

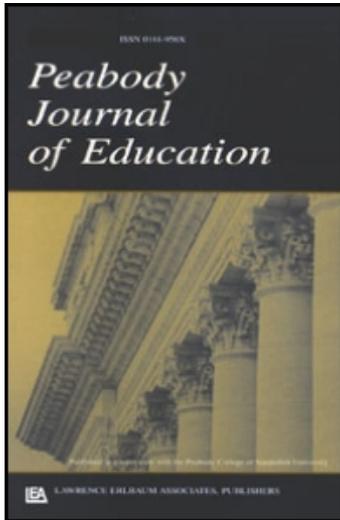
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“External” Organizations and the Politics of Urban Educational Leadership: The Case of New Small Autonomous Schools Initiatives

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Members of organizations traditionally outside public school systems have begun to take on central, and in some cases internal, leadership roles and responsibilities in the implementation of ambitious educational improvement initiatives. How are these arrangements playing out in practice? This article explores that question with a 3-year qualitative investigation of the participation of two such organizations—a school reform support organization and a consortium of foundations—in the implementation of new small autonomous schools initiatives in Oakland (California) and Chicago. Using Malen’s politics of implementation framework, this article reveals how external organizations influenced the implementation of district initiatives with significant consequences for both the reform strategy and their own ability to sustain their involvement in implementation over time. The article concludes with implications for the research and practice of educational leadership.

Private and nonprofit organizations, such as philanthropic foundations and school reform organizations, typically appear in educational research under the headers “external support providers,” “intermediary organizations,” and “nonsystem actors”—as organizations that work with but distinctly outside public educational systems (Coburn, 2005; Honig, 2004a). However, the participation of these organizations in certain urban districts suggests that not all operate in external, supporting, intermediary, or nonsystem roles.

For example, not only do some private philanthropic foundations make grants to support school reform activities conducted by others, but their officers sit as voting members on local education reform boards, assume district central office positions, and otherwise take on leadership roles and responsibilities in implementing ambitious educational improvement initiatives

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(Gammon, 2007; Hess, 2005). Some nonprofit school reform support providers have assumed formal responsibility for running request-for-proposal (RFP) processes and helping create and launch new schools (e.g., Davidson, 2002). Such work seems well beyond familiar forms of districts contracting out for services and penetrates the core of traditional central office roles and responsibilities. These examples suggest that members of some traditionally external organizations arguably operate inside public education systems either formally, by taking on specific posts within central office subunits and boards, or by otherwise assuming responsibility for work fundamental to what central offices do. How, more specifically, are these organizations participating in education policy implementation in urban districts? What are the results of their participation?

This article explores these questions with a comparative, qualitative case study of the participation of private and nonprofit organizations in the implementation of new small autonomous schools initiatives in Chicago, Illinois, and Oakland, California. These initiatives called on organizations formally outside their respective public school systems to assume central leadership roles in implementation and therefore offered particularly relevant cases for this inquiry. The Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI) and Oakland’s Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) approached these demands in quite different ways and offered important opportunities for contrast. Using Malen’s (2006) politics of implementation framework, I show that despite their formal leadership position with respect to the initiative, CHSRI actually operated in the traditional mode of some private philanthropic foundations—seeking to exchange funding, some support, and information for influence and otherwise working to change schools and the central office from the outside in. In the end, another reform agenda displaced theirs. By contrast, BayCES’s leaders took responsibility for core implementation work that might have otherwise been left to leaders within the public school system. Past and present BayCES staff also worked within the system in various formal capacities essential to implementation. These insider strategies fueled school and central office improvements and BayCES’s ongoing influence within the district. I discuss why the two organizations operated differently, why their efforts yielded different results, and the implications for future educational leadership research and practice.

BACKGROUND

Brian Rowan offered a fairly comprehensive typology of how organizations outside formal school systems participate in school systems at the district-level, mainly through the provision of goods and services. He referred to these organizations as part of a “school improvement industry” (Rowan, 2002). Participants in this sector include for-profit organizations such as textbook publishers and vendors, membership organizations like professional associations, and nonprofit organizations including universities and research firms. Rowan argued that school-system change dynamics, particularly system resistance to change, partly result from product-exchange relationships between school systems and organizations in the school improvement industry. For example, textbook publishers’ profit margins partially depend on school systems purchasing their materials over multiple years. When school systems select textbooks and develop curriculum and professional supports around them, they, too, become invested in maintaining their

use in ways that can aid improvement but can also deter reconsideration of such materials in ways that may hamper improvement.

These and other dynamics of product-exchange relationships may capture how some external organizations and school systems interact. However, other interactions involve not only or mainly product exchanges but human exchanges—the participation of employees from these organizations in the design and implementation of educational policy initiatives; relationships between external organizations and school districts then may entail not only the exchange of ideas and funding but also the movement of people into formal central office positions and lines of work. These relationships may result from informal agreements, memoranda of understanding, partnerships and other arrangements different from the fee-for-service contracts typical in product-exchange relationships.

The limited research on external organizations reveals how external organizations operate outside public school systems to support others' work or to advocate for or against particular reform agendas mainly carried out by others but not how they take on formal public leadership roles inside school systems. For example, I have shown how community organizations can enhance various resources essential to central office administrators' work (Honig, 2004a, 2004b). Coburn (2005) elaborated how "nonsystem actors" significantly shape which policy messages teachers receive and engage. Marsh (2007) showed how community organizations and citizens may increase district knowledge and relationships important to realizing accountability policy goals. These studies highlight external organizations' leadership *support* functions, including resource provision and messaging. However, they do not illuminate the internal participation of traditionally external actors.

This literature does commonly reveal political dimensions of how these organizations operate outside school systems, suggesting that a political analysis might provide a useful starting point for a fuller conceptualization of their more internal participation. In my own studies, community organizations generated political capital important to district central office administrators' practice. Marsh surfaced political challenges which arise when community partners participate centrally in public policy processes. Rowan's typology, too, reveals political power dynamics of the insider–outsider exchange relationships.

New small autonomous schools initiatives provide a strategic opportunity for exploring the potentially new forms of participation of traditionally external organizations. As designed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, these initiatives deliberately designated external organizations as the main fiscal agents for these initiatives on behalf of the local public school system, setting up those organizations as central initiative leaders. Studying them increased the likelihood that I would observe traditionally external organizations operating in internal ways. In 2000, the foundation awarded \$15.7 million to the nonprofit BayCES to create a regional initiative with an initial focus on seeding and supporting new small autonomous schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Likewise, in 2001 and 2003, the foundation gave over \$20 million to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) through CHSRI, a consortium of local funding organizations. According to several experts across the country, the Gates Foundation made these awards to these "intermediary organizations" rather than public school systems based in part on the assumption that their leadership would influence educational improvement more powerfully than school districts operating alone or with external organizations' more peripheral participation. Given frequent leadership turnover in some urban districts, positioning external organizations as main fiscal agents also promised to increase accountability for the grant funds.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To anchor an exploration of CHSRI’s and BayCES’s participation in implementation, I turned to Malen’s politics of implementation framework. This framework derives from research on the politics of policy implementation. Because it foregrounds the influence strategies of particular actors as consequential to implementation outcomes, this framework helps reveal political dynamics of how actors exercise leadership in policy implementation (Malen, 2006; Northouse, 2006). At the heart of Malen’s framework, individuals—in this case, members of external organizations—seek influence over other actors’ participation in ways that align with their own interests and resources. Northouse might distinguish these actors as leaders because they aim to influence others toward achieving particular goals. These actors, whether school system insiders or outsiders, influence change not necessarily or mainly through their formal positions or mandates, but by whatever strategies help them marshal other actors’ support for their priorities.

Various conditions may mediate the success of external organizations’ influence strategies. Other actors’ interests and resources may not align with their interests and prompt those others to derail policy goals. If underlying policy premises and “currencies”—the resources associated with a policy—are particularly controversial, leaders may face formidable challenges in marshaling support for those policies. Institutional and sociocultural conditions such as long-standing political struggles for control over education and local social norms also mediate the strengths of these influence strategies (see Shipps, 2003; Stone, 2001). Accordingly, implementation results not from the sheer power of a given actor or influence strategy but from how actors, policies, influence strategies, and contexts interact.

These interactions unfold over time in fairly predictable patterns called political games (Bar-dach, 1977; Firestone, 1989; Malen, 2006). For example, the politics of policy dilution results when actors’ influence strategies fail to align with policy premises and other actors’ interests and resources, and when dimensions of the sociocultural and institutional context do not support such alignment. The politics of policy amplification may occur when actors do achieve this alignment. The games concept prompts researchers to explore how influence strategies play out over time and contribute to predominant political reform dynamics.

This framework focused my inquiry on the following specific research questions: Who are the main actors in implementation and what are their interests and resources? What main influence strategies do they employ over time? What outcomes seem associated with their influence strategies? How do actors, policies, influence strategies, and dimensions of their implementation contexts interact in ways that mediate how reform dynamics play out over time?

METHODS

I explored these dynamics with data from a broader comparative qualitative case study of new small autonomous schools initiatives in CPS and OUSD that captured the early years of implementation in each district.¹ The two districts offered important opportunities for contrast as elaborated in the Findings section. This article draws on 112 interviews with 78 respondents and evidence

¹I conducted field work between 2000–03 in OUSD and 2003–06 in CPS. For an elaboration of the research design and methods, see Honig (2009).

from meetings convened to support implementation. Interviews probed how actors participated in implementation and conditions that mediated actors' participation. CPS meeting data included minutes from CHSRI Board meetings between January 7, 2002, and July 17, 2005. In OUSD I directly observed school board hearings, central office staff meetings, and other implementation meetings. I also conducted extensive reviews of documents in each district including local newspaper articles, policy documents, e-mail correspondence, and Listserv postings. I wrote detailed field notes to highlight key observable dimensions of the implementation context in each district.

I analyzed these data using NVivo software in several phases. First, I coded for basic dimensions of implementation including: policy design features, actors' participation in implementation, outcomes, and conditions that helped or hindered implementation as well as for data type. Subsequently, I selected Malen's framework to guide this subanalysis and refined my coding with codes derived from her framework. For example, within data coded as "participation," I distinguished activities consistent with "influence strategies." I ultimately reported those strategies that I could verify with at least three different types of data sources (i.e., interviews with three different respondents or a combination of interviews, observations, and documents). Likewise, I reduced the data on "outcomes" to those I could associate with specific influence strategies using at least three different data sources.

FINDINGS

Although CHSRI and BayCES were similarly positioned as fiscal agents and formal leaders, their actual influence strategies and outcomes differed greatly. CHSRI's participation was consistent with the traditional outsider influence strategies of some private philanthropic foundations—seeking to trade funding, support, and information for influence. Although successful in other arenas, in this case, such influence strategies did not achieve many of the central office or school changes CHSRI sought. In the end, CPS absorbed CHSRI schools into another initiative, spearheaded by CPS and the Chicago business community, which differed in some significant ways from CHSRI. Such dynamics reflect the politics of policy dilution—processes by which lead actors fail to align other actors' interests and resources with their own and with policy premises and currencies. By contrast, BayCES employees took on work and formal positions that would otherwise have fallen to district employees. These insider influence strategies seemed to fuel positive school and central office changes that weathered the school district's takeover by the State of California. BayCES's influence grew even as district administrators came to participate more centrally in implementation.² Such dynamics reflect the politics of policy amplification, which reveals "how education systems and their surrounding communities . . . develop the governance structures and the cross-sector coalitions . . . that install and sustain major education reforms, particularly in urban centers" (Malen, 2006). For an outline of influence strategies in each district, see Table 1.

²These claims relate to findings up until 2003 in OUSD and 2006 in CPS. They do not necessarily reflect the current state of implementation in these districts.

TABLE 1
Comparative Influence Strategies

	School-Level Influence Strategies	Central Office-Level Influence Strategies
CHSRI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing grants and developing grant-related requirements • Coaching support mainly tied to grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - About schools - To CPS executives
BayCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing school incubation and ongoing coaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing, modeling, and transferring the Small Schools Incubator as a model of central office operations • Designing and helping implement a model of central office transformation

Note. CHSRI = Chicago High School Redesign Initiative; CPS = Chicago Public Schools; BayCES = Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools.

CHICAGO: THE POLITICS OF POLICY DILUTION

In this section I argue that CHSRI’s main influence strategies only occasionally leveraged their intended central office- and school-level changes. In the end, its initiative was displaced by another in ways that significantly dampened CHSRI’s ongoing influence.

Actors: Interests and Resources

CHSRI Board members were mainly local foundation officers who, in one member’s words, “bought seats at the table by contributing to the Gates Foundation match”—the requirement that local districts match Gates Foundation grant funding. Other CHSRI voting members included the Gates Foundation, the Chicago Teachers Union, the Chicago Mayor’s Office,³ and CPS.⁴ The president and chief executive officer of the Chicago Community Trust and the chief education officer for CPS co-chaired CHSRI. CHSRI staff included an executive director with a reputation for significant expertise in community and youth development. Even so, many respondents overwhelmingly associated CHSRI with Chicago-based foundations. For example, most CPS administrators in interviews repeatedly referred to CHSRI and its board as “the foundations.”

According to documents and interviews, CHSRI aimed to improve students’ academic achievement, increase graduation rates, and prepare students for postsecondary opportunities. To this end, CHSRI planned to create upwards of 30 small schools by converting some large comprehensive high schools into multiple small autonomous schools and, beginning in 2003, by creating new stand-alone schools called “new starts.”

³A review of meeting minutes from the study period suggests that the mayor’s office was a limited participant in CHSRI—not appearing on the meeting attendance list in 2002 or after February 2003. In January 2005, they were dropped from the attendance list as someone whose absence was noted.

⁴The document “Update of CPS and CHSRI RFP Process,” dated May 17, 2004, provides an historical overview of the CPS/CHSRI RFP process. This document specifies that voting members of the initiative board have included the CPS chief executive and academic officers, the president of the Chicago School Board, the mayor’s office (with two votes), and the Chicago Teachers Union, in addition to local funders and the Gates Foundation.

At the outset of the initiative, CHSRI's resources included funding from the Gates Foundation's initial \$12 million grant as well as the local foundation match. One CPS central office administrator commented that CPS's total contribution to the initiative significantly dwarfed CHSRI's but that CHSRI's contribution was still "larger than any other fund currently being contributed to the Chicago Public Schools." This individual commented that CHSRI resources also included "all the very important players in the city, [people who are powerful] not just for the money they control [now] but for future money." Two other central office administrators reported that CHSRI also brought "the political buffer or the political engine that is formed by the foundations—the national [Gates] foundation and its drivers, and then the locally-based foundations and its drivers—that both catalyzes the system to change and helps to cover the system in times of trouble during the change."

Main Influence Strategies

To realize their goals, CHSRI aimed to influence schools directly. They also worked to change CPS central office policies and practices to support such school changes.

School-Level Influence Strategies. Study data overwhelmingly suggested that CHSRI sought influence over school-level change using requirements tied to school grants as a main lever. CHSRI Board members and staff agreed that the several stages of their grant application process provided multiple formal and informal opportunities to interact with and intervene in school decision-making processes to improve school-level implementation. Interviews with CPS and CHSRI staff as well as CHSRI Board minutes and other documents revealed that as part of their application process, CHSRI staff visited prospective applicants, assessed their readiness to participate, and reported results to the CHSRI Board. After the RFP was issued, CHSRI required schools to submit evidence of their readiness including letters of intent, the application itself, and typically, multiple budget justifications and revisions. CHSRI frequently made a school's receipt of funding contingent on their satisfactory response to these reporting requirements, as well as multiple rounds of other questions. CHSRI Board meeting minutes and member interviews suggest that one full application cycle consumed between one half and two thirds of their meeting time each year and was their single most time-consuming agenda item. Respondents' comments also supported my claim that CHSRI's main school-level influence strategy involved requirements tied to funding. For example, one respondent reflected, "I think they see themselves very much more like a traditional funder who says 'I got a pot of money, here, do your proposal.'"

CHSRI Board members and staff also intended coaching support to influence school-level changes. Both CPS- and CHSRI-affiliated respondents confirmed that CHSRI staff routinely counseled participating principals and required school-based teams to participate in an action research project. CHSRI also contracted with other organizations such as WestEd and Northwestern University to run workshops for schools on specific issues. However, these and other respondents commented that these areas of work were modest, especially early in implementation. Because the CHSRI Board often required schools to accept this support as a condition of receiving CHSRI funding, I viewed it as a component of CHSRI's grant-related influence strategies.

Central-Office Influence Strategies. CHSRI aimed to leverage central office change primarily by generating information about school-level implementation and sharing it with CPS members of the CHSRI Board through board meetings and formal reports. Their main information sources included an independent evaluation of the initiative involving a series of school snapshots, a qualitative analysis of professional learning communities within participating schools, and a mixed-methods analysis of student and school outcomes. Official meeting minutes of the CHSRI Board in 2002 indicated that CHSRI's Evaluation Subcommittee operated "to ensure that the local evaluation will help the Advisory [i.e., CHSRI] Board, the school system, and the participating schools. It is important that we get lessons learned that can be spread to other schools." Three CHSRI Board members explained that using evaluation as a central office influence strategy stemmed from board members' assumptions that its "real-time" information about participating schools could influence central office decision makers.

CHSRI Board meetings also almost always included progress reports on prospective or participating schools, created by CHSRI staff visits to schools and the schools' written responses to board members' questions. As one board member described these reports, "They . . . give the CHSRI Board . . . a sense of . . . how [school] people were doing; [CHSRI staff] are . . . doing all the day-to-day work and then summarizing what the [schools'] strengths and weaknesses are." Discussions about school reports frequently generated questions and/or ideas that foundation participants asked board members from CPS to consider. For example, in early 2002, the CHSRI Board asked CPS to develop a template for an accountability agreement with participating schools that specifically addressed such questions as, "Should schools be given a time limit to improve?"

CHSRI's approach to using information as a central office influence strategy reflected two underlying assumptions. The chief executive's office and others in what one respondent referred to as the "upper echelons" of the central office should be the primary audience for CHSRI's information, and if CPS executives had access to *school*-level information, they would be willing and able to respond in ways that reinforced CHSRI's agenda, including increasing CPS investments in the participating schools. As partial evidence of the first claim about the main audience for the reports, the CPS chief executive officer and chief academic officer were the only voting members from the school system on the CHSRI Board, and board meetings were the main forums where the evaluators presented their reports. Staff of the CPS new small schools office responsible for managing implementation, several Area Instructional Officers to whom the CHSRI school principals reported, and the CHSRI evaluators all confirmed in interviews that CPS staff outside the executive office had little to no input on the evaluations' design and were not a main audience for the reports even though they were heavily involved with those school.

Regarding the second assumption, the evaluation reports focused almost exclusively on school-level implementation issues and tangentially used principals' reports to highlight how the central office impeded implementation. When asked about this school-level focus of the evaluations, one CHSRI Board member commented, "I hadn't thought of this before you asked. But there is an operating assumption that if [central office executive staff] learn about what is going on at the schools then they will know what to do at the central office level. As opposed to analyzing, at the central office, what they are doing that may be of support or hindrance to what these schools could or should be. . . . If there are real needs at the central office [for an analysis of the central office] then the central office has to put a mirror onto itself."

Outcomes in Chicago

Arguably, the school application process worked as an influence strategy to expand the CHSRI initiative to an increasing number of schools. Between 2002 and 2006, 19 schools opened under the CHSRI banner, and by 2006 the CHSRI Board had specific plans to support an additional 9 schools.

However, the CHSRI grants and grant-related requirements were weak levers of school improvement and, perhaps, counterproductive. CHSRI staff members readily noted such limitations and attributed them in part to CHSRI's initial inexperience with school support. In the words of one, "Every time we get ready to release a [Request for Proposals] we start doing [technical assistance]. We back it out a little bit further and even then I think we have some limitations in terms of the amount of stuff that we have to offer. . . . I think this is kind of on the minimal end and I think it needs to be further developed."

CPS central office respondents most closely involved with CHSRI were generally positive about CHSRI's attempts to leverage school improvement through their grant processes. In the words of one, CHSRI has "made about as strong an effort as they could." Others in the CPS central office and outside CPS offered more critical assessments. In the words of one, CHSRI's approach to helping schools develop and implement school improvement plans "is to run workshops that pull a few teachers out and take them downtown on topics they have decided in advance without consulting or visiting with schools to determine what the schools really need. . . . They seem to have no real understanding that that doesn't get down into the classrooms at all."

Others indicated that the sheer number of reports CHSRI required negatively affected schools. "The principals feel like they are constantly being asked to do more reports, that there is no trust. . . . [The reports] are another set of obligations that distracts you from the very intense work of getting the school up and running properly. . . . I find a lot of times . . . they [school principals] are too overwhelmed . . . but they say, 'Hey, that is where the money is coming from. I had better salute.'" Another elaborated that the limitations of CHSRI's school-level influence strategies stemmed from their approach that "all of their schools have to [participate in workshops as a condition of receiving funding] regardless of whether it works for that particular school. It's all pull-out downtown; they are not in teachers' classrooms helping them."

Regarding central office change, multiple respondents reported that CHSRI helped advance a focus within the CPS central office on small high schools. One characterized CHSRI as a "catalyst. . . . I think they catalyze the process of changing education by making people think differently." Another added, "In terms of being concerned and involved, I would give them [CHSRI] an A. . . . In the last few years I have never heard Chicago talk about education in the way they are talking . . . now."

CHSRI's information-based influence strategies by many accounts leveraged at least two significant central office policy changes. For one, respondents unanimously attributed the creation of a separate Area Instructional Officer (central office administrators to whom all school principals report) for CHSRI schools to the information and attendant pressure generated by the CHSRI evaluation and extended discussions at CHSRI Board meetings. Advocates argued that a dedicated Area Instructional Officer would help ensure CHSRI principals received support and evaluations from someone well versed in their particular challenges and goals. Several CPS respondents also credited the timing and ultimate drafting of a revision of the school board's small autonomous schools policy to ideas and pressure generated by CHSRI Board members.

However, the CHSRI Board more typically raised issues—sometimes over many years—that did not result in CPS policy or practice changes. For example, at multiple meetings over two years the CHSRI Board discussed the importance of changing CPS enrollment policy for CHSRI schools from 600 students to no more than 500 students in keeping with initiative goals and CHSRI interests to shrink school size. Yet despite frequent formal and informal discussions, CPS leaders, citing budgetary concerns, ultimately decided not to lower the cap (Honig, 2009).

Although CHSRI was powerful enough for the CPS Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to consult with them about decisions such as appointing school principals, such consultations did not constitute evidence of CHSRI’s influence over those decisions. For example, in 2004 CPS decided to phase out freshman enrollment at two high schools that they ultimately planned to restructure as new small autonomous schools. Someone from the chief executive office contacted CHSRI staff before issuing a press release to ask if it was okay to say they would become part of the initiative even though the CHSRI Board had not yet voted on those schools. One respondent explained that such a call was a courtesy but not really necessary: “As a CEO, he can say whatever he wants.”

Attendance at CHSRI meetings provides another indicator of CHSRI’s limited influence on the CPS central office. A review of the 46 attendance rosters available for the period between January 2002 and July 2005 revealed that although the CHSRI co-chair from the philanthropic community attended 42 meetings, the CHSRI co-chair from the CPS CEO’s office attended only 27 meetings. Nor did the co-chair from CPS actually chair the four meetings that the other co-chair missed. The CEO of CPS attended only 10 of 46 meetings—most of them in 2002. At almost one third of them ($n = 13$) no voting member from CPS was present.

Approximately 2 years into the CHSRI effort, leaders from CPS, the Chicago business community, and the Chicago mayor’s office launched the Renaissance 2010 initiative to create 100 new schools by 2010, including charter schools that did not fit CHSRI’s priorities. Shortly thereafter, board minutes and interviews with CPS staff indicated CPS would include all new schools, including CHSRI’s, under Renaissance 2010.

In sum, the evidence suggests that the trajectory of CHSRI’s participation in implementation reflects the politics of policy dilution game. In this version, the CHSRI Board and staff members exerted minimal influence over the actions of the CPS central office and its schools. All respondents interviewed about the potential significance of Renaissance 2010 for CHSRI reported that Renaissance 2010 signaled a significantly diminished leadership role for the CHSRI. In fact, in 2008, the CHSRI Board dissolved.

OAKLAND: THE POLITICS OF POLICY AMPLIFICATION

The dynamics of BayCES’s participation in the new small autonomous schools initiative unfolded as the politics of policy amplification—the process by which cross-cutting coalitions come together to grow and sustain major education reforms. In this subsection, I describe these dynamics.

Actors: Interests and Resources

Unlike CHSRI that launched specifically to support implementation of the Gates Foundation grant, BayCES began 10 years earlier than the start of their Gates-funded small schools initiative

as a regional office of the Coalition for Essential Schools (Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, 2007). Their formal mission statement suggests BayCES's long-term interests included fostering dramatic improvements in "educational experiences, outcomes, and life options for students and families who have been historically underserved by their schools and districts. We do this by teaching, coaching and supporting school, district and community leaders to create and sustain systems of equitable and high performing small schools." BayCES's executive director described BayCES's interests in the new small autonomous schools initiative at an Oakland School Board hearing in 2003 in this way: "Our mission is to create and sustain a network of high achieving and equitable schools."

BayCES's starting resources included access to the Gates Foundation grant and the local match but also an established cadre of school reform support coaches whom they deployed mainly to OUSD schools. In addition, various data sources including other researchers' reports (e.g., Davidson, 2002; Mediratta et al., 2004; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2008) suggest BayCES also benefitted from formal and informal relationships with two other organizations, Oakland Community Organization (OCO) and OUSD, specifically to support implementation. OCO, a coalition of faith-based institutions, began organizing around the creation of new small autonomous schools in the mid-1990s. In 1998, OCO invited BayCES to partner with them in what OCO leaders called a "small schools movement." OCO leaders reported that they sought out BayCES as a main partner because they realized that OCO had high capacity to organize communities but not the ability themselves to help schools provide powerful and equitable teaching and learning. As one OCO leader described, "[OCO] organize people to rise up and take power back from systems that oppress them. Historically in many flatland [low-income] Oakland neighborhoods, that has meant the schools. But at some point when you are organizing people to create new schools inside the system, you need to work inside the system. That's where BayCES comes in." In 1998, OCO, BayCES, and OUSD formed the Small Schools Working Group to examine growing and supporting new small autonomous schools. Subsequently, in 1999 OUSD created a position of director of Small Schools and invited BayCES to help draft a new small autonomous schools policy which the Oakland School Board approved in 2000. BayCES then received \$15.7 million from the Gates Foundation to support new small autonomous schools of various kinds.

Main Influence Strategies

BayCES's influence strategies, like CHSRI's, focused on both schools and the central office. However, the nature of these activities departed starkly from CHSRI's: CHSRI's school-level influence strategies mainly involved grants and grant-related requirements, whereas BayCES's entailed more intensive school-by-school supports; CHSRI's central office influence strategies focused on making school-level information available mainly to executive CPS staff, whereas BayCES staff moved into the central office to design and help implement central office reform strategies that promised to help implementation.

School-Level Influence Strategies. BayCES invested a significant amount of time and other resources in designing and running the "Oakland Small Schools Incubator" in which OUSD required prospective and funded school teams to participate. The incubator, "supports

teams of family members, teachers, students, and others as they design new small autonomous schools, respond to the RFP, and open and operate their new schools” (OUSD, 2002, np). Various respondents’ reports and observations confirmed that the Incubator led teams, usually comprised of teachers and community members, through a process of establishing a vision for a new school and building relationships and a culture to support that vision. As one central office administrator described, “BayCES has a coaching mission. It is . . . pedagogical. It is relational. It’s about community visioning around what people want school to be for their children and the children they are teaching. And they have built the Incubator to engage schools in those processes before they officially apply for a small schools grant to help them get ready. And they wrap the Incubator around them after they receive the grant and beyond to help extend the work.” A school principal confirmed, “BayCES was there when we walked in the door [to start our school] and we went through the Incubator process and here on the other end they are here—in fact they are here [at our school] right now working with our . . . team.”

Central-Office Influence Strategies. BayCES also used the Incubator as a strategy for influencing central office change, specifically to model for central office administrators how to support school implementation. Some respondents called the Incubator a “school system incubator.” As the BayCES executive director explained, “So the Incubator, the way we are working with people, the creating of these alliances at the grassroots level is part of what we are trying to do to build a base [for reform] where we take accountability out of the big macro-system and put it into a local relationship. Still with the district being a major player but a new kind of player.”

Multiple OUSD central office administrators reported that they understood BayCES would ultimately, in the words of one, “turn over more and more of the work as we [in the central office] came on line to take it on.” As another explained, “Like we say, this reform is ‘community driven, BayCES supported, and district owned.’ BayCES has had a very significant role in being sort of the proxy for the district, so although they do a lot of that development it was being done in proxy for the district. So the Incubator was always a partnership with the district, BayCES, OCO. . . . [Early on] they [BayCES] took the lead on areas of curriculum related to the design of schools and what school designs should be but it is a partnership and those roles should change over time.”

Beyond the Incubator, BayCES also aimed to influence the central office by developing a model of a transformed central office that would better support implementation and by moving into formal central office leadership positions to help implement that model. As one school principal explained, BayCES, “just decided that there is no way to fix the district [central office] so they went this shadow district route . . . to create a district that is outside of the district that goes through an incubator process that models [i.e., resembles] the process that schools go through. Eventually, that becomes a district and the current district will get phased out.”

While developing their model for broader central office reform, BayCES’s leaders generated ideas and proposals for how OUSD might change specific central office policies to support implementation. For example, in 2003 when OUSD central office administrators were updating their school facilities master plan, BayCES commissioned a local researcher to generate recommendations for a state assembly bill to enable the new schools to occupy certain buildings temporarily while their permanent sites were constructed or retrofitted. The BayCES executive

director and an OUSD central office administrator, who is a former BayCES staff person, helped an assistant superintendent actually incorporate those ideas into the facilities master plan. Shortly thereafter, the BayCES executive director formally remained a BayCES employee but dedicated his professional time to work within the central office on developing and implementing their broader central office transformation plan.

Outcomes in Oakland

During my period of study, nine new small autonomous schools opened in OUSD, and almost as many were participating in the Incubator to prepare a future application. Between 2001 and 2003, OUSD central office administrators increasingly participated in the Incubator. For example, when asked in 2003 to what extent OUSD's participation in the Incubator had changed or remained the same in the preceding 2 years, one central office administrator reported, "I think we have got a much better idea of what the steps are to incubating a school. So we [central office administrators] added the implementation plan. That is a huge step and we had a major role in that. That was our curriculum. That was all our department people so that was a big step of ownership that the district took for this Incubator piece." School leaders confirmed that central office administrators increased their involvement in the Incubator, and, in tandem, the quality of the support they provided to participating schools.

In 2003, the new small autonomous schools initiative in Oakland faced a formidable threat to its sustainability: The state of California dissolved the local school board, removed the superintendent who championed the initiative, and placed a state administrator in charge of all school district operations. These developments could have fueled the dilution of the initiative, especially given that the state takeover stemmed from concerns about OUSD's fiscal management and that at the time the cost effectiveness of the initiative was disputed in local and national forums. Instead, the number of participating schools grew under state oversight. Many Oakland actors advocated for continuing the initiative so it is not possible to credit BayCES specifically with these outcomes. However, as an indicator of BayCES's contribution to this outcome, it was the new state administrator who ultimately invited the BayCES executive director to work within the central office on their central office transformation plans. By many accounts, including observations from my ongoing research in OUSD, BayCES's ideas about central office transformation became *Expect Success!*, a major, multimillion dollar initiative to recreate nearly all central office functions to support principles consistent with the new small autonomous schools initiative (OUSD, 2007).

In sum, these dynamics reflect the politics of policy amplification. They demonstrate how over time BayCES's influence helped leverage deeper school and central office engagement in implementation. BayCES-originated ideas served as the blueprint for broader, ongoing central office reforms and, by the end of my data collection period, the BayCES executive director and another former BayCES staff person had taken on significant lines of work within the central office to advance the initiative goals to which BayCES was fundamentally committed.

COMPARATIVE DYNAMICS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION GAMES

Why did the games differ in each district? I found that differences between the games stem from several specific conditions. First, the politics of implementation framework amplifies the

importance of the *match or mismatch* between CHSRI’s and BayCES’s interests and resources, their influence strategies, other actors’ (viz., in this case, school district leaders’) interests and resources, and policy premises and currencies. CHSRI mainly relied on traditional institutional tools of some private philanthropic foundations as their main influence strategies: grants and grant-related requirements and generating information about but not becoming deeply involved themselves in implementation. Although successful in other contexts these tools weakly matched the CHSRI initiatives’ policy demands and CPS central office leaders’ interests and resources. In this vein, two CHSRI Board members explicitly reported that they viewed the CHSRI Board as a policy advisory board, not a deeper participant in implementation; even so, they did not structure their meetings to follow up on key policy issues in ways that might have deepened their influence. Many respondents acknowledged that CHSRI staff attempted to provide various forms of school and central office assistance but that their small size and relative inexperience—specifically with classroom teaching and learning, and especially in the high need schools CHSRI selected early in implementation—meant they were a particularly limited resource in this policy context. Likewise, the information that CHSRI generated, although potentially useful, generally did not address questions that central office leaders raised as important to their decision making. For example, CHSRI’s evaluation focused on generating school-level information, but CHSRI Board minutes and interviews with central office administrators suggested executive central office staff also sought information about *central office* systems—such as information about the impact of the initiative on the overall central office budget and about central office policies that interfered with school autonomy.

By contrast, BayCES promised to make such important, specific contributions to implementation that another small schools movement leader, OCO, tapped BayCES to participate centrally in implementation. BayCES’s influence strategies took them inside the central office as main leaders of particular major lines of implementation work generally within the purview of central office employees. BayCES chose strategies that both complemented the capacity of their partners and that shifted over time as the central office increased its capacity to support implementation. Thus, BayCES’s leaders seemed intentionally to forge the kinds of matches over time that the politics of education framework highlights as particularly consequential to implementation success.

Second, dimensions of the institutional context in which the two organizations operated—namely, *their organizational histories and past practices*—seemed particularly important influences on these implementation games. CHSRI formed anew specifically to manage the Gates Foundation grant. CHSRI’s individual foundation members and staff brought various forms of expertise to the CHSRI Board, but CHSRI as an organization had no past experiences on which to draw. Especially given the limited examples or role models of external organizations in such central educational leadership capacities, CHSRI members may have been particularly inclined to rely on influence strategies they knew well from their work as individual foundations in other situations, even though those strategies were not a particularly good match in the present case (Barley, 1986; March, 1994).

BayCES, too, may have engaged in implementation in ways consistent with their histories and prior practices. But in BayCES’s case, their history and practice were on a trajectory that seemed well matched for the new small autonomous schools initiative. By the time they received their first Gates Foundation grant, BayCES had already led school reform efforts for many years. Many Oakland respondents recounted that BayCES, OCO, and other Oakland leaders had been building a movement specifically around new small autonomous schools long before Gates Foundation

funding became available and that such a history of joint work may have generated relationships and momentum important to implementation.

Three, the *dynamics of policy design* likely mediated these implementation games. Especially when debates about policy designs are contentious, actors participating in those debates will tend not to reconcile their conflicts or make fundamental decisions especially about policy winners and losers. Rather, actors will pass those challenges and tensions on to implementation in ways that can interfere with implementation progress (Ingram & Schneider, 1991; Malen, 2006). In Oakland, BayCES experienced little conflict over their selection as the fiscal agent for the Gates grant. At the time of policy design, agreement about how various external partners would participate in implementation was so strong that central office leaders and school board members codified the division of labor between BayCES, OCO, and OUSD in the first new small autonomous schools policy and in a formal Memorandum of Understanding.

By contrast, in Chicago, significant tensions arose around policy design, particularly around the selection of CHSRI as the fiscal agent for the Gates Foundation grant; such tensions may have set the stage for an especially challenging implementation experience for CHSRI. Multiple respondents recounted that when it launched its small schools grant program, the Gates Foundation initiated conversations with various long-standing Chicago-based organizations about serving as their fiscal agent. These respondents reported that members of the foundation community argued that Chicago lacked, in the words of one, “an appropriate intermediary for you [the Gates Foundation] to place your dollars and we will form an advisory board. You can place the dollars in a donor-advised fund. That is how we will match the funds but we want a significant amount of control over the dollars given that they are going to be a huge amount and there was no strong intermediary to step up and take the dollars.” The appointment of CHSRI to lead the initiative in such circumstances likely fueled significant counterproductive conflicts among potential partners in implementation and thereby curbed CHSRI’s influence during implementation. As partial evidence of such conflicts, multiple respondents associated with CHSRI and these other organizations accused each other of handpicking the schools they work with, not having an interest in strengthening all schools, and not having the capacity to support schools well.

The *participation of other organizations* in implementation as part of the institutional context in which CHSRI and BayCES operated also seemed to shape the implementation games. Many Oakland respondents, including BayCES staff, reported that BayCES’s work hinged significantly on OCO’s efforts to organize communities in support of small schools. The Oakland Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform reinforced BayCES’s central office transformation plans by linking OUSD leaders to their counterparts in another district that had similarly reformed their central offices. Private philanthropic foundations in Oakland contributed a match for the Gates Foundation grant but largely deferred to the partnership between BayCES, OCO, and OUSD when it came to the strategic direction of the initiative.

The involvement of so many actors could have created unproductive conflict and diffused BayCES’s influence. To the contrary, these organizations over time formed a coalition around common initiative goals and consensus about how various actors would participate in implementation. As a central office administrator commented,

Our second year . . . the pressure and relationships in the partnership [between BayCES, OCO, and OUSD] became more—it wasn’t clearly defined. It was murky. It was difficult. We were stepping on each other’s toes. OCO went, “More, more, more” and we were like, “We can’t, we can’t, stop!” It

was difficult. . . . This year we have done some . . . mending and repairing of the partnership. I think it has to do with the fact that we all have learned and accepted that . . . [there are] certain places and in certain spaces where our partners can be and others [where they] can't be. Also, our [Memorandum of Understanding] that we've developed defining the responsibilities—that has also helped us know what we can partner around and what we can't. And the way we wrote the MOU is we are clear about what's what but it can grow and change as we do.

The prior discussion about the dynamics of policy design suggests a far different and less collaborative relationship between CHSRI and other school reform support organizations. Furthermore, a lack of clarity among members of those organizations, including CPS, may have impeded others' willingness to support CHSRI's leadership. For example, when asked what role CHSRI plays in implementation, respondents' comments varied widely and included “Holds CPS accountable to make sure that the funds are directed and not misdirected”; “Does not create schools. It gives money to support new schools that are created by the central office”; “I don't know, to be honest with you, I don't know. I think right now they approve grants that come or proposals”; Their role “is not around providing dollars or special programs”; “They have provided advice on the transition of some large schools to smaller schools and I think they also have been champions of the schools”; “Partners, cheerleaders . . . [who] bring expertise to the table”; and “Advocates for the schools but beyond that I'm really not sure.” Two CHSRI board members reflected that they never developed a formal memorandum of understanding with the school district and that in retrospect some agreement about the roles and responsibilities for various organizations in implementation could have advanced their work.

As another part of the institutional context in both districts, *the Gates Foundation itself* participated in implementation in ways that seemed consequential to the reform dynamics described here. For instance, partway through my study period, the Gates Foundation changed its grant-making strategy from almost exclusively funding single intermediary organizations within each district to funding other organizations including schools and school district central offices. Gates Foundation funding to Oakland continued to flow through BayCES, further augmenting their resources. By contrast, their grants to Chicago grew to include individual schools, community-based organizations, and ultimately the Renaissance 2010 Board. Such contributions fueled the resources of other actors in ways that likely dampened CHSRI's influence.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article aimed to build knowledge about the participation of traditionally external organizations in education policy implementation. New small autonomous schools initiatives provided an important opportunity for this exploration in part because these initiatives explicitly called on organizations outside public school district systems to spearhead these ambitious change strategies in their respective districts. Previous research on these types of organizations suggested that political dynamics, although by no means the only dimensions of implementation, might be particularly salient to the experiences of these organizations. Malen's politics of education framework provided a basic set of concepts to anchor an initial analysis of their participation in implementation.

I show how CHSRI's and BayCES's influence strategies played out in CPS and OUSD as two quite different implementation games: the politics of policy dilution and the politics of policy amplification respectively. In brief, CHSRI chose influence strategies that positioned them as school system outsiders trying to leverage changes in other people's work. Their actions seemed to reflect relationships between school systems and external partners that hinge on product-exchange relationships—in this case, mainly the exchange of funding and certain kinds of information for influence. Their influence strategies in light of policy demands, other actors' interests and resources, and contextual conditions operated as weak levers for advancing their goals. By contrast, BayCES members took on formal and informal roles and responsibilities in implementation that in many ways positioned them as school system insiders. BayCES participated in implementation—not in product-exchange, but in human terms—by moving in and out of the central office themselves to take on significant roles and responsibilities, and by forging various relationships over time that were important to implementation.

The two implementation games seemed to depend on the following: the match or mismatch among the organizations' chosen influence strategies, other actors' (viz., school district leaders') interests and resources, and policy premises and currencies; dimensions of their institutional contexts including their professional and organizational histories; dynamics of policy design, and the participation of other organizations. In this view, the focal organizations' influence strategies were not objectively more or less powerful but a better or worse fit under their circumstances.

This study, like other strategic case studies, is limited in its power for generalizing to practice. Nonetheless, this study raises a number of issues and questions that educational leaders might productively engage. For one, these cases suggest that under some circumstances expanding the traditional scope of external organizations' participation in implementation may buoy implementation. Arguably, initiatives such as new small autonomous schools create such significant challenges for schools and central office systems that they demand not only funding, funding contingencies, and information related to others' work, but also intensive, hands-on assistance with the daily challenges of implementation from able partners (Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, & Swinnerton, 2006; Honig & Ikemoto, 2008). Such initiatives may benefit significantly from external organizations operating more like insiders—actors who take on roles and responsibilities related to specific lines of work—rather than solely or mainly functioning as outside advocates of how others should participate in implementation. Such expanded participation for external organizations does not necessarily mean central offices or schools lose authority or the ability to exercise leadership themselves. Such participation can actually help build leadership capacity within schools and central offices for increasing their own participation in implementation over time.

To help ground decisions about their participation, leaders of external organizations might review the lessons of these cases and explore: To what extent are our interests and resources lined up with those of other actors we aim to influence and various dimensions of the contexts in which we operate? How can we analyze such relationships to improve our strategic planning around our participation in implementation?

The success of ambitious educational improvement initiatives often depends on the extent to which schools and central offices break from long-standing institutional patterns and engage in new work practices. This study suggests that external organizations too may find that long-standing institutional patterns of their own practice are a better or worse fit with policy demands and contexts. Such institutional shifts can take time, and, as the BayCES example suggests, may hinge on the accumulation of human, social and political capital over many years. Leaders

of these organizations might consider: How can we make decisions about our participation in implementation to address particular implementation needs but in ways that strategically build on our own current capacity? How can we view our participation in implementation not as a fixed set of activities but as part of a dynamic change process? How can we build agreements and processes into our own work so that our participation continues to evolve as our capacity and our partners' capacity changes and grows?

These cases also raise important questions for school-systems leaders to consider in helping them participate productively in their partnerships with external organizations. Among those questions: How can we fuel relationships with various external organizations that help deepen our collective capacity for implementation? As both cases demonstrate, in positive and negative ways, no one actor—not even a consortium of foundations or a well-established school-reform support provider—had all or arguably even most of the resources necessary for the implementation of policies as ambitious and complex as new small autonomous schools initiatives. BayCES's success seemed to hinge significantly on recognition of these interdependencies by the main reform partners and the creation of formal agreements around those interdependencies. Furthermore, the evolution of their agreements over time too seemed consequential to their positive implementation outcomes. How can school-system leaders forge relationships that build capacity inside and outside formal school systems to fuel educational improvement goals?

This analysis also has a number of implications for research on educational leadership. First, this analysis highlights the importance of examining and building knowledge about how traditionally external actors participate in increasingly central educational leadership roles. The featured cases suggest that under certain circumstances the more internal participation of these external actors may be important for realizing ambitious educational improvement goals. Future research might explore cases where these external actors take on other kinds of increasingly internal roles. For example, my research ended as BayCES's executive director increased the span of his responsibilities within the central office while remaining a BayCES employee. How do such arrangements play out over time? What challenges or opportunities arise as external organizations expand their internal participation? What are the positive and negative consequences of having private or nonprofit sector employees carry out main lines of work within public systems?

Second, the politics of implementation framework provided one basic set of concepts for organizing a description of how these organizations participated in implementation in these districts but the framework is limited in a variety of respects that future research might productively address. For example, the framework amplifies actors' "influence strategies." However, other frameworks, particularly those more explicitly rooted in theories of leadership, might reveal a broader range of activities or other ways of framing the activities in which external organizations engage. This study confirmed the importance of framing external organizations' participation in implementation in human rather than product-exchange terms. This framing amplifies the importance of the day-to-day experiences of individuals in implementation and how their relationships matter to implementation. What more specifically are those day-to-day experiences? How do they vary within and between organizations participating in implementation? How do those individual experiences matter to the inter-organizational dynamics revealed here?

Third, future research should aim to build knowledge about these new insider–outsider dynamics in the context of other policy and district cases. As the politics of implementation framework highlights, the resources and currencies of a focal policy matters substantially to how implementation unfolds. Insider strategies pursued by established organizations like BayCES in contexts like

Oakland's may be particularly promising given the ambitious scope of the new small autonomous schools initiatives. However, external organizations might do well to pursue traditional outsider influence strategies in the context of other policy initiatives or other districts. As researchers accumulate findings in different policy and district contexts, analyses across those cases might explore which influence strategies appear productive or powerful across them and which seem particular to certain policies and places (Honig, 2006). This accumulation and analysis of multiple cases might subsequently allow analysts in the future to predict how political games are likely to play out in other settings.

More broadly, this study is one in a growing line of research that challenges scholars of educational leadership to expand the traditional scope of our own field from examining mainly school-level leadership to truly focusing on *educational* leadership—the pursuit of influence over educational improvement from a variety of organizational and institutional positions both inside and outside formal school systems. The practice of educational leadership seems to be moving in this direction. What will it take for more scholars of educational leadership to break from our own longstanding institutional patterns and more regularly expand our conceptions of what counts as educational leadership?

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