time, I learned that principals often did not know how to hold Network

Leaders accountable for their school supports even though a contract stipulated they had firing power. Lastly, in my research, I documented that a small number of Network Leaders and teams were associated with a large percentage of schools proposed for failure in the school closing process in school year 2009-2010. 5 of 60 Network Leaders were working with 13 of 19 schools proposed for closure. Those particular network leaders no longer work in that capacity. But clearly, more research is needed on the supports network teams provide and their efficacy in doing so. Principals do formally rate Network Leaders annually but this data is not publicly available. Principal satisfaction ratings will not be sufficient for determining the efficacy of network teams.

8.4 The Delocalizing aspect of Decentralized Centralism

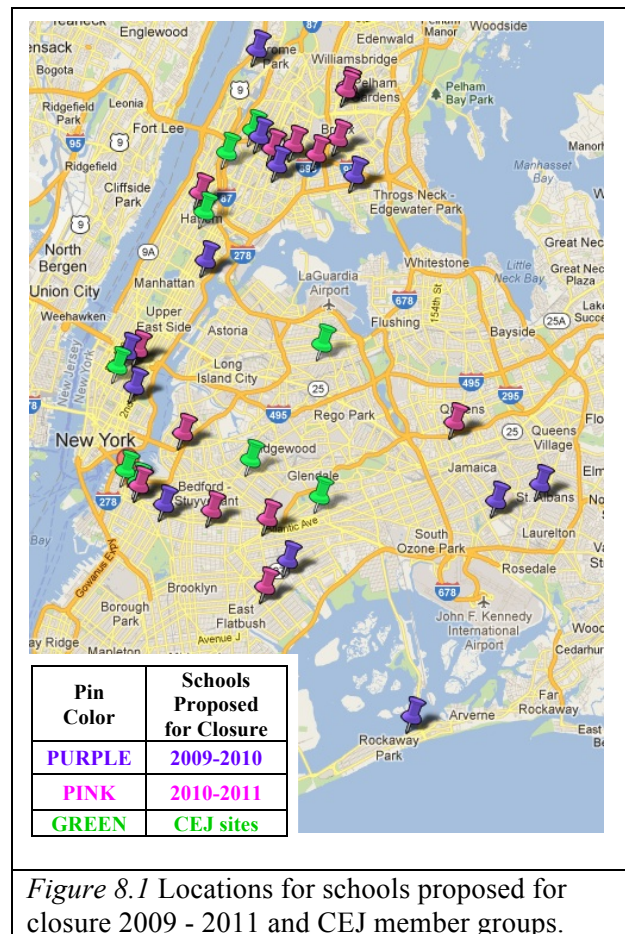
Decentralized centralism in New York City school governance appears to have a *delocalizing* function as well as a *delocalizing* impact. The Central Office's displacement of accountability, as well as instances of network team's inaccessibility is made possible in part through a de-placement or delocalization of accountability. The decision to move to ageographic network team configurations has removed specific places where parents can go to ask their questions. Arguably, no matter how effective network team members are in providing support to schools, their ageographic nature makes them inaccessible. Furthermore, as they are currently configured network teams lack a formal structure to engage with families in an ongoing way. Parents need to know where to go to ask their questions and need an intimacy with the people who are responsible for their children's education. As discussed, while Superintendent's offices remain in the former designated and geographically school districts, they no longer serve as places where parents can get full answers. The new management structure has circumscribed the authority of the Superintendent. *Delocalized centralism* realizes the transference of authority to an entity that places itself outside of the accountability measures that parents would typically exercise.

8.4.1 Shifting strategies to respond to *delocalized centralism*. Following the announcement of school closings proposed in 2010-2011, CEJ spent a considerable time organizing in schools proposed for closure. Schools proposed for closure in 2010-2011, like in 2009-2010, were not located in CEJ member group neighborhoods. But as discussed at the conclusion of 2009-2010, CEJ leaders had determined that they would organize in those schools proposed for closure even if they were not located in their neighborhoods, so to challenge the NYCDoE’s school reform framework.

Figure 8.1 shows CEJ member group locations in comparison to the sites of schools proposed for closure in year one (2009-2010) and year two (2010-2011). With a handful of exceptions, schools proposed for closure were not located in the same neighborhoods as CEJ groups.

As with their experience organizing in the persistently low achieving (PLA) schools, CEJ leaders found that operating outside of their structure was taxing and untenable. Member groups were challenged to staff organizing efforts outside of their neighborhoods, and CEJ’s membership structure did not allow for the absorption of individual parent leaders who wanted

to get more involved in CEJ organizing. Additionally, CEJ leaders found that there were no local targets that they could pressure. In a couple of instances, CEJ demonstrated outside of



Superintendents' offices and found Superintendents willing to meet, but without the authority to respond. The recentralization of the school system without neighborhood based districts or structures, is what I'm calling *delocalized centralism*.

At the end of school year 2010-2011 and at the conclusion of my data collection, CEJ determined they would radically ratify their structure to allow them to more flexibly organize and to grow their membership base outside of their neighborhoods. In a new freelance model, what CEJ sometimes referred to as "rapid response" CEJ could more flexibly and quickly respond to hot-button issues like school closings wherever they took place. From its inception, CEJ articulated that it needed to move beyond the local to have more impact on policy. Neighborhood groups joined collaborative efforts and then combined forces to start to think of their organizing work on a city wide level. The *Fix Our Schools, Don't Just Close Them* organizing campaign was not CEJ's first citywide campaign, but it represented its first campaign largely outside of CEJ neighborhoods. This meant organizing in locales where CEJ had no base, nor relationships. It required groups to have the ability to staff new relationships and base-building efforts, and to help leaders negotiate competing organizing demands.

8.4.2 Implications for organizing. Figure 8.2 on page 269 demonstrates shifts in organizing strategy both in geographic scope and in the degree of structural change proposed. The literature has focused more on how education organizing has changed in degree of structural change, and less in how it is changing in geographical scope. CEJ's School Transformation Zone demonstrates its organizational shift from a local neighborhood organizing strategy to a hybrid model that includes a freelance strategy. This freelance strategy of sending organizers into schools in neighborhoods that are demographically similar but in which organizers do not necessarily have relationships challenges traditional notions of base-building.

Neighborhood organizing groups, which tackled disparities in public schools, initially focused on issues facing school buildings in their immediate locales. They applied pressure to secure resources but they also confronted ineffective principals. Collaborative organizing campaigns expanded their geographic scope to support schools in neighboring districts. BEC, for example, fought for science supports for schools in four districts across the borough of Brooklyn. CC9s work transformed education organizing efforts as it focused on strengthening the instructional capacity of teachers. The School Transformation Zone promoted a set of structural reforms for schools to improve; distinct from earlier organizing efforts (both those that are neighborhood-based and those as part of collaborative campaigns), CEJ promoted these set of reforms in schools similar in demographic characteristics to those in which they have worked but in areas where they did not have a base nor the kinds of strong relationships that sustain organizing efforts.

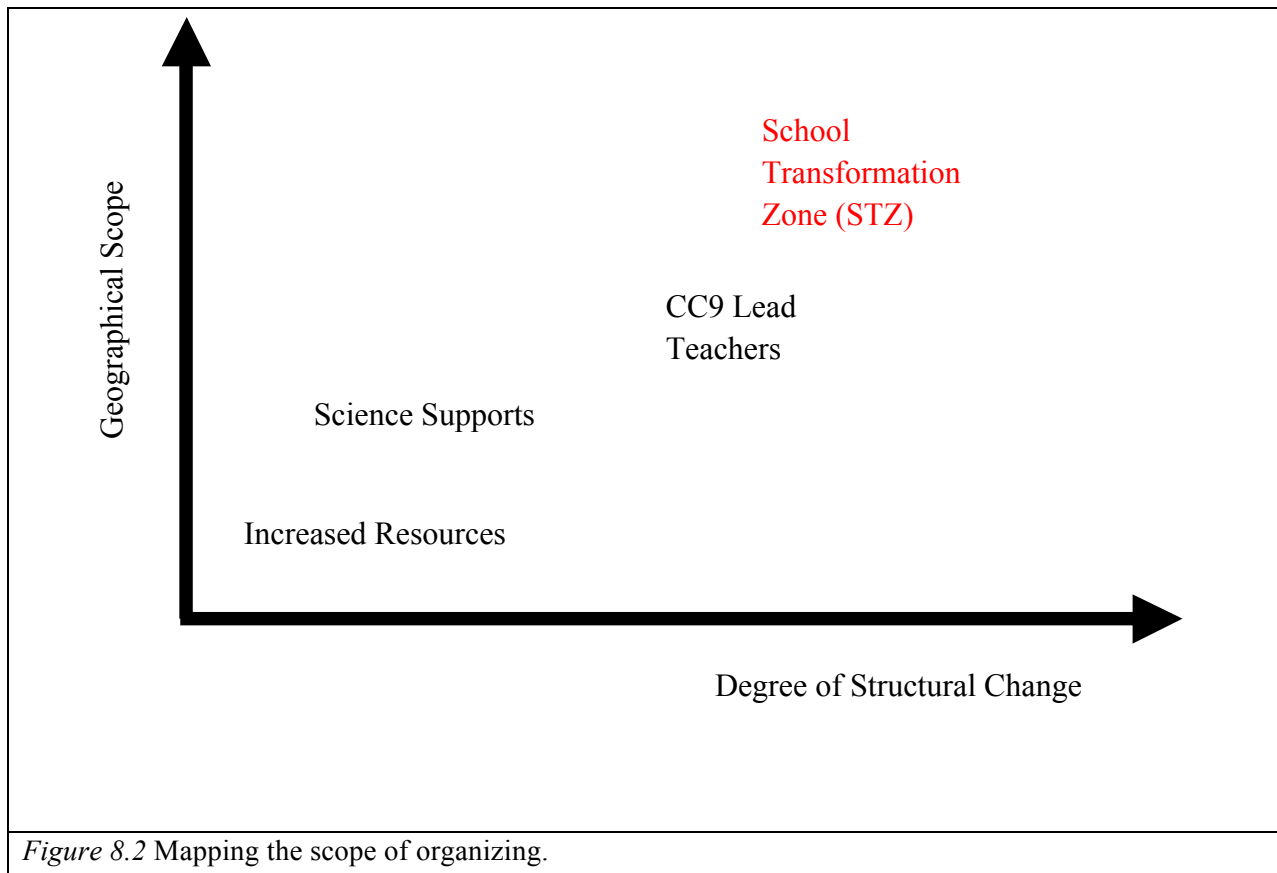


Figure 8.2 Mapping the scope of organizing.

8.5 Revisiting the public sphere in *delocalized centralism*

After decades of school reforms that have not moved test scores and graduation rates, the Portfolio Management Model (PMM) has tried to break new ground with school closings as its axis. PMM can be understood as a franchise model of school governance; it is not place specific, nor place bound. It fails to recognize and dismisses the critical interdependence of schools with the larger community it serves and creates, undermining the local quality of both the school and its setting. The ideological debate about whether or not PMM is a market-based reform, a more insidious neoliberal retrenchment, or whether it should be understood as a contractual regime (Henig, 2010) may continue. That debate however will likely miss the significance of locality to school success.

Delocalized centralism helps to explain how the Portfolio Management Model is restructuring and reshaping schools' relationships to neighborhoods, as well as the larger public sphere of school governance. Accountability channels have become removed from local school governance arrangements. This dynamic has left families at a loss for where they can go with their questions, and with whom exactly they need to talk to get answers. It has also ensured that administrators who make decisions about schools are isolated from those most affected by their decisions. This may make school decision-making processes more efficient, but it will not help teachers, students, and their families.

The terrain of school governance has shifted considerably in the past decade in NYC under Mayoral control. Understanding the new topography, not just the recentralization of power, but the delocalizing aspect of the PMM is critical for organizing groups that want to take hold of new ground. School closings are the current battle over defining equity, accountability, and community engagement. A key aspect of this battle will be determined by the terrain, over which it is fought.

Appendix A
Closed Schools 2003-2009

| School Name | District | Borough |
|---|----------|----------|
| Adlai E. Stevenson High School | 8 | Bronx |
| Evander Childs High School | 11 | Bronx |
| I.S. 143 | 10 | Bronx |
| I.S. 158 Theodore Gathings | 12 | Bronx |
| I.S. 174 Eugene T. Maleska | 8 | Bronx |
| I.S. 191 | 12 | Bronx |
| I.S. 192 Piagentini-Jones | 8 | Bronx |
| Individual Pathways | 10 | Bronx |
| J.H.S. 113 Richard R. Green | 11 | Bronx |
| J.H.S. 135 Frank D. Whalen | 11 | Bronx |
| J.H.S. 222 | 7 | Bronx |
| M.S. 201 School of Theatre Arts Research | 8 | Bronx |
| M.S. 378 Carroll Gardens C.S | 15 | Bronx |
| Morris High School | 12 | Bronx |
| New School for Arts and Science | 8 | Bronx |
| P.S. 156 Benjamin Banneker | 7 | Bronx |
| P.S. 220 Mott Haven Village School | 7 | Bronx |
| Second Opportunity Schools | 79 | Bronx |
| Theodore Roosevelt High School | 10 | Bronx |
| Walton High School | 10 | Bronx |
| William H. Taft High School | 10 | Bronx |
| Bushwick High School | 32 | Brooklyn |
| Campus Academy for Science and Math | 17 | Brooklyn |
| Comprehensive Night High School of Brooklyn | 18 | Brooklyn |
| Erasmus Campus – Humanities | 17 | Brooklyn |
| Erasmus Campus Business/Technology | 17 | Brooklyn |
| George W. Wingate High School | 17 | Brooklyn |
| Harry Van Arsdale High School | 14 | Brooklyn |
| High School of Redirection | 23 | Brooklyn |

| School Name | District | Borough |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| I.S. 232 The Winthrop | 18 | Brooklyn |
| I.S. 252 Arthur S. Sommers | 18 | Brooklyn |
| I.S. 271 John M. Coleman | 23 | Brooklyn |
| I.S. 275 Thelma J. Hamilton | 23 | Brooklyn |
| I.S. 391 | 17 | Brooklyn |
| I.S. 55 Ocean Hill Brownsville | 23 | Brooklyn |
| J.H.S. 117 Francis Scott Key | 13 | Brooklyn |
| J.H.S. 258 David Ruggles | 13 | Brooklyn |
| J.H.S. 33 Mark Hopkins | 14 | Brooklyn |
| J.H.S. 49 William J. Gaynor | 14 | Brooklyn |
| M.S. 143 Performing and Fine Arts | 16 | Brooklyn |
| M.S. 390 Maggie L. Walker | 17 | Brooklyn |
| NYC Vocational Training Center | 79 | Brooklyn |
| P.S. 183 Daniel Chappie James | 23 | Brooklyn |
| P.S. 304 Casimir Pulaski | 16 | Brooklyn |
| P.S. 314 | 20 | Brooklyn |
| Prospect Heights High School | 17 | Brooklyn |
| Thomas Jefferson High School | 19 | Brooklyn |
| Auxiliary Services | 79 | Manhattan |
| Career Education Center | 79 | Manhattan |
| Columbus Middle School | 3 | Manhattan |
| Future Leaders Institute | 3 | Manhattan |
| I.S. 164 | 6 | Manhattan |
| I.S. 184 Rafael C. Y. Molina | 75 | Manhattan |
| I.S. 275 | 5 | Manhattan |
| I.S. 90 | 6 | Manhattan |
| J.H.S. 56 | 1 | Manhattan |
| J.H.S. 99 | 4 | Manhattan |
| Martin Luther King High School | 3 | Manhattan |
| MIAVA | 4 | Manhattan |
| P.S. 162 | 75 | Manhattan |

| School Name | District | Borough |
|---|-----------------|----------------|
| Park West High School | 2 | Manhattan |
| Powell Middle School for Law & Social Justice | 5 | Manhattan |
| Seward Park High School | 2 | Manhattan |
| The Program for Pregnant and Parenting Students | 79 | Manhattan |
| I.S. 180 | 27 | Queens |
| I.S. 198 | 27 | Queens |
| J.H.S. 168 The Parsons | 25 | Queens |
| Offsite Educational Service | 79 | Queens |
| Springfield Gardens High School | 29 | Queens |

Appendix B
 Graduation and Enrollment Data for Schools Proposed for Closure, 2009-2010

| School Name | IBN # | District # | Graduation Rate For 2008-2009 | Enrollment as of | | Date Proposed for Closure |
|--|--------|------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------|---------------------------|
| Academy of Collaborative Education | 05M344 | 5 | MS | 10/31/2009 | 195 | 1/8/2010 |
| Academy of Environmental Science | 04M635 | 4 | 51.1 | 10/31/2009 | 452 | 12/4/2009 |
| Beach Channel High School | 27Q410 | 27 | 46.9 | 10/31/2009 | 1345 | 12/7/2009 |
| Business, Computer Applications, and Entrepreneurship High School | 29Q496 | 29 | 57.4 | 10/31/2009 | 488 | 12/10/2009 |
| Choir Academy of Harlem | 05M469 | 5 | 57.5 | 10/31/2009 | 417 | 12/9/2009 |
| Christopher Columbus High School | 11X415 | 11 | 40.3 | 10/31/2009 | 1423 | 1/8/2010 |
| Frederick Douglass Academy III | 09X517 | 9 | | 10/31/2009 | 594 | 12/16/2009 |
| Global Enterprise High School | 11X541 | 11 | 50.9 | 10/31/2009 | 473 | 1/8/2010 |
| Jamaica High School | 28Q470 | 28 | 46.2 | 10/31/2009 | 1527 | 12/17/2009 |
| KAPPA II | 05M317 | 5 | MS | 10/31/2009 | 142 | 1/8/2010 |
| Metropolitan Corporate Academy | 15K530 | 15 | 47.1 | 10/31/2009 | 419 | 1/8/2010 |
| Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence | 17K334 | 17 | MS | 10/31/2009 | 237 | 12/10/2009 |
| Monroe Academy for Business/Law | 12X690 | 12 | 52.1 | 10/31/2009 | 475 | 12/10/2009 |
| New Day Academy | 12X245 | 12 | | 10/31/2009 | 461 | 12/10/2009 |
| Norman Thomas High School | 02M620 | 2 | 42.7 | 10/31/2009 | 2179 | 12/10/2009 |
| P.S. 332 | 23K747 | 23 | | 10/31/2009 | 500 | 12/10/2009 |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------|----|------|------------|------|------------|
| Paul Robeson High School | 17K625 | 17 | 40.1 | 10/31/2009 | 1020 | 12/8/2009 |
| The School for Community Research and Learning | 08X540 | 8 | 43.9 | 10/31/2009 | 385 | 12/4/2009 |
| W.H. Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School | 19K660 | 19 | 43.4 | 10/31/2009 | 985 | 12/10/2009 |

Appendix C
Progress Report Results for Schools Proposed for Closure, 2009-2010

| School Name | 2007-2008 Progress Report Grade | 2008-2009 Progress Report Grade | 2009-2010 Progress Report Grade |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Academy of Collaborative Education | C | D | D |
| Academy of Environmental Science | C | D | D |
| Beach Channel High School | C | D | D |
| Business, Computer Applications, and Entrepreneurship High School | C | D | D |
| Choir Academy of Harlem | C | D | D |
| Christopher Columbus High School | C | D | D |
| Frederick Douglass Academy III | D | C | C |
| Global Enterprise High School | C | C | C |
| Jamaica High School | C | D | D |
| KAPPA II | C | D | D |
| Metropolitan Corporate Academy | C | D | D |
| Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence | C | C | C |
| Monroe Academy for Business/Law | C | D | D |
| New Day Academy | MS: C / HS: "Progress Reports were not available because high schools do not receive Progress Reports until they have a four year graduation rate" pg 3 | MS: C / HS: D | C |
| Norman Thomas High School | D | D | D |
| P.S. 332 | C | C | C |
| Paul Robeson High School | C | C | C |
| The School for Community Research and Learning | B | C | C |
| W.H. Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School | D | D | D |

Appendix D
Quality Review Results for Schools Proposed for Closure, 2009-2010

| School Name | Quality Review Results 2007-2008 | Quality Review Results 2008-2009 | Quality Review Results 2009-2010 | Education Impact Statement: School's Failure to _____ |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Academy of Collaborative Education | Underdeveloped | Underdeveloped | Underdeveloped | "to make sufficient progress" pg1 |
| Academy of Environmental Science | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | "had not made significant progress for its students" pg 1 |
| Beach Channel High School | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "shown a lack of capacity to improve student performance in significant and consistent ways." pg 1; "had not made significant progress for its students" pg 1 |
| Business, Computer Applications, and Entrepreneurship High School | Proficient | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | "had not made significant progress for its Students" pg1 |
| Choir Academy of Harlem | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made sufficient progress for its high school students" pg2 |
| Christopher Columbus High School | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "School lack capacity to improve student performance." pg 1; "has not made significant progress for its students" pg 2 |
| Frederick Douglass Academy III | well developed | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made sufficient progress for its middle school students" pg 2 |
| Global Enterprise High School | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | "shown a lack of capacity to improve student performance in significant and consistent ways" pg2 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| Jamaica High School | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made significant progress for its students" pg 1 |
| KAPPA II | Underdeveloped | | Underdeveloped with proficient features | "had not made sufficient progress for its students" pg1 |
| Metropolitan Corporate Academy | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped | Underdeveloped | "had not made significant progress for its Students" pg1 |
| Middle School for Academic and Social Excellence | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | Underdeveloped with proficient features | "had not made significant progress for its Students" pg2 |
| Monroe Academy for Business/Law | Proficient | Underdeveloped | Underdeveloped | "had not made significant progress for its students" pg 2 |
| New Day Academy | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made significant progress for its Students" pg1 |
| Norman Thomas High School | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made significant progress for its Students" pg1 |
| P.S. 332 | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made sufficient progress for its students" pg 1 |
| Paul Robeson High School | Well Developed | Proficient | Proficient | "has not made significant progress for its students" pg1 |
| The School for Community Research and Learning | Proficient | No QR conducted as per Division of Accountability and Achievement Resources review cycle criteria | Proficient | "had not made sufficient progress for its students" pg2 |
| W.H. Maxwell Career and Technical Education High School | Proficient | Proficient | Proficient | "had not made sufficient progress for its students" pg1 |

Appendix E
Public Hearings School Closing Statements

SCHOOL A

This is a proposal to transform an institution from one that is not graduating many of its students to one that is achieving that objective. To make a high school graduation rate of [x%] represents a trend where many students over years have not graduated from this school and while the school serves a significant percentage of English language learners and significant number of children with special needs, we know that we have many schools but are getting dramatically different results. That is why this school has a D on its Progress Report. Students at [this school] have often times been falling behind early in their education. This is why in the 2008/2009 school year only (x%) of freshman earned 10 credits and as you know a student must average 11 credits per year in order to graduate. Even if this is an important indicator of future successes we believe that [this school] will continue to struggle. Additionally parents and students are not electing to attend the school. [x#] listed the school as their first choice on this year's high school application. Under this proposal [this school] will not accept a 9th grade in 2010 and in subsequent years. *Instead new schools will replace [this school] over time taking a 9th grade and then growing as [the current school] phases out. I want to be clear about a couple of consequences of this proposal. Number 1, all students currently enrolled in the school will have the opportunity to graduate from [this school]. Number 2, new schools in school building where a school has phased out are obligated to hire at least 50% of the qualified staff who apply for positions. And Number 3, all new schools in the building would serve English language learners and students with special needs.*

SCHOOL B

This proposal is something that the Department takes very seriously and has considered in a comprehensive manner. *Over the past six years the Department of Education has phased out over 90 schools, and we have opened 335 new schools that have demonstrated remarkable success in helping students excel. For example our new high schools have achieved an average four year graduation rate of 75 percent, well above the city wide 60 percent average. Even though those schools serve some of the city's highest need students, this proposal will continue that important work. Now, I want to be clear that the Department of Education is not blaming any individual or group for this situation, but we have determined that it is important to give students the best possible opportunity for long term success. We know that there a lot of people, many of who are here tonight, working incredibly hard every day to support students at this school. But we simply cannot continue doing the same things and expect that we will get different results. I want to talk about the specific criteria we have used now. [This school's]*

graduation rate is extremely low and it is declining. In 2009 the school graduated 40% or only two out of five of its students. And if only Regent's diplomas counted toward graduation, as will be the case in two years, the graduation rate would be 20% or one out of five students. These figures represent a precipitous drop from 2008 when the graduation rate was nearly 57%. Simply put, graduating two out of five students does not meet any standard of success. While [the school's] academic achievement numbers are low, the school's organization culture and learning environment are also deeply troubled. On the 2009 school survey only (x%) of students said they felt safe in school. In conjunction with an attendance rate that was among the city's lowest last year and enrollment that hovers just above a thousand students, down (x#) from just four years ago, it is clear to the Department that this is a school that is not serving our children well. Clearly [this school] serves a challenging student population. That said [this school] is no different from any other schools [in this neighborhood] in that respect. However it is simply not achieving the same results. At [this campus] three schools in [this school's peer group], each serves a similar challenge population and yet, each earned an A, or a B on its progress report. *I want to be clear about the consequences of this proposal and state very, very clearly all students currently enrolled in this school will have the opportunity to graduate from this school, and we will continue to support the school during the three year phase out period. We have no plans right now for a replacement school for September 2010. What we will do over the next year is work with you and the community at large to plan for a replacement school in the building.*

SCHOOL C

This is a proposal to transform an institution from one that is not graduating many of its students to one that is meeting that objective. [This school's] four-year graduation rate is x% well below the citywide average of 60%, represents a [inaudible] where not even half the students graduate. If only Regents Diplomas counted for graduation which will be the case in one year, this school will only have a graduation rate of 29%. This is reflected in the fact that in 2009 [this school] received a third consecutive "C" on the Progress Report. Additionally parents and students are not electing to attend the school. [This school] represents 4.1 applications per seat which is a decline from 4.7 they received in 2008. In addition attendance at the school is below average; attendance was only 7% - that is lower than 82% of the high schools in New York City. *There is not one person or group of people responsible for the school's lack of achievement but it is important that we know we can do better. We give students the best possible opportunity for school success. We know that there are a lot of people working incredibly hard every day to support the students and the school but the city cannot continue doing the same things and expect we will get different results. Under the proposal the school would not accept a 9th*

grade in the 2010, and in subsequent years. Instead smaller schools will replace it over time. This is not a proposal to close the school building; it is a proposal to change the way the building is organized. *Over the past six years the Department of Education has phased out over 90 schools, and we have opened 335 new schools that have demonstrated remarkable success in helping students excel. For example our new high schools have achieved an average four year graduation rate of 75 percent, well above the city wide 60 percent average. even though those schools serve some of the city's highest need students. It is important to be clear about the consequences of this decision. All students currently enrolled in the school will have the opportunity to graduate from [this school]. We will continue to support the school during the three- year phase out process. Two, new schools are obligated to hire at least 50% of the qualified staff who apply for positions. Three, new schools after [this school] will serve a variety of students including Special Education students and English language learners and will also provide [inaudible] programs.*

Appendix F
Public Hearings Coding of Speaker Categories

| Speaking | School A | School B | School C | Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Alumni | 13 | 8 | 20 | 41 |
| Alumni/Community Resident | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Alumni/Coach | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Assemblymember | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Assemblymember/Community Member | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Assistant Principal | 0 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Borough President Office | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Business Owner/School Partner | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| CBO | 3 | 0 | 4 | 7 |
| School Council: CCHS | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| School Council: CDC | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| School Council: CEC | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| School Council, Former CEC | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| School Council: CEC Other | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| School Council: PTA President | 2? | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| School Council, Former PTA | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| School Council: SLT | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Coach | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Community | | | | |
| Community | | | | |
| Councilmember | | | | |
| Councilmember | | | | |
| Council of Supervising Admin | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Education Activists | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Former Teacher | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Guidance Counselor | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Non Identified Person | 4 | 0 | 4 | 8 |
| Parent of Current Student | 3 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Parent of Graduated Student | 2 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Parent Advocate | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| PEP Representative | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Principal | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| School Partner | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Senator | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Sibling of student | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Student | 9 | 4 | 13 | 26 |
| Student, other school | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Student, former at school | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Student, future | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Teacher | 8 | 10 | 13 | 31 |
| Teacher, former | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Teacher, other school | 2 | 5 | 5 | 12 |
| Teacher, community member | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Teacher, alumni | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher, retired | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| UFT Central | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| UFT District | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| UFT Staff? | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| UFT Chapter Leader | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |

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