HIGH STAKES EDUCATION: THE BUSINESS OF REFORM, GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING, AND THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

William Vaughan Taylor

August 2018

Copyright © 2018 by William V. Taylor.
All rights reserved.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes a period rapid reform in a local school district, the emergence of an oppositional grassroots political coalition, and the community school model as an alternative reform trajectory. To give children the skills they need to compete in a high stakes economy, the district placed its faith in the power of performance metrics and the private sector to improve public schools. Metrics showed improvement. But rising scores belied a system in crisis. A business approach to teaching and learning proved deeply unpopular. A grassroots coalition emerged, challenged authority, and advanced a more democratic vision of education. The community school is an alternative reform trajectory rooted in democratic, social, and cooperative values. The model introduces contradictions within the system to create new contested spaces. This case suggests that education reforms promoting fixation on performance metrics and privatization are both dominant and pernicious, but also the current order is neither hegemonic nor inevitable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION: NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION ……1
Defining Neoliberalism……. 5
Critiques of Neoliberal Theory and Practice……... 10
2008: Neoliberalism is Dead . . . Long Live Neoliberalism! 15
Methodological Considerations……17
Organization of the Dissertation……... 26
CHAPTER II FEDERAL POLICY AND THE BUSINESS OF SCHOOLING……. 30
A Nation at Risk: Competing to Win……31
No Child Left Behind: Accountability, Choice, and Privatization……..34
Race to the Top: Cashing in on Crisis……..36
Governance: Self-organization and Diffuse Authority……42
Blurred Lines: State-Market-Corporation……46
CHAPTER III PHILANTHROPIC GOVERNANCE: PRIVATE MONEY, PUBLIC SCHOOLS…….....48
Great Schools Partnership: An Avenue of Influence…… 49
Expanding Role of Private Sector ……..……. 50
Philanthropy as Governance……... 57
A Contested Field . . . "Who's Gonna Win?"……...67
Broad Center: Leadership Pipelines …….……..69
Gates Foundation: Setting the Agenda …...……79
Philanthropy, Technocracy, and Neoliberalism……..83
Entrepreneurial Innovation or Neoliberal Orthodoxy……85
CHAPTER IV RAPID REFORM: ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE POLITICS OF MEASUREMENT ……...91
Five Reforms: "The Overriding Component is Accountability"……92
Measurable Standards…….……..96
Performance Evaluations…….…… 98
Performance Pay ……103
Weakened Tenure ……...106
Elimination of Collective Bargaining …….…107
Outcomes: Counting what Counts……..110
A Winning Narrative: Moving the Needle…….....111
Mixed Results and Leveling Off…….……116
Unscientific Management: The Problem with Metric Fixation ……119
Curbed Labor Power and the Culture of Accountability ……..……134
CHAPTER V TEACHER EXPERIENCE: UNDERMINING PROFESSIONALISM …….....141
Competing Professionalisms……143
Losing Control: Instruction, Curriculum, and Time ……148
Teaching to the Rubric ……...148
When Standards Mean Standardization……..……153
Lost Time: The High Cost of Data Production……..155
Devaluing Expertise, Undermining Professional Identity……164
Devaluing Advanced Degrees…….……...164

Devaluing Experience …….……165
Devaluing Local Knowledge……..…….172
Putting Students First? Perverted Incentives…….…….174
CHAPTER VI GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE: THE EMERGENCE OF SPEAK ..…….……...177
Roots of Resistance: Alienation, Sorrow, and Robots …….…...178
The Meaning of Work ……..179
The Joy of Work ……182
Work as Self-Creation ……184
The Emergence of SPEAK ……190
Recognition of Shared Grievances ……...191
Building a Movement ……...196
Political Consciousness: “Follow the Money” ……..……202
Political Action and Movement Outcomes ……210
“This is *Our* School System!” Democratic Power and Vision …….219
CHAPTER VII THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE: WORKING THROUGH THE CONTRADICTIONS…….……..224
The Model and its Roots ……..226
The University Assisted Community School ……..…….230
Neighborhood Problems: Poverty and Housing Insecurity …..….233
Afterschool Programming: Rich, Diverse, Offerings ……..238
The Workplace: Collaboration, Trust, and Autonomy ……241
Governance: Democratic Obstacles and Opportunities ……248
Service Provision: Charity, Welfare, or Self-Help? ……..256
Services: Welfare or Anti-Welfare? ……...259
In the Contradiction Lies the Hope……..……264
CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WE NEED 268
Changing Tides? Challenges to Neoliberal Consensus ……268
A Timely Case Study: Reform, Resistance, and Opportunity ……273
Wider Implications: The High Cost of Metric Fixation ……....276
High Stakes: The Kind of Education System We Need ……..278
REFERENCES ……287
VITA ……...316

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APEX	Advance Perform Excel
BEP	Basic Education Program
EOC	End of Course
EPNA	Education Professional Negotiations Act
GSP	Great Schools Partnership
KCEA	Knox County Education Association
KCS	Knox County Schools
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
PECCA	Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act
RTT	Race to the Top
SPEAK	Students Parents Educators Across Knox County
TAP	Teacher Advancement Program
TEA	Tennessee Education Association
TEAM	Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model
TNDOE	Tennessee Department of Education
TVAAS	Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System
UACS	University-Assisted Community School

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: NEOLIBERALISM AND EDUCATION

In March 2008 a private jet provided by the Pilot Corporation touched down in Boston to pick up a rising star to interview for the position of superintendent of Knox County Schools. The candidate was an alumnus of the Broad Foundation's Superintendent's Academy, an executive training program that succeeded, in just 9 years (2002-2011), to place graduates at the head of one-third of the nation's 75 largest school districts (Samuels 2011). James McIntyre brought "business-minded accountability" and a laser focus on student achievement. He invited collaboration with private partners—consultants, businesses, and education service providers. He raised academic standards, revamped evaluations, introduced performance pay, and helped administer statewide changes to tenure and collective bargaining. In just 5 years graduation rates improved from 77% to 88%. He was invited to testify to Congress in 2013 about his success and noted gains in "virtually every quantifiable measure of student learning and success." The district became an "Exemplary" School District, the first and only metropolitan system to earn that distinction. But all was not well.

Fixation on metrics and private sector intervention had warped the school system's institutional values. Teachers complained that high stakes testing had "turned teachers into robots and our kids nothing but a bunch of test takers." Many felt the metrics were a "sham" and evaluations were "farcical dog and pony

shows." "I love teaching, but I hate my job," was a common sentiment. Educators felt forced to focus on limited goals, imposed by others, who did not understand their work. They also worried about private sector influence. "Education is not a business," they said. And parents fretted that schools were "being invaded by private investors and corporations that see our children as products."

Improving performance metrics belied a system in crisis. By late 2013 less than 1 in 4 teachers believed the district was a good place to work in and learn; less than 1 in 5 felt trusted to make professional decisions (Knox County 2013). Resentment boiled over in November 2013 when a raucous group of 300 teachers, parents, and students wearing "red for ed'" occupied the monthly meeting of the school board. The demonstrations became full blown "teacher rebellion" and according to one observer, "Nothing like that has ever happened in my lifetime." Out of this popular discontent a formidable grassroots political coalition emerged, Students, Parents, and Educators Across Knox County (SPEAK).

The first major purpose of this research is to describe how dominant trends in national school reform—backed by powerful public-private networks—played out in one local district. I argue that a period of rapid reform between 2008-2013, which focused on accountability and measuring performance, is best understood as a political project. Faith in metrics surpassed evidence of their usefulness. For example, though only half of teachers taught testable subjects, all of them were evaluated based (in part) on test scores. Gym teachers could be evaluated based on history teacher scores. Accountability policies made little

sense as rational scientific management strategies, but make sense as an ideological project to curb labor power, create new education markets, and economizing the culture and conduct of schooling. I argue these policies and practices were animated by a logic best described as *neoliberal*, a fraught term that nonetheless captures an underlying unity diverse reform efforts to subsume education within the economic sphere. A major finding is that the central assumptions of neoliberal reform were deeply unpopular with many of the teachers, parents, and students who experienced them. The grassroots political movement that emerged in Knox County suggests a strong preference for more democratic visions of schooling, and the movement's success suggests possibilities for challenging the contemporary governing order. The potent authority of a network of billionaires, corporations, and state agencies, it seems, is neither inevitable nor hegemonic.

The second major purpose of this research is to describe an alternative trajectory for education. Any attempt to evaluate school reform, must begin by recognizing schools and communities are dynamically interactive and interdependent. As the school district faced a crisis of legitimacy in 2013, the wider community faced a deeper, more persistent crisis. In Knox County 1 in 5 children lived in poverty; in the city 1 in 3 children lived in poverty (2018). Like much of the US, Knox County was riven with racial and class divisions, high poverty and high inequality. Those problems showed up in schools. For example, consider two local elementary schools. One population was racially diverse, 60% "economically disadvantaged," and had a 70% failure rate in English, Math, and

Science (TNDOE 2018). In the neighborhood across the street 9 in 10 were white, 3% economically disadvantaged, and 90% scored proficient or better (TNDOE 2018). One clearly positive legacy of contemporary metric fixation has been to underscore persistent educational gaps based on class and race. The dominant policy solution since the federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has been to hold schools and teachers accountable for these gaps and invest in private options. However, accountability and privatization have mostly failed to deliver.

The stakes are high to get education right. In an attempt to answer the question of "what kind of schools do we need?" I conducted a year of fieldwork at a University Assisted Community School located in a racially diverse, high poverty neighborhood. Rather focusing school reform efforts on school-based factors (curriculum, best practices, test performance), the community school attempts to provide wrap around services for students and strengthening the communities of which they are a part. The project is animated by a democratic vision of school improvement—one that conceives of schools as shared spaces, anchor community institutions, and centers of welfare provision (Dryfoos 1995; Kronick 2005; Benson, Harkavay, and Pucket 2007). The community school project is necessarily incomplete and rife with contradictions. It often behaves as a neoliberal institution, but one that may undermine the very arrangements that make it possible. By working within the system, the community school introduces contradictions into it. By leaning to one side of the contradiction (democratic governance, community empowerment, social responsibility, etc.) over the other

(philanthropic governance, dependence on charity, etc.) the institution introduces institutional and ideological spaces for contesting neoliberal authority and promoting a more social, democratic, and equitable education.

DEFINING NEOLIBERALISM

A major argument in this dissertation is that dominant school reform strategies—metrics, accountability, choice, privatization—are best understood as a neoliberal political project. Therefore much depends on defining neoliberalism, a notoriously slippery signifier. This section does the work of pinning down neoliberalism as a theoretically and historically specific set of policies, practices, and governing rationalities.

David Harvey offers a useful definition of neoliberalism and the neoliberal state (2005). He writes,

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force, if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not

> exist (in areas such as land, water, education, healthcare, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. (2005:2)

According to Harvey there has been a dramatic turn towards neoliberalism in political economic practice and thought since the 1970s as evidenced by widespread deregulation, privatization, and retreat of the state from social welfare provision. These processes entailed much "creative destruction" of prior institutional frameworks, "divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart" (2005:3). Harvey's basic definition of neoliberalism, backed by powerful theoretical and empirical work, animates this research.

Brenner, Peck, and Theodore (2010:183), however, correctly point out that the term neoliberalism often suffers from a "perplexing mix of overreach and underspecification." For some, neoliberalism is everywhere. Lipman (2011:6) asserts, "Neoliberalism has been the defining social paradigm of the past 30 years." For Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is the dominant conceptual apparatus of our time and its arrival constituted no less than a "revolutionary turning-point in the world's social and economic history." And yet for others the concept is so fuzzy and chaotic that it risks irrelevance as a tool for social scientific theorizing (Fish 2009; Cahill 2010; Collier 2012; Jessop 2013). This research answers the need identified by Brenner and Theodore (2002) to identify and specify a

phenomenon, seemingly everywhere and nowhere at once, as a set of contextually specific practices.

Neoliberalism is used to describe theories, practices, and ways of thinking; and in each category it is fraught with contradiction, antinomy, and obscurity. Consequently, some scholars argue neoliberalism functions only as a vague signifier, a mistake predicated on some combination of epistemological confusion, moralized political bias, and analytic ineptitude (Fish 2009; Cahill 2010; Collier 2012). In contrast, others—especially those familiar with Marxian dialectical thinking—argue convincingly that apparent chimeric and antonymous manifestations belie a unity rife with contradiction (Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011; Mirowski 2013). Furthermore, they argue, neoliberalism as a ruling idea is durable *precisely* because its flexible, contradictory permutations allow adaptability under diverse guises of culture, common sense, technical expertise, etc. (Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011, Li 2007).

Researchers document neoliberalism's diverse manifestations. For example, although there is evidence of neoliberalism as a concrete program (Robinson 2008; Winn 2004) that is more-or-less coterminous with philosophical underpinnings set forth by Hayek, Friedman, and Nozick, recent scholars have focused on the blatant disjuncture between ideals and actually existing practices (Brenner and Theodore 2002:352; Lipman 2011; Patillo 2008). Manufacturing consent for unpopular policies has been be achieved variously through overt military or financial force, by more democratic means (Harvery 2005; Robinson 2008), or even through seemingly innocuous everyday social practices (Mirowski

2013; Lipman 2011). Consider the brutalist tactics in Chile in the 1970s and the violent imposition of political will by traditional upper classes backed by the United States (Harvey 2007, Winn 2004) as well as more recent strong-armed, unpopular, and undemocratic impositions of fiscal austerity (Blyth 2013). Compare those with the benevolent guise of neoliberal common sense that is voluntarily regenerated through the cultural entrepreneurism implicit in participation in popular social networking websites (Mirowski 2013: Brown 2015).

These diverse manifestations mask neoliberalism to such an extent that carriers are often unwitting accomplices. They may be, to paraphrase Keynes (1936), practical people believing themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence. To my knowledge, not a single individual or group in this research has ever adopted the term ‘neoliberal’ as a self-descriptor. I have tried avoid using the term ‘neoliberalism’ as a vague signifier or label for individuals, groups or specific policies, instead opting for more precise descriptors (e.g. support for private charter schools, preference for low taxes, etc.). I agree with critics that neoliberalism is not a particularly useful label to apply to individual or groups. However, I maintain that it is a useful theoretical concept that captures an underlying unity in diverse policies, strategies, and logics.

The difficulty scholars have understanding neoliberalism may not be epistemological confusion but rather may be symptomatic of increasing complexity, rationalization, and division of labor that has been associated with a form of modernity that is in continuous flux and in which its distinguishing features are hidden (Gramsci 1996, Dahms 2008). Nevertheless, a review of the

literature that outlines neoliberalism as specific and historically contingent helps delineate neoliberalism's essential characteristics and provides a basis for this study.

Accounts of neoliberal emergence in the 1970s and 1980s identify a loose affiliation of policy makers, corporate leaders, financiers, and academics from around the world who began articulating an economic, political, and social doctrine that would redefine the relationship between state, market, and society (Harvey 2005, Harris 2007; Robinson 2008; Lipman 2011; Mirowski 2013). The theoretical core of neoliberal arguments is a rearticulation of liberalist arguments that market exchange captures something fundamental and intrinsic in human nature, production, and social order (Harvey 2005, Harris 2007; Crouch 2011; Ward 2012). Neoliberalism has penetrated areas of social, political, and economic life long believed to be outside or above the market and sought to harmonize them with the logics of self-interest, rational action, competition, and entrepreneurialism that govern the function of market activity (Harris 2007; Hill 2009; Ward 2012). Among the great promises of neoliberalism is that it promotes liberty by eliminating burdensome state regulations that impede individual choice and economic efficiency by liberating markets. Empowering individuals in a climate of efficient, rational action is supposed to lead to the greatest benefit to the most people. However scholars point out its significant theoretical and practical failures.

Critiques of Neoliberal Theory and Practice

Scholars critique neoliberal theory by questioning the foundational assumption that the market *should* be the primary arbiter of social destiny (de Sousa Santos 2006; Walsh 2010; Apple 2012).[1] Much literature on economic and social alternatives draws on the basic point that much of human life takes place at a distance from markets (Polanyi 1944; de Sousa Santos 2006; Schor 2010; Walsh 2010; Apple 2012; Ravitch 2013). Such critiques usually contain implicit or explicit normative assessments about the desirability of community, solidarity, altruism, radical democracy, social justice, and concern for the environment as organizing principles of social and economic life that are precluded by neoliberal logics. This critique comes from environmental literature (Foster 1999; Castree 2003), literature on economic alternatives (de Sousa Santos 2006; Schor 2010; Coote and Simms 2014), radical democratic movements (Polletta 2002), and Latin American indigenous movements (Kohl and Farthing 2006; Walsh 2010), to name a few.

Scholars also critique neoliberal theory on its own terms by accepting its basic premises but pointing out substantial failings (Jessop 1998; Peck and Tickell 2002; Crouch 2011; F. Wilson 2012). Damning critiques include discussion of the impossibility of achieving necessary conditions for a pure market which would require dealing with externalities, entry barriers, eliminating transaction costs, and barriers to perfect information (Crouch 2011). Another critique points at problems with a democratic polity functioning alongside an

[1] Polanyi (1944) and others have offered similar critiques that apply to capitalism in general.

economic system characterized by high levels of inequality (Giroux 2004; Harvey 2005; Harris 2007; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Blyth 2013; Kuttner 2013; Piketty 2014). Likewise, it is not at all clear why economic power could not be converted to political power (Bourdieu 1986). Finally, inequality poses a danger to markets themselves (Crouch 2011; Stiglitz 2012; Piketty 2014). Accordingly, an economic system that produces such extremes is theoretically suspect, practically unsustainable, and incompatible with democratic egalitarian political principles based on equality (Giroux 2004; Freeman 2004; Crouch 2011; Blyth 2013).

Neoliberalism as a theory is quite different from neoliberalism in *practice*. For example, consider the role of the state. Rather than reducing state power, in actual practice the neoliberal state plays a central role in creating conditions for accumulation and redefining notions of liberty in ways that justify, hide, and reproduce unequal outcomes (Giroux 2004; Harvey 2005; Peck & Tickell 2007; Robinson 2008; Delgado-Ramos and Saxe-Fernandez 2009; Lipman 2011; Blyth 2013). In theory neoliberalism is meant to guarantee liberty. In practice, it concentrates the power in the hands of a few. However, there is significant disagreement over who the dominant group is—for examples see Winters (2011) on oligarchy, Robinson (2008) on the transnational capitalist class, Wallerstein (2004) on world system theory, Domhoff (2009) on elite networks, or McGarity (2013) on the business community. Crouch (2011) offers a convincing accounts of the dominance of giant corporations. Far from classic liberal ideals, neoliberalism as a practice seems devoted to solidifying the dominance of the giant corporations in public life as unpopular political decisions masquerade as

the natural and obscure machinations of the invisible hand. The literature suggests that classic state and market dichotomies should be scrapped in favor of conceptions that involve a tripartite—state, market, corporate—relationship characterized by comfortable accommodation (Jessop 1998; Peck and Tickell 2002; Harvey 2005, Crouch 2011; F. Wilson 2012).

Neoliberalism claims to stimulate widespread economic growth but this has not happened (Ross and Gibson 2007; Robinson 2008; Stiglitz 2012). Harvey (2005:159) argues that neoliberalism has been less successful at generating wealth as redistributing it, and that it is most successful as a strategy of "accumulation by dispossession." Strategies for accumulation by dispossession include: commodification and privatization of land and displacement of people (e.g. Mexico and China); transforming social, collective, or public rights to individual, private, and exclusive property rights; suppressing rights to the commons; monetization of exchange; using the credit system, national debt, and austerity to extract enormous amounts of wealth (Wallerstein 2004, Harvey 2005; Blyth 2013: Kuttner 2013). Nationally, we can look at growing gaps in wealth and income distribution as evidence that neoliberal policies increase inequality and decrease social mobility (Blank 2011; Duncan and Murnane 2011; Apple 2012; Reich 2012; Blyth 2013; Kuttner 2013; Piketty 2014).

From 1947-1977, American GDP per capita doubled and so did the incomes of the poorest families. Social mobility remained relatively high among whites (Blank 2011). Something changed: from the 1970s to 2007 American

GDP doubled again but family incomes began to shrink and social mobility stagnated or decreased (Ross and Gibson 2007; Blank 2011; Duncan and Murnane 2011). Folks in the 99.9th percentile saw incomes triple (Ross and Gibson 2007; Blank 2011; Duncan and Murnane 2011). Although not totally incorrect, it would be an oversimplification to draw a simple causal link between neoliberalism and inequality. However, in the 1970s, the moment of the neoliberal turn coincided with already declining power of the class of manual and industrial workers in the West, changes in technology, offshoring, the shift towards a service based economy, and Keynesian inflationary problems (Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Kuttner 2013). Neoliberal policies were implemented as a series of chaotic experiments and applied inconsistently in the form of tax cuts, austerity, privatization, and free market practices (Harvey 2005, Dumenil and Levy 2011, Blyth 2013). The literature supports claims that neoliberal policies exacerbate inequality in ways that serve the upper class at the expense of the poor (Dumenil and Levy 2011; Blyth 2013; Kuttner 2013) and intensify racial stratification in society (Blank 2011; F. Wilson 2012).

Race is a central feature of the relationship between neoliberal policy reforms and politics, and inequality. The cultural politics of race have played out in ways that both challenge and reinforce the neoliberal project. Indeed, racism is fertile ground for neoliberal appeals to individual responsibility (Davis 1996; Lipman 2011). Much as neoliberalism secures consent by removing consent from the equation, neoliberal policies that effectively discriminate against people of color by presenting themselves as colorblind. Colorblind policies discriminate

against people of color by bolstering political economic structures that persistently produce racial disparities (e.g. health, life span, well-being, academic achievement, access to education, well-being, exposure to environmental dangers, arrest rates, incarceration rates, ad infinitum) (A. Davis 1997; Bullard 2000; Alexander 2012). The racialized character of debates has become coded subtext. Insidiously, neoliberalism provides a sterile language that is technical, depoliticized, economic, and "colorblind" in a way that disguises issues that are deeply political and racial (Davis 1996; Li 2007; Wacquant 2010; Alexander 2012; Limpman 2013). Kozol's (1991:70) interview with a staff member at an urban school wracked by poverty illustrates the effect:

> In certain ways it's harder now because in those days it was a clear enemy you had to face, a man in a hood and not a statistician. No one could persuade you that you were to blame. Now the choices seem like they are left to you and, if you make the wrong choice, you are made to understand that you are to blame.

Racist ideology is embedded in neoliberal policies but in ways that make it difficult to see or, at least, possible to ignore. Although racism is not new, the particular legacy of neoliberalism and racial politics over the last thirty years is novel (Wacquant 2010).

Neoliberalism is more than an academic philosophy or set of policies; it is also a way of thinking that presupposes a limited set of alternatives (McMurtry 1991; Giroux 2004; Li 2007; Wacquant 2009; Mirowski 2013; Brown 2015) and is an idea so ubiquitous it has acquired all the hegemonic force of "common sense"

(Galbraith 1998; Blyth 2013; Mirowski 2013). In Foucauldian terms it is “a normative order of reason” and “deeply disseminated governing rationality” that “transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic” (Brown 2015:9). Famous iterations include Thatcher’s dictum, *there is no alternative* (so famous it has its own acronym, TINA) and Fukayma’s (1989, 1992) *end of history* thesis that proposed the evolution of “Western liberal democracy as final form of human government.” Neoliberalism remains both powerful and vague precisely because suppresses engaged critique about its most fundamental principles and consequences (Lipman 2011).

Neoliberalism is Dead . . . Long Live Neoliberalism!

There is some debate about whether neoliberalism survived the 2008 financial collapse. There was wide agreement that the crisis was a moment ripe for change (Cahill 2010; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Skocpol 2011; McGarity 2013; Mirowski 2013) but there is little consensus about whether neoliberalism, as dominant governing order, lives on (Quiggin 2012; Aalbers 2013; Davies 2014). A financial system teetered on the brink, the U.S. auto industry was on the verge of collapse, the US was mired in two tiresome wars, Obama was elected with an injunction for change, and public awareness of the dangers of unrestrained markets was on the rise (Cahill 2010; Skocpol 2011; McGarity 2013; Mirowski 2013). Mirowski (2013:xi) is not alone when he states wistfully, “the stars seemed to be aligned for another transformative moment.”

Some declared neoliberalism was either dead or dying (Wallerstein 2008; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Skocpol 2011). “Neoliberalism is dead. Kaput,” wrote one observer in an article titled “Neoliberalism: 1979-2008” (Lybeck 2015). Some cautiously proposed it was too early to tell (Cahill 2010). Some argued neoliberalism survived unscathed, perhaps even stronger (Mirowski 2013). Others have argued convincingly that neoliberalism remains curiously *dead and alive*. “Neoliberalism is dead! . . . Long live neoliberalism!” is the title of several scholarly and popular articles (Aalbers 2013; Davies 2014). The argument goes that belief in the power of unfettered markets is dead in academia and policy-circles, but *zombie-like* it continues to animate imaginations and institutional practices (Peck 2010; Murray and Overton 2011; Quiggin 2012; Aalbers 2013; Davies 2014). Smith (2008) described neoliberalism as “Dominant but dead.” And according to Peck (2011), “The brain has apparently long since ceased functioning, but the limbs are still moving, and many of the defensive reflexes seem to be working too. The living dead of the free-market revolution continues to walk the earth, though with each resurrection their decidedly uncoordinated gait becomes even more erratic.” Despite logical inconsistencies, bankruptcy as an academic theory, and empirical failures, prescriptions promoting austerity, privatization, competition, accountability, and attacks on labor continue to be dominate paradigm in policy circles (Cahill 2010; Quiggin 2010; Crouch 2011; Blyth 2013; Mirowski 2013; Brown 2015). As the conclusion addresses, recent nationwide teacher protests against austerity, privatization, and economization of schooling suggest the contemporary neoliberal project in education remains

contingent, fractured, dynamic, contested, and ultimately partial (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Lipman 2011). In 2018 openings for resistance, alternatives, and new alliances are omnipresent. Neoliberalism seems far from hegemonic, but also far from dead.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This project comprises of more than a year of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews with people invested in the local schools and communities. Additionally I have relied on document analysis (news articles, social media, budget reports, policy papers, press releases, etc.) and existing research (scholarly work, white papers, district surveys, consultant research reports, etc.). Identifying, developing, and refining recurring themes from multiple sources allowed me to triangulate data, looking for confluence and overlapping evidence (Denzin 1970). I have tried to follow the data, and it has led in some unanticipated directions.

Early on, fieldwork focused on understanding how stakeholders at a local University Assisted Community School were dealing with the problems of poverty, economic insecurity, and inequality. As is the nature of ethnographic fieldwork, the focus shifted to accommodate and explain events and conditions as they unfolded (Fetterman 20010). My research at the community school coincided with a period of rapid reform and the subsequent “teacher rebellion” that emerged in late 2013. It was momentous challenge to the neoliberal order

that my research was attempting to describe. A key informant highlighted the significance of the moment:

> *Joyce* – One of the people on the school board, this meek girl, looked at the superintendent and said, you're not talking about privatizing are you? And he said no. And I thought, you lying son-of-a-bitch. I know exactly what you're talking about. I think, I think he is a soft sell to a community that rarely rebels. I mean I worked in Knox County for 27 years. I've never seen a rebellion like I saw here.
>
> *Bill* – It's crazy
>
> *Joyce* – It's a complacent place.
>
> *Bill* – I wasn't planning on writing about that, but I think I can't *not* write about it.
>
> *Joyce* – You have to.

Guided by the data, my primary research site remained the community school, but expanded to include the district and community more broadly. For example, early on I was volunteering in the school's community garden when questions arose. Questions like, why was it so difficult to get students in the garden for hands-on science learning during the school day? Or, why were classroom teachers not allowed to make that decision? What kind of approval did they need? And, what did the teacher protests have to do with all this?

Much of the research approach for this project is inspired by a challenge presented by Flyvbjerg (2001) in *Making Social Science Matters: Why Social Science Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*. Flyvberg argues social scientists

must aim to understand organizations and systems as the result of human actions that occur within power-laden, value-laden social contexts. A major goal of social science should be to understand the underlying values expressed by social policy (Flyvbjerg 2001; Horn and Wilburn 2013). For this, the traditional scientific hypothetico deductive model of *explanation and prediction* is an inadequate approach to understanding social phenomena embedded in a complex and variable web of culture, economy, politics, and agency. To understand "the local, national, and global communities in which we live," Flyvbjerg proposes case study research allows close attention to messy and contingent realities structured by values, power, and local contexts (2001:166).

This research is rooted in more than a year of ethnographic fieldwork. Initially, the primary research for fieldwork was at an elementary school with a university assisted community school component. Most of my participant observation was conducted on-site at the afterschool program. I volunteered in the community garden, picked weeds, hauled dirt, planted beans, and got to know the volunteers, teachers, and students who shared that space. I was invited to help with the circus class holding ladders, setting up mats, spotting aerial acrobats, and talking with the teachers. I tutored in the GED class and chipped in with physical education class too. I spent time observing music classes, afterschool clubs, and shared dinner with the parents who used the school's nutrition program. I also attended special events like a holiday musical, art exhibition, student-made movie showcase, invited speakers, and the garden grand opening. I attended a number of planning meetings, meetings with

community partners, city-wide community garden meetings, and community school events hosted at the university. To better understand the field in which the community school operated, I widened the scope of my observations. I attended monthly school board meetings and school board planning sessions. I attended meetings in-person and watched videos posted online. Likewise, I observed SPEAK protests and rallies, the superintendent's State of the Schools Address, events like a non-profit sponsored visit from the state's Commissioner of Education.

Fieldworkers describe the importance of "showing up" and my research confirms that (Pollner and Emerson 1983). Showing up at the school and at events around the city, people began to recognize me, talk to me, offer insights, and introduce other key informants. I am indebted to a number of key gatekeepers who allowed or invited access to these events and to other key informants. My field notes describe the people, places, events, brief field interviews, personal reflections, and restructured dialogue from "casual conversations" with dozens of people (Wolcott 2008). I have several (worn out) notebooks full of notes taken during observations when possible, or immediately after. Since some events (e.g. school board meetings, special events) were video recorded, I was able to transcribe a number theoretically relevant speeches and exchanges.

Interviews with key informants provided an invaluable source of rich data on the experiences stakeholders deeply invested or involved with efforts to improve education. Sampling from a diverse range of informants allowed me to

understand diverse and often competing perspectives on reform policies, political resistance, and the role of the community school. In addition to fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews (and some follow-up conversations) with 26 key informants. I was able to access and interview people with key roles in shaping the field. Those people included leaders of the SPEAK movement, school principals, community school administrators, non-profit administrators, and a local state representative. In addition to informants in leadership roles, I interviewed people invested in the school system: teachers with diverse experiences, education activists, and community school parents and staff. These interviews provided deep and rich insights. For example, a community member talked about poverty and race and why it was so important to listen to people's stories. She said,

> And if you haven't walked in those shoes it's very difficult to understand some things. It really is. I've been there. My kids have been there. You know, I've lived the life.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours were conducted in coffee shops, restaurants, classrooms, and offices. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of participants and transcribed. Drawing on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) I analyzed interviews and fieldnotes using a six stage process of analysis: open coding, writing memos, selecting themes, focused coding, integrative memos, and reflecting.

I have taken steps to ensure the confidentiality and protect the identity of participants of this study. People I have interviewed or talked to are referred to

using pseudonyms and identifying information is omitted or altered. Additionally, to protect research participants I have omitted or altered the names individuals, groups, schools, and places that could be used to identify study participants or connect them to the study. For the research site of the community school I have use a pseudonym and avoided using descriptions, position, titles, and other information that could be used to identify participants or link them to the study. For those not participating in the study—public figures and other prominent public organizations—I have mostly retained their actual names and affiliations for the sake of clarity and coherence of the research, and since this all public information.

This research also draws heavily document analysis. News from community, local, and state papers, radio, and TV provided important information current events and often interviews with influential policy-makers. I also reviewed state and county budgets, state comptroller reports, district 5-year plans, policy papers, press releases, legislative testimonies, white papers, consultant research reports, organizational websites, and annual reports. These were all good sources to find “hard data” on spending practices, but also often these documents contained narratives with clearly articulated political positions. Social media and online discussion boards were another useful source of data. I monitored two active education-related social media pages (each with over 2,000 members), which offered data on the pulse of the community as stakeholders posted and commented on recent events, research, news, political campaigns, policy changes, school board meetings, etc..

Another crucial source of data was a December 2013 survey of teachers conducted by the district, which had an 89% response rate nearly 3,500 respondents. The survey included both Likert-scale survey questions an open-ended comments section. Survey questions included questions about school policies and school climate and provide some basis for quantifying and generalizing teacher experiences. For example, survey results helped evaluate competing claims about the teacher movement as representing only a “vocal minority.” The fact that only 600 of nearly 3,500 respondents (16%) indicated that they were recognized by their school/district as education experts lent credibility claims of widespread discontent. Similarly, I coded and analyzed 163 pages of open-ended comments (around 2,000) to identify theoretically significant themes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2005). The comments provided more in-depth understanding than Likert-scale responses and revealed important themes not touched on by closed-ended survey questions. Comments provided additional data points to compare with themes that emerged during interviews and fieldwork.

As a site of reform Knox County School District was a focus of this research. It is a large metro school district in Tennessee that serves children from pre-K to 12th grade. In 2014-2015 there were 90 schools with 3,670 teachers and 385 administrators. The district served 59,750 students—40% economically disadvantaged, 5% English language learners, and 14% with learning disabilities. The student population was 73% white, 17% black, 7% Hispanic or Latino, and 3% Asian. The school operated with a board approved

$432,335,000 budget and spent on average $9,043 per student with 53% coming from local sources, 35% state, and 11% federal. (TNDOE 2017) The other target of research was a university-assisted community school that served a diverse neighborhood with high poverty and high mobility rates. I offer a detailed description of the community school site in Chapter 7.

This project has been an enormous and difficult undertaking. Particularly, it has been difficult to resolve the tension between my attempt to be an objective scientific observer and the fact that I have been deeply and personally affected by the stories, experiences, and insights shared by my research subjects. Especially early on I had difficulty achieving distance from the field and from the subjects that would allow more objective analysis.The pleas of teachers, for example, sharing their feelings of loss, sorrow, anger, and alienation resonate with me both personally and professionally. My father, a veteran public school biology teacher, used have students conduct stream water quality monitoring projects, tag monarch butterflies, engage in community environmental projects, and write field guides of local flora and fauna. In the last few years his pedagogy was largely reduced to passing out worksheets and test preparation. Feelings of stress, dispossession, and loss led him to take early retirement. Among other things, he is finding joy in opening a gutter cleaning business. Professionally, as I was writing this dissertation I accepted a teaching position at a community college where, on my first day on the job, I learned the college would partner with a Gates Foundation-funded non-profit to improve its “customer service” and focus on metrics. When I asked a question about the validity of the approach, the

college president told me personally—in no uncertain terms—that data was the new “currency of the realm.” I was now professionally under pressure from the same networks of funders, state agencies, and logics that I was studying. Similarly, listening parents describe their hopes, dreams, and fears resonated with me as a new father experiencing all the insecurities and joys associated with that responsibility. To quote C. Wright Mills (1962), “I have tried to be objective. But I do not claim to be dispassionate.”

Leaving the field in 2015 and taking time to write, teach, and start a family has helped me realize my own biases achieve some healthy distance from the subject. Although passion, identity, and political biases may often lead researchers to find what they hope to find (Shefner and Gay 2002), politically guided research that carefully accounts for socially situated knowledges and acknowledges the researchers own biases often produces results that are less partial and less distorted than more “objective” accounts (Smith 1987; Harding 1998). Recognizing that total objectivity is neither possible nor necessarily desirable (Smith 1987; Harding 1998), I follow Apple’s (2006:229) advice to reposition empirical research: “the best way to understand what any set of institutions, policies, and practices does, is to see it from the standpoint of those who have the least power.” To that end, one goal of this research is to tell the story of teachers, parents, and those working directly with community schools. Though I have tried to offer an accurate, fair account of the elite-backed education reform, I have privileged the experiences perspective of those seeking alternatives. Early in the SPEAK movement a special education teacher

lamented the difficulty teachers had telling their story compared to the “big money guys.” She said,

> And that’s why this is so hard, it you know, when you talk about evaluations people just—it’s so complicated. You can’t explain it in a sound bite. They can always explain their side in a sound bite. You know, life is not a sound bite. Sometimes it’s complicated and you have to pay attention, and somebody has got to tell a story.

In part, this research is an attempt to tell that story. In the end, whether or not readers agree with the analysis, I hope they judge the research faithful to the data and fair.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

This research describes the implementation and impact of accountability and privatization reforms on a local school district, grassroots resistance, and an alternative community school reform trajectory. The research is organized and presented in 8 chapters. This chapter introduces the project and lays a theoretical groundwork for understanding neoliberalism as a historically specific set of policies, practices, and governing rationalities that prioritize the market and economy over other forms of social life. This chapter also outlines the project’s research approach.

Chapter II describes the role of federal policy in shaping local education reforms by focusing on 3 key moments. A *Nation at Risk* (1983) established an enduring narrative: American schools were losing the race produce a globally

competitive workforce. The No Child Left Behind (2002) law mandated testing and strengthened accountability, choice, and economic incentives in public education. The Race to the Top (2009) grant incentivized test-based performance pay for teachers and facilitated the rapid growth of an education services industry (analytics, testing, consulting, outsourcing, technology). I argue that federal policy has opened new markets for private sector penetration of public education, promoted governance of schools according to economized market logics.

Chapter III describes how networks of private elites shaped local schools and advanced privatization, accountability, and metric fixation. I describe how 3 non-profits have used money, connections, and position to intervene in the governance of the local public school system. A local public-private-partnership relies on wealthy funders like the Haslam family, and provides an avenue for them to shape public policy. The Broad Foundation shaped the district administration by recruiting, training, and placing its alumni in key leadership positions—the superintendent of schools and 4 central-office administrators. A Gates Foundation grant shaped the district's budget and 5-year strategic plan. I argue that these non-profits are highly coordinated and reflect the priorities and assumptions of their billionaire funders.

Chapter IV describes a period of rapid reform in the district between 2008-2013. The core project was to create a metric-based accountability system to improve institutional effectiveness by distributing rewards and punishments on the basis of measurable performance. I describe the 5 major reforms: higher

standards, new evaluations, performance pay, watered down tenure, and loss of collective bargaining rights. I evaluate the district's narrative that these policies succeeded in boosting educational quality. I conclude the chapter by arguing metric fixation cannot be justified on its own terms, but rather reflects a political commitment to curbing the power of labor and economizing education.

In Chapter V I describe how measurement-based accountability undermined teacher professionalism. Teacher professionalism was deeply rooted in claims to expertise, autonomy, and professional judgment. Rigid evaluation rubrics, standardized tests, and reporting imperatives forced teachers to focus on narrow goals imposed by managers with little knowledge of their work. Performance evaluations perverted incentives and left teachers feeling forced to choose between what was best for students and what was best for their careers.

Chapter VI describes shared grievances and the backlash against unpopular measurement-based accountability policies and traces the emergence of the grassroots political movement, SPEAK. The chapter identifies effective political actions and successes. I argue that the movement depended largely on the agency of committed actors, and was motivated by a democratic vision to reclaim a neoliberalized public space.

Chapter VII examines a university-assisted community school as an alternative reform trajectory. The community school is a contradiction. It provides meaningful welfare assistance and it offers a compelling vision of democratic education steeped in in arts and personal enrichment. But also, it behaves like a deeply neoliberal institution, is dependent on elites and may ease the retreat of

the welfare state. I argue that community school offers a way to work within existing power structures—rather than confronting them directly—to create new contested spaces.

As a means to conclude, Chapter VIII describes the current political moment in education in which tens of thousands of teachers across the nation have been protesting neoliberal consensus in education reform. The chapter highlights the significance of the case of Knox County, suggests wider implications of this research, and attempts to identify a path forward. I conclude the research by attempting to address a crucial question. Our children are facing life in a competitive, insecure, and increasingly stratified society—considering the high stakes, what kind of education system do we need?

CHAPTER II

FEDERAL POLICY AND THE BUSINESS OF SCHOOLING

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) during the early years of the Reagan Administration, the enactment of Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (2001), and the introduction of Obama's Race to the Top competition (2009) were three distinctive moments in which the federal government's facilitating penetration of private firms and market logics into the governance and operation of public schools. This chapter describes how each moment tilted a contested education field and describes how each finds expression in Knox County Schools. First, A *Nation at Risk* (1983) established an enduring narrative: American schools were losing the race produce a globally competitive workforce. Second, the No Child Left Behind (2002) law—which required standardized testing for grades 3-8 and tied federal funding to schools' test results—strengthened accountability, choice, and economic incentives in public education. Third, the Race to the Top (2009) grant incentivized test-based performance pay for teachers and facilitated the rapid growth of an education services industry (analytics, testing, consulting, outsourcing, technology). In addition to altering the policy landscape, these 3 events advanced a particular governing rationality (an economized market logic) which tasked self-organizing actors (states, districts, schools, individuals) with enhancing their speculative value as measured by econometric ratings.

A NATION AT RISK: COMPETING TO WIN

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform in 1983 was a report by Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education and was meant to assess the quality of teaching and learning in US primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. The commission was chartered in response to Secretary of Education Terrel Bell's assertion that the American education system was failing to produce a globally competitive workforce. The commission agreed with Bell and stated in stark terms,

> Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. […] 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. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. 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. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.

The commission cited declining SAT averages and international comparisons as evidence. The authors warned that, "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling," which was to secure "America's position in the world." The report emphasized learning as a commodity:

> Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier.

The authors proposed remedying crisis with higher academic standards, longer school days, and teacher salaries that were "professionally competitive, market sensitive, and performance-based."

The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was a watershed that marked a shift away from the Great Society education programs of previous decades that aimed to improve schooling by focusing on equity, access, and inclusion through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), the Higher Education Act (1965), and the Bilingual Education Act (1968), and through programs like Head Start and Teacher Corps (Ravitch 2000; Ravitch 2013). As a result more students attended college and took the SAT in the 1970s. Though subgroup SAT scores actually rose, overall averages dropped as a result of more poor and minority students taking the test (Berliner and Biddle 1997). Ironically, improved inclusion rates provided the basis of evidence *A Nation at Risk* used to describe a failing system. Subsequent research (Kee, Rupley, and Miller 1990; Berliner and Biddle 1997) largely debunked *A Nation at Risk*'s analysis, but the report's influence apparently did not rely on its accuracy. Rather, it was a convenient narrative that resonated with corporate interests.

Three decades after its publication, fears about failing public schools and declining competitiveness continue to resonate. A host of think-tanks like The

Reagan Institute, Fordam Institute, American Enterprise Institute, Shanker Institute, and Center for Education Reform celebrated the 30th anniversary by releasing fawning retrGSPectives. US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan addressed the Business Coalition for Student Achievement to commemorate the landmark report which according the USDOE press release, "helped generate education reforms at all levels of government and propelled the business community to deepen and expand its role in improving educational outcomes for students" (USDOE 2013). Likewise, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Boston Consulting Group, and Harvard Business School, "Lasting Impact: A Business Leader's Playbook for Supporting America's Schools" (2014) lauded *A Nation At Risk* and echoed belief that standardized test performance "matters in a world of global competition" and that scores were "not improving fast enough with world standards, which puts US competitiveness gravely at risk."[2]

The message resonated in Knox County where, for example, during a 2014 State of the Schools address, a principal—and former Fortune 500 sales executive—defined her school's mission "to support the economic development of our community through an educated workforce." She shared her vision,

> I see a world in the very near future where better schools and a highly skilled workforce will attract better paying jobs to our community and to our region that will directly and indirectly benefit our students. I see a

[2] The report's conflict of interest disclosure begins, "The organizations writing this report have been substantively and, in some cases financially involved in certain examples used in this report." Knox County's superintendent participated in Harvard Business Schools' executive education program, Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) and accepted grants from Gates Foundation and Gates supported initiatives (more in Chapter 3).

> world where every student, regardless of their zip code, will be able to legitimately compete against other students locally, nationally, and internationally.

At the event, a kindergarten teacher explained teach children to read was important because of economic competiveness.

> Helping my students master these foundational skills enables them to compete with any other student regardless of their background. We have fun and I love my students, but I want my students to have same opportunity to compete with other students.

A local non-profit was there and distributed bumper stickers with the image of yellow school bus with the message, “The community with the best schools WINS.” The vision of schools as workforce development centers and engines of economic competitiveness has proved appealing, enduring, and influential.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: ACCOUNTABILITY, CHOICE, AND PRIVATIZATION

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001 passed with bipartisan support and was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It’s official title less well-known but more descriptive, “An act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choices, so that not child is left behind.” The stated purpose was to close, “the achievement gap between high- ad low- performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (NCBL 2001). To achieve that goal, the law (1) included

Title 1 provisions for disadvantaged students; (2) mandated standardized testing for grades 3-8; (3) required schools report scores according to racial and ethnic group, status as economically disadvantaged, disability, and limited English proficiency; (4) and, used these scores to distribute rewards (e.g. federal funding) and punishments (e.g. corrective actions). Crucially, schools failing to meet "Adequate Yearly Progress" benchmarks could be required to submit to "restructuring." Restructuring could include closing the school and "reopening the school as a public charter school," "replacing all or most of the school staff," "Entering into a contract with […] a private management company" (NCLB 2001).

As intended, restructuring provisions invited private sector intervention in public schools and the education industry saw rapid growth in sectors providing assessments, professional development, tutoring and test prep, training and development, curriculum and materials, technology, and education management services (Ravitch 2013). Charter schools, especially, provide a path for privatization. Nationally, between 2000 and 2013 the percentage of all public schools that were charters rose from 1.7 to 6.2 percent—from 1,500 to 6,100 in total (ies.ed.gov 2015). By 2017 the charter school market was $32 billion, growing at an annual rate of 10.5% and counted some 7,686 schools with more than 3 million students (IBIS 2018). In Tennessee the number of charter schools numbers grew from 0 to 51 between 2000 and 2013. The state continues to turn over its lowest performing schools and by 2017 Tennessee had 104 active charter schools (SDE Directory 2017). Though most of charter school growth in Tennessee has occurred in the western region (Shelby County accounted for 69

active charter schools in 2017), Knox County opened its doors to its first charter school in July 2015.

Although some states allow for-profit charter operators, Tennessee law requires charter sponsors be independent, non-profit entities with governing boards that require at least one parent. However, for-profit management firms may still operate charter schools under non-profit contracts. For example, K12 Inc. is a publically traded multinational corporation that has operated under a "non-profit" contract in Union County as an online virtual charter school in Tennessee since 2011. K12 reported revenue of $872 million in 2016 (K12 Annual Report 2016), and collects roughly $10 million a year from Tennessee Basic Education Program funds (Saul 2011; Habegger 2016). An important difference, charter school management firms operate under a separate rules than public school boards. For one they are not democratically accountable. Also, they may reduce expenses by avoiding children with special needs or behavioral issues, hiring uncertified staff, and engaging in anti-union action. They also have access to New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) and low interest loans from pro-charter school foundations, which have provided loopholes for related-parties to engage in lucrative billing and real estate transactions (Baker and Miron 2015; Green, Baker, Oluwole, and Meade 2015).

RACE THE TOP: CASHING IN ON CRISIS

Race to the Top (RTT) was a competitive grant program funded by the ED Recovery Act as part of the stimulus package, American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act of 2009 that advanced NCLB's focus on privatization, accountability, testing, and choice. In the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, program offered a $4 billion to cash-strapped states to incentivize them "to adopt college-and-career-ready standards and assessments; build data systems that measure student growth and success; and link student achievement to teachers and administrators" (RTT 2009). Crucially, whereas NCLB held schools accountable for test scores, RTT extended accountability to individual teachers. The competition rewarded states willing to develop sophisticated systems of data collections, storage, management, and analysis that could be used to rate individual teachers according to performance metrics. Especially, teachers would be rewarded for measurable student improvements, or "value-added measures." Other criterion for the grant included adoption of performance-based evaluations for principals; adoption of standardized benchmarks for student learning; adoption of policies that allowed charter schools; and, plans for turning around low achieving schools. (RTT 2009)

The program opened up new educational markets for providers and investors. Director of Race to the Top, Joanne Weiss, wrote "If we can match highly-effective educators with great entrepreneurs and if we can direct smart capital toward these projects, the market for technological innovation might just spurt from infancy into adolescence" (Weiss 2011). The high stakes and highly technical nature of the grant's criteria created demand for testing products, data analytics, technology, and specialized consultation services. The number of education service providers increased 29% between 2008 and 2016 (88,937 to

114,309) (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Between 2007-2010 and 2012-2014 the number of private equity deals in education more than doubled from 30 to 70 (McKinsey 2015). The market continues to grow. In 2015 the US education was a 1.5 trillion industry growing at 5% annually. In 2017 online learning (K-12) is $118 billion industry growing at 16% annually. Instructional materials (K-12) is a $30 billion industry growing at more than 9% annually. Tutoring/test prep is an $8.2 billion market growing at over 7% annually (IBIS 2018). According to a report by McKinsey & Company (2015), due to the fact that "the pressure on schools to deliver a higher-quality product is intensifying," and "US education is ready for investment." Venture-capital investment has been dramatically increasing—$1.9 billion in 2014, up 55% from the previous year.

As the education market in Tennessee grew, so did the influence and authority of private firms. Race to the Top brought in some $500 in federal funds to the state. Overall education spending (K-12) increased between 2007 and 2011 from $6.9 billion $8.2 billion (TNDOE 2015). State and local districts depended on private consultants (relying heavily on request for proposals [RFPs]) for highly specialized technical services, software, hardware, and expertise necessary to design, implement, and manage data systems. For example, to help implement the Differentiated Pay Plan (2014), the state enlisted Educational Resource Strategies (ERS) and Battelle Memorial Institute.

In important ways, the market has failed to deliver adequate services in Tennessee. For example, the state offered a $108 million 5-year contract with Measurement Inc. in 2014. After repeated delays and failures resulted in the

suspension of grades 3-8 testing in 2016, the state terminated the contract. It offered a one-year, $18.5 million non-competitive bid to Pearson Education to score the tests. Later that year the state a signed two-year $60 million contract with Questar Assessment Inc. Problems with accurate scoring and delays persisted. In 2018 after more delays and login-in problems, the state General Assembly suspended use of the scores and began a review of the contract. The state has also experienced several

Locally, Knox County schools received technical assistance from a range of private organizations. For example, In 2009 KCS signed a contract with Follett Software Company to help launch its Education Management Information System (EMIS). The $2.7 billion privately held Follett, operates several contracts with the county totaling in the millions. County Commission approved $2,555,100 for provision of the student information system in 2013. Likewise, through a public-private partnership, the county shared the cost of a $1 million contract with NIET (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching) to provide its performance based teacher compensation program. In 2014 Knox County paid private consulting group Parthenon Group $180,000 to provide technical assistance in data collection and analysis of resource allocation. The district also worked with Achieve Inc. to provide an inventory and analysis of its testing programs—or an *assessment of assessments*.[3] The school with private firms for a variety of other services. For example, it budgeted around $15 million for its contracted student

[3] "So we have inspectors of inspectors and people making instruments for inspectors to inspect inspectors," noted Buckminster Fuller, begging important questions about the limits of this kind of audit culture (Barlow 1970).

transportation services. The FY 12-13 General Purpose budget includes unspecified contracts with private firms that include, for example, $627,000 for instructional support, $171,000 for special education, and $155,000 for maintenance.

The increasing penetration of private and for-profit firms prompted worries about who controlled the schools, and concerns about their motives. The Republican County Mayor offered a political economic critique of privatization on a local talk radio program in 2014,

> They're just continuously testing. They're mining our kids for information. You know, our children should not be a decimal point on some big shot from Wall Street's portfolio. We should hold them very close and sacred and we're not. And I'm afraid that it's out of control. I'm afraid we've let the foxes in the hen house. … You look at the people that are pushin' this stuff from the top. I'm not talking about these local minions that get their direction from whoever, but the people at the top. They have something financially to gain from this. You know how they always say follow the money? It's a complete takeover of our education system by a group of people that, in my opinion, have one thing in common: they want to get more out of the education system. Education is the one area that has been untapped. And that's what they're doing—and seeing it in Knox county schools, and parents you better wake up! And you better start paying attention because our kids should not be disposable.

Private firms vied for a piece of the district's $450 million budget (2016), and through RTT federal, state, and local governments facilitated their efforts. The mayor's fears were rooted in the deepening penetration of private firms in the governance, management, and operations of public schools.

Though only nineteen states won Race to the Top grants, fully two-thirds changed their education policies to reflect its priorities. Dangling the carrot of funding in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse proved and cost effective way to pressure cash strapped states to adopt federal priorities. As Rahm Emmanuel famously said, "You never want a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that, it's an opportunity to do things that you did not think you could do before" (Wall Street Journal 2008). It appeared a moment ripe for transformation (Cahill 2010; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Skocpol 2011; McGarity 2013; Mirowski 2013), but belying conspicuous popular movements (Wallerstein 2008; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Skocpol 2011) education policy-makers redoubled commitment market-driven solutions to problems (Mirowski 2013). Criticisms of Bush era NCLB policy were mounting and many believed president Obama would change course, but that did not happen. A teacher-activist I interviewed described the moment:

> I mean this whole business model came down. They, meaning reformers and just business in general, want to start kind of sorting people into groups like who will be the most productive and who will not be the most productive. I mean this business model doesn't make any sense to me. I was all excited about Obama getting elected in 2008. I thought, oh this is

> fantastic! We're going to reverse this nonsense. And I'd lived through Ronald Reagan . . . but that was really good compared to what was happening now.

In the aftermath of the market failure that was the 2008 financial collapse, Race to the Top architects seized an opportunity to double down on their commitment to market-based solutions to educational problems.

Governance: Self-Organization and Diffuse Authority

More than outright privatization, Race to the Top, promoted neoliberalism as a form of governance in its reliance on self-organization and diffuse authority (Rhodes 1997; Li 2007; Brown 2015). Federal guidelines expanded formal freedoms within a regulatory framework by giving states the freedom to design their own improvement plans. Where the state retreated, the technocratic authority of private firms filled the vacuum. Instead federally mandated policy prescriptions, a well-funded network of private consultants, non-profits, and think tanks provided resources to school systems to advise, support, and guide their "choices." For example, the implementation of Tennessee's Differentiated Pay Plan (2014-2015) reveals how power operates through networks of dispersed but ideologically aligned firms. The plan (2014-2015) passed as part of the state's First to the Top Act (2010) in accordance with RTT guidelines. The state did not mandate performance pay. But the state did offer multiphase regimen of technical assistance to help under-resourced districts "formulate their own plans." The state partnered Educational Resource Strategies (ERS) to offer planning

sessions, webinars, resource guides, and differentiated pay models. ERS supported “greater focus on teacher effectiveness, more rigorous standards, better assessment data, and the explosion of technology” and eschewed demands for adequate funding as a legitimate strategy for improvement. “We must reinvent. We must make the most of the resources we have,” noted the organization (ERS 2015). With guidance from private consultants 57 of 141 districts had implemented performance pay plans by 2015.

Devolved power formally shifted authority to local districts, but in practice it shifted the locus of that authority to the private sector. Technical consultants’ recommendations replaced state mandates. The *market freedom* to choose how to compete for scarce resources, replaced the *political freedom* to choose adequate funding. High stakes pressure to make the right choices or else lose funding pushed thought, discourse, and action into channels defined by networks of public-private partnerships, expert consultants, corporations, and non-profits. For example, ERS partners included Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, a school system the local superintendent has indicated he would like to emulate. ERS funders and collaborators also included non-partisan, progressive, conservative, and big money foundations, like the Carnegie Corporation and the Aspen Institute, which is itself funded by the Carnegie Corporation as well as the Rockefeller, Gates, and Ford foundations. Knox County has received grants from Gates. ERS funders also included the Broad Foundation, which trained the Knox County’s superintendent and a network of around 30 Tennessee education administrators. ERS also partnered with Boston Public Schools when Knox

County's superintendent's was working there as Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Financial Officer & Budget Director. This tightly tangled web constitutes a powerfully dispersed "neoliberal thought collective" (Mirowski 2015).

No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top changed how people thought and talked about education. Bostrom (2003) noted, "The real power of NCLB is not in the specific policies it advances, but rather in its potential ability to restructure the way Americans think about education. By communicating education reform through the lens of a Market-based Accountability frame, NCLB proponents are invigorating a consumer perspective of education while subtly undermining a citizen perspective."

Market-based accountability frames pressured schools to behave like private firms, fixating on speculative valuation and market metrics. State and district administrators idealized the image of the Silicon Valley start-up and adopted the language of innovation and entrepreneurship. For example the director of the state Department of Education delivered a speech in Knox County about "how we can act more entrepreneurially in education." She borrowed from business guru Jim Collins who recommends finding employees who "are productively neurotic, those who are self-motivated and self-disciplined." The district created an Office of Innovation within the school system and use a Gates Foundation grant to great a "TeacherPreneur" program. In 2011 the Aspen Institute and NewSchools Venture Fund named the superintendent to its Entrepreneurial Leaders Fellowship Program—a program which promised to "open up a new sources of capital and mobilize new dollars for edtech

entrepreneurs from investors who are currently sitting on the sidelines" (Edsurge 2015).

Schools competed to secure future value (ratings, rankings, scores, funding) and attract capital investment. Investors meant profit-seeking EMOs, technology providers, or consultants, etc. Investors also meant non-profit "investors" (grant funding agencies, non-profits, or charities) seeking high returns (retention, college readiness, etc.) on philanthropic investments. Or investors meant taxpayers. Schools competed for taxpayer "investments" in through the state's competitive funding formulas, state grants, and state awards. Knox County adopted language of the private firm in its "Educational Return on Investment Report" (2014), which presented "the results from its return on investment analyses for select strategic investments." Likewise, the report noted "we must ensure that our investments in strategic initiatives are actually yielding the expected results and paying dividends to our students, their families, and the larger community."

Students and families were not only investors, they were customers. As customers—as opposed to citizens—stakeholders could be empowered by giving individuals a wide variety of schooling choices in an educational marketplace so they could shop for whatever best fit their needs (Brown 2015). Knox County embraced the language of "customer service," to refer to citizens. The phrase appears 4 times in the 2014 strategic plan (Excellence for Every Child 2014). Likewise, in a 2014 State of the Schools Address, the superintendent promised to "elevate our commitment to customer service." Some teachers also adopted

the language. A young history teacher noted in an interview, “I think it is fair to apply a lot of aspects of general business to education. Because I mean, it is still a business, just funded by the taxpayers.”

The market-based accountability frame cast teachers as human capital expenses justified by their rate of value production. “Value added” growth measures were a way to identify and eliminate low value employees (Amrein-Beardsley 2008; Horn and Wilburn 2013). According to the state’s board of education, “Armed with new data on teacher and principal effectiveness, the state and many school districts are beginning to leverage this information to make more informed human capital decisions” (TN DOE 2015). Similarly, the president of the local Chamber of Commerce wrote, “I can say with confidence that no other school system in the United States has subjected itself to such transparency, potential criticism and business-minded accountability.”

BLURRED LINES: STATE-MARKET-CORPORATION

This chapter has focused on how three key moments have shaped the national the trajectory of national education reform. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) marked a decisive neoliberal turn in its powerful framing of education as workforce development and economic competitiveness. No Child Left Behind promoted federally mandated testing, accountability, and privatization. Race to the Top capitalized on the 2008 financial crisis to entice cash-strapped states into further compliance with NCLB principles, extending metric-based accountability from schools to individual teachers. As policy-makers invited corporate influence

by opening new markets for the education industry. More than altering the policy landscape, these 3 moments restructured mindscapes—promoting market logics wherein schools as firms, students as customers, taxpayers are investors, and teachers as human capitals. I argue that these policies have advanced neoliberal policy and thought by blurring the political-economic-social lines between state-market-corporation. As I discuss in the next chapter, this blurring has opened the door for billionaires take on influential roles as self-appointed governors of public school systems.

CHAPTER III

PHILANTHROPIC GOVERNANCE: PRIVATE MONEY, PUBLIC SCHOOLS

This chapter describes the role of private elites in shaping local public education outcomes by examining how three non-profits—and three billionaire donors—exert influence through their philanthropy. First, the Great Schools Partnership, a local public-private partnership, provides an institutionalized avenue for elites like the Haslam Family ($6 billion net worth in 2015) to govern local public schools (Barkan 2013, Reich 2013; Forbes 2015; McGoey 2015). Second, based in Los Angeles, Eli Broad's ($7.4 billion in 2015) Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation uses educational leadership programs to train and place educational executives and managers (Forbes 2015). In Knox County Broad alumni occupied the superintendent's office and 4 front office positions, and were part of a statewide network of some 27 alumni, 6 of them at the state Board of Education. Third, Bill Gates' ($79.2 billion in 2015) Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded the district a $1.2 million in Smarter School Spending grant, to change how the district allocated its resources (people, time, and money) and leave its imprint in the lines of the district's 5-year strategic plan. I will argue that though tactically and formally distinct, these non-profits are highly coordinated, their billionaire funders share common interests, and each advances a shared neoliberal vision education. That common vision was one where (1) education serves economic competitiveness, (2) under-resourced schools are a technical

problem that can be solved by better management, and (3) the private sector should play a larger role in public education (through philanthropy, leadership, scientific management, service provision, etc.). Operating in a resource constrained public education environment and leveraging wealth, position, social capital, and the state, the three non-profits asserted multi-pronged but remarkably monolithic goals that that reflected the priorities of their elite funders. Crucially, elite influence was anti-democratic and contrary to claims, failed to promote diverse approaches to schooling.

GREAT SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP: AN AVENUE OF INFLUENCE

The Great Schools Partnership (GSP) is a local non-profit, public-private partnership operating at the nexus of philanthropy, business, and government. Founded in 2005, the GSP is a non-profit charitable trust that is free standing, tax exempt, and public-supported (Brown Jake and McDaniel 2015). It receives financial support from private funders ($2.5 million in 2015) as well as matching county government contributions ($2.6 million in 2015) (GSP 2015).[4] Its largest expenses are a performance based teacher compensation model, the TAP System ($1,000,000) and community schools ($870,000).[5] Reflecting the interests of its corporate donors, the GSP describes its mission to promote education as economic competitiveness and job training—to punch “a first class ticket into the world economy,” which requires “a highly skilled workforce and an

[4] GSP files as a 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) organization.
[5] Other major expenses are administrative ($520,000) and a college and career readiness program ($700,000).

elite school system to get us there" (GSP 2014) The organization describes its role as "think-tank, catalyst, incubator, start-up funder and operational partner for making Knox County Schools globally competitive" (GSP 2015).

Expanding Role of Private Sector

The Great Schools Partnership can be understood in the context of the rising prominence of public-private partnerships that accompanied political pressure to downsize government, cut taxes, and expand the role of the private sector that began in the 1980s (Robertson and Verger 2012, Ginsberg 2012). In this sense, GSP can be understood as part of the neoliberalization of the local school district in 3 ways. First, private intervention is rendered necessary by a state that does not adequately fund educational priorities. Second, large-scale private intervention is possible because of fortunes amassed under a political economic system that promotes capital accumulation, inequality, and incentivizes philanthropy as tax avoidance. Third, GSP philanthropy eases the retreat of the state and formalizes the private sector's role in public governance.

Although GSP private donations amount to a tiny fraction ($2.5 million or less than .006%) of the district's $425 million budget, private sector intervention was deemed valuable—even necessary—because of inadequate funding, budget cuts, and declining state and county revenues (GSP 2015; KCS 2015). Nationally, Tennessee ranks 45th in per-pupil expenditures (US Census Bureau 2014). In a speech hosted by the GSP in 2015, the Commissioner of Education shared a revealing exchange with the state's governor, Bill Haslam:

> I heard the governor say this the other day. It's almost like you have twelve priorities and they are all extraordinarily important, but you have to pick the top four to actually fund at the level you need to.

Though the self-described "education governor" (Daniels 2015) believed only a third of *extraordinarily important* educational priorities were adequately funded, he staunchly opposed any tax increase that might remedy the problem. He noted, "Taxes are job killers. The last thing we should do is raise taxes," and iterated his commitment to "force the state to prioritize, make difficult cuts when we have to" (Haslam 2012). His 2011 $30.8 billion budget was a 3.9% decrease from the previous year. Between 2011 and 2017 the governor and General Assembly enacted $771 million in annual recurring tax cuts (Sycamore 2018).

Declining state and county revenues and budget shortfalls prompted spending cuts in the wake of the 2008 recession, as per-pupil expenditures in Tennessee dropped from $8,766 in 2010 to $8,522 in 2011. However, even when revenues returned to pre-recession levels, budget surpluses ($500 million in 2015, $800 million in 2016) mostly failed to make their way back into the state education budgets. Per pupil expenditures in 2015 ($8,726) were still lower than 5 years prior. Failure to restore funding to pre-recession levels may be understood as part of national trend, noted by Baker, Sciara, and Ferrie (2015). Though a $200 million increase in the 2016 education budget was a significant increase, according to the state's own funding formula it was shortchanging its schools between $400 million and $900 million per year (Spears 2016; TN Office of Research and Accountability 2016).

Seven Tennessee school districts sued the state in 2015 for failing to allocate the funds required by the state's Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula. According to the suit, the state failed live up to its legal duty to free public education, and failed to provide equitable funding for poor communities. The lawsuit alleges that that short-changing schools shifted financial burdens to private actors (teachers, parents, private partners, etc.) (BEP Lawsuit 2015). According to the lawsuit, based on state guidelines, the state shorted districts $734 million annually. Though it is a long-standing problem, underfunding became more acute because new reform mandates were introduced, but without additional funding. In 2016 legislatures responded to the lawsuit by proposing to eliminate the state's constitutional requirement to adequately fund schools (Spears 2016).

Notably, though underfunded, Knox County was the only metro school not to sue the state. However, this is not for lack of grievances. The GSP's Annual Report (2014) states, "public resources simply haven't been there," and acknowledged shortfalls:

> Knox County can't deliver [a great] system spending less than $9,000 per student per year as much as we might wish for it – not when the highest performing systems in our state and our nation are outspending us by more than fifteen hundred dollars per student per year.

In 2015, the county spent $331 less per student than the state average (Knox News 2015). County teacher pay ranked 45th in the state, below comparable districts and surrounding counties (TEA 2015).

Instead of demanding adequate state funding, the district turned to the private sector for resources. Decision-makers justified turning to the private sector by presenting inadequate funding as an immutable economic reality, rather than political choice (Crouch 2011; Brown 2015).[6] The superintendent noted in his 2015 State of the Schools address, "Limited resources are a fact of life in public education." The Chief Academic officer described a "world where we are continually facing shrinking budgets and constraints around funding" (Smarter School Spending 2015). And according to the GSP, "No southern [sic] school district can go from good to great without the support of the private sector" (2014).[7] *There is no alternative*, it appeared for this cash-strapped district seeking private largesse.[8]

The GSP's large role is, in large part, possible because of neoliberal economic policies that promote capital accumulation, protect private fortunes, and encourage philanthropy. The tax cuts, deregulation, privatization, and corporate subsidies that defined the neoliberal turn of the 1980s produced unprecedented fortunes (Harvey 2005; Raddon 2008; Crouch 2011; Dumenil and Levy 2011; Blyth 2013; Kuttner 2013; Humphrey 2015). Globally, the aggregate

---

[6] Notably, the superintendent asked for, but failed to secure, a tax increase that would result in a $35 million dollar budget increase in 2012. Teacher support was conspicuously thin. In 2015 he secured an increase for the budget to fund two new schools without a tax increase. However, the largest portion of the increase would be borrowed against future budgets. In addition to being on the hook for millions in debt services, the deal included largely unspecified cuts (possibly to the central office), elimination of a reading initiative for at-risk children, and promises not to request funding increases for four years. Thus the short-term increase actually seems to be a deal guaranteeing long-term austerity (McCold 2015).

[7] The "Good to great" language echoes Jim Collins' (2001) *Good to Great* discussed in the previous chapter.

[8] *There is no alternative* (TINA) was, of course, Margaret Thatcher's famous answer to critiques of her unpopular market-based reforms.

wealth of the world's 1,810 billionaires (.00002% of world population) is $6.5 trillion, more than the GDP of the world's third largest economy, Japan $4.4 trillion (Forbes 2018). The United States has the largest number of billionaires (540 people) with a net worth of 12% of US GDP. The GSP depends on the largess of two of those billionaires. Bill Haslam, the state governor and (as of 2015) the wealthiest politician in the US was worth around $2.1 billion in 2015. His brother, Jimmy Haslam III was worth around $2.8 billion in 2015. The family's net worth was around 6 billion in 2015 (Forbes 2016). One of the family's foundations listed assets over $100 million in 2014 (Guidestar 2016). The family's annual donations to education measures in the tens of millions.[9] Two brothers, the family foundation, and the family corporation are each listed as major donors to the GSP.

In part, the Haslam family can bankroll large-scale education reform because state and federal tax codes have diverted private wealth from public coffers where voters might otherwise determine its use (McGoey 2015). In Tennessee, Haslam wealth is protected by the most regressive tax system in the nation, which actually widens after-tax income inequality (Cooper, Lutz, and Palumbo 2015). With no income tax, state revenues depend on sales taxes and user fees, which disproportionately affect low-income households that often end up paying more of their income in taxes (10.9%) than the wealthiest (3%) (ITEP

[9] In 2015 they gave $10 million to the district for football fields and STEM projects, and $10 million to a charter school operator. In 2014 they gave $50 million to the University of Tennessee's College of Business. In 2006 the Haslams donated $32.5 million to the university.

2014).[10] Between 2011 and 2017 Governor Haslam and the General Assembly enacted over $711 million in annual recurring tax cuts. The most significant cut was a projected $322 million cut that came with the repeal of the state's only major progressive tax, the Hall Income Tax, which was a tax interest and dividends.[11] Another $119 million came from cuts to franchise and excise taxes on businesses. A $111 million in cuts came from repealing inheritance and gift taxes (Sequoyah 2018).

Federal tax exemptions also encouraged Haslam philanthropy. Though, Jimmy Haslam III has stated, "We never give for tax purposes. We give for the purpose of giving" (Local News 2016), the financial benefits of philanthropy are substantial. Money given to directly to the GSP is tax-exempt and money given to the family foundation, which also gives to the GSP, allows immediate deductions on money donated later (Raddon 2008). Most of the governor's portfolio is in a blind trust, but estimates based on tax returns through 2008 suggest his federal income tax rate averaged just 13.1% over a six-year period (Pesquiarra 2011). Federal deductions and exemptions have helped shield tens of millions in income from taxation (Pesquiarra 2011).

Rendered both necessary and possible by public divestment, private wealth accumulation, and assumptions that private sector solutions are the best remedy for public education problems, the GSP deepens the neoliberal project in

---

[10] Nonelderly families making with incomes less than $18,000 per year are expected to pay around 10.9% of their income in taxes. Those with incomes over $399,000 will pay only around 3%. (ITEP 2014)

[11] This repeal was supported by conservative think-tanks like Americans for Prosperity and the Beacon Center that are also pushing neoliberal education reforms (choice, charters, vouchers, etc.) (see joint report by KNS, Commercial Appeal, and Tennessean 2015).

two ways. For one, GSP represents a kind of neoliberal compromise. The public-private partnership is not outright privatization, but it absolves the state of welfare responsibilities and—by offering tangible resources to those in need—eases the pain created by the state's retreat (Schmitz 1995; Ribot 1999; Mohan and Stokke 2000; Miraftab 2004; Crouch 2011).

Also, the public-private partnership formalizes and amplifies the intervention of the private sector in public governance (Mithrab 2004; Crouch 2011; Robertson, Mundy, Verger, and Menashy 2012). The shared physical space inhabited by the GSP and district administration reflects shared authority. GSP and district offices are housed in the same towering downtown red brick building.[12] Historically, it was the city's premier hotel where politicians and tycoons conducted their "shenanigans" in a smoky backroom (Flory 2007). Today it is owned by the city, and political decisions happen in under the bright fluorescent, smoke-free front offices. Private sector power brokers have titles and offices with nameplates. In these offices, committees meet and important decisions are made. According to an interviewee who works closely with the GSP,

> Well, there are committees. There are relationships. It's not just Knoxville. It's every community across the country. There are places where decisions are made. There are places where decisions are reviewed. And there are places where decisions are announced.

[12] Also reflective of the neoliberal moment, in an attempt to solve fiscal shortfalls by turning over public assets to the market, the city issued a request for information (RFI) for letters of interest in purchasing the building in 2015.

She explained that the informal relationships between well-connected influencers drove policy decisions. From her insider perspective, public forums were only places where decisions are announced, “You can’t just show up at a school board meeting because guess what, by the time the school board meeting happens, the decision has already been made.” GSP administrators had access, position, and resources guide district policy. For example, the GSP coordinated the district’s relationship with the Chamber of commerce, and the Chamber president is on the GSP executive board. In a 2012 interview, the superintendent noted, “The Chamber of Commerce has been a good relationship. They’ve helped us develop and write our strategic plan. … [they] voted unanimously to support that budget proposal” (Annenberg 2013).

Philanthropy as Governance

For corporations and the billionaire Haslam family, the GSP was a tool for advancing a vision of schools as economic growth engines (Schervish 2003; Nickel and Eikenberry 2010). In an interview, a person associated with the GSP described corporate financial interest in public schools,

> I think generally our business community is *very* concerned with the future workforce. So they’re going to want, they have an interest in funding an organization that’s intended to improve the future workforce.

Wealthy individuals and corporations may deploy resources that give wealthy actors enormous capacity to win political conflicts, but also to create, shape, and produce the very rules and resources in which they and others exercise their

agency. Schervish (2003) calls these actors *hyperagents*. By focusing primarily on the Haslam family as hyperagents, I identify 5 ways they shape the policy environment. First, they do not fund isolated programs—instead they fund networks in order to shape entire education systems. Second, their charity shapes the political calculus of local decision-makers, even those formally independent. Third, Haslam political spending (campaign donations, political action committees, etc.) aligns with the "apolitical" work of the GSP. Fourth, leadership positions (government, corporate, non-profit) give additional influence. Fifth, interconnections with other wealthy elites—overlapping political economic interests and positions—further amplify their authority. I describe each below.

Instead of funding isolated programs, the Haslam family funds entire networks of charities, non-profits, public-private partnerships, political groups, etc. Though much their charity is "dark money" (e.g. unlimited and undisclosed funds given to non-profits) and difficult to trace (Smith and Powell 2014; Mayer 2016), by examining public archives (non-profit annual reports, IRS filings, press releases, local news reports, names on buildings, etc.) offers a glimpse of Haslam philanthropic practices. GSP records show that individual, foundational, and corporate Haslam funds converge on the partnership.[13] But their multipronged support for the GSP does not only converge on the partnership—it diverges into a system of horizontally and vertically aligned partners. For example, the family supports, (a.) the GSP directly, programs supported by the

[13] Reckhow and Snyder (2014) and Snyder and Reckhow (2016) demonstrate the expanding role of philanthropy and education and identify a similar phenomenon called "convergent grant-making" whereby multiple foundations support the same organization or district.

GSP, (b.) programs that support GSP supported programs, (c.) institutions that support the GSP, (d.) institutions that support GSP supported programs. A concrete example of system support: the Haslams fund the GSP, Project Grad, United Way, Knox County, and the University of Tennessee. The GSP is the primary private supporter of Project Grad. Knox County also supports Project Grad. The United Way supports the GSP and Project Grad. The University and Knox County support and partner with the GSP. Knox County also supports Project Grad. The interconnectedness is dizzying. If we visualize the Haslams actively producing social structure, we see overlapping feedback loops constituting dynamic yet durable networks that pattern social arrangements (Giddens 1984).

Even “hands off” philanthropy activities exert political influence by shaping political calculus of formally independent decision-makers. The Haslams hold no official GSP directorship positions, but philanthropic influence does not require direct management—or even much attention (Au and Ferrare 2014). Bill Haslam quipped to journalist asking about his charitable donations in 2011, "You've probably paid a lot more attention to what went in there in the past few years than I have" (Knox News 2011). Whether or not Bill Haslam knows where his family’s tens of millions of dollars are going, beneficiaries of that money know where it comes from and the money alters the calculus of local and regional decision-makers. An education program director described her relationship with the Haslams in a way that hints strings attached to their charity:

Susan – In terms of our operating budget, that's all funded through the Haslam family and their foundation.

Bill - So your funding comes from the Haslams, but are these folks involved? Like are they on the board, or some sort of decision making role, or…?

Susan - So we will have, for example, events in which, at which the Haslams are in attendance. We usually have dinner with them once or twice a year. But on a day to day, uh level they are not involved.

Bill - Okay. Yeah that's what I was getting at just how, you know. Do they do any big picture stuff? I mean, do they outline your agenda?

Susan – [shakes her head no]

Bill – Yeah. Okay.

Susan – They like to know what is going on.

Similarly, another director described the relationship with his program's primary funder, "He trusts us completely," but added, "He wants data. Wants to know what's going on. He wants to know that his money is … you know." Fieldwork suggests many local non-profit directors enjoyed significant formal autonomy, but the desire to know what's going on—whether through metrics or informal interactions—is a reminder that that funding is contingent and conditional. It is a fact salaried employees are unlikely to forget.

Interviews, conversations, social media, and editorials reveal a pattern of elite influence on everything from media coverage, school board votes, and superintendent executive action. Myriad local actors (GSP, school board,

foundations, university, superintendent, etc.) have stakes in maintaining the goodwill and support of the Haslam family. For example, in 2014 local education activists were interviewed for a local TV news story highlighting the superintendent's lack of classroom teaching experience. In an interview, an activist described what happened next:

> [The reporter] emails me an hour before air time and says, "It got pulled. Call me." And we thought Haslam. We thought McIntyre [the superintendent], told him cause they had to interview McIntyre for his side. We thought McIntyre called Haslam and Haslam called and had it pulled. But no, McIntyre himself called and had it pulled. Not even somebody from his office. He just called and had it pulled […] But it's because they know his connections with Haslam.

Another activist I interviewed nicely summed up a common sentiment and recurring theme from fieldwork: "Nobody really wants to piss Haslam off."

Political spending by the Haslam family also aligned with GSP initiatives and shaped the environment in the partnership which it operated. The Haslams funded school board candidates that worked with the partnership and state legislatures that voted determine state education policies. In 2014 a school board candidate raised the largest amount ever ($43,035) in a local school board race thanks, in part, to ten members of the extended Haslam family each donating the legal maximum of $1,500 (Knox News 2014; Bean 2014; Knox County Election Commission 2014). Similarly, a Democratic legislator I interviewed lost a close race to an opponent supported by the Republican governor and political action

committees (PACs) associated with his family.[14] The governor exerted influence in Republican primaries to push his education agenda (Humphrey 2014). As the former legislator described it,

> In the Republican primary, there were two guys, two Republican guys on my side—against vouchers. And Haslam beat them both in primaries. They used money from his PAC and these groups to beat his own people. […] So what he has done? Scared the hell out of any Republican who might vote against vouchers because what they'll think is, "He's going to beat me in my next race."

Whether or not he actually spent money to defeat candidates that opposed his agenda, the threat was omnipresent. The quote above suggests Haslam's political power is the sum of *actual* and *potential* resources he brings to bear in political contests (Bourdieu 1986).

The Haslam family derives influence from directing its own wealth, but also by directing the wealth of others. Through directorship positions (corporate, non-profit, public) they direct money collected through taxes, grants, or donations. For example, through multiple leadership positions Bill Halsam can direct resources to the GSP. He is a board member of Cornerstone Foundation (assets over $8 million in 2014) (Guidestar 2016; Statement of Disclosure of Interests 2016); he is chair of the Haslam Family Foundation; and he is a trustee of the University of Tennessee. Each institution has supported the GSP. As a former mayor and current governor he directed public money to either directly to

[14] PACs associated with the Haslams include Jobs4TN, Advance TN PAC, Tennesseans for Student Success (TSS) have ties to Haslam. TSS had 13 lobbyists in 2015.

the GSP or to projects that aligned with the GSP mission. Haslam serves on the board of Achieve Inc., a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit committed to accountability systems, metrics, and aligning education and business (Achieve 2016). The position allows him to the direct resources of funders like the Gates Foundation, ExxonMobil, AT&T, Boeing, Bayer, Dupont, State Farm (see footnote for tangled web that includes these funders, Haslam, ALEC, and the GSP).[15] In 2015 Achieve Inc. awarded Knox County a grant to review its assessment policies. To this announcement, a local reported offered a poignant assessment of the overlapping interests: "Never ask a barber if you need a haircut" (Bean 2015).

The Haslam family also derived influence from the durable formal and informal networks with other elites—their *social capital* (Koenig and Gogel 1981; Shervish 2003; Bishop and Green 2008; Domhoff 2009). The GSP provided institutionalized social capital and a formal link to other elites. Links include formal interlocking directorates spanning public-private spheres as well as more informal connections (see Koenig and Gogel 1981; Giddens 1984; Shervish 2003; Bishop and Green 2008; Domhoff 2005).

Haslam family influence was amplified through close connections with other wealthy, powerful people like the, Randy Boyd—another GSP donor and

[15] This thread is suggestive of wider interconnections: each corporation on listed above has also a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which pursues a neoliberal agenda of limited government and free markets. ALEC has been instrumental in writing legislation like the 2011 bill, signed into law by Haslam, allowing for-profit virtual charter schools in the state. K-12 Inc. won a contract to start a virtual charter in Tennessee, which ended up being among the lowest performing schools in the state. Haslam owned shares in K-12 but sold them when running for governor in 2009. K-12 Inc. is owned by Lowell Milken, the creator of the TAP performance based compensation model. And, TAP happens to be the GSP's largest programmatic expenditure ($1 million in 2014).

Vice Chair of the GSP board. Boyd's political, corporate, political, and non-profit practices reveal overlapping interests, influence, and deep connections with the Haslam family. As an agent of the state, Boyd is Governor Haslam's appointed Commissioner of Economic Development, former Commissioner of Higher Education, and a former special advisor on higher education. He chaired at least four other state development and education initiatives.[16] He has been active in the Republican Party, serving as state co-chair with Jim Haslam for Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign. In 2017 Boyd announced his candidacy to succeed Haslam as governor. Though he has rejected the title and positioned himself as a political outsider, he has been dubbed "Haslam 2.0." In the private sector, Boyd shared similar corporate interests with the Haslams. He founded and served as executive chairman of a large privately held corporation. He sits on at least four corporate boards. In addition to owning several small businesses, he owns a company that owns a of minor league baseball teams. Though not as wealthy as Haslam, Boyd and his wife reported more than $42 million in total income for 2015 and 2016 alone (Elbert 2017). As a non-profit actor, Boyd has sat on the board of at multiple non-profits (at least 8) and many (at least 6) were education related. He chairs a non-profit that supports students in community college and technical programs. He has served in directorship positions for the United Way (also funded by the Haslams). The Boyd Center for Business and Economic Development and the Boyd Distinguished Professorship are housed in

[16] Initiatives include aligning secondary education institutions with employer needs, one supporting entrepreneurship, one infrastructure initiative, and another focused on rural economic development

the Haslam College of Business at the University of Tennessee. At the ceremony celebrating the Center's opening Boyd echoed Haslam's business-minded vision of education, "If you want to make a change in the world, invest in education. If you want the best return on your investment, invest in business education" (University of Tennessee 2016).

Boyd's social capital helped him advance a vision of public education as government subsidized corporate workforce development and an important tool for attracting regional corporate investment. In a cavernous room at a downtown Marriot, Boyd, speaking as state Commissioner of Economic Development, outlined his vision at a GSP sponsored event welcoming the new Commissioner of Education, Candice McQueen.[17] According to Boyd, Tennessee was uniquely willing to offer up its K-12 and Higher Education systems to align with corporate interests. Education was a "great sales tool," he said, and his social connections would help him make it happen.

> It turns out that all those utilities and incentives that we talk about, those are table stakes. Everybody's going to keep diggin' diggin'—so we're all about the same. So at the end of the day the most important issue was not what it was going to cost us to help get our site built, but where are the future workers going to come from? So it's all about workforce development and things that we are doing in our state with [our education initiatives] and some of those programs makes for a *great* sales tool for

[17] These multiple roles or matrices suggest the "duality of persons and groups" (Breiger 1974). But perhaps this "duality" would be more aptly heptality or octality for someone acting in such a diverse multitude of roles.

> us. […] One thing that we're trying to do differently in Economic Development than we have done in the past is try to align—the fact is, we're aligning—try to align with education. And actually I thought this part was going to something that I was really able to do really well because, one, Candice [Commissioner of Education] and I have been friends for a couple years prior to taking this job, so I knew I could work well with Candice. And, conveniently, last July I was appointed the chair of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. […] And so when the governor called in December and said you can be the chair of the Tennessee Education Commission *and* you can be the Commissioner of Economic Development: this is perfect! You know, I met with Candice and with Higher Education, and being the chair and being the commissioner, listen I told her, we're going to be *aligned*! This is going to be great. But unfortunately somebody from the governor's office called me in January and said, we did a little research and it turns out, you can't be both. So you're going to have to resign the chairman of the Tennessee higher education commission. So a bit of trivia, I am now the shortest tenured chair of the Tennessee higher education commission history [audience laughter]. But they still take my calls. I know those guys really well. And we will continue to work together.

His speech highlights how multiple roles, informal networks, and formal institutional connections helped him drive education reform. So even if the

economic development commissioner could not directly dictate Department of Education policy, Boyd reminds us, “they still take my calls.”

A Contested Field . . . “Who’s Gonna Win?”

To be clear, to argue that the GSP serves the interests of wealthy elites, is *not* to argue that the GSP was an uncontested space. Even as it tilted the field in favor corporate interests and private governance of public education, the partnership also created spaces for community empowerment. The GSP promoted grassroots empowerment through its community schools programs, which were its 2nd largest expense ($870,000 in 2015). As I describe in Chapter 7, the community school model is rooted in progressive and radical traditions of community organizing and reflect concerns about social responsibility, equity, social welfare, and democratic control—values at odds with the GSP’s largest expenditure, it’s performance based teacher compensation program ($1 million in 2015). There were 3 major obstacles to realizing the stated goal of community empowerment. I describe each below.

First, there appeared to be a gap between the rhetoric of community empowerment and the actual practice. In an interview, a person involved with the GSP described the problem succinctly,

> [We] can say, oh yes we want communities engaged in decision-making. And we want partners to be aligned—what we actually practice, *not*. We don’t practice that.

He added,

> I know some other white guys who can, they can talk about equity and even feel the importance of it but when it comes right down to it there's a whole—we have to shift our entire paradigm in order to really *live* those values, right?

This person and others within the GSP were dedicated bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice by drumming up support from community leaders, but admitted there were challenges.

Second, another obstacle to community empowerment is the institution's non-representative leadership structure, which privileges the perspectives of its funders and directors. Although its relatively diverse board of trustees includes elected public officials (the teachers' union president, and president of the local branch of the NAACP), its leadership staff and executive board are much less diverse. In an interview, a GSP employee described the problem of non-profit administrators making decisions for underserved communities:

> We have all of these mostly white, privileged people, mostly. That's who works at these agencies. You know, there may be a little bit of diversity but the power structure in our community in particular is mostly white, privileged. And we're making decisions for people who don't, either look like us, they don't come from the same cultural context that we do.

Non-representative elites making decisions for underprivileged, minority communities is antithetical to their empowerment.

The third major obstacle to community empowerment was rooted in the nature of philanthropy. In an interview, a key informant stated the problem as a question of power and conflict:

> The leadership that's engaged in this can articulate, yes, we want communities engaged. Then let's say it comes down to a community says, we want this. But those leaders maybe have a very different idea about what needs to happen. *Who's gonna win?*[18]

The question is poignant and articulates that within a philanthropic model, communities lack teeth to dictate terms and win conflicts. They are encouraged to participate in community programs, but only within bounds approved by those directing resources. The threat of revoking funds is omnipresent. Better policy, refined practice, increased commitment, and more representative leadership—all these may help close the gap between rhetoric and practice, but none alters the fact that the institution is ultimately accountable to its funders. As a form of governance, philanthropy is ultimately plutocratic (Barkan 2013).

BROAD CENTER: LEADERSHIP PIPELINES

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation is another private philanthropy that exerts influence on local education policy. Through its educational leadership programs, the Broad Center trained 5 Knox County administrators (1 superintendent and 4 "residents" in administrative positions), who worked as part of statewide network of some 27 alumni. Eli Broad is the only person to build 2

[18] See Shefner's (2008), *The Illusion of Civil Society*.

Fortune 500 companies (KB Home and Sun America) and was the 65th wealthiest person in the world in 2015, worth an estimated $7.4 billion (Forbes 2015). His charitable foundation has some $3 billion in total assets (Broad 2016). The education focused arm of the foundation is the Broad Center, which is the smallest of the nation's big three education philanthropies (Gates, Walton, Broad), but arguable the most effective. The Broad Center's signature programs are the Broad Academy (for system-wide leaders like superintendents) and the Broad Residency (for high-level managers).[19] Other initiatives include the Broad Prize for Urban Education, the Broad Prize for Charter Schools and the Broad Institute for School Boards. The Broad Foundation's educational initiatives have focused on supporting charter schools, performance pay, and standardized test-based achievement tracking that can be used to rate teacher and administration effectiveness.

The Broad Center is unique in its aggressive reform tactics. Styled after venture capital firms that boomed in the 1990s, the Broad Center seeks maximum return on charitable investments by taking risks on scalable institutional experiments, encouraging entrepreneurial activity, pursuing market solutions, and employing corporate management techniques (Saltman 2009; Scott 2009; Saltman 2010; Lipman 2011).[20] Unlike charitable foundations of the 1960s and 1970s that tended to invest in schools, programs, and underprivileged students (Jehl and Payzant 1992), or more recent philanthropic

[19] This is in addition to numerous other initiatives like the Broad Prize for Urban Education, the Broad Prize for Charter Schools, and the Broad Institute for School Boards.
[20] See also the Broad Foundation's (2009) "School Closure Guide: Closing Schools as a Means for addressing Budgetary Challenges."

focus on policy advocacy (e.g. Walton Foundation, Stand for Children, Students First, American Federation for Children), the Broad Foundation leverages dollars through programs that train and place aligned agents in front office positions (Hess 2005). Once placed, alumni recieve public salaries and pursue neoliberal education reforms from within public institutions (Saltman 2009; Scott 2009; Saltman 2010; Lipman 2013).[21] According to its website, "We practice 'venture philanthropy.' And we expect a return on our investment." Below, I outline Broad's unique blueprint for reform, then describe how the model has been executed in Knox County.

The Broad Center has been particularly successful promoting charter schools, performance pay, and metric-based accountability through its leadership academies. The Broad Academy and Broad Residency programs follow a model that can be best described in 5 steps:

1. *Recruit* – Bring in business executives and military leaders to run public school systems.
2. *Train* – Educate school leaders in business management principles and quantitative methods.
3. Place – Install Broad trained leaders in executive and management positions who can hire additional Broad alumi.
4. Network – Create durable connections between individuals and institutions linked by common ideologies and interests.

[21] See also Eli Broad's (2012) *The Art of Being Unreasonable: Lessons in Unconventional Thinking*.

5. Replicate – Create locally-based leadership pipelines to train school level managers and staff.

I derived this 5 step model based on my primary research (interviews, fieldwork, and review of Broad publications and databases) and secondary research (Saltman 2009; Scott 2009; Saltman 2010; Lipman 2013;). I describe each step in more detail below.

First, Broad recruits heavily from outside public education, targeting those with executive experience in corporate, military, and non-profit sectors (Saltman 2010). Many recruits hold master's degrees in education. According to the Broad Foundation's searchable database (2016), 306 Broad Residents and partners held master's degrees in business administration. Of those, 77 MBAs came from just the top four business schools—Harvard, Stanford, Chicago, and Pennsylvania (US News 2016). Forty-one Broad alumni have a graduate degree from Harvard where Broad has invested in an Education Innovation Laboratory and a program that integrates education, business, and public policy (Broad 2016). Only 24 had a master's degree in education (M.Ed., Ed.M, Ed.S., M.S.Ed), and of those more than half (16) of also held MBAs.

As the product of modern business schools, recruits' managerial expertise consisted primarily in mastery of quantitative methodologies (Gintis and Khurana 2007; Cukier and Mayer-Schönberger 2013) rather than expertise rooted specific knowledge or experience in the field of education (Brown 2015; Muller 2018). This reflects the management style that predominated in the 1980s in the private sector, and was soon disseminated through public and non-profit worlds as "New

Public Management" (Brown 2015; Muller 2018). As the products of military and corporate sectors, recruits also had experience working in hierarchical organizations that value strong leadership, obedient subordinates, and enforced mandates (Robbins 2008; Saltman 2009).[22]

Second, Broad programs trained managers in the style, assumptions, and language of private business. According to their website, programs emphasized strong leadership, discipline, and, especially, data-driven management (Broad 2016). Course descriptions for the Residency program include focus reform, budget and finance, accountability, labor relations, innovation, competition, and human capital systems (Broad 2016). Faculty and lecturers generally lacked normative terminal degrees (WSCUC 2014). Faculty expertise was rooted in professional experiences as charter school executives (e.g. Tennessee Achievement School District, Khan Academy, Rocketship Academy, etc.), private education consultants (e.g. Insight Education, Cross and Juftus, New Angle Consulting), non-profit executives (e.g. Students Matter), and departments of education administrators (e.g. former Tennessee Commissioner, Kevin Huffman) (WSCUC 2014; Broad 2016).

Third, the Broad Center's placement record is remarkable. Broad Superintendents Academy (now Broad Academy) graduates filled fully 43% of all large urban superintendent openings in 2009. From 2002 to 2016 were 160 Broad Academy graduates working in executive education roles around the nation. Additionally, over 250 Broad Residency graduates worked in some 50

[22] Chomsky (1996:434) argues modern corporations are "private tyrannies," that "mimic totalitarian forms in their internal structure." Muller (2018) similarly describes "tyranny of metrics."

school districts, charter school systems, and departments of education (Broad 2016). The Residency placements enjoyed starting salaries over $90,000 (public salaries often subsidized by Broad grants) at education institutions (often Broad supported), and positions that report directly to senior executives (often Broad Academy alumni) (Broad 2016).

Fourth, the Broad Center created durable connections of institutions and individuals linked by common ideology, interest, and funding practices. The Center advertises alumni access to some 500 graduates and partners. Graduates receive support from career services staff in addition to financial support to attend formal networking “convenings,” conferences, trainings, and seminars (Broad 2016). They have access to a “knowledge networking system,” called The Exchange, which promises to connect members and provide access to tools to “help you push reforms faster and further” (Broad 2016). The Broad Center’s hyper-resourced network is strengthened by “convergent funding,” meaning Broad superintendents and residents are placed in positions to succeed insofar as they may be placed in organizations that receive Broad Foundation support through donations, awards and grants, or through the Broad backed Charter School Growth Fund (Reckhow 2013).

Finally, a remarkable feature of the Broad pipeline model for leadership training is that it is self-replicating. There is a “Russian doll” structure of centralized influence with layers of concentric faces radiating from the core (Mirowski 2013:43). System-level executives (i.e. superintendents) fan out across the nation. They hire Broad Residents to fill front office positions (i.e. human

capital management, planning, finance, etc.). Then, these executives create local training pipelines to recruit, train, place, and network school-level managers. Principal training programs have emerged in many districts directed by Broad alumni: Pittsburg, Chicago, New York, Gwinnett County (GA), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC), and Knox County (TN).[23] Principals disseminate to area schools. In turn, principals may tap teachers to lead teaching cohorts to train other teachers (as is the case in Knox County). This replication is crucial to Broad's ability exercise outsize influence relative to its investments.

Knox County provides a case study of the Broad Center's leadership pipeline model. The Broad Center (2016) lists Knox County Schools as a likely residency opportunity. Local influence began in March of 2008 Pilot Corp. sent a private jet to Boston to interview a rising star in education, James McIntyre, a graduate of the Broad Superintendents Academy. The candidate was selected by 5-4 vote of with the support of then mayor, Bill Haslam and the Chamber of Commerce (Knox News 2008).

The candidate's resume boasted business management acumen and just one year of classroom teaching experience (KCS Candidate File 2008). At Harvard he participated in a leadership program that was a joint effort between the Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Business School. As Chief Operating Officer of Boston Public Schools, he increased efficiency and

[23] For example, New York City's former Chancellor of Education, Joel Klein also served as chair of the Broad Center's Board of Directors. He created the New York City Leadership Academy. In an interview he said, "I wanted to change the old system. New leadership is a way to do that" (Gootman and Gebeloff 2009). Chicago has a long history of Broad influence. As CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan hosted 23 Broad Residents. As U.S. Secretary of Education, he had 5 Residents working with him (Broad Annual Report 2009).

accountability, improved “customer service,” leveraged “technology to improve business practice,” formulated data driven policy, and effectively managed union threats (KCS Candidate File 2008).

Once in place, the superintendent hired four Broad Residents. They directed offices focused on accountability, planning and improvement, federal programs, and human capital. All had corporate executive experience, MBAs from top schools, and management expertise rooted in quantitative data literacy. To make the hires, the superintendent unilaterally accepted conditional Broad grants to create their positions. The most recent grant stipulated Broad would pay $30,000 dollars towards compensation: the county was responsible for “matching” expenses of around $90,000.[24] Notably, unilaterally entering these contracts violated school board policy and drew a rebuke from county commissioners and county the law director, but not until well after the fact (Knox News 2015).

The district’s Broad alumni are part of a regional network of Broad alumni and Broad supported institutions. For example, since serving in Knox County—and in addition to sitting on the Broad Center’s Alumni Advisory Board—Nakia Towns was appointment by governor Haslam as the state’s Assistant Commissioner of Education where she worked with 5 other Broad alumni.[25] Additionally, some 21 other Broad alumni worked in the state, primarily managing

[24] Broad grants have included far reaching stipulations. In New Jersey, for example, a $430,000 grant came with a condition that governor Chris Christie remain in office (Cohen 2012).
[25] Their job titles are Special Assistant for Accountability Implementation, Executive Director, Educational Talent, Chief of Staff to the Deputy Commissioner, Deputy Assistant Commissioner (Data & Research Division), and Executive Director of Student Readiness (TNDOE 2016; Broad 2016).

7 charter school operators (Broad 2016).[26] Four of those charters operators were listed as Broad philanthropic "investments" (Broad 2016). And all 7 operators are listed in the Broad (and Gates) supported Charter School Growth fund's philanthropic "portfolio" (Charter Growth Fund 2016). Notably, the Tennessee Department of Education is itself a Broad supported institution (Broad Annual Report 2014).[27]

The superintendent created his own local leadership pipeline to recruit, train, and place school-level administrators. In 2010 the University of Tennessee's Center for Educational Leadership opened its doors to its first Leadership Academy cohort.[28] A promotional video for the center claims, "there is nothing like it in the country," yet its basic structure, purpose, and approach resembles training academies in other districts with Broad superintendents. The center was made possible by large, anonymous donation and support from the Cornerstone Foundation (Haslam is a board member) (Guidestar 2016; Statement of Disclosure of Interests 2016). The Academy's explicit purpose is to be a "principal pipeline" to produce managers "well versed in their sponsoring school district's goals," according to the superintendent (Annenberg 2016). Instructors include university faculty, but also practitioners like the superintendent

[26] This number is based on the Broad Residency's searchable database and publically available archives. The number includes directors of national charter chains operating schools in the state even if they are headquartered elsewhere. The breakdown is as follows: 5 Green Dot Public Schools; 3 Rocketship Education; 3 LEAD Public Schools; 1 Aspire Public Schools; 1 Gestalt Community Schools; 1 Scholar Academies; 1 KIPP, and 1 Shelby County.
[27] The Tennessee Department of Education received between $100,000 and $100 million for 2012-2013 (Broad Foundation Annual Report 2014)
[28] In 2014 the Leadership Academy was recognized as a national model to train principals in a review conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago. The University of Illinois at Chicago's Urban Education Leadership Program is one of the Broad Center's "current investments" (Broad 2016).

himself. Similar on a smaller scale to the Broad Center, Leadership Academy graduates enjoy an accelerated path to the leadership positions, continued professional development and networking, and have a high placement rate (Bean 2012; Annenberg 2016).

Through the Leadership Academy, the superintendent had influence at almost every level of the executive recruiting, selection, training, and placement process in the district. The academy cost the district about $835,000 per year, or about 6.68 million between 2010-2017. The program “tapped” or selected aspiring leaders from the school district. By 2013 there was a clear perception among teachers that Academy recruits tended to be inexperienced and/or ideologically compliant. As one teacher wrote on the 2013 Teacher Survey, “Leadership positions are handpicked seemingly based upon agreement with the system.” The superintendent then has a role in instructing and evaluating students. A recently minted graduate of the Leadership Academy described the superintendent’s role in an interview,

> He teaches that Leadership Academy class every spring and he takes personal days to do that. He does not accept money from the university. And he takes personal days—he’s still at work! Because we do it right over at his office.

Candidates also apprenticed under Academy approved mentors. Finally, the superintendent ultimately decided where and in what capacity to place graduates. According to the superintendent, “We’ve got a great cohort of folks to choose from that we can then really select for the right positions, the right

leadership positions for them," adding, "So, you know, I think it gives us some options we might not have had in terms of potential leadership folks" (Jessel 2011).

The Leadership Academy was avenue for continued influence for the embattled superintendent when he abruptly resigned in 2016 amid intense popular pressure and the prospect of an oppositional school board.[29] His resignation came just weeks after securing a pay raise and contract extension. He said he had no job prospects (Knox News 2016).[30] He assumed increased responsibility and influence at the academy, training some of the same the educators who resisted his reforms and advocated for his ouster. Notably, he was hired by University dean and GSP executive board chair, Bob Rider, after a "targeted search" (Local News 2016). The current GSP President was named interim superintendent. (More on this in Chapter VI)

GATES FOUNDATION: SETTING THE AGENDA

The largest education non-profit in the nation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, shapes national education policy through its support for Common Core and *Race to the Top* (Saltman 2009; McGoey 2015). But also, the Gates Foundation influenced Knox County directly through a Smarter School Spending grant that paid for consulting firm to recommend reallocation of resources

[29] Broad alumni to resign amid popular discontent include Mike Miles in Dallas, John Deasy in Los Angeles, John Covington in Detroit, Jean-Claude Brizard in Chicago, and Peter Gorman in Charlotte Mecklenburg.

[30] These factors helped him negotiate a contract buyout worth around quarter million dollars. Just three months he was announced as the new director of the Center for Educational Leadership.[30] He will make around $180,000 in addition to his contract buyout.

(people, time, and money). Though the grant was relatively small—just $840,000 or 0.002% of the districts $406 million budget—it bought a big impact, leaving its imprint on the district's budget and its 5-year strategic plan. Gate's approach to education reform has primarily been "apolitical" and technocratic. That is, Gates pursued a model of education reform focused on reform strategies that would maximize educational efficiencies by promoting scientific management practices, encouraging technological innovation, and promoting standardized or scalable "best practices." The Gates Foundation has tried to avoid overt political conflict by pursuing policies that set the education agenda and the terms of negotiation.

Invited to apply by for a Smarter Spending Grant by the Gates Foundation, Knox County administrators partnered with Boston-based business strategy and consulting firm, Parthenon Group, to develop a proposal for its Strategic Use of Resources Initiative in 2013 (Parthenon-KCS Proposal 2013).[31] The proposal clearly aligned with the Gates Foundation's technocratic vision of educational management based in data collection, data reporting systems, and data-based evaluation. These proposal promised that ramped up standards-driven and measurement-based accountability systems would become "part of the culture" and "embedded in district leadership daily operations" and it promised that Knox County could provide a model for replicable, scalable reform (Parthenon-KCS Proposal 2013). The successful application was awarded $840,000 from the

[31] There are several links between Knox County leadership and the Gates Foundation. For example, the superintendent is an ASPEN Institute Fellow. The Aspen Institute has received significant contributions from Gates. The district's Director of Professional Development is on the Common Core State Leadership Team. In 2013 Gates gave $400,000 to the State Department of Education to support Common Core (Gates Foundation 2016).

Gates Foundation and required $360,000 in matching funds, half of which would come from the GSP and half from Knox County (GSP 2014).

In May 2014, the Parthenon Group released the results of its findings and recommended a strategic finance plan for the district. Parthenon recommended investing in technology-based personalized learning, performance pay for teachers, and building analytic capacity and data systems to monitor implementation and outcomes (Parthenon 2014). Recommendations also a number of budget cuts to be realized by: reducing staff (i.e. librarians and counselors) that did not measurably contribute to higher test scores; ceasing higher pay for advanced degrees; and increased class sizes to reduce the number of necessary teachers (Parthenon 2014).

The recommendations were predictable and the mirrored recommendations Parthenon had made to Nashville Schools, Memphis Schools, and others. A review of Parthenon Group's white papers reveal consistent alignment with Gates' focus on driving measurable outcomes (Parthenon 2015). A good example is Parthenon's report, "Driving Grades, Driving Growth: How private capital in education is increasing access, inspiring, innovation and improving outcomes" (Parthenon 2015). A review of Parthenon's educational consultants reveals expertise derived primarily from quantitative literacy, and most hold Master's in Business Administration from top business schools (Parthenon 2015). Perhaps it is not surprising that a business model approach to education analysis would lead Parthenon to recommend (in different report but one that was widely circulated in Knox County) that schools should "focus on

operational profitability" and recognize that "All students are not equal. Some or more profitable than others."

If the results of the study were predictable, they were also influential. The study informed district's budget and its five-year plan (2014-2019), *Excellence for Every Child*. In the superintendent's own words,

> We're really excited about, not just the short-term impact this will have on the budget process coming up, but also the long-term impact on making sure we are getting the best possible return on our educational investment in our community (Bean 2014).

District leaders leveraged the authority of the well-researched, heavily quantitative, and cleanly presented report to answer critics of unpopular standards-driven, measurement based accountability reforms.

In addition to the Smarter Spending grant, Knox County also received a smaller award, an $85,000 "TeacherPreneur" grant, which rewarded teachers who produce measureable student gains. The program encouraged entrepreneurship, envisioned classrooms as "innovation labs," and promoted Gates' vision of technical, scalable solutions to education problems (KCS 2016). Both Grants reflected the Gates Foundation's assumption that education problems are not necessarily rooted in problems of poverty or lack of funding, but rather may be fixed by apolitical, technical solutions that maximize efficiencies.

Philanthropy, Technocracy, and Neoliberalism

Though Bill Gates has eschewed some key tenets of neoliberal doctrine—he has advocated for higher taxes on the wealthy and criticized markets as unresponsive to the poor—his philanthropic, technocratic education reform efforts are distinctly neoliberal in two ways (Goodell 2014).[32] For one, technocracy and neoliberalism share a logical affinity in their shared fixation on econometrics and maximizing productive efficiency (Centeno 1993; Habermas 2015). Technocratic beliefs have diverse roots in high modernist visions of rational centralized state government (Burris 1993; Scott 1998), Taylorism and strategies for scientific management (Maier 1970; Muller 2015), and the ideas of American New Deal social engineers (Akin 1977). Technocracy also found unique expression in authoritarian neoliberal regimes that emerged Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s (Burris 1993; Harvey 2005) and in the administration of Margaret Thatcher's in Britain (Harvey 2005; Muller 2015). To the extent that the Gates Foundation advances its standards-based, measurement-driven accountability solutions, it participates in the deeply neoliberal project of economizing areas of social life previously outside of market pressures (See also Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

Secondly, there is a clear affinity between philanthropic, technocratic, and neoliberal reform efforts—each is a rejection of democratic politics as at least

[32] Gates, speaking at the Royal Academy of Engineering's Global Grand Challenges Summit, noted that while malaria research received little funding, "if you are working on male baldness or other things you get an order of magnitude more research funding because of the voice in the marketplace" (Solon 2013). Similarly, Gates trustee and fellow billionaire, Warren Buffet, criticized regressive taxes in his 2011 New York Times op-ed, "Stop Coddling the Super-Rich" and in public statements like, "My cleaning lady pays a higher tax [rate] than I do on my dividends and investments . . . it has been a marvelous, marvelous time to be superrich" (qtd. in Paraneti 2011).

inefficient and likely corruptive (Centeno 1993; Habermas 2015). Gates has expressed concerns about democracy (Goodell 2014) and contends that technological innovation is the real driver of human progress and flourishing. He told *Rolling Stone* in 2014:

> Our modern lifestyle is not a political creation. Before 1700, everybody was poor as hell. Life was short and brutish. It wasn't because we didn't have good politicians; we had some really good politicians. But then we started inventing – electricity, steam engines, microprocessors, understanding genetics and medicine and things like that. Yes, stability and education are important – I'm not taking anything away from that – but innovation is the real driver of progress.

Technocracy, in this instance, is reflected in the notion that human problems (poverty, educational inequalities, disease) have unique solutions that can be discovered through experimentation and implemented at scale (Scott 1998; McGoey 2015). If human problems have scientific solutions, then the influence of democracy appears primarily corruptive. Gate's technocratic reforms require empowered CEO-like leaders who make excutive and scientific—if unpopular—decisions. Gates told CNN (2009), "The cities where our foundation has put the most money is where there is a single person responsible." These leaders eschew political criteria (equity, justice, compromise, balancing interests) in favor of technical criteria (measurable growth, performance, efficiency, benchmarks, future valuation, etc.). Such regimes derive legitimacy from measurable outcomes, not as reflections of political will (Habermas 2015).

ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATION OR NEOLIBERAL ORTHODOXY

This chapter has described how three distinct approaches to philanthropic reform have neoliberalized Knox County Schools. The GSP formalized the role of philanthropic hyperagents in local governance; the Broad Foundation created pipelines to recruit, train, place, and network key district leaders; and the Gates Foundation has used grant-making to shape the district's education agenda. I have also argued that distinct tactics achieve two common ends. One is to reinforce the power of wealthy, self-appointed directors of public policy through philanthropy. The other is to restructure schools to promote economic competitiveness.

As a means to conclude, I highlight a major empirical finding that though their tactics are distinct, these three non-profits are highly coordinated with each other and with a complicit state. This finding has major ramifications to crucial question: can philanthropy support democratic ends? Some reasonable theoretical arguments justify philanthropic intervention on the grounds it promotes heterodox innovation (Bishop and Green 2008; Reich 2013). Bishop and Green (2008:12), for example argue the primary advantage is that foundations have freedom, "above all, to try something new." Similarly, Reich (2013) posits,

> Foundations, answerable only to the diverse preferences and ideas of their donors, with a protected endowment permitted to exist in perpetuity, may be uniquely situated to engage in the sort of high-risk, long-run policy innovation and experimentation that is healthy in a democratic society.

Setting aside some damning theoretical critiques (Scott 2009; Saunders-Hastings 2014; McGoey 2015), I address the empirical question: have philanthropies *actually* exerted pluralistic influence through novel ideas that reflect diverse donor preferences? In this case they have not.

Just how varied are the "the diverse preferences and ideas" of the corporate executive billionaire white men described in this chapter? The philanthropists described here support similar—and quite often the same—projects. There is consensus on issues of teacher evaluations based on student standardized test scores, performance pay, corporate-style management, and private intervention in the name of economic competitiveness. A good example of how these non-profits are highly coordinated is the district's Smarter School Spending Grant. The grant was proposed by a Broad superintendent, awarded by the Gates Foundation, and subsidized by the GSP. But, as in almost every case, the connections run much deeper. Support for the proposal came from the GSP, the Chamber of Commerce (an GSP supporter with interlocking directorships), and a Gates supported non-profit (TNSCORE) that advocates standards-based reform in the state ($250,000 in 2013) (Gates 2016). TNSCORE's board and steering committee included more GSP funders, the GSP president, a Haslam family member, and the district's Broad superintendent. It has published articles that cite and link to Broad-produced research, offers a monetary prize similar to the Broad Prize, uses the same technical consultant (RTI International) that conducts data analysis for the Broad Prize, and has a Broad Residency alumnus on its selection committee.

Links between these non-profits are too numerous to enumerate exhaustively, but here are a few more representative examples. The district's Broad-trained superintendent is linked to Gates through Gates supported institutions like the Aspen Institute (Gates gave $3.6 million for Aspen's Urban Superintendent's Network in 2013). Other district leaders are linked to Gates through organizations like the Common Core State Leadership Team (in 2013 the state received $400,000 from Gates to support Common Core). Also, Broad and Gates spending converges on the Charter School Growth Fund which has supported governor Haslam's charter school initiative and supports more than a dozen charter operators in the state, several of which are in turn directed by Broad Center graduates. The Charter Growth fund in turn backs Haslam supported Breakthrough Schools, which assists the Broad-led Knox County Schools district's new charter school. That charter school's parent foundation is backed by the Haslam family and other philanthropists who support the GSP. Also, both Gates and Broad charity converges on Harvard programs and professors that teach and publish on the need to integrate education, business, and public policy.[33] The district's superintendent holds a PhD from Harvard (37 Broad Residents also hold graduate degrees from Harvard) and has taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Managing directors of Parthenon Group (which conducted the resource analysis for the Gates grant) also hold graduate

[33] Broad has invested in Harvard's Education Innovation Laboratory. Gates has supported the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Harvard Business School. In 2009 Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Thomas Kane was appointed deputy director of education for US Program at Gates Foundation. He remained Professor of Education and Economics and faculty director of the Project for Policy Innovation in Education. Likewise, "Lasting Impact: A Business Leader's Playbook for America's Schools" was produced by the Boston Consulting Group, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Harvard Business School.

degrees (MBA, MEd) from Harvard (Parthenon 2016), and a senior partner is also fellow the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Gates also gave $30 million to the New Schools Venture Fund (NSVF), a non-profit charter school advocacy group. The Broad foundation also supports the NSVF, which partnered with Aspen Institute to create the Entrepreneurial Leaders for Public Education Fellowship Program to which McIntyre was appointed in 2011. I could go on. But the point should be clear: these philanthropic agencies are tightly networked, highly coordinated, mutually supportive, and share common goals.

A major justification for philanthropy is that it does something different than government (Bishop and Green 2008; Reich 2013). My research suggests these philanthropies are themselves deeply embedded in local, state, and national governments and deeply aligned with government policies. In a video interview, Eli Broad (2013) highlighted how his education philosophies aligned with federal policy,

> I am delighted that President Obama and Secretary Duncan are really pushing for what we believe in: charter schools, mayoral control, a longer school day and a longer school year, incentive compensation for teachers, national standards. So we're delighted to see this administration moving forward.

Likewise, In 2009 Secretary Duncan employed five Broad Alumni in the U.S. Department of Education. These philanthropies play a major role pushing policies that contribute to the neoliberal blurring of lines between state, market, and corporation (Crouch 2011).

Furthermore, although the state depends on private philanthropy, the reverse is also true. Private philanthropists depend on the state to exercise outsize influence relative the size of their contributions. The GSP's annual contributions amounted to just 0.006% of the district's annual budget, the Gates grant just 0.002%, and the Broad Center's contributions were even less (the cost of training and small salary supplements). Nationally, philanthropy accounts for just $4 billion, less than 0.008% of the $500 billion the US spends on primary-secondary education annually. Yet policy-makers ranked Gates, not the US Secretary of Education, the most influential individual in education (Swanson and Barlage 2006). These non-profits depend heavily state complicity and state aid. For example, the GSP receives half of its funding ($2.5 million annually) from the district. Broad Center influence depends on graduates receiving public salaries and benefits. Recent Broad grants required "matching" funds (more than $60,000) for $30,000 grants for local Residency placements. The Gates grants also come with conditions and matching requirements. The $1.2 million Gates grant consisted of $840,000 from Gates and required $380,000 in matching funds, half of which came from the district. One-time private grants that create long-term public institutional change (through aligned personnel, new front office positions, policy trajectory) are especially high yield investments. The private non-profits described in this chapter have aggressively leveraged small contributions to create big changes subsidized by the state. A fair question is who supports whom?

In conclusion, this research offers strong empirical evidence that non-profits coordinate with each other and a complicit state to exercise plutocratic and neoliberal influence on the district. Crucially, they are not ancillary groups supporting local public school. They are private actors deeply and formally integrated in district governance. Taken as a whole, their myriad programs do not offer substantive diversity. None are promoting any real intellectual diversity which might include critical pedagogy, deschooling, freedom-based learning, Montessori, or Reggio Amelia. Rather, these philanthropies impose a monolithic program that valorizes competition, private sector, corporate management, and metrics. Their ideas are not so innovative or novel as their rhetoric suggests. Rather, they are part of a close network offering multilateral support for what amounts to neoliberal education orthodoxy.

CHAPTER IV

RAPID REFORM: ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE POLITICS OF MEASUREMENT

Knox County Schools, underwent period of rapid reform from 2008 to 2013. The core policy project was to create a metric-based accountability system to improve institutional effectiveness by distributing rewards and punishments on the basis of measurable performance. The driving logic is succinctly captured by management gurus' pithy dictums like, "What gets measured gets done" (Peters 1982:268), and "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it."[34] In this chapter I outline 5 key reforms that defined the period of 2008 to 2013, evaluate district claims of success, and conclude by discussing how the politics of metric fixation are deeply neoliberal. First I describe the pillars of the new accountability system, which were: (1) high and measurable standards, (2) a new teacher evaluation instrument that measured adherence to best-practices and student outcomes, (3) performance-based compensation, (4) watering down of tenure protections, and (5) dismantling of collective bargaining rights. Second, I evaluate claims that the accountability system boosted educational quality. Administrators constructed a "winning" narrative and cited improvement on test scores, graduation rates, and state rankings as evidence that their policies were working. Yet, judging by the district's own standards, results were more ambiguous than official accounts suggested. Achievement gaps remained stubbornly large, and by 2014 early

[34] Some version of this quote is ubiquitously and incorrectly attributed to Peter Drucker.

gains appeared be slowing. Moreover, there were serious doubts about the validity of success measures. That is, what was *actually* being measured (i.e. composite standardized test score) was a poor proxy for what was *intended* to be measured (teaching quality). Third, I conclude the chapter by arguing metric fixation cannot be justified on its own terms, but rather clearly reflected deeply neoliberal political ideologies. From a Marxian view of neoliberalism, metric fixation expressed a preference "expert" control that curbed the power and autonomy of labor. Accountability reforms promoted managerial control and produced a more flexibilized and disciplined teacher workforce. From a Foucauldian view of neoliberalism, the reforms expressed a more indirect and diffuse governing rationality, identifiable as particular set of metric-focused practices, market logics, and economized language.

FIVE REFORMS: "THE OVERRIDING COMPONENT IS ACCOUNTABILITY"

At a 2014 State of the Schools address, the superintendent described the previous 5 years: "The pace of change in public education in Tennessee, and here in the Knox County schools has admittedly, been breathtaking," adding, "sometimes it feels like quite literally." Indeed, the period of reform between 2008 and 2013 was unique in terms of speed and intensity of reform. Measurement-based accountability reforms in Tennessee have roots that may be traced back to early 1980s when the state was an early adopter of performance-based teaching assessments (Tennessee Value-Added Assessment Score) that incentivized individual performance based on student test score growth (McNeil

2000; Amrein-Beardsley 2008; Horn and Wilburn 2013).[35] Likewise, Tennessee School Boards Association has opposed teacher collective bargaining since 1982 (Gibbons 2012). However, for Knox Country the period of 2008 to 2013 brought particularly rapid change. The 2008 financial crisis provided the urgency and justification for major reforms. Federal policies (NCLB and Race to the Top) and state policies (First to the Top) provided the resources and guidelines for restructuring important human capital, funding, and assessment policies. A Republican dominated state government was generally favorable to the business-minded education reforms. By 2012 historic Republican victories had ushered in a "super duper majority," with party members holding more than two-thirds of government offices (Brooks 2016). Locally, Broad Academy trained superintendent, James McIntyre, arrived in July 2008 on the eve of the global financial crash and a moment ripe for reform.[36] The first morning of his first day in office, the superintendent issued a limited budget freeze and immediately began the work of restructuring compensation systems to align with a vision of accountability that would put students at the heart of the system. He was backed by a supportive school board, a network of public-private partners, and aligned

[35] An adjunct professor of agriculture at the University of Tennessee, William Sanders, developed a model to measure and assess teacher effect on student performance. His Tennessee Value-Added Assessment Score (TVAAS) has been used in Tennessee since 1993, and has served as the model for the widely used Educational Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS). Analytics software company, SAS Institute Inc., currently customizes and sells EVAAS to states and school districts. Notably, in 2011 the Houston Independent School District fired 211 teachers based on EVAAS scores, has since dropped the system, and faces pending lawsuits (Amrein-Beardsley and Collins 2012).

[36] The subprime mortgage market crisis began in 2007, but the extent of the international banking crisis became clear with collapse of investment bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008. Locally, declining tax revenues created budget deficits that justified major structural reorganization.

state and federal policies. He described his strategic plan in a 2013 interview: “The overriding component is accountability” (Annenberg Institute 2013).

At a televised roundtable in 2014, a panel of educators gathered under bright studio lights in a high school library for a discussion with an embattled superintendent. Though many teachers were frustrated with recent changes to their profession, the superintended was riding high on a wave of quantifiable success. During the televised discussion the superintendent did well to deflect pointed criticisms of his personal leadership style and contextualize teachers’ grievances in terms of policy. He outlined the 5 major reforms, which defined the previous 5 years:

> I think it’s probably important to put the whole conversation in a bit of context. And I think it’s important to note there has been a lot of change in public education in Tennessee and in the Knox County Schools the last few years. If you think about where we were 5 years ago versus where we are today, we’ve seen significantly higher academic standards put in place, a new teacher evaluation system, um there’s been a push by the state of Tennessee to move towards strategic compensation, changes to tenure, changes to collective bargaining. There has been a lot of change in public education over the last few years. I think much of it for very good reasons: to try to make sure we raise the bar, in terms of our expectations and provide our students with an even higher quality education. But you know, there’s been some challenges in terms of so much change so quickly.

Here is a clear summation of the 5 major policy changes in Knox County education between 2008 and 2013: rising standards, new teacher evaluations, performance pay, weakened tenure, and dismantling of collective bargaining rights.

In the classroom teachers often experienced reforms as a fragmented series of chaotic experiments and disjointed mandates. But from a macro perspective—like from the elevated view the downtown central office—the 5 reforms appear cohesive, coherent, and rational. Standards defined success and created a baseline for benchmarking and comparing school, program, and employee performance. The new teacher evaluation instrument generated scores based on observable teaching practices and student outcomes, which could be used to rank employees. Performance-based compensation strengthened the accountability system by incentivizing compliance and productivity. Weakened tenure protections made jobs less secure, which made precariously employed teachers more sensitive punishment lest their performance evaluations suffer. And, a law eliminating collective bargaining rights was a crucial component of the reform strategy. The new bargaining framework, called *collective conferencing*, made it explicitly illegal to negotiate crucial elements of the accountability system (e.g. evaluations and performance pay). More generally, eliminating collective bargaining strengthened the accountability by weakening teachers' ability to negotiate terms of employment through their unions. I detail each of the 5 reforms below.

Measurable Standards

The first step in establishing a robust accountability system was to create measurable standards to benchmark success and failure. The push to establish high, measurable standards was most clearly expressed in the district's 5-year strategic plan (2009-2014), *Building on Strength: Excellence for All Children* (2009). The overarching strategy was to restructure institutions to better align educational practices with district goals by promoting accountability (*Excellence for All Children* 2009). A data-saturated environment of continuous measurement would inform that vision of accountability. Performance indicators and benchmarks allowed the administrators to evaluate the district, schools, grade-levels, subject area, programs, and individual teachers, and thus hold each accountable to performance relative to new standards.

The overarching benchmark adopted by the school board to measure district progress was its 100/90/90/90 target. The plan outlined yearly targets with the ultimate goal to be reached by 2020. Measures focused primarily on graduation and ACT numbers with: 100% of entering freshman graduate within 4 years; 90% graduate with a regular diploma; 90% of those graduating with a regular diploma take the ACT; and 90% of those taking the ACT will score at least a 21. These goals significantly raised the bar on 2008 numbers, which were respectively 84/79/71/62. (KCS 2009)

At a more granular level, the district set goals and collected data on a variety of indicators for individual student achievement, student growth, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. These measures included both

performance and context indicators. Performance indicators were measurable values meant to demonstrate how well the district achieved key objectives. Key performance indicators included student scores on standardized tests (TCAP, ACT, EOCs), student attendance, student discipline rates, post-secondary enrollment and remediation, teacher retention, and survey results.[37] Context indicators provided data on teacher experience and training, teacher attendance, resource allocations, student demographics, student interventions received, and volunteer activity. Context indicators described the general environment in which policies were designed, planned, and implemented. (*Excellence for All Children* 2009)

The plan was especially ambitious in raising proficiency targets for End of Course Exams and the TCAP math and reading/language arts tests. For example, the plan aimed to move the proficiency rate (2008 to 2020) in Algebra I from 51% to 85%, and proficiency on the grade 8 TCAP math assessment from 49% to 90%, a remarkable 83% increase. It should be noted that proficiency benchmarks are subjective determinations and often moving targets. State standards are determined at a minimum every six years by the State Board of Education. Test questions change from year to year. District, state, and national standards for proficiency are subject to change based on political calculus, like Tennessee's move to raise standards in its bid for Race to the Top funding. Though subjective and subject to change, proficiency targets serve the purpose

[37] TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) is the state's public standardized testing program. The ACT (American College Testing) is commonly used for college admissions and used by the state as a proxy college readiness. EOCs the state mandated End of Course exams.

of setting a standard to which districts, schools, programs, and employees may be held accountable.

The district sought to create a culture saturated by metrics and "expand its use and management of data to inform its decisions and review results in all aspects of instruction and operations" according to the superintendent's *Excellence for All Children* blueprint (2009). Measurable targets was a big part of this plan. A major action item was that, "More […] metrics must be developed at the department and school level in order to carry out these objectives" (Excellence for All Children 2009). Likewise, according to the plan, "accountability measures are woven throughout the plan and will be tracked annually, monthly, weekly, and sometimes daily." Measurable standards allowed the district to track and rank teacher performance.

Performance Evaluations

The second step for establishing a robust accountability system was the centerpiece of district reform efforts: a new teacher evaluation system. In 2013 the superintendent was invited to testify before Congress about his success. He said, "perhaps no other recent change has greater potential to improve the quality of education in our state than the adoption of a new teacher performance evaluation system." The evaluation system was the link between micro-level teaching decisions and district, state, and national standards. By producing multiple measures collected throughout the school year, the evaluation connected performance assessment to the day-to-day work of teaching. Teacher

evaluations were supposed to serve two primary—and distinct—functions. For one, the evaluation was supposed to be a professional growth tool that provide valuable information and feedback for teachers to use in reflecting on, evaluating, and improving their pedagogy. But also, the evaluation was a management tool for distributing rewards and punishments as scores provided the basis for decisions about employment, tenure, promotion, and compensation.

With bipartisan support, in 2010 Tennessee became an early adopter of a comprehensive teacher evaluation system based on student outcomes as part of the state's First to the Top Act and federal Race to the Top guidelines. The Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) relied on objective observations and student performance data to assess teacher job performance. According to a new state law, every teacher had to be evaluated every year. And, at least half of the evaluation had to be based on student academic outcomes. TEAM fulfilled those requirements, and Knox County schools enthusiastically adopted that model and implemented it in 2011.

The TEAM evaluation system measured effectiveness in three areas: teaching, professionalism, and student outcomes. Key measurements were derived from multiple yearly classroom observations, observable indicators of teacher professionalism, and scores generated by student performance on standardized tests. Classroom observations and professionalism measures accounted for 50% of a teacher's score. The other 50% was derived from student testing data. Knox County also piloted program to incorporate student feedback

in scoring teacher effectiveness (a sort of customer satisfaction survey) but that measure was ultimately short lived. I discuss the 3 key measures below.

First, *classroom observations* were a major component of the evaluation and scores were derived via an extensive, detailed rubric. This instrument was designed as a collaboration between the state Department of Education and the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). The instrument was modeled on NIET's Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) and is an example of evaluation industry inroads in public education.[38] The design draws on educational psychology and cognitive science research to define standards of good teaching. But also, a review of the model's research base shows designers drew heavily on existing accountability models and pay for performance plans, as well as drawing on best practices from fields of business and management to develop standards of good teaching (TNDOE 2011, NIET 2011). Evaluators scored teachers based solely on observable evidence. Evaluation protocol was supposed to provide objective assessment of instructional and planning practices, though the superintendent has admitted problems with inter-rater reliability (McIntyre 2013). The rubric lays out 61 instruction and planning criteria for teachers to meet in each observation.

Second, a *teacher professionalism* rubric scored teachers based on 17 criteria. The evaluation instrument assessed professional growth, use of data,

[38] NIET was founded and chaired by Lowell Milken. Milken is a billionaire former junk bond trader barred from working in the securities industry who, as one interviewee told me, "decided to save poor kids." Milken co-founded of the largest private provider of early childhood education in the world, which has annual revenues in the billions. He created the TAP system, GSP's largest programmatic expenditure. He owned K12, a low performing Tennessee's virtual charter school.

school and community involvement, and leadership. As I detail in the following chapter, the definition of professionalism outlined in the rubric rewards compliance with district policies, active leadership in approved roles, and the use of data and assessments in promoting a culture of accountability.

Third, *student academic outcomes* were a crucial component of teacher evaluations and accounted for 50% of a teacher's TEAM score. Student academic results incorporated both proficiency measures (15%) and growth measures (35%).[39] First, achievement data gauges a student's score on a standardized test against a subjectively determined standard deemed "proficient" in a particular subject for a particular grade level. Proficiency scores are derived from state standardized achievement tests for grades 3-8 as part of the, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). Subject areas include, English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Second, growth scores, or value added growth measures, measure student learning over time and indicate whether students have exceeded or underperformed relative to the their expected level of academic progress during that time period. Value-added measures are meant to provide a quantifiable metric for the amount of value produced by the teacher. Growth scores were generated by the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS).[40] TVAAS relies on sophisticated algorithms and data computing technology for

[39] See Devos and Franken 2017.
[40] In 2006 Tennessee was one of the first two states to receive US Department of Education funds for a growth model project, with the goal of piloting statewide growth model accountability systems that would inform the reauthorization of NCLB. TVAAS has also served as a model for the most widely recognized and implemented model, the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) (Amrein Beardsley 2012).

large-scale tracking of change in achievement scores over time. A benefit of value-added measures is that they do not penalize educators whose students may have come to them already behind academically. Although state law and district policy mandated that 50% of every educator's evaluation based on student standardized test performance, around half of all Tennessee and Knox County educators taught in non-tested areas. For the growth data of educators in non-tested areas, teachers were required to choose between sharing growth data for their school, or another discipline.

TEAM scores were meant to provide a basis for compensation, promotion, tenure, and contracts.[41] Failure to meet benchmarks triggered a number of negative consequences. For example, non-tenured teachers could have their contracts non-renewed (though non-renewal of a non-tenured teacher required no explanation or justification). Regardless of the overall evaluation score, receiving a 1 out of 5 growth score (TVAAS) meant teachers would receive a conference of concern letter, which marked the beginning a probationary status and—if scores did not improve—possible termination for a tenured teacher. Teachers undergoing remediation would also be subject to 4 evaluations instead of 2. They would be assigned an instructional coach and special professional development responsibilities like the districts' Intensive Assistance Program, which in addition to providing an improvement plan produces documentation

[41] It should be noted that although TEAM evaluations are supposed to form the basis of district human capital decisions, non-tenured teachers could have contracts "non-renewed" for any reason (or no reason) and without explanation. I highlight this case in the following chapter.

used to justify termination of employment.[42] Likewise, failure to meet benchmarks could result in lower compensation through disqualification from extended summer contracts, being denied leadership roles, or loss of APEX performance bonuses (TNDOE 2014).

Performance Pay

The third key component of district plan to create a robust accountability system was performance-based compensation. In 2011 the district introduced the Advance Perform Excel (APEX) strategic compensation system. The APEX system included professional support, training, and career advancement opportunities, but its distinguishing feature was a monetary performance incentive, which ranged from $1,500 to $2,000 annually. The majority (70%) of the incentive was based on the TEAM evaluation score, 20% was based on leadership roles, and 10% was based on placement in a high-needs school (APEX 2012).[43]

Limited performance pay was already in the district as early as 2006 when the district adopted the TAP (Teacher Advancement Program) model, which was designed for high-needs schools and adopted by four local schools. The TAP System sought to align systems for managing human capital with achievement goals. The system, like APEX, included elements of professional support, but

[42] The IAP process has existed since 1998. Teachers have described the IAP process as demeaning and demoralizing.
[43] Schools were also eligible to receive award money ($5,000 - $10,000), which could be spent educational improvement initiatives like purchasing instructional equipment or professional development.

also like APEX, a key component of the system was promoting instructionally focused accountability through monetized incentives awarded on the basis standards-based evaluations (APEX 2012). Through a partnership with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), the TAP program was expanded under the new superintendent in 2010 with a 5-year $26.5 million grant from the federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) and contributions from the Great Schools Partnership. By 2013 TAP had been expanded to 18 local schools (Annenberg 2013). APEX did not eliminate TAP in 2011, but rather extended it in a modified form to the entire district. The APEX system was funded by more than $10 million in federal grant money (Race to the Top, Innovation Acceleration Fund, and Teacher Incentive fund), which was available for 3-5 years. The goal was to incorporate APEX costs into the general operating budget, but ultimately as federal money dried in 2015 so had political support for performance pay (Clark 2015).

Introducing a performance pay for standards-based evaluation scores was a massive undertaking for a district with over 8,000 employees and almost 4,000 certified teachers. During just the first semester under APEX, evaluators completed nearly 7,000 TEAM observations and over 4,000 TAP observations (APEX 2012).[44] At the end of its first year APEX paid a total of $3.6 million to around 58% (about 2,100) of district teachers who had been awarded financial incentives.

[44] The majority (80%) of those first observations were announced, while the majority of spring semester observations were unannounced.

To put these compensation reforms in context, nearly 90% of school districts across the country use a traditional salary schedule that determines pay based on years of experience and degree attainment (TN DOE 2014 Differentiated Pay Master Plan). To be clear, APEX did not totally eliminate or replace traditional salary schedules in Knox County. However, the introduction of APEX signaled administrative preference shifting towards performance-based compensation. Indeed, during this period, the traditional pay scale came under fire from the superintendent. For example, citing of budget deficits in 2010, the superintendent put step pay raises on the chopping block when he asked teachers either forgo step pay raises or else face layoffs (Alapo 2010). Similarly, in a 2012 letter seeking support for a budget that included performance pay, the superintendent again raised the specter of layoffs citing budget expenses related to the contractually obligated 2% step pay raise (McIntyre 2012). Though significant, APEX was not the most radical performance pay scheme. Ultimately, threats to eliminate of step pay raises never materialized as they did in places like Eagle County, Colorado and Baltimore City Schools (OREA 2013). Likewise, the amount of money allocated for APEX performance bonuses was relatively small compared to, for example, Michelle Rhee's Washington D.C. school district program, which offered up to $25,000 individual performance bonuses for teachers who agreed to give up seniority and tenure protections (Wesson 2013). Knox County bonuses were small, just $1,500 to $2,000 annually for teachers

with an already low pay scale.[45] Despite the ultimately limited scope of APEX, nevertheless, it signaled a meaningful shift from traditional pay scales and towards a competitive compensation model that held teachers accountable to performance measures.

Weakened Tenure

Significant changes to teacher tenure also played key role in promoting accountability by making teachers more vulnerable to the outcomes of evaluation. A tenure law passed in April 2011 made teacher tenure harder to get, less meaningful, and contingent on evaluation scores. It was the first significant reform to a teacher tenure law dating to 1951 (Wesson 2012). The legal changes extended the probationary period for achieving tenure from 3 to 5 years. Additionally, during the last two years of probationary status teachers had to receive high evaluation scores (4 or 5 out of 5). The revised law also tied tenure to evaluation scores, mandating that teachers receiving consecutive low scores (1 or 2) would lose tenure and return to probationary status. Likewise, under the new law, receiving low evaluation scores (1 or 2) was considered cause for dismissal.

[45] Knox County starting salaries were the lowest of the state's four metropolitan school districts. In fact, minimum salaries ranked 43rd in the state, and average teacher salary ranked just 45th (TEA 2015). This, in a state that ranked 38th in average teacher pay in 2015 (NEA 2017).

Elimination of Collective Bargaining

Just two months after losing tenure protections, teachers lost collective bargaining rights when the governor signed into law the Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing ACT (PECCA). Effective June 2011, PECCA strengthened the accountability system by specifically outlawing negotiation of key components of the system like performance pay and evaluations. More generally, the law strengthened accountability to performance measures by weakening teachers' ability to negotiate the terms of their employment.

PECCA repealed a 1978 measure that established collective bargaining for public school teachers (TN Comptroller 2012). The old law, the Education Professional Negotiations Act (EPNA), granted professional employees' associations exclusive negotiating authority with local school boards. EPNA mirrored broad national trends favoring workers' rights in the 1970s, and national trends favoring teachers' rights more specifically (Goldstein 2014). The original PECCA draft proposed a complete repeal of EPNA, which would have made it illegal for school boards to negotiate with teachers' unions. Some legislators believed complete repeal was too radical, and the law eventually passed with an amendment that required some collaboration with professional employees or their representatives on a limited range of topics—essentially base salaries, benefits, and certain working conditions (EPNA 2011).

Though school boards were required to meet with teacher representatives under certain conditions, their unions had virtually no authority. In the first place, school boards were not required to engage in conferencing unless a majority of

all *eligible* voters (not a majority of voters) voted to engage in collaborative conferencing. Once conferencing began, if teacher representatives and school boards could not agree, school boards were granted ultimate decision-making power. School boards were not required to submit to mediation or arbitration to resolve disputes with teachers associations. Representatives had little recourse as PECCA maintained EPNA stipulations that teachers engaging in strikes would be subject to forfeiture of tenure and dismissal. Additionally, even if agreements were reached under PECCA, the agreements were not considered contracts since the law stipulated contracts existed only between individual employees and their employer. Instead of contracts PECCA only allowed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between teacher associations and boards. The law was supposed to reduce "the friction teachers unions have" generated, lead to smoother school operations, and increase freedom and flexibility for school boards to unilaterally initiate reforms (Gibbons 2012:163).

Crucially, the law expressly prohibited "collaboration" on a number of important topics like performance pay, expenditure of grants and awards, evaluations, staffing decisions (e.g. determining the role of seniority), assignment of employees, and payroll deductions for political activities.[46] In addition to prohibiting collaboration on those topics, school boards were not required to

[46] Payroll deductions for unions have been a significant legislative target, with multiple bills proposed by state Republican lawmakers. A bill approved by the state Senate in 2016, banned local school districts from deducting dues for a statewide teachers union from teachers' paychecks. This provision was tucked away as an amendment to a bill purported to urge teaching students how to properly use and position bicycle helmets. It was rushed through the Senate with support from groups like the Koch's Americans for Prosperity (KNS, Tennessean 2016). Another bill proposed in 2017, opposed by TEA, would have allowed school systems to deduct up to 10% of teachers' union dues from payroll.

discuss pensions or retirement programs or working conditions mandated by any law or policy.

Teachers in Knox County felt the effects of PECCA immediately. The newly elected president of the local teacher union, Knox County Education Association (KCEA), was denied a request for reassignment of duties. She requested a temporary reprieve from teaching to take on her full-time assignment as association president whereby the association would pay her salary. In refusing the request, the superintendent bucked a 28-year precedent citing PECCA. “After careful review of the new law,” he wrote, “I believe approving a temporary assignment for the KCEA president is no longer appropriate given the substantial changes in our operating environment” (KCEA 2011). The superintendent also refused initial requests to meet with KCEA representatives. He cited PECCA rules that allowed conferencing with multiple teacher associations, though no other group had expressed interest in entering the Collaborative Conferencing process with the district (Bean 2012).[47] Notably, the school board delegated its authority in negotiations to the superintendent. Knox County PECCA negotiations were drawn-out. The district was one of the first to enter the collaborative conferencing process in October 2011, but would not reach a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) for more than 3 years. In late 2014 Knox County was the last district in the state to complete the collaborative conferencing process. The negotiations were fraught with accusations from

[47] The KCEA president reportedly worked 60 or more hours per week to fulfill her duties and her husband reportedly began driving for her because she was falling asleep at the wheel (Bean 2014). She was eventually granted reassignment and a 2012 law, dubbed “Sherry’s Law” would guarantee leave for education association presidents.

teachers that collaborative conferencing was not collaborative and that district failed to negotiate in good faith. Notably, per explicit prohibitions outlined by PECCA, the MOU signed in December 2014 contained no mention of key grievances around accountability issues like standards, evaluation, or performance-based compensation.

OUTCOMES: COUNTING WHAT COUNTS

What were the outcomes of this period of rapid reform? For one, some scores improved, and according to district officials the new measurement-driven, performance-oriented accountability system had set the district on a winning course in the race to excellence. Administrators cited impressive growth on key indicators like standardized test scores and graduation rates to construct a winning narrative that justified unpopular changes. Secondly, judging by the district's own standards, results were not unambiguously positive. The district failed to reach some key benchmarks. For example, reforms failed to significantly reduce persistent achievement gaps based on race, income, language, and disability. Lastly, there are serious doubts about the quality of measures upon which success claims are based. Measures produced scores seemingly at odds with reasonable judgment. I argue the district's measurement policies are an instance of the cart driving the horse. That is, though data-driven policy-making may have been the goal, in practice they were producing policy-driven data.

A Winning Narrative: Moving the Needle

District administrators promoted a narrative that recent reforms had set the district on a winning course to excellence. The superintendent concluded his testimony on the TEAM performance evaluation system to US Congress in 2013 saying, “You may be wondering how the new teacher evaluation system in Tennessee is impacting teaching and learning (McIntyre 2013). So, I will leave you with just a few perspectives on outcomes.” He provided a table showing TVAAS gains and detailed numerical gains in “virtually every quantifiable measure of student learning and success.” Similarly, a year later (February 2014) the superintendent set the tone for a televised roundtable with concerned educators by outlining the 5 major reforms then listing associated accomplishments over the previous 5 years: graduation rates improved from 77 to 88 percent, years of rising scores on state standardized tests, and the highest marks on the state’s value added assessment scores.[48] The reserved superintendent hinted a smile as he added, “And for the first time, ever, we received straight A’s on our report card as a school system this past year.” Based on those scores, Knox County became the first and only metro school system to have achieved “exemplary” status from the state (Matheny 2016). Other measurable improvements included increasing numbers of students taking and passing advanced placement (AP) courses, recent improvement of composite

[48] In 2011-2012 proficiency increased Knox County students overall in grades 3-8 in all four tested subject areas: English, math, science, and social studies. Teacher value added scores increased. Academic growth, graduation, rates, and ACT scores all improved. The number of teachers performing at the lowest effectiveness levels declined from 18% to 9%. The number of teachers scoring in the highest effectiveness levels rose from 27% to 36% (McIntyre 2013).

ACT scores, and increasing number of schools receiving all “As” in achievement (Knox County 2017).

The district accumulated an impressive trove of accolades. The district, its schools, programs, and employees received recognition, grants, and awards from a host of public and private groups including the Gates Foundation, The Broad Foundation, the Milken Family Foundation, Oak Ridge Associated University, Union College, United Way, the Haslam Family Foundation, and the Chamber of Commerce, to name a few. The chief accountability officer was promoted to assistant commissioner for the state department of education, where she would be in charge of research and assessment for education statewide (Donila 2014). The superintendent received recognition as a rising star in education. The state PTA named him Tennessee Outstanding Superintendent of the Year for 3 consecutive years (2009-2011) and the National PTA awarded him its highest honor, the *Lifetime Achievement Award* (2013). In 2011, the Aspen Institute and NewSchools Venture Fund named the superintendent to its selective Entrepreneurial Leaders for Public Education Leaders Fellowship Program.[49] He has been profiled by *District Adminstration Magazine* and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Of course, the accolades and scores did not speak for themselves. They were employed in a carefully crafted public relations campaign that emphasized winning and competition. Knox County Schools Public Affairs Office operated with a nearly $900,000 annual budget and managed media relations and

[49] NewSchools Venture Fund (NSVF) is major supporter of charter schools and education technology start-ups.

communications with the community and businesses. As Broad Center program alumni, the superintendent and the district's 4 Broad Residents have received training in public and community relations. The superintendent also relied on the support of private sector public relations professionals.[50] Working pro-bono, those professionals helped create and publicize the 2015 State of the Schools event, which offered a look back on the *Excellence for All Children* (2009) plan and a "celebration of success." The success narrative was expressed in speeches, media appearances, social media, video blogs, and legislative testimonies.

Sports references and metaphors saturated the winning narrative. The highly choreographed 2014 State of the Schools address featured speakers who invited comparisons between the school district and the championship football programs like the New England Patriots, the University of Tennessee, and Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers. A principal, for example, compared the school reforms efforts to the efforts of the local college football team's return to national relevance. She said,

> Some fans even *questioned* the competence and play calling ability of the head coach and his coordinators when we didn't win the close ones. But team 118 didn't quit. And now team 119 is currently ranked in the AP preseason top 25 for the first time in a long time. [shouts and applause]

[50] E.g. Susan Richardson Williams of SRW & Associates, Cathy Ackermann of Ackermann PR, and Mike Cohen of Cohen Communications Group. The public relations professionals were well-connected public-private networks that include ties to government, business, and non-profits. Connections include ties to the Republican Party, conservative think tanks like the Beacon Center, and school privatization advocacy groups like American Federation for Children.

> There are only 207 days until the 2015 season kicks off. And I believe that the best is yet to come for the Vols but I also believe that the best is yet to come for us. […] Like our Vols I'm just asking you to stay the course with me. I'm asking you to continue the great work that we've started. Others around the country are already taking notice of our game changing initiatives, our game changing initiatives for our students. It even prompted a recent presidential visit to our very own backyard.

As the excerpt above suggests, a big part of the sports narrative was that the ends justify the means.

At the 2014 State of the Schools Address the superintendent invited comparisons of himself to hall of fame football coach, Vince Lombardi and used his inspirational quotes to build a narrative that "winning" justified the district's direction,

> The work is hard. Our critics are loud. And the journey to excellence is long. Our determination will have to be unwavering. […] Vince Lombardi famously captured this dilemma when he said this: "The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will." And indeed as our work has become harder, our expectations loftier, and the stakes higher, our collective resolve to stay the course may be the determining factor in the success of our children. It may indeed be the difference between excellence for our students and mediocrity. So let's stand together, strong for our children. Let's keep moving forward. Let's keep expecting more.

> Let's truly achieve excellence for every child. […] In one of his all-time greatest speeches, "What it Takes to be Number 1," Coach Lombardi said that he firmly believes that any person's finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all they hold dear is the moment, quote, "when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on field of battle, victorious." […] We are absolutely on the right track. We are experiencing success, a lot of success, in fact. And we have a lot more in store in the future. […] By the way, I was kinda hoping that if I used enough of Coach Lombardi's words you all would get really fired up and carry me out of the auditorium on your shoulders at the end. Oh, you're not feeling that? How about a brief, polite applause?

A focus on winning is evident in the language of victory, being number 1, excellence, and success. The idea that victory justified unpopular reform, was echoed by a school-level administrator during an interview. I asked what she thought about recent calls for the superintendent to resign. She answered,

> It's like trying to, like firing your coach during a winning football season. Because we have never done as well as we are doing under Dr. McIntyre's, as far as student learning, never done as well.

The narratives above suggest performance gains should insulate measurement-based accountability reforms from criticism.

The superintendent cited performance metrics to justify unwillingness to compromise his vision. For example, at the televised roundtable discussion in 2014, the superintendent responded to teacher concerns about TEAM

evaluations saying, “As a school system and as a state, we’ve come too far and shown too many enhancements for kids to go backwards.” He added that gains were due largely to recent standards-based reform policies, and thus concluded, “[We want] to be very clear we weren’t going to compromise our rigorous standards and high expectations.” A teacher and union representative on the panel responded, “I took it almost as a, personally, as an insinuation that some of the things that teachers were asking for would be *lowering* our rigorous expectations.” She added, “many teachers have been really been offended by that.” The winning narrative played an important role in strengthening the accountability system by providing ideological insulation from critique.

Mixed Results and Leveling Off

Undeniably, the district posted some impressive scores, but results were not unambiguously positive. Evaluating the district’s success on its own terms yields fraught results. Early gains beginning in 2009 appeared to be leveling off by 2014. During the 2013-2014 school year—even as the superintendent testified to Congress about the previous year’s straight “A’s”—the district failed to meet several key benchmarks.

- Academic achievement scores (TCAP) flat-lined. District improvement rates declined on 8 of 11 TCAP targets. Proficiency rates for grades 3-8 English actually declined (McIntyre 2015). The district received a 1 out of 5 for literacy on its state report card (TNDOE 2017).

- The district failed to make significant progress closing achievement gaps. It received a failing score from the state, as the district met only 4 of 16 achievement gap targets.
- The district failed to meet its graduation targets. Though graduation rates continued to improve slightly, the pace of improvement slowed between 2013 and 2014.

Although graduation rates improved remarkably from 79.3% in 2008 to 88.7% in 2014, ACT composite scores and ACT college readiness benchmarks remained stubbornly low, and gaps remained stubbornly high.

- ACT composite scores declined from 22.0 in 2008 and to 20.4 in 2014 (McIntyre 2015).
- ACT composite scores improved slightly between 2013-2014 from 20.2 to 20.7. However, those gains may be the result of a semester-long ACT prep offered at 5 local high schools rather than the broader district policy trajectory.
- In 2014, despite graduating nearly 9 of 10 students, less than a quarter (23%) were deemed college ready according to ACT College Readiness Benchmarks in English, Math, Reading, and Science.
- College readiness gaps between schools remain massive. For example, 45% of students at a predominantly white (82%) suburban school were

college ready compared to just 4% at a predominantly black (84%) urban school.[51]

Another troubling result was the state's scoring of district schools. In accordance with state and federal guidelines, the state is required to identify Priority, Focus, and Reward schools. Priority schools are the lowest 5% in the state in terms of overall performance.[52] Focus Schools score are the lowest 10% in terms of achievement gaps. Reward schools are those scoring in the top 5% in overall performance and top 5% in progress. The 2015 list was released in August 2014 and the results for Knox County were underwhelming:

- The number of Priority schools grew from 1 to 4.
- The number of Focus schools grew from 5 to 9.
- The number of Reward schools declined from 9 to 5.[53]

These classifications are partly based on TVAAS growth scores, which showed some negative trends. For example,

- Since 2013, the number of high schools scoring a 1 out of 5 rose from 2 to 6.
- The number of schools scoring a 5 out of 5 fell from 9 to 4.
- One high school saw its score drop precipitously from a 5 to a 1 in a single year.

[51] Farragut is 82% white and 15% of students are economically disadvantaged students. Austin East is 84% black and 87.5% of students are economically disadvantaged.
[52] Without improvement, priority schools may be turned over to charter operators or education management firms.
[53] Insert Dolly Parton joke here?

These data are hardly conclusive, but they pose significant challenges to the official narrative that accountability policies were working and that the district was, unquestionably, on the right course.

Unscientific Management: The Problem with Metric Fixation

Assessing student outcomes and using data to make informed decisions is almost unquestionably a good practice for school districts. Likewise, the need to hold professionals accountable for their performance seems beyond doubt. However, assessment and metrics are not synonymous and should not be treated as such. Likewise, metrics are only useful when what is *actually* being measured is a reasonable proxy for what is *intended* to be measured (Muller 2018). In that murky space between what we want to measure (e.g. authentic learning) and what we can measure (e.g. test performance), blind spots exist. Behind a veneer of scientific precision and objectivity, measures of educational quality are inherently subjective, imprecise, and political. Below I discuss 4 evident problems with key performance measures.

First, the district success narrative leaned heavily on rising graduation rates as evidence that recent reforms were improving student learning. However, it is neither clear that rising graduation rates are evidence of increased educational quality, nor is it clear that those gains can be attributed to the 5 major reforms described above. Graduation rates do not measure student learning, they measure students graduating. The fact that high and rapidly rising graduation rates were not accompanied by commensurately high and rapidly

rising college readiness scores suggests graduation rates may not be the result increased learning. Instead, high graduation rates may be indicative of other formal and informal policies that have little to do with measurement-based accountability reforms. Administrative focus on improving graduation rates might consciously or subconsciously influence the myriad subjective determinations teachers make when assigning grades. More formally, graduation rates could be affected by other changes like the district's new non-traditional graduation pathway programs that had nothing to do with measurement based accountability. On the same note, there were actually some slight year-to-year ACT score gains in 2013. But even these gains may have less to do with increasing authentic student learning, and more to do with programs like a pilot ACT preparation classes introduced that year.

A second major problem, student test performance is not an objective or particularly strong indicator of teaching performance. I will not rehash extensive debates on the use of achievement scores to evaluate teachers here other than to point out that the preponderance of evidence suggest that achievement differences between students are overwhelmingly attributed to factors outside of the classroom (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin 1998; Goldhaber, Brewer and Rees 1999; Rockoff 2004). Value-added models, which are supposed to account for these differences, present problems. A statement released by the American Statistical Association in 2014 states that value-added models typically measure correlation, not causation, and that teachers only account for about 1% to 14% of

variability in test scores.[54] The statement concludes, “Ranking teachers by their VAM scores can have unintended consequences that reduce quality” (ASA 2014).

One reason student test data is a poor measure of teaching quality, is that proficiency benchmarks are subjective determinations and often moving targets. Standardized tests were supposed to provide objective measures of student learning, but achievement data is derived from a student’s score against a subjectively determined standard deemed “proficient.” Benchmarks could be adjusted up or down for political reasons. The high-stakes nature of proficiency standards prompted worries from teachers that determinations would be subject to political pressures. One teacher I interviewed described the fear:

> And so my biggest concern with all that is um, that the data doesn’t get manipulated. That we can look at that—that we can take the test scores *honestly*. Um, because there is a difference between—I don’t know who comes up with the range of proficiency on a test. I’ve never understood kids who take the Algebra II or Algebra I, or whatever, there’s 40 questions and they got 9 right: they’re proficient. It’s sometimes, it’s the bands of proficiency are totally obscure. Because they’re not even getting the majority of the material correct. So what are we really measuring? And so we’re at a real rock and a hard place. We’ve made everything so data-driven now, but we’re also ramping up the standards and changing the

[54] Poverty, family background, curriculum, and unmeasured factors like class size, teaching “high need” students, or use of extracurricular tutoring account for the majority of variation in scores (ASA 2014).

> assessment, so are we going to be okay with, are we going to be honest when kids don't score well?

The high stakes prompted fears that the achievement measures would be misused or manipulated by administrators.

Value-added scores also required subjective determinations about what would be considered below, at, or above expectations. Not only that, the measures themselves became subject to corruption pressures. Teachers worried that managers would game the numbers to secure rewards, avoid punishment, or to control employees. Their concerns are captured well by the adage known as Campbell's Law (Nichols and Berliner 2007):

> The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

For example, raising proficiency standards would lower teacher performance scores, making teacher's jobs less secure and more sensitive to evaluations. Conversely, *lowering* proficiency standards would be a way to raise scores to show school or district success. Of course, one could also create separate scoring scales. In fact, this is what many teachers believed was happening. Several teachers I interviewed described a system that produced low scores for teachers, but high scores for schools. One asked, "How does the district get all A's, but the teachers are barely meeting expectations?" Another teacher describe it like this:

> And these [administrators] know exactly how to look good on those scores. And then you've also got, you know, Knox County got all 5's or A's or whatever, but every teacher got the lowest score. How does that happen? So I'll tell you how that happens. What we found out this past year, is that score that the kids get, if you say Bobby Johnson is in my classroom and I'm his math teacher and according to last year's scores, Bobby Johnson if he gets an 80 on his test, then that's a 3—that's right where he should be. If he gets an 85, well that's a 4. If he gets a 90, that's a 5. You've really done something with that kid. Well, that's the score for the teacher. Now if you are the school, it's a different scale and a different expectation. For the school, if the kid gets a 60 it's a 3. If he gets a 65 it's a 4 and if he gets a 70, it's a 5. So the teacher, for the same kid, the teacher gets a lower score than the school gets. Exact same kid! If you log in as a teacher or as an administrator you get different expectations for the exact same kids and that's a fact. And call down to, call the state and ask them how that is. And listen to them try to give you an answer. It's hilarious. The answer is always the same and it is, "the answer is, uuhhh well it looks different how the kid does in a school or how the kid does in…" It's total BS! A friend of mine who is admin, signed in with a teacher, she was trying to help a teacher, and she's admin—and there was that kid and there were those different scores.

Three principals I asked seemed to have trouble answering whether or not this was the case. However, three things are clear. First, the use of seemingly

precise and objective test data actually involves a high degree of imprecise and subjective judgment on the part of policy-makers. Second, TVAAS is a statistically sophisticated system that is opaque to people who depend on it, and even to those who use it for high-stakes decision-making. Third, the high stakes nature of these metrics makes them susceptible to corruptive pressures, therefore less useful as measures.

The incentive to game the metrics applied to teachers, not just administrators. Though teachers could not manipulate the benchmarks, they could manipulate the measurements. A middle school teacher explained,

> *Jim* - I mean my job is on the line. I have a family. And it's not just me, you know, all those non-tested teachers depend on my scores too.
>
> *Bill* - So what did you do?
>
> *Jim* – What would you do? You throw away whatever stuff you're supposed to be teaching 'em. It's like, here's what you need to know. Like, don't ask questions. Just remember this person or that whatever.
>
> *Bill* - How do you know what's on the test?
>
> *Jim* – [laughing] There's ways. I don't think there was much cheating but there are different ways.

Though no interviewees admitted to cheating or admitted to being aware of cheating, there is a well-documented relationship between high stakes testing and rampant cheating other cities including Atlanta, Cleveland, Dallas, Houston, Washington, and Chicago (Ravitch 2011; Jacob and Levitt 2003; Aviv 2014; Muller 2018). However, if outright cheating was not widespread, then *gaming*

was. A high school history teacher described how he could game the metrics and "beat the test."

> When that end of course test comes around what we did was . . . throughout the year we would differentiate instruction and teach to different learning styles, but we would stop everything we were doing. We'd take 2 weeks. We'd take this massive study guide that he teacher from the next classroom over developed questions over the years and we knew of that 150 questions, we had most of the test. Kill it and drill it, baby! We had pass rates well above 99%. We figured out how to beat the test. We had one student every other semester that would not score proficient. I could tell you their names. So our pass rate was 99.5% or whatever so the way it worked was gym teachers used our scores for their [evaluations], art teachers I think too, and drama teachers. We floated all them. We got hold of that test prep and passed with flying colors. And the result was no one questioned us. Nobody asked questions. They didn't want to know.

Similarly, an English teacher told me, "Of course I taught to the test. Every week, we'd write these essays and I'd tell them what to put in there based on the rubric. It was kinda artificial I guess, but it's what you had to do." Though teaching to the test may not be cheating in the way falsifying tests is cheating (e.g. Atlanta), it is nonetheless a way to alter the measurements in a way that was not intended. The obvious problem is that gamed test scores—though useful for teachers—are not useful measures of authentic student learning.

The third glaring problem is that the district ranked teacher performance by using test scores of students that teachers did not necessarily teach in subjects they did not teach. State law mandated that 50% of every educator's evaluation must be based on student outcomes, but around half of all Tennessee and Knox County educators taught in non-tested grades or subjects.[55] For their growth data, educators in non-tested areas were required to choose between sharing growth data for their school, or otherwise a particular subject. As the teacher in the previous paragraph noted, gym, drama, and art teachers used his history scores. Even Kindergarten teachers were required to use a growth score, though there were no preschool test data to provide a baseline for growth calculations. A kindergarten teacher summarized the problem on the 2013 Teacher Survey:

> As a K teacher, I would like to have the option to choose my 15%/35% from a score that comes from the year that I have taught the students. As it is now, I am forced to choose an assessment score and receive a score from a year of growth when students were not in my classroom. I would like my score to reflect my teaching and not a year of growth when I did not teach the students.

Another noted, "Having non-tested teachers evaluated and scored based on scores of other subject areas is absolutely *ridiculous,*" and added it was unfair that "teachers are being reprimanded based on testing outcomes of

[55] Non-tested areas change from year-to-year and depend on a variety of factors but in general many non-tested teachers are teaching in fine arts, Kindergarten and first grade, physical education, and world languages.

students/subjects they don't teach." A non-tested chemistry teacher could assume a three-year average of math TVAAS scores to account for the 35% growth data portion of her evaluation. Teachers described placing high stakes bets, wagering career opportunities and compensation on which set of growth would produce the highest returns. A comment on the 2013 teacher survey highlighted the problem.

> The TEAM evaluation is subjective no matter what is said about evidence. […] People who do not have TVAAS score should not have to gamble or have scores come from students they have not taught.

For all the focus on *data-driven policy-making* the state and districts' requirements to use standardized test data to generate teacher performance data seemed to be an instance of *policy-driven data-making*. That is, the imperative to generate metrics on teaching performance had overtaken the imperative that those metrics reflect reasonably valid measurements.

Other problems with using student tests scores to rank teacher performance were small sample sizes and misalignment between course curriculum and state tests. For example, I interviewed a middle school teacher whose entire student outcomes score—50% of his TEAM evaluation—was calculated based on the performance of one of his five classes, just 22 of his 142 students. The teacher taught primarily advanced physical science courses for which no test existed. The class was a modified inclusion science class that included a number of students with special needs. Based on that class's

performance he scored a 1 out of 5 on his TVAAS. It was a small sample size derived from a non-typical class. His observation scores (50% of TEAM) were high enough that he was able to maintain a 3 out of 5 overall TEAM score. However, the 1 out of 5 TVAAS score meant he was excluded him from APEX bonus money, subjected him to double observations, and he received a conference of concern letter, which could be the first step for eliminating a tenured teacher. The following year, district administrators allowed teachers and principals some choice in whether those taking physical science (with a physical science curriculum) would be tested under the 8th grade science TCAP (based on the 8th grade science curriculum). According to the teacher this solution created a new problem: the misalignment of the test and the curriculum. He described the situation:

> Downtown allowed the principals of middle schools who taught physical science and the teachers who taught middle school physical science to vote as to whether they wanted those kids to take the TCAP. Well because everybody saw what happened to me—so I got a 1 on TVAAS because of that—whereas if those other kids had taken the TCAP, maybe I would have maybe I would have not. But, so none of the other principals wanted their schools' scores to drop and none of the other teachers teaching it wanted their scores to drop. So they all voted to have them take the TCAP. I voted no, they shouldn't take the TCAP. And this, to make a long story short, bottom line is Knox County has decided to have those kids take the TCAP over a curriculum they are not even taught just

> so they have data on the teacher. That's the bottom line. To this day even, I mean, I still get a 1 [TVAAS] every year because I choose to teach those physical science kids the physical science curriculum.

For this teacher, a low TVAAS score is not a valid indicator of his teaching performance. Instead, a low score more likely indicated his unwillingness to teach to a test (8th grade science) instead of teaching course appropriate material (physical science).

Improper use of TVAAS data resulted in two lawsuits. Two 2014 lawsuits filed by Knox County teachers alleged that state policy forced an overreliance on flawed TVAAS estimates in improper statistical methodology in high-stakes decisions (Satterfield 2016). Though the judge was not unsympathetic to the plaintiffs' complaints about unsound statistical methods employed by the district and state, but he ultimately issued a narrow ruling that confirmed the district and state's use of data was a political question. He ruled that it was not a question for the courts and it was up to voters to take up these methodological issue with their legislators.

The fourth major problem with the measurements, wide fluctuations in TVAAS growth scores and low scores for highly regarded schools and teachers contradicted reasonable and informed judgment. Curiously, 3 of the schools receiving failing grades in 2014 were among the county's top performers. One suburban high school, for example, consistently ranked above county averages in every achievement measure, ACT scores, and graduation rate and was recently ranked among the top 25 public high schools in the state (TNDOE 2017,

Niche 2017). However, because of low growth scores (TVAAS), in just one year that school's ranking fell precipitously from the highest possible 5 to the lowest possible 1. According to local newspaper, the KCEA president, and 3rd grade teacher, asked the superintendent if parents should pull their students out of that high school based on its failing grade (Bean 2015). In that instance, the superintendent's commitment to the validity of TVAAS metrics wavered. According to the KCEA president,

> He had no answer for me. Then he said he didn't believe test scores were the most important thing. For 10 or 15 seconds, I lost all professional decorum. I belly laughed. When I got done, I said, "I have to disagree with you, Dr. McIntyre. The only thing we get a media circus with confetti guns and the governor for is test scores."

The teacher rightly points out the high degree to which district's success narrative has relied on rankings and metrics to determine success. It was another instance in which the measure used to indicate educational success clearly failed to be a reasonable proxy for the thing it intended to capture. Other metrics and common wisdom suggest that the suburban school was a high quality, high performing school. Such wide fluctuations and scores that call into question the wisdom of relying so heavily a value-added measure like TVAAS to rank school performance. The American Statistical Association's 2014 statement discourages overreliance on value-added scores citing, among other concerns, problems with random variation and scores that tend have large standard errors (ASA 2014).

Similarly, interviews and public statements revealed instances in which highly regarded teachers with high marks on observations received incongruently low scores based on student test data. For example, an elementary school teacher I interviewed highlighted problems with simplified models that rely on measurement, but leave little room for complexity, measurement errors, or reasoned judgment. The excerpt from that interview below highlights 2 major problems. First, rigid human capital management processes that are mechanically driven by measurement may fail to take into account subjective factors and the psychological impact of those processes on employees and performance. Second, low scores may conflict with the judgment of informed peers, principals, and parents. She described two apparently good teachers who had recently received low evaluation scores and who were at risk of losing their jobs:

> I'm having this conversation with my principal and this teacher and she was getting really nervous about the tests. And she's like, I'm just feeling so anxious about this, and my principle is telling her, don't worry about this. You're a good teacher. This is just gonna get rid of the low hanging fruit. That's who they're going after. You're not low hanging fruit. But she got a conference of concern letter last year. Also, the teacher next door to me, fabulous teacher. Both, threatened to lose their job. And the teacher next door to me only had one year of test scores. She didn't even have real TVAAS because she taught first grade the year before. Somehow they were projecting growth from what they had in second grade, and so,

all of a sudden it hit me. Oh my god! They're not even going for schools in Memphis, they're not even going for those lower performing schools in Knox County, those low hanging fruit that we were told they were going after and for us not to worry. It's happening. And if it can happen to them, it can be me next year. And, you know, the whole reform thing is to, [lowering her voice] "Push out those bad teachers who are causing our schools to fail. The teachers who are not growing our kids, and are the reason why our inner city schools have poor test scores. It's not cause of the kids or the poverty, it's cause we have bad teachers." And that's the line that they're putting out there. And so I literally had to pick my friend up off the floor. And the other teacher that I found out that same day that had gotten a letter, she had taught at Halls for about 15 years, her husband had gotten brain cancer. He got brain cancer and he'd had it for about two years, and just before school started, she put him in hospice. She has three kids under the age of 8. And they thought, that principal thought, that it would be a really good idea to give her a conference of concern letter the week she got back to school. That just—I lost it. It's just so . . . And here's the crime though. The crime wasn't even that that teacher got that letter and her husband is dying of cancer and has to worry about how she's going to provide for them if she loses her job. The crime is that she never needed the letter. She's an excellent teacher. She's the kind of teacher that all the parents hope their kids get. You know, when they post classes, they're like face up against the window to see if they're on that

> list. Both of those teachers, really. And so that was the day I'm like, this shit has got to stop. I was cursing like a sailor. I was saying this is not okay for them to treat you all this way. This has got to stop.

Stories like this were not uncommon. The relevant point is that scores defied reasonable judgment. And rigid processes based on those scores seem to contradict the goal of improving education quality. For one, it seems unlikely that issuing a conference of concern letter to an emotionally and economically vulnerable teacher is an effective means of professional support that would boost her teaching performance. To many teachers I interviewed, the mechanical issuance of conference of concern letters seemed to contradict administrators' insistence that TEAM evaluations were about professional growth. Secondly, it is not clear that letters were even warranted.

The allure of standardized performance measurement is that it provides "hard data" can be used to engineer institutional improvement. Although numbers offer a veneer of objectivity and precision, measuring something like *educational quality* is inherently subjective and imprecise. Problems occur "because not everything that is important is measurable, and much that is measurable is not important" (Muller 2018:18). Problems also occur because measurement is political—especially when used to distribute rewards and punishments. What gets counted? What does not? Who decides what is counted and who decides what counts? These are deeply political questions.

Policy-makers' apparent obsession with quantifying performance defied reasonable scientific methodology, and belief in the efficacy of their program has

outlasted evidence that it often did not work. Faith in metrics cannot be justified on purely scientific grounds and even “has the elements of a cult” (Muller 2018:20). Metric fixation seems less rooted in scientific empiricism than a “self-reinforcing rhetorical system,” and it makes much more sense to consider it as an expression of a deeply political rationality (Charlton 2002).

CURBED LABOR POWER AND THE CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

I conclude this section by describing how measurement-based accountability policies that defined the 2008-2013 period may be thought of as deeply neoliberal. I argue that the reforms cannot be justified as apolitical scientific best practices, but make sense if we consider them as an expression of neoliberal political ideals. The 5 pillars of the accountability system represent a significant reorganization of prior institutional frameworks that brings them in line with neoliberal ideas about labor, work, management, and even human nature. Examining the reforms from both a Marxian and Foucauldian perspectives of neoliberalism bring forth fruitful insights. I discuss each below.

First, Marxian theoretical perspectives of neoliberalism focus on power relations between capital and labor. From this angle, the accountability reforms appear as relatively consistent, coherent project to curb the power of teachers, limiting their ability to make important determinations about their quality, pace, and content of their work. Reforms appear consistent with the neoliberal drive to create a disciplined, precarious, and obedient workforce (Harvey 2005). Specifically, creating a measurement-based, punitive accountability system

focused on assessment weakened teachers collective power to make important determinations about what and how to teach. An extensive body of literature demonstrates how employing technical mechanisms like standardized assessment transform power relations within schools and the broader role of school in society (Freire 1970; Apple 1996; McLaren and Gutierrez 1997; Apple and Oliver 1998; Beyer and Apple 1998; McLaren and Gutierrez 1997; McNeil 2000; Giroux 2016). Standardized assessments and evaluations promoted legibility, which refers to the technologies and practices by distant managers to render local populations of citizens or workers comparable, understandable, and thus subject to governance and management (Scott 1998). A growing body of literature also describes how metric focused evaluations function primarily as management tools, rather than proven professional growth techniques (Jones and Culbertson 2011; Pulakos and O'Leary 2011). In this sense, TEAM evaluations come into focus as surveillance technologies by which administrators can monitor performance and teacher obedience to mandated benchmarks by collecting, storing, processing, and analyzing massive troves of data on student achievement, student growth, teaching performance, and professional activity. Likewise, the implicit threat of TEAM evaluations coupled with performance pay and lost tenure protections provided a means to discipline teachers. Failure to comply with mandates, or failure to produce a subjectively determined amount of value at work, could be punished by lost compensation, licensure, tenure, position, promotion, or employment. Finally, the dismantling of collective bargaining rights was a rather blunt attack on labor's most historically powerful

means of resistance, their unions. Legislators explicitly articulated the anti-union intent of PECCA following its passage. State Senator Jack Johnson (R-Franklin), the sponsor of the bill, noted the bill would reverse teacher union's "strangle on the hope of education reform" (TNedreport 2011). Glen Casada, a TN legislator, referred to the move signified a fight against what he considered "socialist bargaining" (Locker 2011). More attacks on teacher unions followed from the state's Republican super-duper majority. For example, a bill approved by the Senate in 2016, would have banned school districts from allowing union dues to be deducted from teachers' paychecks. The provision was tucked away in a child bicycle helmets safety bill and was rushed through the Senate with support from groups like the Koch's Americans for Prosperity (KNS 2016; Tennessean 2016). Another bill proposed in 2017, would have allowed school systems to charge teachers a 10% administrative fee for deducting union dues. A host of school voucher and charter school bills may also interpreted as attempts to undermine public school teacher unions. These efforts in tandem with the 5 pillars of district reform described in this chapter constituted a systematic plan to replace teacher autonomy, job security, and collective voice with a disciplined, precarious, and obedient workforce.

Second, Foucualdian theoretical perspectives privilege a discursive examination of the exercise of power as an enabling force. From this perspective, the 5 big reforms appear not so much as blunt instruments that impinge upon labor power, but rather as a particular rationality governing the "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1991:28) From this view, teachers were invited to think of

themselves in terms of human capital, concerned with enhancing their value to the firm. Accountability and performance pay models expressed beliefs that managers incentivizing individual employee performance within a competitive system of rewards and punishments that would maximize human capital efficiency and output. The “winning” success narrative invites teachers to think of education, not as a collaborative social project, but rather competitive struggle within a market that produces winners and losers. Likewise, the data-saturated environment embodied in these policies suggests the most important aspects of teaching and learning can, and should, be economized, or thought of in marketized terms of quantifiable value. Justification for this performance-based accountability structure depends on the belief that experts can create reliable, accurate, quantifiable measures that capture the amount of “value” produced by education workers. This vision of accountability reflects a deep faith in the idea that humans, work, and social relations may be reduced to economic value, and schools could be run like corporations. These policies, as part of a neoliberal technique of governance, are enacted through a set of best practices that aspire to consensus and buy-in, rather than dictatorial mandates. Accountability is enacted as a set of best practices that may be understood as part of the “soft power” that justifies itself in positive terms of professional support, excellence, success, and continuous improvement. Likewise, the construction a culture of accountability within a public education system may be understood as an emanating for the neoliberal sense that public institutions and their employees—

in the absence of market pressures—are lazy, unresponsive, undisciplined, and inefficient (Crouch 2011).

In this sense, the 5 big changes reflect a cultural shift, whereas culture is a deeply political "hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion" (Foucault 2001). For example, the TEAM evaluations were more than simply assessment instruments—they were also consciousness-shaping instruments. The superintendent expressed this idea in his 2013 testimony to Congress. He spoke about the need for teachers to "internalize" their TEAM scores. He argued for teachers must be "internalizing that scoring a '3' on this five point scale represents 'meets expectations' for effective teaching." The superintendent stated that TEAM required "a necessary *mind-shift*, and one that aligns with a perspective of continuous professional growth." He also described TEAM as a "common language for educators to help challenge and support each other." In other words, TEAM was more than an objective measurement tool. It was a part of a technique of governance—one consisting of particular policies, best practices, logics, and a language—that invited teachers to internalize their value in terms of economized terms of metrics, ratings, and performance. Indeed, one educator observed, "Teachers are calling themselves by numbers 'I'm a 3, I'm a 4,' etc." (Teacher Survey 2013).

Certainly there are many instances when decision-making based on standardized measurement is vastly preferable to judgments based on personal experience or professional expertise. However, as I have begun to demonstrate,

there are instances when commitment to measurement and accountability becomes counterproductive. To the extent that accountability and measurement are pursued as political projects to curb the power of labor then the goal of objectivity is derailed by partisan interests. Likewise, to the extent that accountability and measurement are part of a peculiar form of reason that reconfigures virtually all aspects of education in economized terms, then the neoliberal "accountability" creates blind spots for institutional architects who give short shrift to vital questions about both purposes of education and questions about whether educational value is essentially measurable and quantifiable. In both senses, ideological blinders precluded important questions about whether the *actual* measurements are reasonable proxies for things they *intend* to measure. The political commitment to the project of accountability helps explain the rapid pace of change, which teachers experienced as dizzying. One teacher, I interviewed described the ramping up of accountability and measurement:

> How it has rained down on everybody is, "We're *going* to reform it! And so here's what we're going to do. We're going to start new teacher evaluation models. We're going to start new testing. We're going to start all these kinds of things." And it seems like we wanted to change in such a damn hurry. That, it's not been . . . Many of the ideas come through as kinda half baked.

Comments from the teacher survey revealed similar sentiments (2013). "It's like building a plane while you're flying it," wrote one teacher. The speed and zeal with which the district implemented accountability reforms suggests more than a

commitment to boosting educational quality through data-driven practice, but rather suggests an expression of deeply neoliberal commitments.

CHAPTER V

TEACHER EXPERIENCE: UNDERMINING PROFESSIONALISM

This chapter describes teachers' experience of the metric-focused accountability reforms between 2008-2013. By 2013 less than less than a quarter of teachers believed the district was a good place to work and learn and less than a fifth believed they were treated like professionals (Knox County 2013). Teachers' sense of lost professionalism was rooted in 5 key claims. First, teachers contested the district's vision of professionals as manageable human capital. Second, imperatives to generate standardized data (metrics) constrained professional judgment on instruction, delivery, content, and pacing. Third, teachers lost control over their quality and length of their working day. Metric fixation meant more paperwork, more meetings, less planning time, and longer working hours. Fourth, district measures of professionalism failed to account for expertise rooted in advanced degrees and practical wisdom. Fifth, I conclude by arguing the district's neoliberal vision of professionalism as accountability, conflicted with the profession's core values. Leaving little room for professional judgment meant that when incentivize structures (e.g. maximize metrics for money) invariably conflicted with teachers' professional values (e.g. service to students is morally good), teachers faced an impossible choice—do what was best for their careers, or do what they judged best for students.

Data for this chapter is derived from surveys, fieldwork, document analysis, and long interviews. An important source of data for this chapter is a

December 2013 survey of teachers conducted by Knox County (89% response rate, approximately 3,500 respondents) included both Likert-scale survey questions an open-ended comments section. Survey questions included questions about school policies and school climate and provide some basis for quantifying and generalizing teacher experiences. I coded 163 pages of open-ended comments to identify theoretically significant themes. The comments provided more in-depth understanding and revealed important themes not touched on by closed-ended survey questions.[56] Data for this chapter also comes from fieldwork at University-Assisted Community School, after school events, education rallies, school board meetings, and panel meetings. Viewing videos of school board meetings and panels offered an opportunity to identify, transcribe, and code significant speeches and discussions. Additional data comes from monitoring blogs, local news (paper, TV, and radio), and official documents (KCEA Advocate, KCS releases, etc.). I monitored two active social media pages for local teachers (each with over 2,000 members), which offered data on the pulse of local teachers who posted and commented on recent events, research, and news related to local public education issues. Additionally, I have reviewed county budgets, state comptroller evaluations, district reports, 5-year plans, and white papers for official numbers and information on precise policy formulations. Fourth, long semi-structured interviews with teachers provided in-depth, rich

[56] The 2013 Teacher Survey was issued by the district in response to the public outcry from teachers and measured concerns about evaluations, assessments, Common Core, and the general climate of schools and the district. Admirably, the district publically released the results of that survey (both Likert-scale responses and written comments). The issuance of the survey and the release of results testify to administrators' commitment to collecting and sharing data.

qualitative data teachers' experiences of deep and rapid changes. Identifying, developing, and refining recurring themes from multiple sources allowed me to triangulate data, looking for confluence and overlapping evidence (Denzin 1970).

COMPETING PROFESSIONALISMS

The Knox County School District expressed clear commitment the "highest levels of professionalism" through language, policy, and practice (Excellence for Every Child 2014). Strategic plans promised to "ensure high levels of professionalism," and contained language like, "we want to honor the expertise and professionalism of our workforce and will not compromise our standards" (Excellence for All Children Plan 2009; Excellence for Every Child 2014). The superintendent regularly confirmed his desire to treat "our educators as the professionals they are" (WATE 6 News 2014) and promised to "elevate our commitment to customer service and professionalism" (State of Schools 2014).

The commitment to professionalism was not just talk. The district supported through its professional development office and by supporting instructional staff development ($538,489 in the 2014-2015 budget). At the district level, professionalism was monitored and operationalized as series of performance indicators related to student performance, return on investment calculations, and "customer satisfaction" survey data (Excellence for All Children 2009). For individual teachers, professionalism was operationalized in the TEAM rubric (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model). The 18-point rubric (different than the 61 point teaching rubric) defined a professional as one who

“Systematically and consistently utilizes formative and summative school and individual student achievement data.” Compliance with district policy was another indicator, as a top scorer “Always adheres to school and district personnel policies and serves as a leader and model for others.” A review of professionalism benchmarks shows the district defined professionalism in terms of employee commitment to maximizing productivity, efficiency, engagement with data, and adherence to an overarching set of best-practices.

District supervisors also operationalized the professional ideal through interactions with employees. Teachers who questioned policy risked being labeled unprofessional. For example, a Spanish teacher told the school board in 2013, “When I question any of this [evaluation policy], I am tired of the phrases ‘professionalism’ and ‘team player’ being thrown out as weapons.” A veteran music teacher wrote on an online forum, “I believe that discussing conflicting feedback with evaluators should be a positive,” but when she raised concerns she was “met with belittling accusations of ‘being negative.’” Teacher Survey (2013) comments provided more evidence. “Concerns need to be recognized and addressed, not dismissed as stubborn resistance and venting,” wrote one teacher. According to another, teachers “have serious, valid concerns. I think these concerns are brushed off as teachers just being negative.” Another noted, “Too often we are asked to give input, but we […] are concerned that our input will be seen as complaining or trouble making.” And, “I am fearful of being held insubordinate in terms of speaking out.” A principal corroborated teacher’s sense that dissenting voices were not welcome. In an interview she told me she was, “in

charge of the leadership team and vision of the school," and big part of her job was "trying to get everybody on board with the vision." I asked if that was difficult with so many teachers publicly questioning that vision. She dismissed critics as low performing whiners,

> I think that there's a lot of angry—there's a lot of people with really loud voices that are upset. There are just as many if not more people that are not upset, that are focused on teaching kids and not focused on trying to tear down the district. […] I think it's just all in how you look at things. And there's this big negative view of a lot of things right now. And if you want to look at things negatively, then that's how it's going to end up, you know. […] And people have decided that they are upset that teaching has changed. And it has changed. And if you don't do well on observations then chances are you're not teaching well.

These data suggest teachers were right to worry that speaking out would be considered unprofessional by supervisors.

Teachers feared retaliation for stepping beyond bounds the district's vision of the compliant professional who buys into an agenda set by managers. "Teachers do not feel comfortable speaking out for fear of what central office may do," wrote a teacher on the 2013 Survey. Another worried, "Teachers are afraid to speak up. If they seek solutions to problems, they are targeted for 'Conferences of Concern'" (the first step of termination). Similarly, "We are 'encouraged' to speak up, but then we are labeled and targeted because we spoke ill of our superiors." Teachers' fears were not unfounded. In 2014 a

teacher's contract was "non-renewed" after she publically advocated against a district-mandated standardized test for K-2 students. According to her testimony to the board of education,

> My evaluation scores increased each year. I took on leadership roles. […] I was never written up. And To my knowledge I never had any complaints from parents or colleagues. I was however, called into the office after my first school board speech and told that I am an ambassador for Knox County Schools. […] I may have asked questions and given my opinions, but I always did what I was told.

Despite a spotless record and "rock-solid" evaluation scores, the popular young teacher's employment was terminated. She had no tenure protection, was never offered a formal explanation, and had no recourse. She was offered no reason other than that she "no longer fits the vision" of her school.

Despite the district's demonstrated commitment to supporting and enforcing professional ideals, by 2013 teachers clearly did not feel treated like professionals. Less than 19% of teachers believed they were trusted to make sound professional decisions (Teacher Survey 2013). The most ubiquitous complaint on the 2013 Teacher Survey was some variation of "Teachers in this district are not viewed as professionals." Teachers felt undervalued, underappreciated, mistrusted, and disrespected. "Teachers are treated as second-class citizens, not professionally," wrote one teacher. According to another, "never did I expect to work so hard for so little and be treated so unprofessionally and be unappreciated." And, "I have never felt so disregarded

as a professional in my life." Another wrote that teachers "are considered by the district to be immature children." Similarly, "The amount I am evaluated […] insults me as a professional."

Teachers rejected the district's vision of professionalism defined largely in terms of manageability, customer service, and efficiency. Instead, Teachers tended to agree with a more broadly accepted vision of professionalism whereby

> Professions have been represented theoretically in the image of those who belong to them, and who advance their interests as having a strong technical culture with a specialized knowledge base and shared standards of practice, a service ethic, long periods of training and high degrees of autonomy. (Hargreaves 2000:152)

This empowered professional stands in opposition to blue-collar employment, which has generally been defined by externally imposed management, regulation, and direction (Larson 1979; Hargreaves 2000; Sachs 2003). Teachers understood professional work as characterized by a high degree of autonomy and self-determination explicitly located excessive management as the locus of their deprofessionalization. "Micromanagement of classrooms, time, and teachers leads to a feeling of not being professionals," wrote one teacher in a representative comment (Teacher Survey 2013). According to another, "I should not have to be micro-managed as it is currently required […]. We are professionals." Another teacher pleaded, "please stop micro-managing us and telling us what we need to do. Trust us to use our professional knowledge to make decisions for our students."

LOSING CONTROL: INSTRUCTION, CURRICULUM, AND TIME

According to teachers high stakes evaluations, narrow assessments, regimented schedules, and rigid lists of best-practices frustrated creative energies and limited the autonomy that was central to their professional identities. Teachers lost the ability to make important professional decisions in 3 key areas. First, a rigid teaching rubric used to score educators limited choices about instruction and delivery. Second, emphasis on standardized testing led to standardization of content and curriculum. Third, tasks related to collecting and reporting data meant teachers lost control over the quality and length of their working day.

Teaching to the Rubric

The TEAM teaching rubric was used to score teachers during their biannual classroom observations and it was central to district's efforts to hold teachers accountable to a set of best practices for teaching. According to the superintendent's testimony to Congress, "I believe the great power of this evaluation model is that it gives a blueprint for outstanding instruction" (2014). The 61-point measurement tool applied to K-12 educators across disciplines and was designed as "objective assessment based solely on the evidence an evaluator observes" (McIntyre 2014). Inflexibility was a design feature, not a bug, and was meant to eliminate subjective scoring.[57]

[57] Complaints about subjective scoring and favoritism plagued Tennessee's efforts to implement a merit pay system based on teacher evaluations in the 1980s (Dee and Keys 2005).

To be clear, teachers concerns were not that rubric's "best practices" were bad pedagogy, and they were not opposed to being evaluated. "I have no problem being evaluated at any time. I do have problems with strict wording of rubric," wrote a teacher on the Teacher Survey (2013). Another wrote, "We don't mind being evaluated, we mind being evaluated with a rubric that does not work for all lessons especially not all grades K-12." A teacher told the board of education in 2014, "I *do* want my supervisors and principals dropping in on my room," adding, "but instead I see them a few times a year checking things off a checklist which I've been assured is not a checklist." And, complaints were not about the "best practices." One teacher wrote, "I believe in best practices but I think as a professional I should be able to use them to design my own lesson according to my students" (Teacher Survey 2013). Similarly, another teacher described her frustration with trying to hit all 61 points on the rubric during a single lesson:

> I do think the rubric has some valid points. It's like a list of the best ingredients for cooking. The things on the list are important—they're not all-inclusive, but they are important. But what good recipe uses six pages of ingredients? If you did that, I'm pretty sure any chef would tell you, you would end up with tasteless trash. My job as a teacher, like the job of the chef, is to carefully pick which of those ingredients to use on a particular day for the needs of my students. […] My students deserve better than this. I can teach better than this.

When I asked a principal in 2014 why teachers did not like the rubric she said, “If I weren’t doing well and I felt like my job was on the line, I’d probably be pretty mad. My suspicion is that a lot of the upset people are not doing so hot.” She added, “I mean there’s nothing in that rubric that is bad practice. Like, that is just good practice.” But this was not what teachers were saying and complaints were not limited to low performers.

A major criticism was that the rubric—not students, not content, not teachers—were driving instructional decisions. “The TEAM rubric does not fit all lessons and should not drive instruction in a classroom,” wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). Though TEAM was meant to put students at the center of decisions, teachers said it had the opposite effect. “Evaluation process is not achieving its goal – teachers are teaching to a checklist and not according to student needs,” wrote one teacher. According to another,

> Teaching is and always will be about making connections with students and everyone does it or does not do it in their own way. You cannot put everything and judge everything in a RUBRIC. Most teachers take pride in what they do and are very professional in how they go about their jobs. We are not treated as professionals because we are being told exactly how to run our classrooms, the art of teaching is being lost and decision making is being taken out of our hands.

The rubric disempowered teachers. “TEAM micro-manages our instruction to the point where we have lost our autonomy in the classroom,” wrote one teacher. “We are not allowed to make decisions about instructional delivery at my school.

We are dictated and mandated to by coaches and principals too strictly," wrote another who added, "I do not have a say in how I teach."

Evaluators scored teachers by ticking boxes on a list of criteria, but administrators emphasized it was not a checklist. Teachers had trouble understanding the difference. "TEAM evaluation is a checklist regardless of what people say," wrote a teacher. "We are told the rubric is not a checklist, however, if we do not do everything within an indicator, our score is lowered," complained another. Another noted punitive nature of the rubric, "Evaluation system is said to not be checklist, but it is. Rubric should only be used to improve teaching – not decide if teachers should lose their jobs." One wrote emphatically, "lessons can be varying and might not always hit the checklist. That does not make me a bad teacher!" adding, "The entire system SUCKS!" Ubiquitous use of the word checklist is significant because it suggests teachers perceived the instrument less as tool for deep and critical reflection on their pedagogy, but rather an onerous mandate to unthinkingly perform a set of prescribed tasks. Some worried that it reduced teaching to stale, standardized performances. "Instructional delivery is slowly being manipulated with cookie cutter practices and seems to be headed entirely to scripted lessons," wrote one teacher. According to another, "The rubric is not realistic and promotes robotic rather than creative teaching practices."

Not all teachers took the rubric seriously. "Teacher evaluation is a joke," complained several teachers (Teacher Survey 2013). For them the problem was less about lost autonomy and more about the problem of evaluations based on

biannual farcical performances. “Unannounced observations for professional teachers are just dog and pony shows and have no bearing on what really goes on in the classroom every day,” wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). A number of teachers admitted they kept canned lesson plans to, as one teacher told me, “whip out of my desk when I see her in for that unannounced observation.” The high stakes observations did less improve teaching so much as promote occasional and elaborately contrived performances. A number of Teacher Survey (2013) comments described the “farcical nature of the evaluation dog and pony show.” One teacher suggested, “the rubric should be modified in the instruction component to where teachers don't have to put on a dog and pony show to score well.” Another wrote, “The TEAM rubric is an onerous burden […] and turns teacher into circus performers.” Remarkably, some administrators seemed to willingly participate in the sham. Teachers were advised by administrators to “teach to the evaluation,” not their students. Several teachers reported that principals might stop by before an unannounced observations and not so subtly hint, “hey, are you gonna be here on Tuesday? Okay, just checking. No reason.”

The data above suggests, replacing more subjective evaluations with a rigid rubric undermined professionalism in two big ways. First, scoring teachers according to a strict list of “best practices,” denied teachers the ability to make important professional judgments. Second, some teachers (and some supervisors) felt pressured to engage in scripted displays of teaching. Like the “Emperor’s New Clothes,” some teachers (and evaluators) were pretending

something was real, when they knew it was not. One teacher wondered of the superintendent, “I wonder if his inner circle are “yes” men or shielding him from the reality.” Another noted, “Central office has no clue about teacher’s abilities.”

When Standards Means Standardization

Setting standards was a crucial piece of district’s efforts compare and rank teachers. In order to benchmark performance the district standardized curricular formats to ensure horizontal alignment across classrooms and vertical alignment with district, state, and federal standards (i.e. Common Core). Of course, standards do not necessarily imply strict standardization, but teachers felt unable to make important decisions about curriculum, content, and materials. Less than 13% of teachers agreed with the statement, “Teachers in my school/district have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy)” (Teacher Survey 2013).

An exchange between the superintendent and a teacher at a televised roundtable illustrated frustration with restrictive standards. The superintended stated during a 2014 televised event, “[We want] to be very clear we weren’t going to compromise our rigorous standards and high expectations.” He added, “I actually emphasize that because I believe our teachers agree with me on that that our standards must be high.” A teacher responded,

> I think teachers would agree that teachers want high standards, but when 70 some percent of teachers are saying on a survey that they don’t think their professional judgment is being valued, then there is some kind of

> disconnect between what you are saying and how teachers are taking it and, you know, whether or not they feel you are sincere.

The teacher's response highlights disagreement about whether standards mean replacing professional judgement. "I feel as if I have no say in the materials, pacing and lessons taught in my classroom. I feel that I am treated like I can make no professional judgments," wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). "I feel like the 7 years I spent studying my field and education were a waste because I'm not trusted to teach my content based on *content* specific research," lamented another. Similarly,

> I don't feel that I am respected as a professional educator in Knox County because of how the delivery/pacing of the curriculum is spoon-fed to us by the district, which allows little, if any, flexibility to teach the standards in the way I feel would get the greatest results.

Another teacher noted, "To be treated as professionals, the 'pacing' and curriculum should be more flexible."

Even supporters of federal Common Core standards felt the district had been too rigid in its implementation. "Common core seems to be a strengthening of what we were already doing. Anchor standards make sense. The problem isn't the standards – it's implementation," wrote a teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). According to another,

> I am not treated as an expert in my profession. I am not free to make decisions about pedagogy and especially not about instructional materials.

> I support the transition to Common Core, but the way that the district has handled it has been a complete disaster.

Another teacher noted, “Certain aspects of Common Core are acceptable,” and liked that “we would teach less standards more in-depth.” But, “We haven't seen the ‘less’ yet. More and more keeps getting added to our plates. Teachers aren't allowed to use their own judgment in making decisions for their classrooms.”

The district created approved lists of instructional materials and required special approval for any materials not on the list. “We cannot make decisions about materials if we have to choose books from an approved list,” wrote a teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). Another wrote, “The new instructional materials policy further limits what teachers can do to meet their students' needs.” Pointing to the arrival of the superintendent one teacher noted, “Local school control has eroded significantly within the past 5 years.” The teacher continued, “The asinine demand that teachers list every article, video clip, etc., and send downtown with threats of disciplinary action if not completed is demoralizing and in direct conflict with our evaluation indicators which state that we use out of school, real world materials.”

Lost Time: The High Cost of Data Production

The district’s measurement-based accountability system required data be generated, reported, assessed, analyzed, utilized, and documented. These imperatives came at a high cost—demands for data impinged upon teacher’s ability to make professional decisions about how to use their time. For one,

additional tasks meant teachers' schedules became more regimented as teachers lost planning and instructional time. Specifically, three major time consuming tasks were testing, professionalization (i.e. meetings), and documentation (i.e. paperwork). Secondly, extra work meant teachers lost control over the length of their working day. Many reported working longer hours and losing the ability to maintain work-life balance. "Every moment, right now, is planned and scheduled—micro-managed to 3 minute intervals in small group. Really? Trust me, as a professional, to manage my day," wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013).

The state mandated regimen of tests in 2014 included the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Achievement Test, TCAP End of Course (EOC) Tests, TCAP Writing Assessment, TCAP Social Studies Field Test, Universal Screener and Progress Monitoring, ACT Suite (EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT), ACCESS/WIDA for English Learners, and NAEP. District-specific mandated tests included District End of Course (EOC) Tests, Middle School Honors Mid-Terms, and the SAT-10 administered to K-2 students. Other district tests included District Created Module Assessments and Common Assessments by PLCs. Of course, these are in addition to course-specific assessments. An Achieve Inc. (2015) study suggests the hours an average student spends taking tests for grades 3-12 account for only around 1-2% of the school year (about 10-12 hours). However, time spent by teachers on testing *related* activity was between 7-16%, or between 74 and 169 hours per year. This figure included time for test administration, in-class test preparation, planning and preparation outside

class, and lost time due to testing for another class (Achieve 2015). Additionally, 69% of teachers reported having to attend test security training, 62% reported losing planning time, and 55% felt pressure to give up classroom time in favor of test preparation (Achieve 2015). Similarly, a calendar released by SPEAK (Students Parents Educators Across Knox County) indicated that local kindergarteners would be tested or preparing for a test on at least 25% of school days (SPEAK 2014).

Test related tasks undermined teachers' ability to determine the best use of instructional and planning time. "All we focus on it testing and data. I spend more time collecting data than planning rich lesson plans," wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). According to another, "Students are tested too much! Additional state and district tests take away instruction time. Remember, teachers still do their own testing outside the required tests." Similarly, "If all we do is test, and then prep for the next test, the data becomes meaningless because I have no time to teach the material in a meaningful way." Another noted, "We need time to plan quality lessons, and some testing needs to be eliminated." One teacher pleaded, "Please stop the testing that is not required by the state. [...] We have plenty of data already! Just let me teach!"

Measurement-based accountability systems required time consuming meetings and trainings. So-called "professionalization" meetings eroded discretion about how to use already limited planning periods and in-service days. Teachers had to learn how to access, interpret, and use data. Then they had to generate evidence/data on how they were using the data. A big part of this was

the Personal Learning Community (PLC) meetings. PLC meetings were designed to help teachers leverage data and share best-practices to inform instruction, but less than 30% of teachers agreed that PLCs enhanced instructional practice (Teacher Survey 2013). The district provided teachers with instructional coaches trained to assist data-driven decisions about content knowledge and delivery.

Teachers found externally mandated “professionalization” undermined professional discretion about the best use of their time. For example, speaking to a local journalist one teacher described the loss of her planning time, “Over the last five days, I’ve had two days of planning time. We’re supposed to have it every day” (Bean 2015). PLC meetings and technology trainings replaced her planning time. She added, “What we’re supposed to be doing is do grade-level planning, identifying kids who need help; but usually, we just look at test data” (Bean 2015). An enormous number of 2013 Teacher Survey comments were some variation, “There are too many meetings during our planning time.” Some went into more detail. One teacher wrote, “The additional requirements of gathering and collecting data, reporting that data, meeting with PLCs to discuss that data. All mandatory and all took away from the scarce planning time.” According to another,

> I am disgusted at the repetitive professional development and lack of time in my classroom doing useful tasks. We are not lazy. We won't waste our days at school. Don't waste my time.

Similarly, “As a teacher we need time to plan and organize our classrooms (on

contract time). A lot of meetings and trainings have been a WASTE of time." Another added emphatically, "Teachers need time to plan, implement, and develop. We need in-service days to prepare - NOT MORE WASTED TRAINING!" Teachers did not feel trusted to make good decisions about how to spend their working day. For example,

> We are treated as if we are not to be trusted to spend an in-service day doing the planning ... Rather, we've had our time wasted with repetitive canned presentations that seem like sales pitches.

One teacher complained, "I was a much stronger teacher before PLCs … I've lost 2+ hours a week to be told, 'Keep doing what you're doing,'" and demanded, "give me my time back."

Certainly not all teachers felt every aspect of the trainings, meetings, and professionalization opportunities were a waste of time. Some teachers, for example, found aspects of PLC meetings useful. "PLCs are most helpful when teachers use it as a platform to share what they have found helpful," commented one teacher." Another wrote, "PLCs are a good thing but I do not think we need to meet weekly." Some of the resentment stemmed less from the fact that teachers did not find PLCs useful, but more from the implicit message that determinations about the best use of a teacher's time should be left up to managers. A number of teachers noted that they preferred, "optional or not required training." One teacher wrote, "PLCs should not be mandatory … collaboration happened *naturally* when teachers feel less stressed."

Teachers spent a lot of time recording and reporting data, and complaints about increasing amounts of paperwork were ubiquitous. One teacher wrote, “I used to love working here. About 4-5 years ago it became harder and harder to do my job because all I am doing is testing and paperwork!” According to another, “There is too much unnecessary paperwork for PLCs - it is meaningless” (Teacher Survey 2013. Similarly, “Evaluations are needed, but the paperwork is preventing teachers from staying focused.” One teacher noted, “Collaborative planning … is extremely beneficial me, but PLCs are often spent completing paperwork.” Similarly, “My PLC group accomplishes far more when we aren't filling out forms for meaningless data collection but are instead collaborating and sharing in a less formal manner.” During an interview a middle school teacher described how data collection requirements constrained principals too.

> I mean, principal’s jobs are changing too—their jobs are geared towards paperwork now. Four years ago, with the start of TEAM, I stopped seeing principals. Which, I’m not scared of being evaluated. I want to be evaluated. Good teachers should not be worried about it, you know. I want the principal in my classroom, like 2 days a week would be great. She can know me and know what’s going on. […] Principals are so concerned about numbers and how many honors students you have that it’s all about making it look good on paper.

Several teachers noted that time spent providing managers proof that one is teaching well, is time not spent doing the things one needs to teach well. According to one it felt like “the tail wagging the dog. Too much paperwork for

accountability purposes." Another added poignantly: "I would rather spend my time planning effective lessons to further my students than filling out paper to prove it."

Teachers also reported losing control over the length of their working day. Increasing production demands (rising standards, higher performance targets, additional tasks, etc.) increased necessary labor time as teachers reported working longer hours, taking work home, and working weekends.[58] "We are pressed to the limit on every side. I work unreal hours everyday and weekend because I care." For many the demands seemed impossible, "I as well as the rest of the teachers in this school, cannot continue to work 11, 12, 13, 14 hours a day! […] The expectations are unattainable." Another wrote, "I am working 12 hours a day and on weekends. I am a level 5 lead teacher. I am seeking other employment." One teacher asked, "how many people would tolerate conditions such as this: 25 minute lunch break, meetings and more meetings that leave little planning time, 10-12 hr. work days!?!" Another commented, "I work at least 60 hours a week trying to meet all the demands. I don't have time for my family or anything else."

[58] Despite working longer hours, in January of 2015 a local paper ran an article suggesting increasing teacher absences evidenced teachers shirking responsibilities (News Sentinel 2015). Responding to methodological criticism, the author doubled down in an editorial inflammatorily titled, "Are Teachers Playing Hooky?" The original article cited a study from the non-profit, National Council on Teacher Quality, highlighting teacher absences. NCTQ advocates tougher evaluations and was originally sustained by a $5 million grant from Rod Paige. Rod Paige is a former U.S. Secretary of education who once likened the country's largest teachers union, the NEA, to a "terrorist organization." Paige was introduced by the Knox County's superintendent as an "informal mentor and executive coach" in 2014 (News Sentinel 2014).

Notably, teachers working longer days and fulfilling more tasks were not guaranteed increased compensation. “The time teachers are given to do all that has to be done to be an excellent teacher requires that they work for free 3-4 hours a day!” wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). According to another, “Teachers are expected to spend too much time off contract on things that are mandatory. 60+ hours is too much time to expect us to spend without additional compensation.” Similarly, “*We* are expected to spend our “free” time getting our job done. This is exhausting! Teachers are underpaid as it is—please stop abusing our livelihood and free time.”

Teachers losing control over the length of their working day not only threatened professional autonomy, but it encroached on personal lives. This idea was powerfully born out in the Teacher Survey comments. “I work at least 60 hours a week trying to meet all the demands. I don't have time for my family or anything else,” wrote one teacher. Another noted, “I work at school until 5:00 PM everyday and spend hours working at home, because I love my students. Is this fair to my 10 year old and 4 year old?” Similarly, “I spend so much time planning, grading, testing, and so on that I lose time with my family.” One wrote,

> Change is constant in education, but [it] is taking its toll on teachers. We have given our best with little reward but "good, now let's add this" and we have nothing left to give. Our families want us back.

And, “My family time is now taken to have my classroom ready each day by staying late / coming in early / and working weekends to make up the time.” Teachers also noted a negative impact on their health. “The pace we work and

learn is unhealthy," noted one. "Teachers are developing health problems!" wrote another. Another described the problem this way,

> All of the new procedures and evaluations has created a lot of extra work for teachers. All of the extra load has to be done at home or on my own time. This takes time away from my family. Teachers have to be given time to complete paperwork, plan, grade papers, create items for instruction, input grades, etc. on contract time. My family is suffering and my health is suffering because it cannot all be done in the day.

Some teachers felt the burden professionally, socially, emotionally, and physically.

> I feel as teachers, no one is listening to how stressed, overworked, and underpaid we truly are for the job you are expecting us to perform. I truly love being an educator, but have spent more time away from my family, in tears, and sick due to stress. This is not okay!

Teachers clearly felt that they had lost professional control over the expectations and conditions of their employment. District managers leveraged power to raise expectations and implement threats and rewards to induce teachers to accept a more regimented and prolonged working day. As the comments above suggest, the loss of professional control meant work demands trespassed into personal lives.

DEVALUING EXPERTISE, UNDERMINING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Policies that rewarded performance and adherence to prescribed best practices undermined professionalism by undermining teachers' professional identities, which were rooted in expertise. By 2013, only 15% of educators agreed with the statement, "Teachers in my school/district are recognized as educational experts." Teachers claimed expertise in 3 primary areas: advanced education, classroom experience, and local knowledge. District policies and practices failed to recognize or reward these three sources of competency and left teachers feeling untrusted, disrespected, and devalued.

Devaluing Advanced Degrees

First, teachers claimed professional expertise based on their advanced professional degrees. New performance compensation schemes (APEX, TAP) shifted away from traditional compensation models, which rewarded advanced degrees and years of service, towards pay for performance outputs. Plus, standardized curriculum and instruction constrained teacher autonomy and their ability put their degrees to use. A number of teacher comments were some variation of, "As educators with professional degrees, we should be treated and valued as professionals." (Teacher Survey 2013). One teacher wrote, "The 7 years I spent studying my field and education were a waste because I'm not trusted to teach my content based on *content* specific research." Another wrote,

> Our practices and better judgment are constantly undermined … To have degrees in English Literature and a Master's in Education and be treated

like my knowledge is nonexistent is preposterous.

One teacher wondered, “Sometimes I question why I can't have more say with instruction in my classroom, even though I do have a Bachelor's, Masters and EIS in curriculum and instruction?” Similarly, “To have degrees in English Literature and a Master's in Education and be treated like my knowledge is nonexistent is preposterous.” According to another, “As a Language Arts teacher with multiple high degrees, I am not treated as an expert in my profession.”

Devaluing Experience

Second, teachers claimed professional expertise based on classroom experience and resented new district policies that did not recognize years of service as an indicator of competence. “Teachers with experience are not valued highly,” wrote a number of teachers (Teacher Survey 2013). “In the district, we are treated as though our experience and knowledge count for nothing,” wrote one teacher. According to another, “We have a superintendent who is using a business model where teacher experience is not valued.”

As evidence that experience was not valued, teachers cited the fact that people with little or no classroom experience had the most power to make decisions about teaching and learning. According to the 2013 Teacher Survey less than 20% of teachers agreed with the statement, “Teachers in my school/district have the opportunity to provide input regarding the district’s strategic direction.” They correctly noted that most policy-makers—politicians, lobbyists, philanthropists, administrators, consultants, Board of Education

members—had scant classroom teaching experience. A common sentiment was that, “Teachers desire to have their classrooms back rather than following the dictates of those who have little to no experience” (Teacher Survey 2013). One teacher wrote, “I am violently ill of people with extremely limited education/teaching experience are commanding/dictating what and how we teach.” Another noted, “The district has inexperienced people in positions that DO NOT understand or know what takes place in the classroom.” Similarly, “We feel as if decisions are being made by people who are out of touch with the realities of the classroom.” Another wrote, “Would also be nice if the School Board had experienced teachers making decisions for teachers.” One teacher lamented that his school should not “be run by an incompetent principal … He, along with McIntyre have *very* little classroom experience, and are not qualified in any way for their positions!”

As several of the comments above imply, many decision-makers’ primary competency was derived from business experience. Locally, all 4 of Knox County’s Broad Center Residents were former corporate executives with MBAs from top business schools. The Broad Academy-trained superintendent had just one year of classroom experience. Similarly, a review of profiles the district’s private consultants at Parthenon Group and Achieve Inc. shows expertise derived primarily from MBAs and quantitative literacy rather than teaching tenures. Likewise, according to public profiles 5 of 9 Board of Education members in 2013 had significant corporate executive experience (e.g. healthcare, banking, food service, real estate). Only 2 of 9 listed significant

teaching experience. Teachers worried that corporate executives were shaping schools in their own image and ignoring the most experienced voices. “People that make the most money do not always know what is best,” wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). Another pleaded, “NO MORE Corporate Consultants and Business Models! Please Stop running schools like businesses! They are not for profit, and need experienced Educators.” According to one teacher, “We have a superintendent who is using a business model where teacher experience is not valued.” Similarly, “The education business has tried to adopt the business model too quickly thus not utilizing the expertise that they have in their teachers.” And, “Teachers are very frustrated being represented by someone who has no real experience in working with students on a daily basis. Education is not a business.”

Teachers cited more evidence that experience was not valued by pointing to the fact that those charged with coaching and evaluating teachers often had little relevant experience or expertise. A 2014 speech to the school board by a Spanish teacher captured the exasperation felt by many,

> I am tired. I am tired of being forced to neglect the educational and developmental needs of my students in order to implement some scripted dialogue by someone who has no training or experience in my subject matter. I am tired of having to explain to my students why they have to sit in their desks completing the worksheet and regurgitating one-word answers. My instructional coach tells me this is what I should be doing but I miss the interactive hands on projects that brought my kids and my

> classroom to life. My students ask me, “why can’t we do the stuff that helps us learn anymore?” I don’t know what to tell them. […] I’m tired of being asked to speak less Spanish when my Spanish class is being evaluated, because my evaluator doesn’t know the language

A number of teachers shared the frustration of of being evaluated by outsiders who did not understand their work. “I think my colleagues and myself should be evaluated by someone who has taught or has experience in that grade level,” wrote one teacher (Teacher Survey 2013). “Teachers with less than 5 years experience should never evaluate other teachers,” wrote another. And, “Evaluators should have real experience in the grade/subjects they are evaluating.”

Some teachers even believed experience was a *liability*—they believed that more experienced teachers were being pushed out of the district. Certainly, the high human capital expenditures associated with an older, more experienced work force undermined the district’s commitment to maximizing economic efficiency and value to its “customers.” According to one teacher, “Experienced teachers are not appreciated; to the contrary, I believe the district wants younger, cheaper teachers,” and added, “We are losing good, experienced teachers by the droves.” Another pleaded, “Stop alienating veteran teachers; a teacher with 10+ years is a better educator than a newbie even though they are ‘cheaper.’” And, “Stop running off experienced teachers to hire new graduates.” Another suggested, “If [the superintendent] wants veteran teachers to leave, quit or resign, give them an early full package with benefits retirement,” and added,

“then the [district] can have 2 new teachers for the price of one.” On a local teacher wrote a social media post in response to a veteran teacher who had she had been forced out of her job,

> How many more teachers have this happened to that we know nothing about? When this experienced teacher is replaced by a new teacher Dr. McIntyre will boast about how he saved money. The institutional knowledge of our school system is fading before our eyes as this bureaucrat Superintendent keeps experimenting with education. And our Board of Education? Where are they? Cheerleading as our school system loses its greatest resource.

The superintendent implemented a “rational and equitable” staffing formula his in 2009 that “was painful because it resulted in layoffs and a reduction in force” (Alapo 2009). A teacher I interviewed described the dismissals that followed.

> So, there was forum where there were quite a few teachers who had been riffed—handed their pink slips—and those were the ones that were going to be losing their jobs. And I noticed, as one after the other, got their microphone up top, they would tell how many years experience they had. And I noticed there wasn’t one of ’em that had less than 20 years experience. I said, I don’t know about you, but this seems pretty obvious that the people who are losing their jobs have 20-plus years of experience, and are nearing retirement. What’s going on there?

I asked if more experienced teachers were still being pushed out. She replied,

> This year at my school, our music teacher's wife has been teaching for 18 years and she had applied for an opening. We had quite a few openings this year because have had quite a few people retire. We have 5 brand spanking new teachers. Not like 5 teachers who transferred from another school, 5 first year teachers. So when he interviewed her he told her, "You're the most qualified person for the job. Love to hire you, blah blah blah, but my hands are tied. I'm not really sure what I can do blah blah blah." The girl that got the position . . . *first year teacher*. [The principal said], "oh, she just wasn't a good fit." I'm like, what do you mean she just wasn't a good fit!? She actually did part of the maternity leave for one of the teachers a year or two back, and everybody loved her. And it was so clear. And so you have 5 brand new teachers.

Fears that the district was angling for a more youthful workforce were stoked in 2013 when the district's Broad Center Resident and Chief Accountability officer tweeted "We need TFA in Knox County Schools." The tweet linked to a popular news source citing a non-peer reviewed study found that Teach for America's high performing and inexperienced college graduates outperformed other teachers.[59]

Many teachers also believed inexperienced teachers were being fast-tracked into leadership positions because they were more ideologically

[59] Teach for America offers an accelerated pathway to teaching for high performing college graduates and professionals. TFA training is centered around an intensive 5 week program. Recruits commit to 2 years service and receive an entry-level salary plus some federally subsidized benefits.

compliant. One interviewee noted the role of the Leadership Academy,

> The Leadership Academy? Oh that's horrible. That's a nightmare. [The superintendent] just teaches people to be like him and [Broad Center trainees]. That's all it is. They're not *leaders*. They're followers. I, I call it the Followship Academy because you're not teaching people to think for themselves. And it's generally younger people that haven't been in it long enough to really understand what's going on. So you know, it's just awful. And I think if you start with the younger people, they're less likely to figure it out, because you've got them, you know?

Similarly, a letter to Board of Education in 2015 from a former teacher echoed the fears expressed above:

> Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of Dr. McIntyre's leadership is the trust that has been broken between our students, their families, and our school Principals—forcing lifelong educators who have sought to serve as administrators to choose between supporting the current party line and doing what is right for their students and community – lest they face reassignment or replacement by a ready and willing cadre of Leadership Academy "fellows" handpicked by Dr. McIntyre and annually funded by six-figures of taxpayer dollars – supplemented by a still-unidentified anonymous corporate "donor."

Though it might be difficult to prove experienced professionals faced systemic discrimination, the qualitative data is revealing. The fact that many educators

believed that their years of experience were a liability indicates a crisis of professionalism.

Devaluing Local Knowledge

Closely related to experience, teachers claimed expertise based on local knowledge not easily measured or inaccessible to distant policy-makers.[60] Teachers made distinctions between practical, local wisdom and expert knowledge. Teachers distinguished *real* classrooms, *real* students, and the real *world* from the world constructed by experts. One teacher wanted “the people ‘making the rules’ to come spend extended time in the real classroom” (Teacher Survey 2013). Similarly, another wrote, “The people making decisions should visit classroom often to see the reality of what they are voting on. It all looks good on paper but isn’t reality.” Similarly, “The upper administration is so disconnected from the reality of the day to day working of an elementary school.” According to another,

> I feel teachers are not treated with respect or as professionals. I feel the decisions are being made by politicians, business persons, and non-educators who know nothing of what goes on in the "real" classroom. Ideas that appear to look great on paper often do not work with 24 children, 6 reading levels, and 4 pull-out programs.

The case for the indispensable role of local knowledge was powerfully argued in

[60] The role of local knowledge and its contentious relationship with expertise has been aptly illuminated in J.C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Scott critiques modernist planning practices that exclude the necessary role of local know-how.

a speech delivered to the school board by music teacher in 2014. Greg compared himself to a standardized test and weighed the relative merits of each a tool for assessment. He concluded that his intimate knowledge of subject and student, combined with his capacity for conscious subjective interpretation, make him the superior assessment tool.

> My name is Greg and I am a highly effective measure of the growth of my students. Let's see how I compare to a standardized test like the SAT-10. … The SAT-10 is used as a measure of a teacher's teaching ability. … They're seeing if I'm teaching the way a company wants me to teach. … But here's the underlying thing about the assessment of students that I'm hinting at. … I don't know for sure that you actually trust me to assess my students. I get the impression that I am too dumb to know my students' abilities. Please allow me to counter-argue this sub-textual inference that has been lorded over me and my fellow teachers. I know which of my French horn students is playing by ear and not reading notes. I know who keeps switching up the fingering between F and G. I know which of my trumpet players is going to have the hardest time adjusting to getting braces. I know which of my clarinets has the best tone in their upper register. I know also who has the worst tone in their upper register. I know which baritone has the highest range in general. I know which percussionist understands 8th and 16th note combinations the best. I know which flautist has fingerings down beyond a 95% mastery. You know what else I know? [Voice cracking] I know which kid isn't doing well right now

> because they're hungry. I know who hasn't had a home most of the semester. [Gasps for a breath] I know who is dealing with domestic violence disrupting their home life. I know who is desperate for praise from anyone, so I *have got* to catch them doing something good before they act out just so they can get any attention even if it's negative. I know who's got a helicopter mom, who just needs to learn how to fail so they can work through the tough stuff in a healthy way. I know who has awesome parents and needs to be a friend for someone else so they get a good role model to imitate. I know what teachers to talk to, to get the rest of the story on a kid that I just don't get enough time with to catch everything. You know what else I know, that there wasn't a bubble on a test for them to fill out to get that information, but what do I know? I'm just their teacher.

Greg's classroom relationships are structured by unique layerings of time, place, history, and biography that mediate subjects' interactions with content and with each other. His knowledge is intensely local and necessarily obscure to distant experts and outside observers. The expertise he possesses about student performance, peer resource networks, psychologies, relationshps, and shared experiences is illegible to distant accountants, yet is central to is professional identity and practice.

PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST? PERVERTED INCENTIVES

To conclude, I argue that policies that undermined teacher professionalism by constraining autonomy and devaluing expertise created

conditions for a deeply moral crisis within the profession. When educator's technical judgments invariably conflicted with district mandates, teachers faced an ethical dilemma—put students first or put their careers first. In 2013 a middle school science teacher described the problem in a speech to the board of education,

> I'd like to start out asking a question. Are we putting students first? … As teachers we are no longer allowed to do what we know is best for our students—not if we want to avoid a conference of concern, keep our incomes, and practice the gift that we were given, teaching. We are now in a position where we either put ourselves first above our students or we suffer the consequences. Teachers are told by administrators, when you are being evaluated, you are no longer teaching to your students you are teaching to the evaluation. Your priority is the checklist, not the students. The incomprehensible reality: your score is more important than your students' learning. […] We see our students used solely as data, data to gain federal money or for our superintendent's personal national recognition. […] Our kids are worth more than that. They are worth more than we are giving them. They must be put first, whatever it takes. I will close with this. I will not do it. I will not allow you to *force* me to put anything ahead of what is best for my students. I have no doubt that I am on my way to losing my job. I will be devastated, but it would hurt me even more to be a teacher and not put my students first. But when I am no

> longer allowed to teach in Knox County I will be proud and content with the knowledge that I put my students and their education first.

Matt's speech suggests competing visions of professionalism created an ethical crisis. The professional ethic advanced by district demanded compliance and high test scores. The professional ethic advanced by teachers demanded autonomy and was rooted in claims that much teaching and learning exists outside or above an economic sphere that assumes anything of value can be counted, quantified, scored, and ranked. Teachers' claims that their primary professional duty was to students—not their employer—is a deeply subversive claim that undermines the basic assumptions of contemporary neoliberal authority.

CHAPTER VI

GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE: THE EMERGENCE OF SPEAK

Knox County was supposed to be a model for expert education reform, but instead became the site of grassroots political action against technocratic policies. There was nothing inevitable, or even likely, about the success of a coalition of insurgent teachers, parents, and students that emerged in the wake of popular demonstrations at school board meetings in late 2013. “It’s a community that rarely rebels. … It’s a complacent place,” noted a long-time resident, activist, and veteran educator. She added, “I worked in Knox County for 27 years. I’ve never seen a rebellion like I saw here”. The catalyst for that movement was a defiant speech delivered to the school board by an exasperated third grade teacher. A social movement emerged under the banner of SPEAK (Students, Parents, & Educators Across Knox County). Within 4 years that movement flipped the school board, severed ties with a divisive superintendent, took the reins of the teachers union, and affected changes to evaluations, compensation, standardized testing, and dismissals practices. The pertinent empirical question is how the frustrations of dispossessed teachers become channeled into a broad-based, effective political coalition. In short, social strain rooted in the (irrational) economic rationalization of teaching created occupational culture at odds with the culture of everyday life—a contradiction that

left teachers deeply alienated.[61] Ripe structural conditions fueled the efforts of committed activists who capitalized on pivotal moments and mobilized popular support to and build and sustain the movement.

ROOTS OF RESISTANCE: ALIENATION, SORROW, AND ROBOTS

Widespread feelings of alienation provided conditions for shared grievances around which a social movement could emerge. The district's standards-based, measurement driven accountability system created a rift between an economically rational occupational culture and the culture of everyday life. That contradiction fueled feelings of dispossession, loss, and anger best captured by the concept of alienation and its multiple meanings. As social relation it describes the transfer of one's affections, sympathies, loyalties, or trust. As a psychological term, alienation may refer to a passive state disconnectedness or isolation characterized by feelings of melancholy at an undefined loss. It may also refer to an active psychological state of hostility in which an alienated individual lashes out irrationally with no clearly defined target. Legally, alienation refers to a transfer of ownership. Specifically, according to Marxist thought, alienation describes the condition of workers in a capitalist economy wherein workers legally alienate control of their labor, transferring it to the capitalist for a period of time in return for a wage (Gorz 1989; Harvey 2014). Specifically, local teachers described being alienated in 3 big ways: (1) from the

[61] For more on alienation and economic rationalization of work see Andre Gorz' wonderful *Critique of Economic Reason* (1989) and David Harvey's "The Revolt of Human Nature: Universal Alienation" in *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (2014).

sacred and social meanings of work, (2) from the joy of working, and (3) from their work as a means of self-creation.

The Meaning of Work

For many teachers the relationship between the job of teaching and its social—even sacred—meanings had been severed. Teachers often invoked religious language of vocation, mission, or calling to describe the meanings attached to their work.[62] For example, on the 2013 Teacher Survey a teacher described the effects of the evaluation system and performance pay: “Between TEAM and APEX, I have never before questioned my calling as a teacher,” and added, “I look for new jobs every week. I don't know how much more of this I can take.” Another teacher commented, “The requirements added to my job this year has led me to rethink my calling as a teacher.” According to another survey response,

> God sent me to KCS. After arriving, I asked Him what I had done to anger Him. I thought He had sent me straight to Hell... […] Now with the evaluation system, my hair has fallen out, I've broken most of my teeth and for the first time in my life...I've considered suicide.

Another teacher running for school board in 2014 described her reason for retiring as being unable to fulfill her professional calling:

[62] The notion of a calling is rooted in Protestant ideas of labor as “task set by God” that are the fulfillment of divine will (Swedberg and Agevall 2005:293).

> I retired two years ago […] my heart would no longer allow me to damage five and six year-olds in the name of "best practices" and "rigor." I could no longer conduct my classroom knowing I was damaging children emotionally and academically and remain true to my calling. (Bounds 2016)

This loss of purpose was often expressed as sorrow. A particularly poignant example was a public resignation letter of a former Teacher of the Year, 20 year veteran of 3rd grade. She described how district demands for data, measurable outcomes, and rigid best practices had created competitive pressures and insecurity that estranged her from the relationships and values that informed her life's purpose, a job she described as dream come true.[63]

> I am ever so thankful for the opportunity to teach the grade I love, in a school I love, with teammates and staff members who have been as close as family. My calling, my mission in life, was to work with children; to teach not only academics, but to show love and respect, to be kind and expect kindness in return. My class has always been called the Connor Team because we found that working together is what makes us most successful. I have tried to instill in my students my belief that we must respect and take care of one another. Over the years, I have watched my students' ballgames, frequented birthday parties, sat among families for baptisms. I am saddened to leave my precious Adrian Burnett family and friends. I cannot, however, remain in a profession where children are

[63] This excerpt has been edited for length.

> treated as data measurements rather than tiny humans with real needs. As a former Teacher of the Year, it has been shocking to find myself in a position of having to fight for my professional life and reputation as a "Conference of Concern" teacher. My confidence has been shaken as I wonder why I wasn't worth saving. The constant threat of losing one's job creates a wearisome work environment. The joy of teaching is gone. It has been replaced by discouragement, anxiety, and fear.

The language of community, family, and friendship describe her working relationships. Her work was informed by ideals of collaboration, support, loyalty, love, teamwork, and caring. But, as she notes, those values had little purchase in a system faithful only the most recent calculations the educational value produced for the firm.

It should be noted that the policy-makers also understood education, and their own work, as a sacred duty. Both sides appeared to believe, as Benjamin Disraeli famously put it, "I am on the side of the angels!"[64] At the 2014 State of the Schools the superintendent echoed teacher narratives about sacred responsibilities: "This is not just a job, but a vocation, and truly, a calling." He described the sense of purpose that informed his strategic plan, *Excellence for Every Child* (2014) in a speech not lacking grandiloquent sentimentality.

> I saw firsthand the diligent work and the enthusiastic faces of our future, bright excited children from all walks of life, eager to learn, smiling broadly

[64]G.K. Chesterton quipped in response, "Benjamin Disraeli was right when he said he was on the side of the angels. He was indeed: he was on the side of the fallen angels."

> with great hope for the future, and absolutely trusting that we will teach them what they need to know to be successful. I take that innocent trust as an unspoken expectation, as the acceptance of a promise, and as a sacred covenant that we as adults need to live up to. And every time I meet one of our kids I make a silent vow to do exactly that. […] That solemn promise, that deep commitment to our children is embodied in four simple words that define or vision, our goal, and our future. … Excellence … For … Every … Child.

Rhetorically, there was little difference between educators and policy-makers on the question of whether education was sacred duty. Rather the difference had to do with whether the economization of sacred, social obligations undermined or fulfilled those responsibilities. Ultimately, administrators' discursive nods to teachers' intrinsic sacred motivations belied the concrete fact of policies that explicitly designed to appeal to teachers as economically rational, self-interested actors.

The Joy of Work

Many teachers described being alienated from the joy of labor. Increasing job insecurity left teachers anxious and bereft a sense of basic safety. Preoccupied with professional survival, finding enjoyment seemed untenable. As one teacher wrote on the 2013 Teacher Survey, "I am working my behind off, scared to death that I will lose my job," adding, "This is no way to spend your life." Another wrote, "I feel that teachers live in fear of failing rather than feeling

confident their employer wants them to succeed." And another, "The human, relational element in our schools is being replaced by an atmosphere of fear and mistrust." Though the threat of losing one's job is a kind of motivator, it was not *motivating* per se. As one teacher commented, "I feel demoralized and exhausted. […] I have never felt so much stress. I have never felt so sad and defeated." Another teacher wrote,

> I have been a teacher for many, many years and have never been so unhappy. I dread getting out of bed some mornings because school is so heavy these days. The job I once loved and was impassioned by, is now just a heavy load I drudge through.

Another teacher cited Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explain how an evaluation system experienced as arbitrary and punitive extinguished enjoyment. In a speech to the school board in 2013 he offered a tearful plea,

> I was Teacher of the Year from 2007-2013. I love to teach. But I am so overwhelmed that even though I still love to teach, I no longer love my job. I am watching those I love, teacher after teacher, from school after school tell me this is it, I can't take it anymore. My own sweet wife has said, I am done. It hurts so much to see her in pain. The main reason I am standing here is because one of my dear friends who is the best teacher I have ever worked with in the last 20 years, has received a Letter of Concern. Now I am concerned! Dear friend, I am so sorry. I know how dedicated you are, what an incredible teacher you are. It must have felt like they pulled the heart out of your chest. You deserve better. […] [To the

> administration] You are robbing people of their dignity with those letters. I recently won one of my more challenging students over and one thing she said is, you make us feel safe. Well I can tell you that teachers no longer feel safe. Maslow only lists things like breathing, food, and water above safety, including employment. Without safety there is no creativity, without safety there is not joy. I cannot even describe to you what it has been like last year, and particularly this year. And just when I think I can't take another hit, something else has happened. […] Listen to the people. Give us back our joy.

A clear sense of sorrow and loss emerged from the anxiety and fear that ruptured the symmetry of his job (what he did for money) and his vocation (his life's work). Indeed, that rupture cut at his very identity.

Work as Self-Creation

"Working is not just the creation of economic wealth; it is also always a means of self-creation" (Gorz 1989:80). As one teacher noted in a 2014 speech to the school board, "I'm a teacher, it's not just my profession, it's who I am." For teachers like this, the job of teaching was not simply time and obedience exchanged for a wage. Indeed, a major theme of the so-called teacher rebellion was that it was not about the money. Teacher Survey comments reflected this theme. For example, "I did not come into the teaching profession to make money" (2013). And, "Teachers do not enter this field to make money. We do it to make a difference." According to another, "Teaching is an art, concentration on

data collection distracts and does not add to my planning. Bottom line—I just need more time not money." Another wrote emphatically, "Keep your money!" It seemed relatively clear by late 2013 that the social value and meaning of teaching had been obscured in the representational form of quantified value (especially money). Despite clear evidence from the Teacher Survey and loud protestations that teacher concerns were "not about the money," the superintendent responded to the morale crisis by proposing a 2.5% teacher salary increase in 2014. It was a remarkably deaf response that elicited responses like this, from yet another public resignation letter,

> Contrary to the convenient explanation of the ongoing exodus of experienced educators from our district, my recent resignation had nothing to do with "financial compensation". I did not begin working for KCS for the salary, and it is not because of the salary that I am leaving. In fact, I am taking a REDUCTION in pay after being hired by a neighboring district. For many teachers "compensation" is more than a dollar amount, if it has anything to do with money at all.

The district's apparently oblivious attempt to address non-economic grievances by increasing wages makes sense if we assume that either (1) narrow market logic was an ideological blinder that obscured policy-makers' ability to perceive clearly articulated grievances, or (2) narrow market logic dictated that a wage concessions were the only concessions that did not undermine their position. The latter makes sense if we consider Gorz' (1989) argument that wage demands are "the only demands which do not undermine the rationality of the economic

system." And, "Demands bearing on working hours, the intensity of work, its organisation and nature, are, on the other hand pregnant with subversive radicalism; they cannot be satisfied by money…" Furthermore, "The 'market-based order' is fundamentally challenged when people find out that not all values are quantifiable, that money cannot buy everything." And in fact, "what it cannot buy is something essential or is even the essential thing" (Gorz and Turner 1989:116).

Teachers frustrated by the inability to perform work as a means of self-creation felt alienated from *themselves*—from the thing that made them human. The most dramatic evidence of that were ubiquitous references to robots, automatons, and dehumanization. Some teachers noted feeling dehumanized by the economization of social relations at work: "We are no longer treated as 'family' […] I often feel like a robot" (Teacher Survey 2013). Another teacher noted, "excessive standardization is dehumanizing education." One wrote, "There is no room for creativity or individualism. Knox County wants robots, not teachers." And, "Teachers are no longer teachers. They are no longer facilitating unique academic minds. They are robots trying to produce-cookie cutter students." And, "Teachers are impersonalized and treated like robots." Some teachers focused on the effects a test-focused culture, "I feel we are being turned into robots and our kids nothing but a bunch of test takers." As one teacher put it, "This entire emphasis on test scores is not developing the whole child – testing robot is what we are creating." Another noted, "let students be treated as students – let them learn – quit trying to make them testing robots." Still another

wrote, “Our current system is transitioning students into test-taking automatons.” Similarly, in a speech to the school board a student complained about the measurement-driven system. With tongue in cheek he asked, “It works with nuclear reactors, it works with business models, why can't it work with students?” He added,

> How convenient, calculating exactly who knows what and who needs what. I mean, why don't we just manufacture robots instead of students? They last longer and they do what they are told.

There was a clear sense that overreliance on reductive measurement was dehumanizing. As one teacher noted, “Overpaid statisticians churn out numbers that pretend personalities, motivation, life experiences, and general humanity do not exist” (2013 Teacher Survey).

Certainly, the feelings of alienation described by teachers were not new to workers in a modern capitalist system. Writing in 1844, Marx observed that under a system of wage labor, “the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.” And in 1973, Ivan Illich described the alienating effects of a measurement-driven bureaucratic system:

> The institutionalized values school instills are quantified ones. School initiates young people into a world where everything can be measured, including their imaginations, and, indeed, man himself. But personal growth is not a measurable entity. It is growth in disciplined dissidence, which cannot be measured against any rod, or any curriculum, nor compared to someone else's achievement. In such learning one can

> emulate others only in imaginative endeavor, and follow in their footsteps rather than mimic their gait. The learning I prize is immeasurable re-creation."

If alienation is nothing new to wage laborers or those embedded in bureaucratic educational systems, then perhaps the intensity of neoliberal policies and logics that expand these pressures is new.

The uniquely neoliberal formulation of labor as *human capital* means that teachers are not human capital for themselves (or their students), but rather for the firm, which employs them (Brown 2015). The dehumanizing experience of becoming a human capital was not lost on local teachers. "Educators are not 'human capital!'" wrote one teacher on the 2013 Survey. On social media another teacher wrote, "We have heard about compassionate and supportive school leaders who treat their employees as people and not "human capital." According to another, "Director of Human Capital Strategy needs a name change to Treating Staff Like Human Beings!" Similarly, another posted,

> That term Human Capital slays me. It reminds me of several years ago when the hospital I was working in brought in a bunch of MBAs as administrators and our patients became Product Lines overnight.

A former special education teacher I interviewed offered me a vocabulary lesson, referencing the language used by private education consulting agencies:

> If you hear a school board candidate use this word you'll know what they mean. *Human Capital*—every child, teacher, secretary or employee has a price: some are more profitable than others.

Configured as human capital, teachers were tasked with being responsible for themselves and their performance relative to other competing human capitals, but ultimately *for* the firm. Brown (2015:37) writes, "as a matter of political and moral meaning, human capitals do not have the standing of Kantian individuals, ends in themselves, intrinsically valuable."

By late 2013 the school district was a pressure cooker. Volatility increased as frustrations rose between district administrators bent on intensifying economically rational pressures and teachers bent on recovering the meaning, joy, and humanity of their labor. As tensions rose something had to give. One teacher wrote, "We're running on fumes and it's unsustainable" (Teacher Survey 2013). Another wrote, "I am exhausted and don't think I can continue at this pace." And, "You cannot continue to add water to a cup and expect the cup to be effective. Something spills." Reflecting back on that time, a teacher described in radio interview the growing unrest, "I became aware of teachers who were voicing their opinions—and, just kind a low murmur of things" (Miller 2014).[65] Similarly, a former teacher I interviewed described her efforts to alert school board members of rising tensions:

> I would get frustrated, because for years […] I would tell people on the board. I would tell them what was going on. And I thought they were listening, but now I don't think that. […] I just kept going, you don't understand! Morale is getting worse and worse and worse. And nobody

[65] In 2014 SPEAK organizers joined a nationally broadcast radio program, The War Report on Public Education with Dr. James Miller, and offered an extensive and detailed history of the emergence of the movement.

> was—and I was trying to tell them that. And I thought they were listening, […] I'd say in order to improve morale you don't even have to spend a dime. You can treat people like professionals without spending any money, and gave some ways you can do that, you know. And it would've—we wouldn't have got to this point.

The tipping point came in late 2013 when the pent-up energy of accumulated feelings of alienation released in a wave of public expressions of discontent and the emergence of a grassroots political coalition.

THE EMERGENCE OF SPEAK

The popular backlash and subsequent emergence of the grassroots coalition, Students, Parents, and Educators Across Knox County (SPEAK), was not inevitable, but it *did* happen. The loss of professional autonomy described in the previous chapter and related experiences of alienation, of course, do not automatically lead to protests. The associated feelings of sorrow, loss, and anger seem as likely lead to disengagement, self-blame, lashing out at home, or rebellion against immediate overseers (Piven and Cloward 1979; Gurney and Tierney 1982; Harvey 2014). The catalytic problem was how atomized frustrations became channeled into a collective political movement. To answer the question, I offer a history of the emergence of SPEAK and describe on 3 key elements of its success. First, a defiant speech to the school board went viral and sparked recognition that grievances were not isolated, but widespread and shared. Second, energy from that speech fueled reactionary protests and

coincided with fledgling efforts by teacher-organizers to recruit, build, and mobilize a broad-based community of activists. Third, SPEAK members developed an informed and critical political consciousness largely through SPEAK's function as an educational platform dedicated to sharing information, conducting and disseminating research, and amplifying diverse stakeholder voices.

Recognition of Shared Grievances

The watershed event—that precise point when the trajectory of Knox County Schools turned—was the moment a fed up, plucky 3rd grade teacher delivered a blistering speech to a quiet and sparsely attended meeting of the school board in October 2013. Though the speech was only 5-minutes long, its reverberations were still being felt 5 years later. The teacher described herself as generally conservative and not very interested in politics, but as she reflected in radio interview in 2014 there was moment when she decided enough was enough.

> Watching what my co-workers were going through. Feeling what I was going through. And not even realizing how universal those feelings were, I decided to speak because a fellow teacher of mine had her job threatened. […] She was so distraught. And, and that kinda was the straw that broke the camel's back. I'd had enough. I thought about what I wanted to say for 5 or 6 days and then I went to the board meeting. (Miller 2014)

With only handful of friends for support, she aired a laundry list of grievances related to the major reforms of 2009-2013. She delivered a steely and forceful critique in what became known as the "Tired Teacher Speech."

> I am a teacher who loves teaching but unfortunately what I am going to say tonight is not very warm and fuzzy. […] Teachers trusted that TEA would gain the ear of individuals in our state government who had some common sense.[66] We also hoped that our own school board and superintendent would listen and adjust some policies accordingly. Instead we got tenure rendered virtually meaningless, our teachers associations shut out of negotiations, a rubric more extensive than the first one, the possibility of our entire certification being dependent on test scores and even the opinions of six year olds. And our superintendent testifying on Capitol Hill last February about how the vast majority of our teachers were supportive of this process. Really?
>
> So I come to you, not as a teacher who has a case of sour grapes, one whose job is in jeopardy due to poor evaluations or test scores. If I reduce myself to a number, I'm a four [out of 5], at least this year. However I am also not here as a teacher who is hopeful that my opinions will be heard or make a difference, but as a teacher who is just plain tired, really tired. I am tired of trying to plan 5 different lessons a day that hit 61 different indicators on a rubric—and that's just to score a rock solid three. I am tired

[66] TEA is state teacher union, Tennessee Educators Association.

of the public being convinced that Knox County is moving in the right direction when I see good teachers at my school in tears at some point during the day on a regular basis. I am tired of having to waste instructional time giving tests every week whether I need to or not just so I can have data to discuss at a PLC meeting. I am tired of listening to teachers talk about the frustration of 5, 6, and 7 year olds who don't understand the language of a test or survey that they are now required to take. […]

I am tired of people wondering why teachers are not out en masse to support the school budget every year. Well, we are tired of money being wasted on programs that take away our creativity and professional judgment [...]

I am tired of watching friends who are great, experienced teachers with great evaluation scores quit mid year due stress, retire before they intended, or be given conference of concern letters which imply the threat of dismissal […]. I am speaking of teachers that have earned so much respect that parents wait impatiently when classes are posted to see if their child has been lucky enough to get in their class. But these teachers may be without a job next year because of one test. And they have no way of knowing if their TVAAS formula was tabulated accurately, they can't

> even review the tests themselves, and are unable to challenge the results.[67] […]
>
> Lastly, I am tired of the board, our representative body, taking the word of someone who only has one year of classroom experience over these teachers behind me who have actually put in the time and earned the right to call themselves educators. But that would mean you would have to talk, listen to, and believe teachers. Last January I invited you to come talk to us. The board member representing our school brought us some cookies today. But to this day 21 months later she has not been to our school even one time to talk to us, the teachers. I think that is grounds for a conference of concern letter, don't you?

She walked away from the lecturn to the sound of silence from board members and the sparse applause of a few friends. She did not think the speech would have much effect. She said she remembered thinking, "I know they are probably not going to do anything but I don't want them to be able to say they didn't know." She added, "Then it turned into something completely different."

At the time this "tired teacher" was unaware how universal her frustrations were. Her words resonated with teachers who began discussing the speech and sharing a video of it online. She described how the video went viral:

> It's a little surreal actually. […] A friend called me on a Saturday morning after I had given my speech at the local board meeting and said, hey

[67] TVAAS is the Tennesse Value Added Assessment System, which tracks and measures student growth from year to year.

> somebody posted your video. And I said, really? So I got on YouTube and it had like 20 hits. […] On Monday morning I looked and there were a couple hundred hits. By Wednesday there were about 40,000. (Miller 2014)

Soon the video had over 100,000 views. When I asked her about it during an interview she joked, "It's no Katy Perry video, but for a teacher speaking at a board meeting, it's not doing so bad." A teacher-turned-activist described the effect the speech had on him and others:

> I had been under some pressure at school and feeling a lot of frustration about things that I don't seem to have a whole lot of control over, and trying hard to stay on top of things. I was just frustrated. Then her video hit the internet. She gave voice to hundreds and hundreds of teachers' issues with what she had to say. It was perfect. It was wonderful. And I was excited about, you know, hearing from people I knew who were like, have you seen this?! And I myself passed it on to my school board member. So there was a lot of energy that came out of her video. And a whole lot of excitement.[68] (Miller 2014)

The speech clearly articulated the experiences of many teachers, giving voice to their feelings of frustration, anxiety, and sadness. It also explicitly identified the source of frustrations in district evaluation, measurement, tenure, and spending policies. The speech's primary significance was that it sparked recognition that teachers' frustrations and grievances were widely shared.

[68] Edited for length.

Building a Movement

Another thing the “tired teacher” did not realize was that a small group of teachers had already begun recruiting educators to identify shared grievances and discuss what could be done. The meeting’s original organizer described how her efforts coincided with the buzz of tired teacher speech (Miller 2014):

> I had become concerned about things going on in education back in the spring of 2013. I started getting articles from a friend in Memphis that was bringing things to light things to me that I was thinking myself that I was experiencing. I was invited to be part of a call-in show for Diane Ravitch. […] Her recommendation to get groups involved was to get grassroots involvement and to have meetings with other teachers in your area. […] In the meantime, after our meeting was scheduled, her video went viral and I will never forget the first time I heard that video. I absolutely went bananas. I said, she has spoken for me. She has said everything that I feel. And I think, my god that woman has guts! And so did everyone else. And we were all asking, who is she?

She contacted the tired teacher and they had their first meeting in a local coffee shop. About 50 educators showed up. “We were all there for about 3 hours sharing our thoughts, what’s going on,” she said. “None of us really knew what we were getting into. We were just there for a purpose (Miller 2014)” Another teacher-turned-activist described how teachers’ shared grievances were translated into broader political organizing:

> When I started hearing there was going to be a meeting that she was organizing, to get people together of a like mind. […] It was really exciting to get together and look around and say, wow yeah. We all feel this. It's more than just my issues. It's a lot of people who are feeling like this, and so going from that grassroots start to things, and then building up and involving and hearing from parents and students and seeing that these are issues that involve our students. It it's not just a teacher issue. It's a student issue. You know, how well are we taking care of our kids? It was exciting to grow from that and have a real focus to our energies. SPEAK grew out of a need to organize and inform and communicate with each other. (Miller 2014)

It would be an understatement to say that early recruitment and mobilization was a success.

Within days the group mobilized hundreds of demonstrators to what amounted to the occupation of the school board meeting. The first organizing meeting was on Saturday, November 2nd. By Wednesday, November 6th, according to the meeting organizer,

> We had 300 teachers [wearing] red for public education, and with about 30 speakers, including teachers, students and parents speaking before the board of education. And nothing like that has ever happened in my lifetime, and I am a lifelong resident of Knoxville, Tennessee. And have taught many years here in Knoxville. It was a chilling experience to say the least. (Miller 2014)

The typically humdrum bureaucratic machinations of the board became a rollicking democratic show as demonstrators cheered, booed, and applauded speakers. The December 2013 meeting of the school board was more of the same.

Enthusiastic participation continued for much of the year and the meetings became contentious. For example, when the board announced its decision to hold a special workshop examining concerns about special education that had been raised by teachers and parents, the crowd cheered and applauded. The board chair had a strong reaction to the attendee's vocal approval.

> Please don't do that! Please don't *do* that! [her voice shaky and cracking]. No, it's *not* the first time you've been heard. This board has been *attacked* for over a year . . . as if they don't give a darn and don't care. We have been insulted from the floor meeting after meeting after meeting. […] I'm not going to take it anymore. […] Let's just try to work it out and quit this adversarial relationship, we are all here because we are trying to do the right thing for students and families of this community but please don't insult me and assume I am a bitch. Thank you.

The board of education did not welcome the passionate participation from its employees, and in September 2014 it began limiting access to public forum by enforcing a 2011 policy that stated, in effect, that employees wishing to address the board must provide written documentation that they have exhausted normal chain of command before their request to speak would be approved. According to the board chair,

> We’re so glad the teachers have spoken up, but we’ve heard you now. […] This is our existing policy, and as Chair, I didn’t enforce this last fall, because we were in a heated moment, and I thought as a goodwill gesture and a matter of good faith with our educators, we wouldn’t enforce this. I think what we are saying is, we need to be enforcing our policies. These are *our* board meetings.

Teachers complained that the policy stifled speech, and cited a March 2014 County Commission ordinance public employee’s rights to speak openly about Knox County Government issues (Absher 2014). Some worried that stifling public airing of grievances would make teachers who complained more vulnerable to retaliation from supervisors (McCoy 2014). Other complained that years of working through the chain of command had produced few results. According to one teacher-activist in a 2014 address, “It seems to me that the board still feels like teachers who have addressed the board have not tried to take their concerns up the chain of command.” She added, “But when years of trying this method got us nowhere, this is our only recourse.” One this is clear. Over the course of a year board meetings transformed from (as one local leader told me) places “where decisions are announced” into sites of noisy participation, debate, and conflict.

An important theme that appeared in interviews, on protest signs, and on social media was some variation of the idea that, “teacher working conditions are student learning conditions.” Framing teacher’s grievances as broad educational problems was crucial to the movement’s successful recruitment of parents,

community members, and students. As one early organizer describe it, “Of course there’s all kinds of alliances that form when you start speaking up on behalf of your children. Because other people start saying hey I need help too, I’ve got that issue” (Miller 2014). Crucially to the movement’s legitimacy, 4 students delivered speeches at those early board meetings.[69] One student, for example, excoriated the board for overreliance on measureable outcomes: “If everything I learned in high school is a measurable objective, I haven’t learned anything.” He argued, “Creativity, appreciation, inquisitiveness—these are impossible to scale, but they’re the purpose of education.” His speech garnered even more attention than the tired teacher speech, quickly reaching 600,000 views and eventually more than 2 million. A SPEAK organizer highlighted the importance student speakers, explaining to a local paper, “They weren’t speaking out for their jobs or pay but rather the integrity of the teacher/student relationship that they recognized as being crucial in their learning and development (Knox Focus 2014).” Building a coalition of diverse voices added legitimacy, numbers, and strength. As one movement leader told me, “When issues become universal, then you cannot be minimized as just a couple people that are unhappy.”[70]

Activists recognized that creating meaningful changes would required more a few popular mobilizations, but rather a sustained and organized effort. The fledgling movement would formalize under the name SPEAK (Students, Parents, and Educators Across Knox County). According to a movement leader,

---

[69] Three were presidents of their school’s student government, one a valedictorian, and each with above a 4.0 grade point average.
[70] SPEAK grievances often dismissed as the concerns of a “loud minority,” though most of the data from surveys, comments, interviews, and fieldwork suggests otherwise.

starting SPEAK was “not something I envisioned myself doing. I love teaching kids and being in the classroom” (Miller 2014). A reluctant activist, the tired teacher’s political work was born of necessity. She explained the rationale behind the creation of SPEAK,

> Our teacher unions have been weakened. They stripped away bargaining rights. When those rights were stripped away a lot of teachers figured no reason to spend money. I wanted to make a stronger association to bring more people in. SPEAK was born in [a teacher’s] kitchen during a Christmas party. We wanted it to be, not just a teacher organization but for stakeholders as well. (Miller 2014)

Organic alliances, reactionaries, and loose political aims crystalized into an organization with definite structure and objectives. The group created a social media page, which appeared in January 2014. SPEAK’s name began appearing on flyers, t-shirts, and in local media. A document with SPEAK’s original mission statement appeared in March 2014. The first formal articulation was a vague democratic statement in support of “strengthening public schools through the active involvement of all stakeholders” (SPEAK 2014). However, a more precise political platform can be derived from early literature distributed by SPEAK, and can be summed up by 4 key objectives: (1) more valid evaluation system that respects teachers as professionals; (2) end excessive standardized testing that treats children as data; (3) direct resources away from corporations and into students classrooms; and (4) more democratic decision-making that includes students, parents, and teachers as equal partners.

SPEAK is collaborative organization run by a group of volunteers and there are no paid positions. The group operates on very little money and according to interviews with SPEAK members, the group receives no funding from outside sources or political groups. The group is not affiliated with any political party. Volunteers donate time and resources to cover slim operational costs. “Membership” in the group remains largely informal and seems based primarily on self-identified affiliation and participation in the group’s activities. SPEAK’s “intention is to be as open a group as possible” according to its website. Joining the group’s social media page as a “member” does not necessarily imply membership in any meaningful sense. The group holds monthly meetings that are publicized on its social media page and open to all community members. Those who attend the General Meetings may participate in discussions and deciding on the group’s actions and official positions, which are communicated through the website, pinned social media posts, or press releases. The leaders of this collaborative and volunteer-run group tend to be those who take on the most active roles and duties and there is no formal hierarchical structure.

Political Consciousness: “Follow the Money!”

A crucial characteristic of the movement’s success was the politicization of previously non-political actors, and the development of a critical political consciousness.[71] For a movement to be successful it is not enough to recognize

[71] To be clear, being politicized had little to do with party affiliation. One movement leader, who describes herself as “generally conservative” told me in an interview, “It’s not a Republican or

common deprivation (loss of autonomy, increased stress, more hours at work); activists must identify and target the specific sources of their deprivation (standards-based accountability policies, economic interests, political ideologies). With so many educator-activists, perhaps it is little surprise that they threw themselves eagerly and capably to the task of educating themselves and each other. Through research, discussion, and dissemination of information a more-or-less coherent political critique emerged—it was one particularly sensitive to the role of money and power in shaping policy. The perspective is summed up well by SPEAK's mantra, "Pay attention...and always follow the money!" (speaktn.com 2016).

Pay attention. Many would-be activists lacked an informed political perspective prior to the events of 2013. Some described themselves as preoccupied with surviving day-to-day, others figured themselves immune to the negative effects of education reforms, and many dismissed political analyses as paranoid conspiracy theories. During an interview, a movement leader described her reluctant realization that seemingly distant reforms would ever affect her:

> You know, all these reforms started coming out. And well, that's Chicago, inner city schools, that doesn't really have anything to do with us. We're a suburban school. We do a good job. Our achievement is good. They're going to leave us alone, right? So then it hits Memphis. Well that's still

---

Democrat thing." She added that there are people, "who are normally diametrically opposed on a lot of issues but they understand that this is different." SPEAK activists and allies came from across the political spectrum. For example, a campaign kick-off event for a SPEAK-backed school board challenger in 2014 featured vocal support from both a progressive Democratic State Representative and the Republican County Mayor.

> Memphis, that's all the way over there. It's inner city. Nothing is going to happen here. It starts creeping across the state, now we have all this . . .

She went on to describe her reluctant realization that "all this" was driven by powerful political economic interests:

> My husband used to say that, with whatever situation, follow the money. And it's ironic, because even my principal several years ago started talking about, yeah this is all a thing to privatize public education. Whatever! Why would anybody want to do that? I mean I was just, it sounded like a conspiracy theory to me. I'm like yeah, whatever, who gives that much of a crap about all that stuff? And now it's funny that I'm more a believer in that stuff than he is. [laughing] I was like, oh my god, you were right. You knew! You know, because I didn't go home and research all this stuff. I went home and graded papers and went to bed.

Another teacher I interviewed described the politicization of a former professor who became active in local education politics after learning of the role of groups like the Broad Foundation, Gates Foundation, Parthenon, and Student First. She said,

> One of my professors when I was at UT and um, we, we talked and she was very apolitical […] and really was not involved. But she said this has made her, you know—she said, oh conspiracy theories or whatever. And now she totally gets it. And she's just like, it's overwhelming, the amount of information, that you have to know and find and research to get to the bottom of all this stuff. And I think because they have the infrastructure

> and they have the money to hit it ten million different ways, we're just trying to keep up. We're just trying to figure out where they're going next and what they're going to destroy and what they're going to take, you know. And it does seem very conspiracy theory-ish.

Another activist described her moment of realization in an address to the school board. Researching the Broad Academy's board of directors she discovered many had financial stakes in the education reforms they advocated. She remarked, "I had no idea—no idea that this is what we were bringing into our school systems and our communities." She added, "I was just blown away and I apologize for not doing that research sooner. God help us all."

Follow the money. A teacher-activist I interviewed summed up SPEAK's general perspective, "The money trail is, sadly, the most direct line to anything that's going on right now." The group's political perspective—particularly critical of the role of private groups shaping education—was clearly articulated one blustery day in May 2014 when around 100 demonstrators attended a rally at a downtown plaza to call attention to a Gates-funded report by a private consulting firm, Parthenon. Dressed in red, demonstrators' hand-made signs flapped in the gusting breeze. The signs read: "Our public schools are not for sale!!!" And, "Keep public education public. NO Wall $t." A big poster, about 8 feet wide read: "Those who teach <u>can.</u> Those who <u>can't</u> lobby for: Wall St., Parthenon Group, StudentsFirst, Teach for America, Stand ~~for~~ on Children, Pearson Inc., Achieve Inc." According to another, "Put the people first. We demand full funding for

public schools." On the megaphone a parent and former teacher addressed the crowd:

> I have seen what is happening in my child's school and am disturbed by it being *invaded* by private investors and corporations that see our children as products. Testing companies, private investors and testing companies will continue as long as it's profitable! (Field Notes 5/14/14)

Next, a local state representative, former teacher, and vocal critic of recent education called attention to national education groups.

> They say they are pro-child but that's not what we are seeing. They are not donating money to schools. They are donating to campaigns—100,000 dollars to a *local* school board race! That's what we're seeing. Students First is ramping up efforts. Why are outside interests coming to Tennessee to get involved in *our* schools? […] They're concerned with profit [boos from the crowd].

SPEAK activists developed a critical awareness of the role of private consultants, investment firms, lobbyists, corporations, and elite-backed advocacy organizations shaping education policy.

SPEAK members educating themselves and each other was a key to developing an informed, critical political perspective. Staying abreast of complex, rapidly changing education issues was a tall task. As one activist described it in an interview,

> And that's why this is so hard, it you know, when you talk about evaluations, teacher evaluations—um people just, it's so complicated—it's

> not, you can't explain it in a sound bite. They can always explain their side in a sound bite. You know, life is not a sound bite. Sometimes it's complicated and you have to pay attention.

SPEAK facilitated education in a number of ways: hosting candidate forums (e.g. for County Commission and Board of Education); hosting community forums (e.g. on effects of standardized testing) holding meetings to discuss education policy (e.g changes to school system strategic plans,); attending national and regional conferences to meet with organizers and activists (e.g. NEA); partnering with other groups to host teach-ins and organizer trainings (e.g. Stop School Push-out); attending local government meetings (e.g. Board of Education regular meetings and work sessions, County Commission Meetings); publicizing speakers and panel discussions (e.g. Alfie Kohn, David Berliner, Diane Ravitch, state Education Department commissioner); hosting and attending film screening events (e.g. *American Teacher, Standardized, Education Inc.,* and *Backpack Full of Cash*); producing research (e.g non-renewal rates, alignment of district and state policies, legality of grant acceptance, etc.). In these efforts SPEAK partnered with a number of groups including KCEA, United Campus Workers, University of Tennessee's Department of Theory and Practice in Education, NEA, and the PTA.

SPEAK's social media page was an essential tool for posting information, disseminating research, and sharing experiences. Within a few months, SPEAKs social media page membership grew to 2,000 members and eventually more than 3,500. Users with smart phones could post information and commentary in

real time. Likewise, the site offered users access to: a calendar of education related events (e.g. speakers, community forums, open houses, video screenings, regional and national conferences); local, state, national and international education news; notes, updates, and videos of public meetings (e.g. County Commission, BOE meetings, BOE work sessions); official county documents (e.g. MOUs, teacher surveys, school budgets, county budgets); local election information; scholarly research; and local activist white papers (e.g. a 2016 Review of Personnel Dismissals). In 2015, the group created and alphabetized index of files on a range of topics (e.g. collaborative conferencing, charter schools, testing and assessment, test refusal, compensation models, and the Leadership Academy).[72]

The open nature of a social media platform that allowed its users to post content and comment helped foster a political consciousness that aligned with the group's democratic mission. In a segment from a 2014 radio program, organizers described the importance of a creating a media platform that encouraged dialogue between members (Miller 2014):

> *Joe* – Information is key. And just kinda like, *Field of Dreams*, if you build it they will come. […] There's an awful lot of people that want to how to fight back, that want to know how to get information. And if you make that available to them in an easy way, in a place where they can have 2-way communication, that's really important. That's very, very important. People

[72] The public nature of the group worried some members who feared retaliation. The group's guidelines state, "we expect that any school administrators viewing this page do so with the intention of gaining a deeper understanding of community concerns, and that they will not use posts on this page for defamatory or retaliatory purposes against school employees."

> want to know how, what they can do to make a change. They know things aren't right and they want information.
>
> *Kim* – I agree. […] We have a Facebook site. We also have a website, which we thought would probably be the place where we put out most of our information, but really that 2 way communication that we have on the Facebook page has been invaluable because its brought students and parents in, and we can actually have discussions with them about the issues. They can ask teachers questions. We can ask parents about you know, what their perspectives are. […]
>
> *Joe* - One of the things that I've been most proud of is the information that we provide to parents and just regular citizens who want to know what's going on in the schools. You know, here's an issue that's happening in my child's school. Is this going on anywhere else? We get an awful lot done because of our parents and the questions that they ask and the insights they bring.

It is worth noting the stark contrast between the district's use of information to justify unilateral policy implementation and SPEAK's use of information to democratize decision-making and empower the public. According to one organizer,

> Many times, we've found that our group is more informed than our own board of education. Because our board of education has lacked reaching out […] They use *one* source" (Miller 2014).

Crucially, sharing information online or on ground did not simply shape political *consciousness*, but sharing information was political *action*. One teacher described a major tactic of the group as, “boots on ground, speaking truth to power” (Miller 2014). She added, “We just started showing up at board meetings and speaking our truth and we’ve accomplished a lot” (Miller 2014).

POLITICAL ACTION AND MOVEMENT OUTCOMES

By any measure SPEAK achieved enormous influence via grassroots political action. Much of that success must be attributed to the individual efforts of committed activists working together. According to one organizer, “We have not sat down and just let things happen as they may. We have gone after what we needed to go after to get things done.” SPEAK’s political advantage was not based on its command of material resources or its position to direct institutions from the top. Rather, SPEAK’s success depended on its ability to spread information and mobilize popular support around key issues. SPEAK employed 3 main tactics: public demonstrations (protests, rallies), formal political activity (lobbying and campaigning), and public outreach (media campaigns, events, and social media). Below I describe 7 areas where these tactics have produced results.

First, SPEAK played a significant role in eliminating a standardized test for Knox County’s youngest learners. The Stanford 10 (SAT 10) was a K-2 assessment in math and reading that optional for districts between 2012-2014. It was a shelf product offered by the state’s assessment vendor, Pearson. Activists

expressed concerns about the amount of time spent on the test, believed it was not developmentally appropriate, and believed results were not valid for teacher evaluations. Actions that led to the elimination of the SAT 10 test included speeches to the school board, local media interviews, community forums, an official grievance filed to the county by a local teacher, research on alignment of district and state policy, and an opt-out campaign aimed at concerned parents that included a bill introduced by a SPEAK ally and state representative.

Second, SPEAK brought changes to district dismissal policies. Activists shined a light on the district's practice of terminating non-tenured school staff without warning, documentation, or explanation. The termination of a popular young teacher in 2015 triggered an uprising of parents, community members, and educators in protest of what they perceived to be retaliation for publically voicing concerns about the SAT 10. Though the teacher had solid scores, a record of leadership, and no documentation of bad conduct, she was dismissed and offered no reason other than that she "no longer fits the vision" of her school. SPEAK coordinated with community members to create a Save our Teachers campaign, which involved contacting representatives, speaking at the school board, and public demonstration. One community member warned the superintendent in a public letter,

> I became aware of the story […] through family and friends as I am in the Halls community, which includes Copper Ridge. […] I do not believe that this administration thought anyone would care about this one woman in a little school tucked away in the corner of our county, but I assure you we

> do care, we are watching and if this is not made right we will fix it in the next election.

A rainy July 2015 rally drew more than 50 soggy demonstrators with handmade signs that read, “We love our teachers,” “Give your new teachers a chance to succeed,” and, “Educate don’t retaliate.”

In addition to its organizing efforts, SPEAK members produced an in-depth report titled, “A Review of Personnel Dismissals by Knox County During May and June 2015” that documented inconsistency, opaqueness, and arbitrariness of district termination practices. Activists also spoke to local news outlets. As one activist told a local talk show host,

> The miscalculation on, on the school system’s part was that they thought no one would care […] The problem is they *did* care. And that’s really first time we’ve seen, you know, a *community* uprising, some parents and teachers at Copper Ridge and some parents and teachers at Mount Olive have finally decided they are sick of all this churn, they’re sick of all these people getting rid of their teachers for no reason.

Ultimately, though the movement failed to save that teacher’s job and non-tenured personnel are still subject to non-renewal, there has been a sharp decline in both the total number of non-renewals and the number of non-renewals lacking documentation.

Third, SPEAK activists helped create a teacher advisory council. They helped restore some voice for teachers disenfranchised by the loss of collective bargaining rights under Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act

(PECCA) in 2011 and the superintendent's reluctance to work with union representatives through the creation of a permanent Teacher Advisory Committee, which evolved from a December 2013 Working Group. The committee meets to discuss issues with the superintendent, and reports to the school board. To be clear, the advisory committee lacks teeth. The committee does not operate under an MOU. Committee members are selected by the superintended, not elected by peers. That said, SPEAK has encouraged members to apply with some success. The committee was an early step towards restoring a place at the table. Additionally, complaints by SPEAK and other disenfranchised groups across the state (e.g. local, state, and national unions and teachers organizations like BATS) led to the creation of a statewide Teachers Advisory Council in 2014.

A fourth outcome, SPEAK successfully shifted local media narratives. Early on, activists complained that the major local media outlets were unreceptive because of material and ideological ties to establishment powers. One SPEAK activist I interviewed described how misinformation was being uncritically broadcast on local TV in 2014 by a particular district administrator and Broad Academy alumnus:

> I'm sorry, but nobody does journalism anymore. I mean nobody really digs into a story. I got so pissed the other day. They had [the administrator] on about, um, the SAT 10, and she goes well, teachers are going to get lower scores if we don't do the SAT 10. She's lying! Because half the state does

> a different test. You can do whatever test you want. It … You know, that is a lie. And Channel 10 was like, okay. Stupid idiots!

SPEAK was able to find a strong voice by turning to smaller community papers, a local alternative weekly paper, and local talk radio. Eventually they gained access to mainstream outlets. As an organizer described in a radio interview:

> We've been able to make inroads with some of the local media so that they actually come to us when there are education issues on the table and that wasn't happening a year ago. So, but we've done it just by speaking up. You know, we're not trained in PR. We're not trained in politics per se—except for Lisa, ha. […] We just took a truth and started putting it out there. (Miller 2014)

In 2015 when a local TV station ran a special 3 part story on "developments in the school system" a SPEAK activist and the superintendent each received their own segment and equal air time. Even local union elections became fodder for news. The incumbent union president expressed surprise at hearing from a reporter in 2015. "It's new for us to have an article in the paper," she said (Bean 2015).

Fifth, SPEAK has lobbied legislators on a number of issues with some success. Through visits, calls, letters, and emails activists played a role educating legislators and influencing votes. They have lobbied against school vouchers, charter schools, performance pay, and overuse of standardized testing. They advocated for fully funding schools based on state formulas, for the rights of special education students and families, that ability for parents to opt-out

of tests, and for community schools. They have remained vigilantly watchful of state legislation like, for example, when they publicized a provision to ban deduction of union dues that was tucked away inside a 2016 bicycle helmet safety bill.[73] Efforts by SPEAK have no doubt played a role in stalling school privatization schemes. For example, in 2017 a voucher bill opposed by SPEAK was defeated for a 5th straight year.

Sixth, SPEAK activists helped bring changes to evaluation and compensation. Working in partnership with the union, they won fairer evaluations. Changes to evaluations included elimination of the SAT 10, reduced number of unannounced teaching evaluations, prohibitions against adjusting teaching observation scores to align with TVAAS growth scores, prohibitions against using TVAAS growth scores for non-renewals or revoking teaching licenses, requirements that students must be present a minimum of 150 days for scores to count toward evaluation, and allowance of choice in selecting 15% achievement measure (KCEA 2015). Additionally, after what can only be described as a 3-year-long debacle (crashed servers, failed delivery of tests, late scoring, incorrect scoring, etc.) with the rollout of the state's standardized test TNReady, the use of state assessment data for teacher evaluations was temporarily eliminated.[74] Additionally, the district moved away from performance

[73] According to the Knox News Sentinel (2016) the bill was rushed through with support from groups like the Koch Brother's Americans for Prosperity.

[74] Tennessee experienced serious problems with standardized test scores for a four consecutive years, between 2014 and 2017. In 2014 there was a significant delay in scoring. In 2015 the state DOE changed the way it computed scores with little communication or transparency. In 2016 say widespread test failures as the state's vendor's servers failed. The state switched to paper tests, but those tests were not delivered in time. The state ended up cancelling many of the tests altogether. In 2017 it was reported that reported nearly 10,000 TNReady scores had been scored incorrectly.

pay and restored a salary schedule that rewarded years of service and training. Relatedly the district guaranteed duty-free planning time.

Seventh, nowhere has SPEAK's influence been more pronounced than shaping local leadership through elections. Political efforts have produced 4 important changes in local leadership. The school board completely flipped. The divisive superintendent resigned amidst pressure. The district severed ties with the superintendent's Leadership Academy. SPEAK members took key positions in the local teachers union.

Activists totally altered the composition of the school board. For most of his tenure the superintendent enjoyed a supportive school board with a reliable 8-1 margin. Indeed, even during tumultuous din of the 2013-2014 uprising the board voted to 8-1 to extend the superintendent's contract. It is worth noting that the vote was a pivotal act played in front of a packed house.[75] As one activist described in an interview:

> I always knew—there was one pivotal moment where it could have all flipped. And that was where they were going to renew his contract. And I don't know if you were at that meeting, but in this meeting, he starts to talk, and he hesitates . . . and it, all these things went through my head, but the main thing that went through my head was, he's going to turn it down! He's going to say, let's wait. And all I could think was, if he does

[75] There were some 45 speakers in attendance with many speaking in favor of the much-maligned superintendent. Though, as the lone dissenting board member noted, many of his supporters were administrative colleagues. He told a local paper, "It's like asking the mayor's staff to testify for him."

> that, okay, that takes the air out of everything. The protest is done. It would really end this thing. […] I thought, he's going to do it. And he didn't.

He accepted the contract. SPEAK responded to the board's vote to approve the contract by hosting school board candidate forums, canvassing, and endorsing a slate of new candidates. A SPEAK member and school librarian announced her decision to run for school board the same kitchen where SPEAK was born and managed to unseat a well-funded incumbent in 2014. An organizer described the significance of the victory in a radio interview:

> She really is a testament to what the everyday average person can do to change a situation they're not happy with. Amber was the librarian at my school and when she decided to make this run she knew that she would have to resign her position. She actually beat an incumbent board member. And it wasn't because she had a lot of money. There was a lot of money that was floated into this other board member's campaign. There were a lot of the other incumbent school board members that were speaking on you know Amber's opponent's behalf. And yet a lot of us working together, you know, making phone calls, going out and putting out signs. Amber went door to door every day to get her message out there and, and she won every precinct. Um, that's pretty astounding for somebody that has never run for public office before. But that just goes to show you what a grassroots movement can do when, when people decide to take some action. (Miller 2014)

The election confirmed SPEAK was able to do more than disrupt school board meetings—they were a formidable political group capable of mobilizing voters to win political contests. Within a year the superintendent's margin of support on the board dwindled to a tenuous 5-4 majority. In 2015 that 5-4 margin was still enough to extend the superintendent's contract for another two years. The superintended accepted the extension and a raise. However, just weeks later, he offered his resignation in exchange for quarter million dollar buyout. Looming school board elections and the promise of unfriendly results figured in his decision to resign. The new 2016 board, composed primarily of veteran educators, has generally sided with SPEAK by a 7-2 margin.[76] After resigning as superintendent of Knox County Schools, McIntyre remained influential in the district by taking on a full-time role training Knox County Schools' leaders through the Leadership Academy (or the "principal pipeline") that he started with the help of a large anonymous donation. The coup de grace for the superintendent was seemingly delivered in 2017 when the board voted to sever ties with the local Leadership Academy.[77]

In 2015 a slate of SPEAK candidates also took key positions in the local teachers union, Knox County Education Association (KCEA). Some teachers believed that the union had become passive and complacent. As on organizer told a local reporter, "Teachers need to feel like their association is actively advocating for them and their students, not just waiting in the wings until

[76] Whereas only 2 of original board members had significant teaching experience in 2014 (most came from business), by 2016 only 2 did not.
[77] Though, the vote left the door open for repurposing or reimagining the district's relationship with the Leadership Academy.

something really goes wrong" (Bean 2015). One vocal SPEAK member stepped away from teaching to take on full-time responsibilities as KCEA president. Another SPEAK member took over as vice president. SPEAK members also filled offices of secretary, high school executive board representative, middle school executive board representative, and 2 others were elected to the team that interviewed candidates for public office (Bean 2015).

"THIS IS *OUR* SCHOOL SYSTEM!" DEMOCRATIC POWER AND VISION

The first conclusion speaks to the emergence and success of the movement as a testament to the power of collective agency and grassroots organizing. Entirely within the realm of possible worlds, teachers might have sought different employment or drearily trudged on, counting the days to retirement. In another possible scenario administrators might have sucked wind from the sails of insurgency pursuing a more gradual roll out the evaluation system. Or, administrators might have pursued more aggressive "listening" campaigns (e.g. teacher advisory boards, input surveys, focus groups, etc.) to make teachers *feel* heard and participated. More "listening" might have appeased teachers who felt excluded, or it might have helped administrators better frame unpalatable policies and responses (e.g. avoiding words like human capital, avoiding deaf responses to non-economic complaints with promises to increase wages). Or possibly, administrators could have deflated the movement by offering more concrete concessions early on (e.g. guaranteeing planning time, more autonomy, etc.). Conversely, it is not beyond the scope of imagination that

administration could have suppressed dissent by more authoritarian means—they could have doubled down and ramped up retaliatory teacher dismissals, raised impossibly high performance standards, or pushed to eliminate tenure altogether.

The movement was not inevitable, but it *did* happen. Much of the explanation for *why* it happened must be attributed to the agency of a critical mass of people who grew weary of incoherent policies and stood up to collectively say, “Enough!”[78] One teacher-activist told me in an interview that teachers eventually realized they “didn’t have to put up with that crap.” On the SPEAK social media page echoed this sentiment,

> KCS does not need and cannot afford any more deceptively innocuous-sounding "Fellowships" or "Networks" influencing the education of OUR students or determining the working conditions of OUR teachers. Enough is enough.

That the movement was able to achieve some success was also remarkable and a testament to the power of popular organizing. Consider that grassroots activists operating on a shoe-string budget won political contests against a massively well-resourced network that included elite funders (Haslam, Gates, Broad, Koch), corporations (Pearson, Follett), state agencies (Knox County Schools, Tennessee Department of Education), private consultants (Parthenon, Education Resource Services), public-private partnerships (GSP, Chamber of Commerce),

[78] Ja! Basta!” (enough already, or enough is enough) is an expression that has been used by Latin American activists and organization to describe that pivotal moment of dissent. See Harvey 2017.

and political groups (StudentsFirst, Stand for Children, Tennessee Federation for Children). Much of that success was due to the sustained efforts of committed organizers deciding to taking professional risks by speaking out against their employers, doing the hard work of educating themselves and others, continuous outreach and recruitment, and mobilizing and organizing for political action.

The second conclusion speaks to an important question: whose schools are they? SPEAK offered a democratic vision that starkly contrasted with the neoliberal vision offered by district policy makers. The movement is significant as backlash against the neoliberal capture of a public institution. SPEAK's core objectives included demands for more employee autonomy, a rejection of the idea that educational value can be reduced to performance metrics, a deep suspicion of profit-driven initiatives, and a demand for more democratic, collective control over public schools. It would be difficult overstate just how vehemently the board of education and the superintendent rejected the legitimacy of these demands. The mere assertion of political rights by teachers is anathematic to neoliberalism. According to the neoliberal formulation of employees as human capital, teachers have no legitimate claim to political rights since they have chosen to rent themselves—their time, labor, creativity, allegiances, freedoms—to their employer in return for a wage. According to the Broad Academy the ideal superintendent is a "bullish CEO" whose job is to promote efficiency, choice, competition, and accountability provide maximal value to students and taxpayers as consumers of educational products. Indeed, if education is a technocratic exercise in value maximization, then democratic

influences can only be corrupting. The superintendent and his board publically lamented what they saw as an excess of democracy in the movement. Recall the board's 2014 efforts to restrict employees from speaking at public forums and the board chair, who chastised teachers saying, "We're so glad the teachers have spoken up, but we've heard you now," adding, "These are *our* board meetings." As democratically elected public officials suspicious of democracy, board members conceived of their job as limited to advising and empowering the superintendent to make executive decisions free from the corrupting influence of democratic interference. In a televised interview in 2016 a former board member and businessman shared his view of the board of education's role:

> The board has got to be really just and advisory board--policy making and advisory to the superintendent. […] A good organization has one boss. You can't have 9 extra bosses. (WBIR 2016)

The interviewer replied, "Aren't constituents, though, pretty keen on an active board?" The former board member reiterated the importance of executive authority:

> For us to go into the school and say this is what I say we're going to do and people not to know where the lines of authority are, I just think it just creates chaos.

Similarly, in his resignation speech in 2016 the superintendent lamented that discussions about education had become political rather than narrowly focuse "effective education of our children." As Crouch (2011) argues, "marketization strategies in public policy try to put issues beyond the range of conflict and

debate, and beyond the reach of difficult ethical choices." He writes, "It may be possible, within the corporate sector, for a chain of questions asking 'why do we do this?' to stop with the answer "because it maximizes profit." However, answers to difficult educational questions are not easily reducible to accountants' spreadsheets. SPEAK members rejected the legitimacy the form of technocratic, executive governance being implemented in Knox County. In the barest sense, activists aimed to reclaim meaning, joy, and control over their working lives. In doing so, they were engaged in a collective political project to reclaim neoliberalized spaces—classrooms, schools, board of education—and making radical assertions that public spaces should be democratically controlled. As one organizer put it, "Instead of top-down education policy, we want it to go from the ground up" (NEA 2016). Or as a community member told the school board in 2015, "This is *our* school system. And I hope we will still be here long after everyone on that stage has moved on."

CHAPTER VII

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE: WORKING THROUGH THE CONTRADICTIONS

If the district offers a cautionary tale for standards-based measurement-driven accountability reforms, it also provides an example of a possible alternative reform trajectory. Since the late 1990s the district has been a site of parallel reform efforts to build community schools. Community schools are school-based interventions aimed at building systems of support for vulnerable students experiencing the “wicked problems” (Mason and Mitroff 1981) associated with poverty, economic underdevelopment, and racial segregation. Instead of focusing narrowly on academic issues (curriculum, teaching best practices, test scores) community schools tend to the whole child (emotional, physical, intellectual) and seek to empower the communities of which they are a part by providing services and promoting “neighborhood-level democracy” (Basma and Kronick 2016). In this sense, the community school is not just a recipe for academic success, but a movement for social change attempting to address root problems of poverty and economic insecurity of which achievement gaps are a symptom.

This chapter aims to accomplish two related tasks. For one, it offers a description community school model and the particular University-Assisted Community School that was the site of fieldwork. But also, beyond description, the theoretical question animating this chapter is whether the community school

offers a viable alternative to the neoliberal reforms described in preceding chapters. The paradoxical answer to this question is yes and no. Whether or not the community school represents a significant challenge to dominant neoliberal trends depends much on its implementation. On one hand, the community school may deepen and support the neoliberal project by aiding the retreat of the state from welfare provision by strengthening the role of private sector intervention and governance. On the other hand, the community school presents new opportunities for promoting neighborhood-level democratic decision-making and grassroots community empowerment. The data that informs this chapter suggests that this particular community schools does both. Rather than offering a clear path toward private governance or clear path toward restoring collective control of a public space, the community school created a new contested space for tensions and conflicts to play out.

Here is a brief overview of the chapter. First, I outline neighborhood problems of poverty and housing insecurity. Second I describe the afterschool component of the program, and its diverse, rich array of educational offerings and support. Third, I discuss the afterschool program as a workplace characterized by trust and collaboration. Fourth, I describe the program's governance structure and the tension between democratic ideals and actual practice. Fifth, I describe the service provision component of the program and highlight tensions over the type of services offered and nature of those services. Finally, I argue that as a vehicle for social change, the University-Assisted Community School is a contradiction. In many ways it behaves like a neoliberal

institution, but it is also an institution that that may undermine the conditions that make it possible. The community school presents both new problems and new possibilities. Crucially, it introduces contradictions to the local education system. Those contradictions open new spaces for contesting privatization—if often yet unrealized—for more democratic allocation of resources and control over a public space.

THE MODEL AND ITS ROOTS

Community schools are adaptable and there is no prescriptive cookie-cutter definition for a community school. Nevertheless community schools share a basic structure, aims, and distinguishing features (Lawson 2010). For one, all community schools are partnerships:

> A community school employs strategic partnerships to expand the boundaries of school improvement; and at the same time, to increase the stakeholders who make decisions about the school and its relations with surrounding neighborhood-communities. (Lawson 2010:11)

Likewise, expanding school boundaries and relations is supposed to accomplish three aims common to community schools: to improve and enrich the whole child; to support families by providing stability and voice; and, to enhance and empower underdeveloped communities via economic, social, and political resources. Finally, fully developed community schools share six core features: a focus on socio-emotional and academic learning; health and social services for children and families; out-of-school programs; support programs and resources

for parents; connections to economic development, anti-poverty initiatives; and, decision-making processes that give authority to youth, families, and neighborhood residents. (Lawson 2010)

As its name suggests, a university-assisted community school (UACS) is a variant of the community school with an engaged university component (Lawson 2010; Benson, Harkavay, and Pucket 2007).[79] UACS are distinguishable by a number of features including: service learning programs, internships, participatory research, on-site courses, and joint funding and grant initiatives (Lawson 2010). Ira Harkavy has become the most recognizable figure advancing the university-assisted community school model through his work with the University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships. However, it should be noted that although the development of the community schools in Knox county paralleled Harkavy's work, it was initially done independently and unaware of Harkavy's work with communities in West Philadelphia.

A university professor spearheaded local efforts and was primarily influenced by Dryfoos (Kronick and Dahlin-Brown 2010). Early on he was attempting to build his own version of a university-school-community partnership. His work eventually attracted attention from community school experts and he welcomed visits by Joy Dryfoos and Jane Quinn in 2002, Marty Blank in 2005, Ira Harkavy in 2007, Jeanita Richardson in 2014, and others (Kronick and Dahlin-

[79] Ira Harkavay is most recognizable for advancing this model via scholarship and advocacy through University of Pennsylvania and its Netter Center for Community Partnerships. This is redundant, cut it.

Brown 2010). Based largely on the experiences and success of this University-Assisted Community School, a local non-profit has helped the county establish 14 more community schools. Though not as well funded or staffed, each has a resource coordinator to recruit, organize, and align community resources. Each also has a site steering committee to promote neighborhood-level governance.

Contemporary community schools have roots in the praxis and scholarship of several progressive traditions. Contemporary advocates cite work of Progressive Era reformers like Jane Addams, Elsie Clap, and John Dewey and their efforts to build democratic communities of learners in the late 19th and early 20th century (Benson, Harkavy, Johanek, and Puckett 2007). [80] In addition to the Progressive Era reformers most commonly cited in the scholarship, another important antecedent of contemporary community schools can be found amongst the segregated schools of black communities pre-Brown v. Board of Education. Under-resourced black schools depended on community support, functioned as community centers and could provide a stable, supportive, and protective institutional structure for black students (Morris 2003; Perry 2003; Morris 2008; Richardson 2009).[81]

The community schools in Knox County draw on this tradition of black schools as anchor community institutions. I interviewed a former principal of a

---

[80] Prominent examples include social settlements like Addams' Hull House in Chicago (1889-1960s), Evelyn Dewey and Marie Harvey's Porter School in rural Missouri (1910s-1920s), Elsie Clapp's community schools in Kentucky and West Virginia (1928-1938), and Leonard Covello's Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem (1934-1956) (Ediger 2004; Benson Harkavy, Johanek, and Puckett 2009; Richardson 2007).

[81] An exception is the well-documented example of the James Adams Community School in Coatesville Pennsylvania, which was operated by is Thomas and Anita Anderson between 1943-1956 (Richardson 2009).

Title 1 elementary school who partnered with the university professor to create the district's first "community school" in 1998. But a according to her, the professor's ideas were hardly new. She described the community school she co-founded as rooted in lessons learned in the segregated one-room schoolhouse that she attended as a young girl in the early 1950s.[82] She described it in an interview:

> *There's nothing new under the sun.* [83] What, what we're trying to do, or what they're trying to do with the community schools is exactly what our elementary, our elementary school did. […] The building stayed open until 8 or 9 at night because the 4H club met there, Boy Scout, Girl Scout met there, home demonstration met there—anything the black community needed—met there in the schoolhouse.

So when a university professor came to her in 1998 about creating a community school, her reaction was, "I was already doing all of that. I was already doing it." She said, "I didn't have a name for it. But what do you call that? Community school." The university professor used what he learned from this early community school project to build several other community school programs including his most ambitious (and well-funded) project, the University-Assisted Community School in 2010.

---

[82] That school was served grades 1-8 and was located in nearby Lewisville, TN.
[83] "There is nothing new under the sun" was a quote used by Jeanita Richardson in her visit to Knox County and appears in her book, "The Full-Service Community School Movement" (2009:2).

THE UNIVERSITY-ASSISTED COMMUNITY SCHOOL

The University-Assisted Community School is formally a partnership between an elementary school and a flagship state university. Funding for the university-assisted component comes primarily from a single donor, a wealthy and politically active local businessman. The elementary school serves a racially diverse community with high rates of poverty and mobility. The elementary school is a K-5 Title 1 school that had 325 students in 2014-2015. Official per student expenditures were $9,043.00 in 2014-2015 with 54% coming from local sources, 35% from the state, and 11% from the federal government (TNDOE 2017). The school is notable for its diverse student population with about 47% identifying as white, 37% black or African American, 14% Hispanic or Latino, and 2% other races for the 2013-2015 (TNDOE 2017). About 17% of students are labeled English language learners. The school also has a strong international character with students from more than 20 countries speaking some 30 languages.

The immediate location of the school is a primarily residential neighborhood adjacent a major interstate highway with billboards, overpass, and the noise pollution of passing traffic. It was close enough the garden coordinator fretted, “I don’t know if stuff flies from the interstate but I don’t like it.” The building itself is an aging, mostly single story brick structure was constructed in the 1950s. The school received major renovations in 2017. An $8.6 million, 58,000 square foot construction project will include new wing of classrooms, gym, cafeteria, media room, music room, playground facilities, and more. At the time of

fieldwork the school building also consisted of a number “temporary” mobile classrooms units that had been in use for a number of years and were located behind the main building and attached by covered walkway.

The program utilizes existing public space in order to keep operating costs low. For example, when the primary funder had initially wanted to use money to build a brick and mortar charter school, the university professor convinced him otherwise. According to the local paper the donor, the donor said,

> “He told me, in not so many words, ‘that’s a really stupid idea,’” he remembers. “We don’t need any more buildings—we’ve got plenty of those. What we need is more seat time. Pick a school, extend the hours, and make that school a hub for everyone who wants to serve these kids.” (Local News 2015)

In the professor’s words, “I have a building! I just need to keep the doors open.”

Space was a premium. Every day the after school staff, students, and volunteers transformed a lunchroom full of tables and seats into a circus space with gymnastic mats, balance, beams, ladders, or space for unicycling, then back again to a dining room when families arrived for dinner. Likewise, a classroom might serve triple-duty hosting a 3rd grade class, afterschool math tutoring, then a science club meeting. Similarly, the library served as a space board meetings, student learning activities, after-hours speaking events, seminars, staff meetings, online computer access for parents, GED classes, and a place for books.

Leveraging the sunk and fixed costs of the building (construction, maintenance, heat, etc.) required organization, clear expectations, and flexibility.

It also required a shift in perspective. The transition was not smooth. For example, a school-level administrator described negotiating shared space as one of the biggest challenges early on:

> You're sharing space. You're using teacher's classrooms. You know, we were working through that issue. And you've got, [teachers] want to stay late and work in their classroom. They can't because community schools is using the classroom and not necessarily taking care of the space the way the teacher would like the space taken care of. […] So shared space becomes an issue of protocols, rules, of this is what happens and what you should do.

Another school-level administrator described working to overcome that same challenge by establishing clear protocols, but also by promoting a sense of collective responsibility:

> So we've got to find a way to make it that, we're all doing this together . . . I've tried to refer to things in a way of—not it's *your* classroom and they're coming in, but it's *our* classroom. […] We're going to get there in baby steps. In my mind, they're our kids, our kids will benefit from it. But people struggle with giving of their own things too. And they're worried some things won't—I guess I don't know what they're worried about. But um, so we want to change that perspective and I think we're getting there

By 2014 most teachers and afterschool staff seemed to have settled into the new normal of sharing rooms. A key point is that the community school model advanced a vision of the school as a public space to be shared, collaboratively

controlled, and widely utilized. Such a vision seemingly contrasts with a neoliberalized educational space governed by private interests and technocratic experts.

Neighborhood Problems: Poverty and Housing Insecurity

According to US Census tracts, the school serves an urban neighborhood (Federal Register 2011) that is approximately 4 miles from the downtown center of a city with around 700,000 residents. The neighborhood is comprised of industrial, commercial retail, and residential zones and is bifurcated by a major interstate. Residential areas include single-family homes and at least 5 major apartment complexes. According to the USDA, the neighborhood is an officially designated food desert, but the neighborhood boasts a strip of diverse and popular food offerings including a popular barbeque joint, a middle-eastern deli operated by a former New Yorker, a farmers market, and an established pizza joint. The neighborhood has a small but active neighborhood association of long-time residents concerned with preserving neighborhood history, promoting controlled growth, and blocking the construction of additional apartment buildings that would bring in more renters.

Many neighborhood students are growing up in poverty. About 76% of students were officially economically disadvantaged in 2014-2015 according to state criteria (TNDOE 2015). About 90% received free or reduced lunch (sometimes used as a rough proxy for the number of students living near or below the poverty line). Practically, this meant families struggled to meet basic

physical and emotional needs. One mother described the stress, insecurity, and difficult choices she faced,

> I was trying to survive, feed myself and Adam, often on a thousand dollars a month. And, um, I wasn't receiving child support, you know. This, this is what I had. It was four hundred and twenty two bucks every two weeks. Okay? Yeah. And when you find yourself in such financial turmoil because you have to let your car insurance go. Or you have to let your homeowners' insurance go. When you are under that kind of stress you start getting anxiety. You know, if there's a huge storm coming through, what if that tree falls on my house and there's no insurance on my house. What if, you know, all this, this happens? So you end up creating an emotional state for yourself that is constantly stressed. And constantly exhausted so, of course, that effects your participation and *absolutely* everything . . . and you don't have access to mental . . . health care. Mental health care. […] And it also, of course, affects the children.

Her financial hardships seemed fairly typical of parents I spoke with, many living paycheck to paycheck. Another neighborhood resident had lived there for more than a decade. She described the day-to-day struggles of poverty straining community relationships.

> *Bill* - Is this a community that has a sense of itself? Does that make sense?
>
> *Marie* - Mm hmm. I would say no.

Bill - What about by *neighborhood*—do people identify with it? Do people know each other?

Marie - I would say no, and the reason I would say no is because, because of the disadvantage of the, you know, individuals economically, that they're so consumed in trying to make it. Trying to work, to do whatever they're doing. Just trying to live from day-to-day. It's not that sense of community like I think you're talking about, you know.

Bill - Yeah. [sigh]

Marie - Where everybody kind of, kind of knows everyone? It's really not that, in my thinking. It's really not that at all. It's everyone just trying to make it and you know. And there's no time for socializing, or even getting to know you're neighbors that well. Because you're gone so much, doing whatever you're doing trying to survive.

Related to the strains of poverty were housing insecurity and a neighborhood in more-or-less permanent transition.

The neighborhood and its school are in constant flux. High mobility rates and instability characterizes the lives of many students passing through the community school. More than 70% of neighborhood residents are renters, many of them low income. The school has a 37% mobility rate, meaning 37% of students either entered or left the school during the school year. According to a program director, "Student mobility is a big problem. Parents often move first of the month because that's when rent's due." A community partner and long-time

educator familiar with the neighborhood described the seriousness of housing insecurity,

> *Bill* – You said the problems facing students look the same in a lot of ways, but it seems they are also pretty different.
>
> *Dora* – Tell me how.
>
> *Bill* – I was hoping you would tell me how.
>
> *Dora* – The only way they are different to me is all the properties surrounding the school is rental property. So you have people that are moving in and moving out. […] The community is in transit now.
>
> *Bill* – So like when rent comes due?
>
> *Dora* – They gone.

Poverty and housing insecurity presented significant challenges for the community school staff attempting build a stable environment.

I asked an after-school staffer what story he would share, if he could tell one meaningful story about his work at the community school. His story had to do with poverty, economic insecurity, and the relationships broken when families are forced to move.

> The story I have to tell is a bonding story. We lost, two—I don't remember exactly where they were from. It was a small, real poor side of Africa. But they was brought over here and they were lacking a father. And I guess bills got on top of bills and they weren't able to stay where they were staying. And they just came in there and was like, Mr. Keith, we may be leaving. I'm like, where y'all going? They was like, to another school. And

> like, well my momma told me she wasn't able to provide, you know. […] So they just start crying like they was going to miss me. And I guess just being there—because their daddy wasn't there. And they had an older brother but he was in and out of juvenile, in and out of jail. So it was just—it was sad. It really hurt me, just because you know, for them to say something like that. I mean, I would hope I have an impact on some of the kids but when it really hits you, like, it *hits* you.

Keith noted that they had not moved do a different city, only a different neighborhood. "I still check on them, they're at another school," he noted. But for most students leaving the community school there was rarely any follow-up, contact, or continued support.

Housing insecurity and high mobility rates frustrated efforts by community school staff to build stability, continuity, and support. School administrators were frustrated by the difficulty of tracking students, which made it difficult to assess program effectiveness. As one administrator noted that high mobility, "is what is affecting your scores." She noted, "I told somebody that the other night. I said, in the paper they're getting blamed for these low test scores—you're not even testing the same students!" Similarly UACS administrators believed that the community school program helped stabilize families and reduced mobility rates, but noted the difficulty in measuring the impact. An UACS administrator noted, "Our movement is actually much lower than others. But we don't know." He wondered if the program was making a difference, "I sense that it does. I don't say in my heart I know. Because that's not going to fly. How do you measure

community aspects of community schools? He sighed and concluded, “We know more about migratory birds than migratory children.”

Afterschool Programming: Rich, Diverse Offerings

The afterschool component of this University-Assisted Community School is the component of the community school that set it apart. Administrators I spoke with were adamant that “shift two,” the 4 hour afterschool intervention, was not an ancillary program, but part of an integrated whole involving both day and afterschool partners. The professor who founded the school has worked to create a community school that is a collaboration involving mutually invested equals.[84] One coordinator described constantly fighting “the idea, oh, you know, community schools is just one more add on.” Likewise a school-level administrator said, “[We] have talked a lot about wanting to be—and it’s actually in our strategic plan—we just haven’t nailed down how it’s gonna work, wanting to be one entity, one thing, one school.”

Shift-two personnel include an on-site coordinator, 15 paid UACS staff, a number of staff from partner organizations, and a host of volunteers. The afterschool program has a low teacher-student ratio of 10:1. Initially 75 children, or about a quarter of the school’s students were enrolled in the afterschool program. That number increased to just over 100 at the time of fieldwork in 2014-2015. All of the elementary school’s students are eligible to be enrolled, but due

[84] Collaboration is one of the three themes that animates community school philosophy: prevention, systems thinking, and collaboration (Kronick 2000, Kronick 2005, Lester, Kronick, and Benson 2012; Luter and Kronick 2017)

to funding limitations not all students are selected. Motivated by a focus on prevention, the program targets high-risk students and considers a number of factors including grades, absences, tardiness, and disciplinary reports.

Afterschool program kept the doors of the school open from 3:00 to 7:00 five nights per week during the school year and from 10:00 to 2:00 during summer break. The program was open around 47-48 weeks per year. Arrangements with the Boys and Girls Club helped cover during times when the UACS was closed. Enrolled students were expected to attend from at least 3:00-6:00 every day. In an effort to create quality, stable programmatic offerings, administrators required consistent attendance for the duration of the afterschool day.

The array of rich programmatic offerings made it almost impossible to compile an accurate, complete inventory of offerings at any given point in time. Below is an incomplete list of the services and programs being offered around the time of my fieldwork in 2014-2015. For students, regular programmatic offerings included music (singining and instrumental), art, circus, physical activity, character development, philosophy, yoga, language, and reading (including a program in which students would read to dogs brought in by volunteers). Students also had the opportunity to join a number of “clubs” that might meet weekly or bi-weekly at the school. Examples of clubs include the Lego club, robotics club, science club, French Club, and Land Scouts program. Students also received access to mental health services and tutoring programs. For parents and community members the school offered a variety of programs and

services. The school hosted one of the only General Equivalency Diploma (GED) courses in that part of town. The county located birth-to-kindergarten development services in the school. A number of language classes included Spanish classes, Chinese classes, and an English as a second language (ESL) course. A lawyer offered legal advice for tenants. A regional bank (Fifth-Third Bank) offered classes in financial literacy. A particularly popular class was an exercise class, mostly utilized by women. There was also a women's support group and classes in nutrition and cooking. Community members had access to computers for job searches and applications. A major draw and important feature of the initiative were free dinners available at the end of each day for families of children enrolled in the afterschool program. Additionally, the afterschool program offered special event opportunities like a winter holiday concert, public circus performances in the park, a musical performance for a tree lighting ceremony, an art show at the university, rock climbing at a local gym, and students who made stop-motion short films were able to watch their movies on the big screen at a local theater. The school also had an active community garden.

These diverse offerings, many aimed at personal enrichment and the arts, seem to present and an alternative to neoliberalism, which conceives of the primary function of education as promoting economic growth, economic competition, and job skills. There is certainly a case to be made that music classes, rock climbing, yoga, philosophy, and art promote economic growth. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts makes just this case. A report by

the NEA (2016) justifies investment in the arts in economic terms citing growth in performing-arts audience demand, growth in employment from arts and cultural production, US arts and cultural sector as an “export powerhouse,” and a number of fast-growing arts and cultural industries. However, beyond the instrumental impacts of rich educational curricula (community revitalization, raised SAT scores, and jobs creation) the arts are intrinsically valuable. Art has clear value as more than a commodity. Even economists realize that purely economic justifications tend to be inherently shallow and unsatisfactory (Hutter and Throsby 2007).

THE WORKPLACE: COLLABORATION, TRUST, AND AUTONOMY

One reason for the range of rich, diverse offerings of the UACS is that staff and volunteers were given a high degree of autonomy and trusted to creatively design and/or execute their programs within collaborative work environment. Organizational principles and management within the community school were largely defined by collaboration and trust seemed to breed confidence in staff and students. This approach also produced a number of successes.

The Community Garden is an illustrative case. Handing over an enormously complex task of pioneering an ambitious community garden program to a young, relatively inexperienced recent liberal arts graduate produced positive results. A job description for “Garden Josh” might include: creating a collective vision for the program, surveying and planning the site, developing skills and

knowledge, navigating complex bureaucratic approval processes, recruiting and organizing workers, weather forecasting, fundraising, developing a budget, aligning programs with curriculum, educating and supervising students and volunteers, coordinating with local non-profits, and strategizing a sustainable design. That is not to mention the day-to-day weeding, planting, watering, hauling dirt, composting, fertilizing, and harvesting. Though Josh worked with several supervisors (on-site UACS coordinator, school principal, grant coordinator) he was largely free to self-manage daily operations.

> *Bill* – Who do you work, um answer to like day-to-day?
>
> *Josh* – On a daily basis? [laughs] Myself. Um. I guess [the UACS coordinator] is who I interact with most frequently. But honestly, when it comes to just doing day-to-day stuff it's myself and whatever volunteers I happen to have that day. Logistic-wise, I speak to [the Vista director] but really. Day-to-day operations I'm on my own.

With a lot of help, he grew the garden program to include a 2,500 square foot plot, dozens of institutional partnerships, and scores of volunteers.

The space became a defining feature of the campus and symbolically significant as visible representation of the less tangible collaborations that embodied the community school. The new principal described her initial reaction at seeing the massive garden, "I freaked out when I first came! I was like, who takes care of that!? [laughing] I really did because I was like, that is not going to be me." Josh was a full-time Americorps Vista volunteer working at the UACS

through a grant from the local community college.[85] At the time of fieldwork, the garden included a small space for community members to grow their own produce. The majority of the garden was dedicated to growing food for the school. After skillful bureaucratic maneuvering (an MOU with the district, safety certifications, adherence produce size and type specification, zoning approvals, etc.) food from the garden, radishes and lettuces, was served for the first time in the school's cafeteria in May 2014 where a brightly colored handmade sign that read "Grown by students." More than food provision, the garden provided space for community members, volunteers, students, and staff to interact. Students could work in the garden during recess. Land Scouts club utilized the garden for service-learning. And, Josh worked with teachers to develop an "edible curriculum" that aligned with common core standards. But, he observed, "afterschool teachers are more likely to work in the garden because they have flexibility. They don't have to meet teacher requirements." By most accounts the upstart project was a success. On one sunny day in May of 2014 a crowd of students, staff, parents, volunteers, media, and local dignitaries showed up to the garden to celebrate and officially dedicate the Community Garden. Attendees included the county and city mayors along with other representatives from the local government, university, community college, and the school district. The event ended with a ribbon cutting and bright voices of students singing their school song.

[85] Americorps Vista volunteers serve for one year and receive a modest living allowance and a small end of service benefit.

Josh had no manual, no rubric, no prescriptive list of best-practices. He had no performance-based incentives, no threat of a conference of concern for underperforming. What he had was intrinsic motivation and a modest compensation to cover living expenses. He had ideals and the freedom execute his vision. Like Josh, other UACS staff, partners, and volunteers described feeling trusted and relatively free to be creative and innovative. The afterschool music teacher described it this way:

> I love the community school, You haven't asked this but, as I said in the meeting, because it allows me to be *soooo* creative. I know there's no way I could teach the way I do in a public setting. But here, Mark is, he's really good. He's totally hands off. You know, he observes me and he's done that before. And but it's just like, go ahead be creative. And having that trust in *me* to be able to do that and not worry about me, it means a lot. […] He knows that, you know, that I will do the best by these kids and teach them. He has no concerns about me and I *like* that. I really, really do. And I think that's why I'll never teach in the school system.

With her freedom she worked to create a space defined a loving, nurturing, and encouraging space for her students. She also worked to align music with things they learned in other classes—she called it "singing your homework." Another example, a colorfully eccentric teacher received funding to create and run a circus program. An avid reader with a creative mind, he drew on such diverse fields and traditions as neuroscience, yoga, physiology, psychology, sociology, and theater to design curriculum and activities to meet the unique needs of his

students. Students learned to do flips, climb free-standing ladders, and ride unicycles. Drawing on his experience and deep knowledge of Augosto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed,* his students learned to tell their stories as they performed, described, critically analyzed, and collectively participated in the transformation of their realities.

The confidence of supervisors seemed to positively impact the confidence of staff and students. The morale of UACS staff was mostly positive and confident. One teacher, for example, was not bashful about her ability:

> I can see that I'm teaching them something. I think I told you about all things we do. … I didn't mean to come across crazy in the interview, but I really feel like I could teach them *anything*. I know that's not humble at all. And I'm thinking, why did I say that? But I do. Because I've taught them so much, and I'm thinking, I could—when I'm standing up there teaching I'm thinking I could probably teach you *anything*, and you would get it.

She intentionally cultivated confidence in her students as well:

> you need to be and that uplifting and giving them those positive accolades, they're not getting that other places. … So I do, do a lot of that too. I say, oh you're so smart, you know. Even the small things they do, I just praise them to the hilt. And you can see in their eyes how, it's just like WOW, you know?

She added, "Cuz I want that too, you know, everybody wants to be praised." Efforts to build a collaborative, positive, caring, and uplifting working and learning environment seemed to be working.

Of course, teacher working conditions are student learning conditions (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, and Fuller 2006). I asked teachers and staff what the changes they observed in students attending the afterschool program and it seems that confidence was contagious. A school-level administrator noted:

> We had great success with the students, changing their perception of themselves I think. Because we had a lot of students who, um, I think through the circus program and through a lot of the social/emotional programming that we worked through and just the mentoring program and the partnerships that kids had with adults that were consistently coming, um, helped build their self-esteem to give them a different perspective about themselves and their own ability to achieve.

The afterschool coordinator agreed. He said,

> And the big one is too—it's very hard to, to statistically show improvements, but I could tell, there could be a hundred funders in this room and I could say, our kids can now look you in the eye.

These observations were born out in fieldwork. Evidence includes the observable confidence of a 9 year old who had just learned to ride a unicycle. Likewise, students letting go of self-consciousness reading to a dog as part of a Ruff Reading Program, students displaying their art at a university-hosted art show, and students watching films that they made at a local theater all exhibited high self-esteem.

The high degree of confidence and trust felt by UACS staff is partly a testament to UACS Director's commitment to collaboration as a key principal of

the community school. Beyond coordination or cooperation, the Director describes collaboration as a process of mutually invested work between and within diverse institutions (university, school, funding agencies, etc.) and individuals (classroom teachers, afterschool coordinators, community members, volunteers, etc.). Collaboration according to the Director it is an ideal that "centers around trust," involves "shared responsibility" (Kronick and Dahlin-Brown 2010:52). It is characterized by 7 components: communication, clear agreements, decision-making, monitoring and evaluation, recognition, trust, and leadership (Lawson-Butcher and Ashton 2004; Luter and Kronick 2017). The deeply mutual process of collaboration is key to the workable operation of a complex, seemingly unwieldy organization.

This data is a particular striking considering the context of local school reform. Afterschool program employee's confidence and trust stood in stark contrast to district teachers who felt constrained by rigid standards, distrusted, alienated, fearful, and stressed by the constant threat of evaluation. In a single year, the elementary school lost 8 school teachers—roughly 30% of its classroom teachers. Several who left publically criticized policies that denied them supportive and caring working and learning environments. The idea that trust, collaboration, and support lead to positive organizational outcomes would seem to stand in stark contrast to neoliberal assumptions that individual economic rewards, competition, and insecurity (precisely the pressures created by competitive markets) produce organizational flourishing.

GOVERNANCE: DEMOCRATIC OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A central contradiction of the community school is rooted in the tension between its democratic ideals and its actual governance practices. On one hand it is formally hierarchical institution managed by experts and accountable primarily to wealthy donors. On the other hand, it is designed to empower communities through participatory, neighborhood-level democracy (Luter, Lester, and Kronick 2013; Lawson 2010; Benson and Puckett 2007). Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett's (2007:xii) *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of Education Reform* envision the UACS helping

> create the truly democratic society that Dewey envisioned as necessary if the world were to be transformed into a "Great Community," and integrated world of interactive, interdependent, truly collaborative, truly democratic societies.

However, community school governance is complicated by an unbalanced, diverse list of collaborators, which included a number of non-profits, businesses, churches, local government agencies, and neighborhood partners.

Though the UACS promotes collaborative partnerships that are "not one of top dog/under dog" (Kronick and Dahlin-Brown 2010:52), it follows a formally hierarchical governance structure. The program is housed within the University. As a shift-two staff member told me, "my paycheck comes from the university." The Director of the UACS, is a professor at the university and is charged with overall operation of the program, fund raising, and program design decisions. The on-site Program Coordinator is involved in the day-to-day operations of the

community school and “can be thought of as the Principal of the extended day program” (Luter and Kronick 2017). He supervised15 paid staff members, was involved with student disciplinary issues, and communicated with partners. He also sought out funding and support. He recruited families to participate. And lastly, “just overseeing the budget and making sure we don’t run out of money [chuckling] before the year’s over.” In addition to his duties at the site, the coordinator was also helping establish and organize a new UACS at another school. Staff included those running music, reading, math, physical activity, and circus programs. Ultimate executive authority resided in the dean of the college, a person who had little practical involvement in operations.

The community school is more than the sum of its paid staff. The community school is also governed by its partner members. In addition to the university and the school, hundreds of local and regional partners participate with varying levels of engagement, different interests, and unequal positions of influence.[86] For example the collaboration included individual and institutional

[86] An incomplete list: Business partners included Radio Systems Corp./PetSafe, Ruby Lucky Green, Bearden Beer Market, Dollar General, Cricket Cellular, Red Onion Pizza, Mojo Coffee, European Motor Werks, Farm Fresh Produce, Strawberry Fields Market, The Family Bubble Laundromat, Holy Land Market, DaVinci’s Pizzeria & Calzones, Osaka Hibachi & Sushi, Subway, Cornerstone Farm Construction, Monterey Mushroom, Cortese Tree Specialists, and Ace Hardware. Non-profit partners included Boys and Girls Club, United Way, Red Cross, Knoxville Opera Company, Centro Hispano, Helen Ross McNabb, Catholic Charities, Rotary, The Knoxville Jewish Alliance, the Great Schools Partnership, the Confucius Institute (of China), and Human Animal Bond in Tennessee (HABIT). A host of houses of worship also supported the community school. Charitable organizations included the Skelton Foundation and the Siddiqi Charitable Foundation. Government partners included school-level staff, various school district offices, city and county government offices like the Health Department, and Americorps. Higher education partners included Pellissippi State Community College, South College, and a number of University of Tennessee including the Haslam Scholars, a fraternity, student volunteers, researchers and the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Nursing, Education, Health and Human Sciences, and Natural and Agricultural Sciences, along with the departments of Sociology, Wildlife and Forestry, Counseling and Sport Psychology, and the Howard H. Baker Center for Public Policy, and UT Educational Psychology and Counseling Department.

public and private partners like a local hardware store donating tools for the garden, friends of staff volunteering time at the circus class, a university fraternity performing community service in the garden, city and county government offices operating under MOUs, colleges from the local university doing research and service learning, grant foundations providing support.

One way partners participated in governance was through the University-Assisted Community School's board. At the time of field work the board included representatives from the university, the school, the district, the community college, the major donor, a mental health non-profit, and a few others.
Another way partners collaborated in decision-making was through the onsite coordinator and program director who helped organize service delivery and resources. Some partners played only a minor role in governance. For example, according to the on-site coordinator: "Catholic Charities, I forget about them because they don't want anything in return. They're like here's the money. Do whatever you want with it. Amen sister!" However most donors, at least required evidence that the terms of their funding were being met. For example, United Way, required detailed quarterly accountability reports. Grant funders could, of course, set or negotiate the terms of their support.

Within this collaboration, not all partners held positions of equal power and influence. A few were absolutely critical to the community school viability. The community school required: (1) school district support in the form of approval (2), buy-in from the school-level staff and administrators to create joint operating

procedures (3), institutional support from the university that housed the program, and (4) major donors to pay expenses like staff salaries. Arguably donors held the most potential power. The primary funder committed to $450,000 of funding over 3 years. The program also received grants from organizations like the United Way, which awarded $300,000 over 3 years (the funder was United Way's Campaign chair that year).

UACS administrators were adamant that donors had been hands-off. However, the potential threat of interference from donors is omnipresent (Luter and Kronick 2017). An interview with the school administrator illuminates how much *potential* power a donor has.

> *Bill* – So I'm trying to figure out where the money's coming from and who's in control, and all that. There's coordinator, then there's Boys and Girls Club, then it's funded by the university, right? But then there's the funder. It's a weird—
>
> *Betsy* – If he pulls his money, the university is not going to pay for it. [laughing]
>
> *Bill* – Yeah, right. I haven't come up to a good answer for that yet.
>
> *Betsy* – Well that's the answer. If he his money, the university won't pay for it.

Any serious description of the UACS governance structure must note the powerful role of its major donor who—though practically hands-off and not formally in control of the program—holds an ultimate veto power via his ability to withdraw support.

In this discussion of governance one group has been conspicuously absent. Neighborhood-level community members played a relatively minor role in directing the program at the time of fieldwork in 2014. In an interview, an administrator reflected on the problem of low participation of parents and suggested several reasons.

> *Bill* – Is there any institutional mechanism for the parents to be involved in decision making, like can they come to board meetings or what's the . . . ?
>
> *John* – We do. We started to have a parent board. Because when we started we had one board. We had one board and that board would consist of [local leaders] and then we'd invite parents, but . . . it's intimidating. Parents didn't want to come. I mean they didn't feel comfortable coming in to a table with professor so and so, Dr. so and so, principal so and so, […] They're sharing ideas and they're talking in terms that the parents don't understand. There are parents that don't want to say anything because the administrators are sitting there. Even to say, I don't like the way my child is being treated, I think they felt threatened that there was going to be retribution. So we started a parent board. Only parents, and you will give us—we want you guys to basically steer the ship. What you guys need and want for yourselves and your kids, and you neighbors.
>
> *Bill* – How's that going?
>
> *John* – It's not going well. It's not going well. It's been hard to get parents who are willing to come and give an hour once a month, to be honest with ya.

Bill – Why do you think that is?

John – Part of is because I think when we first started, we started out—we didn't have the time to plan it out accordingly. We should have had them there to plan. We got that donation from [the funder] and he wanted that program started in 3 weeks. We had to kinda get going with something. If we had had time we should have had more teachers. What do you guys need to support you in school? More parents. What do you guys want from us? And the community. And that should have guided the ship from the dock. But we didn't. So I think parents have in their mind that they don't have a say. What they think or say isn't worthy. Or they don't want to feel like there's gonna be retribution towards their child, if it's a negative thing. But I'm pushing for that. I want more and more. I want them guiding.

John identifies 3 reasons for low participation. One is that parents may feel like disempowered outsiders at board meetings where they lack the social capital (social networks and joint memberships) and cultural capital (education, status, ways of speaking) of high social status individuals. Another is the power imbalance between those administering services and those dependent upon them, and the perceived threat that speaking out could mean losing access. Third, contingent funding required a quick launch and executive decisions. This left little time to build the trust, relationships, and institutional capacity for democratic decision-making (Luter, Lester, and Kronick 2013). Though the launch did not determine later structure, it may have set a precedent that was difficult to overcome.

From the perspective of parents, it was not clear that they felt particularly empowered to participate in community school governance. The excerpt below from my interview with Sara is poignant and describes her sense of frustration and distrust.

Bill – They call it a *community* school, right? So who's making decisions—like how do decisions actually happen?

Sara – I've never been privy to any decision-making. Um, it's kind of authoritarian in its existence. This is the rules and, and if you want your kid to be here, you have to follow this way. I recognize their side. But it's still, it's still a bit of a totalitarianism in microcosm.

Bill – Have you ever been to a, to a board meetings or anything like that?

Sara – I have not. I was invited to attend a couple of them last spring or the spring before that, but I have not been to a board meeting.

Bill – So I was asking [an administrator] how much say parents get. From his perspective it's like, "we want them to be involved but there seems to be a lack of willingness to participate on their part." And it wasn't necessarily accusatory but I was wondering from your perspective, why such low participation?

Sara – My reason for not attending is simply that I did not have care for my son.

Bill – That's a good reason.

There is a lot to unpack here. Sara indicates that she feels both excluded from decision-making and that she has declined invitations to participate in board

meetings. This apparent contradiction is resolved by her last statement—Sara may want to participate and may be invited to participate but circumstances (lack of access to affordable childcare) preclude her involvement.

That is not to say poverty and material circumstances were the only things keeping parents from participating. Poor communication and belief that meetings were irrelevant or unproductive seem to have been factors. One parent noted, “I’ve never received a notice that there was a board meeting. So parents may not be participating because they have no idea when meetings are.” Then she asked, “Have you ever been to those kinds of meetings?” Adding, “It turns into a bunch of wells, buts, and then banter, and then nothing really gets accomplished.” She said, “So even if you did notify every parent, you’d probably have three show up. Like three showed up for the third grade thing.”

Low participation is not necessarily a damning critique. The fact of low neighborhood participation does not preclude possibilities for improvement. The community school institutionalized at least two *potential* avenues for community empowerment that did not previously exist. First, an expressed commitment to democratic ideals lends legitimacy to potential claims for authority and a basis to push for more representation and participation. Likewise, the community school board and the more recently initiated parent board provided institutional mechanisms for neighborhood-level democratic engagement.

SERVICE PROVISION: CHARITY, WELFARE, OR SELF-HELP?

A central feature of the community school service provision to children and families in need. But questions about the nature of that help and who deserved it were points of contention. The community school provided a range of free services that included hot dinners, mental health services, dental services, and afterschool care. Zero cost to families was an important criteria for the major donor. According to the coordinator,

> The money is given on the condition that, [the funder] doesn't want them to pay—wants that families will not have to pay. It's provided. It's a free community service for kids and their families and adults and uh, nobody will pay for that. That was the biggest condition.

He laughed and added, "that, and he'll keep giving us money as long as [the director] and I stay out of jail."

The question of whether or not the afterschool program offered free childcare was a point of contention. School administrators were adamant that the community school was not free childcare service, but was an educational service. The onsite coordinator described how the afterschool program differed from childcare,

> These kids are going every hour. They are doing something. They're doing something worthwhile, as a controlled, influenced group, you know? Everything that we do, even if it is during circus time it's academically focused. Or an art project or an singing a song on math, music history

> doing something that's going to hopefully improve their behavior, mindset, control.

Coordinators were building quality educational programs and did not want parents to use the program as a childcare program in which they could pick up their children whenever they wanted.

Though parents I talked to appreciated quality programming, the fact of free childcare was a major draw of the afterschool program. Neighborhood parents faced limited childcare options. The daycare across the street, for example, charged $110 per week (consider the mother and son living on $211 dollars per week). Poor parents could apply for a childcare subsidy through the states Families First program, but parents I talked to preferred the UACS for several reasons. One was certainly the quality of its programs. Cost, convenience, and security were also appealing. According to one parent, "it was really nice to know that he can go to school and simply stay at that location." She added, "That's security for him." Another advantage of utilizing the afterschool program as childcare was that parents could avoid the disruption, insecurity, and stigma associated government assistance. Tracy explained the problem well:

> The thing is, when you have to go through those routes, it demands your time. It demands your time to turn stuff in. it demands your time to go and qualify and verify. It demands that you not be at work multiple times a year. Plus they also call your job. I experienced this when I was using Families First. They call your place of work every other month and, you know, it's kind of disruptive and I felt like my privacy was being invaded.

> […] You have to go in person or else it all gets cut off. So you end up without help for a month until they can get a new appointment set up [sighing]. You know it's, it's really um, dysfunctional as far as a person who works in poverty already works in a hostile environment and then ... they don't mail you the notice until right before your appointment. So you get it in the mail on Thursday and suddenly you have to take off of work on Monday. It's, that's problematic.

For families like Tracy's the community school offered an appealing alternative to state subsidized childcare programs.

A drawback for some parents who relied on the afterschool program as childcare was that it lacked the flexibility of a childcare program. Tracy explained it best,

> The downside is—and it's not the program itself—but it's who funds the program—they will cut the program's funding if students are not staying until 6 pm. And I have a fundamental issue with this because I like to spend time with my child. And if I'm not picking him up until six, and we get home at 6:15, dinner's ready at 6:45. He, depending on whether or not he likes the vegetable, he might be done eating at 7:00 or 730. Then, you know, it's shower and brush your teeth and reading time and at most we have 30 minutes of me being a cool fun mom, and not a rigid schedule, we have to do this this way [pounds fist on table] mom. And so I really, um, dislike leaving him there until 6.

Limited options left Tracy a difficult choice between a free quality afterschool program she liked and more time with her child. Where administrators were primarily concerned with providing quality programming, Tracy desired more flexible free childcare service. This is an example of a small-scale political conflict playing out within the space of the community school.

Services: Welfare or Anti-Welfare?

Although community school service provision is certainly a form of welfare, some viewed the community school's mission as *anti*-welfare. For example, person involved in administering the program indicated his preference for relying on private funding so as not to make assistance "government type of thing." When I asked about the difference between government welfare and UACS service provision he noted,

> So we are trying to target those people to improve. But if they're not willing to come in, we can't force them. So in some ways, yes, we are—we are providing support or assistance and I hate to say it but—that wasn't the purpose of the program—but we are.

And he was ambivalent about helping children if it meant enabling undeserving adults,

> I've often said to that we've kind of created a monster. We've kind of created an enabling monster. And I know the intentions were good. And the intentions were for the kids. You can't fault the children for the effort of the parent. So in some ways the initial purpose was for the kids […] and

> then it grew into that we have to address the needs of the adults too. […] We're providing toxic charity in some ways.[87] But I always go back to the kids. It's not toxic charity to them—they're not working jobs to pay for things, they're the ones that have to, you know, go home to the emptiness, and no food and empty fridges. And, you know, fourth graders babysitting first graders and babies. It's not their fault. […] I don't want to consequence a child for this—the decisions of their parents. It's a tough one. Do you remove a child from the program because the parent isn't doing anything to reciprocate?[88]

Another decision-maker worried: "it's kinda got to the point where like we're creating a handout." Similarly, The University Office of Community Engagement and Outreach described the UACS mission helping the poor "learn to help themselves" (2015).

Contradictory views on welfare were rooted in contrasting views of neighborhood poverty. Of the parents and neighborhood members that were willing to talk to me or consent to interviews, most viewed poverty as temporary hardship that they would overcome.[89] Jana described here poverty: "I will work my way out of it. And so that, while it affected me during the situation, it is not something that will continue with me." A young father, Jameel, described working

---

[87] His interpretation of the original conception of the project seems to contradict other interpretations, in which helping the community has always been a core goal.
[88] I do not mean to be uncharitable sharing this dialogue. This is a person who worked long and often irregular hours, pouring his heart, energy and time into helping raise other people's children. He did so at the expense of time with his own family and children. He was understandably frustrated at low parent participation in programs he worked hard to promote and maintain.
[89] Of course, it is entirely possible that community members less involved with school, and therefore less likely to appear in the sample, held different views.

multiple jobs, taking classes at the community college, caring for his son, and his dream of majoring in social work so he could help disadvantaged children apply for college. Carlos, an immigrant from Mexico described challenges like language barriers, experiences of discrimination, lack of reliable transportation, and leaving school around 10 years old. He recounting long 12 to 14 hour workdays at a golf course with only one short lunch break. And he spent his nights working towards a GED (General Equivalency Diploma). He prided himself on his work ethic, but his hours and pay were often irregular, dependent on weather and seasons. Lacking proper immigration documents, he had trouble securing steady employment and benefits. Nevertheless, he told me, “America is a rich country. All you have to do is work for it. That is why I came here.” For Jana, Jameel, and Carlos the problems of poverty were manifested in day-to-day stresses and impossible choices. Jana struggled with deciding which bills to pay. Jameel struggled to resolve the competing demands of needing more hours at work and needing more time for his college courses. Carlos faced difficult choices about paying rent, keeping his electricity on, sending money home to family, and paying for medical treatment. He had to choose between returning to a society in which he believed he had no future and remaining in a society in which he lacked equal rights. None of these people complacently accepted their poverty as a permanent condition. But this contrasted with the views of some people involved with the community school.

Some involved with the program viewed poverty as the result of a culture of complacency and entitlement. For example, one person deeply involved with program described poverty as mindset. He described the parents,

> A lot of them are on subsidized housing and financial assistance. And, I think it's just that cycle. The parents were brought up the same way thinking that their education is not a priority and just getting by with assistance is fine. I can eat and I can get the government to provide a voucher—life's good. You know, and the bar unfortunately I think is set very low. And the kids see that, so… Yeah. It's a mindset. The mindset of the community. […] And people settle for that. Some people are just settling for that, not wanting to break that stereo- … not even stereo- I shouldn't even say stereotype—some of it is a label given for statistical reasons.

For him being poor was a reflection of cultural or moral deficiency. He noted family values were an issue: "A big problem that I see is—and, and I don't want to call it a problem because if I call it a problem then the parents they'll be offended—but single parent households." Several others noted that children lacked adequate role models at home. "It's another reason why I love to work here—it's good for the kids because they might not see a positive African American role model, male or female," said one staffer.[90]

[90] Another of the major donor's philanthropic projects was a program through which private funders paid for poor student's to go to community college with the requirement that they perform a day of service each semester and are matched with a mentor. That program served as a model for Tennessee's statewide last dollar community college scholarship.

Concerns about moral instruction were also evident in programming. A university student created a character development program based on a theory she described as "popular with local leaders."[91] Another example of moral instruction of the poor may be the financial planning class offered a local bank. Researcher note that framing poverty as a deficit of "financial literacy" moralizes poverty and ignores its structural roots (Hammond and Darity 2017; Willis 2008; Lucey 2007). Teaching people without money how to manage money is a practically limited solution, and one that frames poverty as an individual deficiency (poor choices, poor work ethic, lack of grit, etc.) (Lucey, Agnello, Laney 2015). Likewise, at the time of fieldwork there was some debate amongst decision-makers about whether parents should be required to *earn* the services they received (volunteer hours, participation in classes, or monetary payment). This question was one example of a relatively small but significant political conflict playing out within the collaborative structure of the community school.

To be clear, the views of one or several people involved with the program did not define it. The important point is that there was significant disagreement within the program (and its partners) about the nature of the services offered. What services should be offered? For what purpose? Who deserves help? Balancing competing demands and conflicting ideologies was a difficult task. A 2014 study of a University Assisted Community School found that building

[91] She began the character development program in 2014 for 4th and 5th graders based on Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership. Greenleaf 's (1977) widely influential theory of servant leadership focuses on 11 qualities like empathy, listening, and building community. His ideas have been popular with business management gurus like Steven Covey and Ken Blanchard, with religious leaders, service learning programs, a local leader in the medical profession, and the local university football coach.

collaborative relationships within a diverse coalition required coordinators to create a climate of “neutrality.” A coordinator noted,

> You know, you kinda gotta be a, you got to be Switzerland, almost. You gotta be neutral on things being said and done because you’ve got a lot of different beliefs of what’s best for the kids, and you get some people who, who get upset if things aren’t going the way they want. I mean, you gotta try to be very neutral to both sides. (Luter, Lester, and Kronick 2014:178)

But if we develop the metaphor further, Switzerland’s official stance “armed neutrality” belies the reality that it was neither impartial nor disinterested. Neutrality, in this sense, is a strategic political tactic. As Howard Zinn (2002) reminds us, we may strive to be fair and open to opposing views, but neutrality is not an option. He, “events are already moving in certain deadly directions, and to be neutral means to accept that.” His famous line is, “You cannot be neutral on a moving train” (Zinn 2002:34).

IN THE CONTRADICTION LIES THE HOPE

To conclude the chapter I argue that the contradictory and ambiguous expressions of the community school are not a bug of the institution, but rather a defining feature and actually key to its viability. In the polarized political climate that characterized Knox County in the years after 2009, the community school model enjoyed ubiquitous popularity—if not actually much financial support. Architects of privatization, expert governance, and accountability (e.g. the superintendent, corporate partners, private non-profits, and state legislators) as

well as activists for professional autonomy and democratic governance (e.g. SPEAK, teachers unions, the county mayor) both advocated for community schools. As researchers familiar with the case noted, “It was able to co-exist with these more traditional reform efforts, which perhaps explains why it was allowed to exist by the school system” (Luter and Kronick 2017). How then can it be an alternative to neoliberal education reforms?

First, another related question should be answered—why would a conservative Republican businessman bankroll the vision of a university professor who quotes Saul Alinsky?[92] One possible answer is that donors are dupes or lack self-awareness. That seemed to be the answer of a local Democrat politician described the major donor this way:

> If I and other people were in his ear, the man would be a Democrat. I mean that’s all there is to it. He is, he just doesn’t know it. Randy’s goals are, I think, the same thing your goals are and my goals. It’s his naivete.

But that seems an unfair and unjustified characterization of sophisticated individual who describes himself as a “proud Republican” and “principled conservative,” and has expressed deeply conservative views that include faith in free markets, disapproval for gay marriage, and hardline stances on immigration including support for Donald Trump’s border wall. Another answer, one posed by Luter and Kronick (2017), is that elites can be *ideologically flexible*. After all, the funder had originally wanted to invest money in a new charter school, but that

[92] Alinksy was influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology, is known for *Rules for Radicals* (1971), and left a mark on organizers like Cesar Chavez, Ernesto Cortez, and Myles Horton of Highlander School.

changed when he met the university professor and heard his vision for a community school. It is a wonderful point. Indeed the funder's views "evolved" over the last few years, but pointing out ideological flexibility is an insufficient answer to the question of why he supports community schools. A more complete answer, I argue, would be that conservative donors find aspects of the community school appealing and consistent with their values. That is, they see things they genuinely understand and genuinely like as data from this chapter shows. They may for example see it the community school as an opportunity to roll back the welfare state in favor of private charity.

The community school is not a revolutionary model. It does not confront privatization, technocratic governance, or the competitive individualism enshrined the district's performance pay schemes. That is, the community school did not seek to overthrow existing power structures—at least, not directly. Rather, I argue, it may undermine neoliberalism indirectly three ways. First, as a form of welfare provision, the community school offers concrete relief and material resources to people in need. Though service provision is certainly no direct assault on the foundations of neoliberalism, providing material relief to the poor, at least, creates conditions in which the poor may pursue collective interests beyond individual survival. Second, it offers a broad and compelling vision at odds with neoliberalism—enriching education, collaborative working environment, and an alternative vision of shared governance. Though it has failed to live up to its own ideals (especially in promoting participatory governance), the community school does offer a substantive alternative

ideological educational framework for thinking about education reform. Third, the creation of a community school represents the creation of a new space for political engagement that did not exist prior. As an institution, the community school may be used to advance neoliberal or more democratic ends. It creates a new contested space, but—crucially—that space is not a neutral one. As a public-private entity compatible with neoliberal arrangements, the community school attracts material resources (grants, private donations, public money), valuable partnerships (corporate, faith-based, public-private, education, state), and legitimacy (from media, academics, the school district). But also, as an institution formally committed to democratic principles and ideals of social responsibility, the community school may employ resources in a way that creates possibilities for reimagining, contesting, and refiguring the very arrangements that produce it. The institution penetrates existing systems and introduces contradictions. For example, cultivating democratic microsystems within a larger undemocratic structure introduces questions of legitimacy to that system. Within the non-neutral spaces created by the community school, actors may negotiate political conflicts and promote systemic change leaning to one side of a contradiction (e.g. democracy, enriching education, collaborative relationships) over the other (e.g. elite control, economized education, accountability and measurement). As German playwright Berthold Brecht reminds us, “In the contradiction lies the hope.”

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM WE NEED

In the first months of 2018 tens of thousands of teachers are striking, protesting, and rallying in states that embraced privatization, austerity, and high-stakes testing. It is a pivotal moment and the local grassroots uprising in Knox County that began in 2013 seems to have predicted themes appearing in these national movements. As a means to conclude, this chapter describes the current political moment in education, highlights the significance of the case of Knox County, suggests wider implications of this research, and attempts to identify a path forward. I argue that the neoliberal project in education seems to be both ascendant and facing serious challenges. I also argue that beyond K-12 education, a deeply neoliberal fixation on performance metrics has warped our most important institutions in some pernicious ways. I conclude the research by attempting to address a crucial question. Our children are facing life in a highly competitive and increasingly stratified society—considering the high stakes, what kind of education system do we need?

CHANGING TIDES? CHALLENGES TO NEOLIBERAL CONSENSUS

A few years ago there seemed little doubt about the trajectory of K-12 education. Privatization, measurement-based accountability, and anti-labor messages dominated in film, print, and policy circles. Documentary films like *Waiting for "Superman"* (2010) and *Won't Back Down* (2012) were hugely

influential. Time magazine ran a cover story in 2008. “How to fix America’s Schools” featured stern-faced Michelle Rhee standing in a classroom holding a broom—hint: the implication was not to hire more cleaning staff. Another Time cover announced in 2014, “ROTTEN APPLES: It’s nearly impossible to fire a bad teacher. Newsweek ran a 2010 cover. “The Key to Saving American Education” pictured a chalkboard with a handwritten phrase scrawled over and over: “We must fire bad teachers. We must fire bad teachers. We must fire bad teachers.” Oprah ran a show titled, “The Shocking State of our Schools,” in which she praised Michelle Rhee for closing dozens of public schools and firing more than 1,000 educators.

In 2012 around 26,000 teachers went on strikes in Chicago in the first significant challenge to the business elite’s neoliberal education agenda, and their efforts received little positive coverage from national media. Time’s education columnist told NPR, “Part of this strike, it’s pretty clear, is that the union needed to have some theater for its members. Let them blow off some steam. I think that’s increasingly obvious” (NPR 2012). An ABC News correspondent tweeted, “I wonder if the Chicago teachers realize how much damage they are doing to their profession—and to so many children and their families” (Robin 2018). President Obama expressed “concern for the students and families who are affected” (Davey 2012). The president of nation’s largest teachers union, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Randi Weingarten praised the Chicago mayor’s privatization efforts and told the New York Times that the unions “had gotten the message that it needed to embrace changes to

improve the nation's schools" (Greenhouse 2012). Notable figures like Bill Gates, Whoopi Goldberg, Wendy Kopp, Joel Klein, Kevin Johnson, and Campbell Brown promoted the narrative. Knox County Schools were swept up in this national reform movement. But also, events in Knox County predicted rumblings of discontent.

It is a seemingly propitious moment for those weary neoliberal privatization and austerity. In 2018, thousands West Virginia teachers went on strike. In a nod to the 10,000 miners at the Battle of Blair Mountain—who over 5 days in 1921 confronted some 3,000 lawmen, strikebreakers, air raids, and the US Army—the teachers occupied the state capitol wearing red bandanas. Within weeks Oklahoma, Kentucky, Colorado, Arizona, and North Carolina teachers gathered in their state capitols by the tens of thousands.

Though it is too early—and outside the scope of this research—to offer a definitive analysis of the national moment or an in-depth comparison with the case of Knox County, there seem to be a few clear similarities. Just as teachers in Knox County organized from a place of seeming weakness, the rank and file labor rebellions against neoliberal education consensus emerged in states with the most entrenched austerity and privatization programs (Seidman and Gott 2018). The protests have emerged in deeply conservative states, with weak labor protections (Enten 2018).[93] The protestors confronted a powerful network of corporations, neoliberalized state agencies, and billionaire-funded think-tanks, lobbyists, and non-profits.

[93] Trump won West Virginia by more than 40 percentage points and Trump support in some southern counties exceeded 80%.

As in Knox County, teachers across the country have made it clear that it was not just about the paycheck, though much media coverage has focused solely on low pay as motivation for the strikes. “To explain the reasons for the strike and ongoing mobilizations, most mainstream media have been marketing poverty porn: This teacher sells plasma. Another works six jobs,” writes Vande Panne (2018). Teachers in Oklahoma report that major outlets were specifically requesting interviews with the poorest teachers (Vande Panne 2018). One West Virginia teacher said, “Wages and health benefits were almost a distraction. They are important, but there were five major stances we took, and we won all five” (McAlevey 2018). According to another, “This isn’t just about our healthcare plan. It’s about rebalancing the power of workers and corporations in our state” (McAlevey 2018). Protests in Oklahoma began with general calls for more school funding, but their politics sharpened. They identified the Eli and Edyth Broad Foundation working with complicit adminstrators. According to one teacher, “They are working aggressively to force privatization of the schools. That’s the real story” (Vande Panne 2018). Oklahoma teachers called on other public workers to join them and began demanding higher taxes on oil and gas industries and funding schools instead of prisons.

Some strikers decried overreliance on standardized testing, especially when used to determine pay (McFeely and Wigert 2018). Nationally, 1 in 7 teachers say they would prefer step pay increases with *no opportunity* for increased pay for performance (Gallup 2017). The strikes were also about respect and dignity. The governor of Oklahoma sparked anger when he

compared teacher's calls for adequate funding to, "a teenager wanting a better car" (Murphy 2018). Kentucky teachers held signs that read, "Kentucky teachers demand respect." One political scientist observed, "we're seeing the real resistance, the most profound and deepest attack on the basic assumptions of the contemporary governing order" (Robin 2018).

No doubt these movements face an uphill battle as they push against the stubborn political opposition and stubborn ideologies. But victories in West Virginia (blocked charter school expansion, proposal to eliminate seniority, effort to block union dues; won better benefits and 5% raises), Oklahoma (raises and increased funding), Arizona (20% raise and increased funding), and Kentucky (blocked the governor's veto of tax increase) have given protestors a sense of their own power, and they inspired others. According to a West Virginia educator,

> Being at the capitol is empowering and exhausting. It's crowded and chaotic, it also often means waiting for hours in line to get inside the capitol. But at the same time it's so positive and emotional, people have been really polite and kind to each other. People are coming together to find a solution to a common goal. It feels good. (Blanc 2018)

As West Virginia teachers left the capitol they chanted, "Who made history? We made history?" (McAlevey 2018). The experience of empowerment is reminiscent of Knox County teachers. A Knox County teacher said on local TV in 2014, "Now is the time to start realizing that we do have the power to control some things."

It remains to be seen if the momentum can be sustained and what alternatives they will pursue. In education, at least, it appears the neoliberalism is

both resurgent and facing significant popular challenges. Failures of the market have become increasingly apparent to teachers. Failures include failures to significantly reduce educational disparities and failures of the private sector to deliver improved or even adequate services. In Tennessee, for example, between 2014-2018 the state has experience repeated delays, inaccuracies, and other problems with its contracted standardized testing systems. This research speaks to this moment by providing a detailed qualitative study of how similar contradictions sparked social change on a local level.

A TIMELY CASE STUDY: REFORM, RESISTANCE, AND OPPORTUNITIES

This research may be useful in the current moment because it describes the implementation and impact of neoliberal education policies on a local school district, grassroots resistance, and an alternative community school reform trajectory. With roots in No Child Left Behind (2001) and the arrival of a new superintendent in 2009 the dominant narrative driving local education reform was that educational achievement gaps were evidence that public schools—and their teachers—were failing to give poor and minority children the skills they needed to compete in a rapidly changing economy. The dominant policy prescription was to hold schools and individuals accountable to performance metrics and to encourage private sector investment (charitable or profitable) to attract resources and unleash the creative power of market innovation and efficiency. Practically, this meant increasing authority experts (analysts, think-tanks, consultants), billionaires (non-profits and philanthropies), and corporations (service providers,

public-private partnerships, chambers of commerce, offices of economic development, etc.). What they lacked in expertise in education or education policy, they compensated for with a seemingly unshakable belief in the business model.

In Knox County, and nationally, there have been some marginal gains in test scores, but it is unclear that those gains reflect increased educational quality (Dee and Jacob 2011), and those gains came at a high cost (Darling-Hammond 2007).[94] It may be that "what gets measured gets done" (Peters 2006), but as Chapters 5 and 6 show, "Not everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted" (Cameron 1963:13). Schools serve a multitude of legitimate purposes not limited to preparing democratic citizens, enriching students' lives, anchoring communities, and providing job skills. However, fixating on performance metrics and the economics of schooling superseded other purposes and teachers reported a lost sense of meaning, trust, goodwill, and professionalism.

A key finding is that the most basic tenets of contemporary neoliberal education reform—economization, privatization, accountability, technocracy, competitive individualism, etc.—were deeply unpopular with teachers, students, and parents. The unpopularity and failure of neoliberal privatization are not unique to public education. The findings of this research fit within a broader

[94] The assessment that NCLB raised test scores is generous, contested, and generally based on evidence that NAEP scores increased between 1999-2012 (NCES 2015). Some researchers argue that this rise in scores reflects trends that predate NCLB and find little evidence that NCLB played any causal role in improving overall achievement or achievement gaps (Dee and Jacob 2011; Lee and Reaves 2012; Ladd 2017)

literature on the theoretical and practical failures of neoliberalism. Privatized healthcare, water, telecommunications, transportation, banking, and prisons have produced well-documented failures and popular backlash (Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011; Mirowski 2013).

Though these neoliberal education reforms in Knox County were backed by well-funded, politically powerful overlapping public-private networks that advanced ideas and policies, this case suggests that current order seems neither hegemonic nor inevitable. This research describes several paths forward for those who decided “enough is enough!” For one, the grassroots uprising of teachers, students, parents, and community members that coalesced under the banner of SPEAK experienced some success rolling back unpopular district policies and influencing local elections. These victories suggest that direct confrontation and democratic organizing can affect meaningful change. But also, working within existing frameworks provides avenues for subtle subversion as the case of the community school suggests. The community school was an institution “allowed to exist” by the district and it attracted significant resources precisely because it did not directly challenge elite consensus. However, the model introduced contradictions that tilted the field. By leaning to one side of the contradiction (e.g. democratic participation, social welfare) over the other (e.g. philanthropy, elite control) the community school created new possibilities. By not directly challenging existing power structures (charitable organizations, corporations, district policy), change agents could attract resources (grants, funding, charity) and redirect them into the community school and ideally allowing

for more democratic control over those resources. Confronting authority directly (unions, popular movements, political organizing) and leaning into the contradictions of existing institutions (community schools, public-private partnerships) both appear viable tactics for creating more democratic education institutions. Instead of strengthening institutional mechanisms geared to maximize economic value, this research suggests it is possible to begin the difficult work of creating institutions more focused on social welfare and human flourishing.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS: THE HIGH COSTS OF METRIC FIXATION

A major finding, widely applicable, is that fixation on metrics warps institutional values and practices in some pernicious ways. Policies and modes of governance that enlarge the economic sphere to subsume virtually all aspects social life are defining features of the contemporary neoliberal authority that animates the management practices, language, and conduct of our most important institutions. Though scientific management is not unique to neoliberalism, it is uniquely compatible.[95] Higher education, healthcare, policing, churches, social welfare agencies, and even families are reorienting in accordance with market logics in ways that distort their purposes.

Funding formulas for colleges and universities increasingly focus on rankings and measurable outputs. US News and World Reports, Forbes,

[95] We find clear historical precedent in late 19th century European "productivism" and the early 20th century American "scientific management" of Fredrick Taylor (Scott 1998; Muller 2018).

Newsweek, Princeton Review, and Kiplinger release college rankings that drive administrators—seeking monetary bonuses, prestige, or promotions—to offer scholarships based on SAT or ACT scores rather than need or equity (Espeland and Saunder 2007); or they drive administrators to improve graduation rates at the expense of academic standards (Johnson 2003). The University of Tennessee's Top 25 Initiative, for example, has focused on attracting "superior students" as measured by ACT equivalence scores, measures that correlate strongly with family income (Economist 2016). Similarly, Tennessee's community colleges use outcomes-based funding formulas. In 2017 Chattanooga State Community College faculty were congratulated by the state governing body for improving graduation rates and, according to one state administrator, "taking money from those other schools."[96] Those other schools included community colleges serving distressed communities in poor and rural areas. For academics seeking tenure and promotion, rankings are often based on the number publications produced or "impact factor," neither of which clearly indicate quality of research (Brown 2015; Muller 2018). In each instance "improvement" seems at odds with the institution's core purpose.

The problems of institutional fixation on metrics are not unique to the educational sector. Diverse organizations across the globe are currently ruled by belief that the key to unlock widespread flourishing Is quantifying value, measuring human performance, and allocating rewards based on the results. Healthcare, policing, military, and business and finance, and philanthropy are just

[96] Field notes from Tennessee Board of Regents remarks at 2018 convocation at Chattanooga State Community College.

a few other sectors currently dominated by the measurement-based accountability fetish (Muller 2018).

The point is not that measurements and metrics are always useless or unredeemably pernicious. To the contrary, they are incredibly powerful and useful tools when used reasonably. But this research shows that metrics—especially when used to distribute rewards and punishments—are often inaccurate and counterproductive. Muller (2018) observes, “Because belief in its efficacy seems to outlast evidence that it frequently doesn’t work, metric fixation has the elements of cult.” How else do we explain the belief that we can use a history teacher’s students standardized test scores to measure a gym teacher’s performance? So when the state commissioner of education told local teachers in 2014, “You have to rally around what is occasionally complex issues and simplify it, and with diligence, go forth with the plan” because “the data tells you where you need to go,” it seems obvious that, as one teacher stated bluntly, “they had no clue that what they were serving was some bullshit on a platter.”

HIGH STAKES: WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION DO WE NEED?

The stakes for our children are high and it is incumbent we provide them with the education system they need. Children will enter a hyper-competitive and increasingly stratified economy. In the US 1 in 5 children live in poverty and more than 40% live in low-income households (US Census Bureau 2017).[97] Nearly half of the children born to low-income parents will end up low-income adults.

[97] Low income is defined as at or above 200% of the federal poverty threshold (Cauthen and Fass 2008).

Children born in the bottom quintile have just a 6% chance of making it to the top (Erickson 2015). However, of those born to high-income parents, 40% will become high-income earners themselves. Social mobility has declined sharply since 1977 and wages have stagnated or decreased for most US workers (Piketty 2013). During the same time, both capital income and earned income have grown for the richest families—the top 1% now collects as much income as the bottom 50% and owns much as wealth the bottom 90% (Piketty 2013). Since the 1970s, income for the top 1% of earners increased 165% and the top 0.01% has gained more than the rest of the top 1% combined (Piketty 2013).

In large part, the US response has been to put faith in its education system. Many hoped schools could be both social safety nets and engines of mobility. Parent's willingness to embrace strict high-stakes testing regimes for their small children may have to do with anxieties about tightening labor markets, low wage employment, rising college costs, lack of affordable housing, and unaffordable healthcare (Erickson 2015). According to one parent, "if they just knew that the kid was going to *be OK*, there would be way less hysterical pressure of making your five-year-old jump through that standardized test hoop" (quoted in Erickson 2015:15). Yet faith that fixing education will fix economic problems seems misplaced.

President Obama announced in 2010, "In the 21st century, one of the best anti-poverty programs is a world-class education." No doubt, there are strong correlations between education and poverty. Degree attainment is a powerful *individual* solution to poverty, but it is an unlikely *social* solution. Since the 1990s

educational attainment steadily increased (high school, bachelor's, post bachelors), but there has been little improvement on poverty, worker's wages, or mobility (Bruenig 2015). There are several reasons why education as an anti-poverty program is unlikely to succeed. For one, the types of jobs available is determined by a number of factors—globalization, technology, supply, demand, government policy, union power, etc.—that have little do with the number of degrees produced. Second, as more people obtain degrees, the relative value of degrees decreases. "The poor in 2014 were the most educated poor in history" (Bruenig 2015). Third, even if better education produced overall higher wages, this is an indirect solution to poverty since most poor people cannot work. Children, elderly, disabled, students, and caregivers account for nearly 70% of people living in poverty (US Census Bureau 2014).

If education is a poor anti-poverty program, maybe it can promote equal *opportunity*. In 2013 President Obama affirmed America's commitment to equal opportunity, "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own" and he cited the need to "reform our schools." Diane Ravitch called US public education the "essential institution" tasked with providing "an education of equal quality to every child so that each of them as an equal chance to succeed in the world" (2013:304). The superintendent of Knox County stated in his 2014 State of the School address, "we must collectively create a pervasive culture of excellence in our school system. Only then will

every child have the opportunity to successfully reach their highest potential, regardless of whatever challenging circumstances they may face." Fixing schools, it appeared, was key to fixing declining economic mobility for poor and minority students.

Yet it seems unlikely that schools can succeed in producing equal opportunities for poor and minority students. For one, the US economy does not appear terribly meritocratic. Wealthy high school dropouts are about as likely to wind up in the top quintile of earners as poor children who graduate from college (Reeves and Sawhill 2014). Similarly, a white high school dropout is more likely to be employed than a black student with some college (Adams 2014). And white high school dropouts have more wealth than black and Hispanic college graduates (Bruenig 2015). Secondly, to the extent that the economy is meritocratic, merit itself is largely inherited. In 2016 The Economist described the "blending of merit and inheritance" noting, "More than ever before, America's elite is producing children who not only get ahead, but deserve to do so: they meet the standards of meritocracy better than their peers." Between 1972 and 2006, high-income parents increased spending on child-enrichment goods and services nearly tripled, from $2,700 to $7,500 annually. The USDA's "Cost of Raising a Child Calculator," estimated the cost of raising lower income child would be $176,550; whereas higher income families could expect to invest $407,820 in raising a child (college was not included in the price tag) (USDA 2013). Between birth and age 6 wealthy children will have spent 1,300 more hours in novel environments (outside home, school, childcare) (Erickson 2015). Wealthier

children receive better healthcare (even before birth), have better nutrition, live in safer neighborhoods, gain more valuable social capital, more valuable cultural capital, ad infinitum . . . (Putnam 2015; Owens 2016). Parent education levels and income are the strongest predictor of educational achievement (Economist 2016). The accumulated advantages of wealth outside of school are staggering. If schooling is a race to secure valuable skillsets, it is clear which children get a head start.

None of this is to say that schools do not play an important role in shaping economic or social lives. To the contrary, envisioning schools as merely places teach students to adapt to life in a competitive, insecure, and stratified economy is a disservice. Such a "realist" vision is too limited. A teacher I interviewed lamented middle school parents' obsessing about college admissions. He said, "I believe school has potential to be a central force in a lot of kids' lives—more than just a place to go to get the grades to go to college." Many of the neoliberal solutions aimed at fixing educational problems described in this research are limited in the sense that fixating on solving problems does little good without creating room for imagining what kind education system we actually want. If the best goal we can hope for is providing poor children with skills to survive and not much more, or to prepare them to compete for a limited number of decent jobs, then that is a failure of vision. According to Donella Meadows envisioning is a vital part of the policy planning process for, "If we don't know where we want to go, it makes little difference that we make great progress" (1994:1). Paulo Freire

offers more radically important role for education than merely preparing students to survive in a precarious world:

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire 2000:34).

The idea that schools should only prepare students for the "real world" is based on a fundamental misunderstanding about the relationship between education and society. Education and society are interactive and interdependent. An important purpose of schooling is to teach students that they may democratically engage in shaping the "real world."

Both the University-Assisted Community School and the SPEAK movement recognized that the fates of schools and communities are dynamically intertwined. Both pushed for more democratic schools. Community school advocates recognized there was "No 'silver bullet' intervention" and that "where there are underperforming schools, there are underdeveloped communities." They proposed a "vision for the school to be a generator of ideas in community-based problem solving and neighborhood-level democracy" (Luter and Kronick 2017:26). Similarly, SPEAK lists as a core value, "We believe that critical consciousness of public education is the core of democracy. Local decisions in our education system are a central component of an involved community."

Demands for more free and democratic schools recall the words of John Dewey who wrote in 1895,

> It is . . . advisable that the teacher should understand, and even be able to criticize, the general principles upon which the whole educational system is formed and administered. He is not like a private solider in an army, expected merely to obey, or like a cog in a wheel, expected merely to respond and transmit external energy; he must be an intelligent medium of action.[98]

Just as stratified and authoritarian schools reflect and reinforce stratified authoritarian societies, democratic schools reflect and reinforce a democratic society.

Neoliberalism and democracy provide useful foils to describe competing paths forward. According to a neoliberal vision, work is primarily a means of wealth creation, and schooling is primarily useful as preparation for life in a competitive economy. According to Parthenon consultants, “not all students are created equal. Some are more profitable than others.” A local teacher described his school, “It still a business, just funded by the taxpayers.” Another teacher described the value of teaching kindergartners to read, “it enables them to compete with other students.” The reaction to popular participation at board meetings by the chair was revealing, “we’ve heard you now . . . these are *our* board meetings.” According a more democratic vision, “Working is not just the creation of economic wealth; it is also always a means of self-creation” (Gorz

[98] Quoted in Goldstein (2015:1).

1989:80). And according to the local mayor, “our children should not be a decimal point on some big shot from Wall Street’s portfolio. We should hold them very close and sacred.” Teachers argued the “joy of learning” was justification enough. To the question of who owned the schools, one community member answered "This is *our* school system!”

For their part, children seem to grasp the contradictions and possibilities inherent in their world. During fieldwork at the community school I listened children tell stories during circus class. The fourth graders sat cross-legged in a circle on blue gymnastic mats in the large, tiled room that served double duty as cafeteria and gymnasium. A boy with shaggy hair wiggled on the mat and volunteered to go first. He told us about the end of the world. A small crack opened up and split the city, he said. It got bigger and people were falling in, screaming. It spread around the world and people were falling into the core of the earth. Children intuitively understand their world and experience the hardships and divisions in their community—one riven with cracks that divide families, workers, and neighbors along gendered, racial, and class lines. Next, we listened to a girl wearing neon high tops. A bad witch turned all the vegetables into candy and had to be vanquished by an unlikely coalition of fairy tale characters, she said. Children giggled and laughter like bells filled the room. Children are also infinitely imaginative, creative, and enviably capable of joy and wonderment. As it would be wrong to ignore real and pressing socio-economic challenges our children face, it would be wrong to assume our best efforts to imagine and create a better, more just world are doomed to fail. This research offers a critique of

divisive education reforms that atomize and isolate individuals and promote conformity with contemporary governing order that seeks to economize virtually every aspect of social life. This research also describes alternative visions and contributes to understandings about how our best efforts improve schools may simultaneously reinforce and undermine our ability to create meaningful social change. So to the question, “What kind of education do we need?” The answer can only be found in the answer to another question. “What kind of society do we want?”[99]

[99] Here I borrow heavily from Harkavy 2013 and Tironi 2005.

REFERENCES

Addams, Jane. 1990. *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Alexander, Michelle. 2012. *The New Jim Crow*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Alinsky, Saul. 1971. *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. Vintage.

American Statistical Association. 2014. “ASA Statement on Using Value-Added Models for Educational Assessment.” Retrieved November 20, 2016. (*http://www.amstat.org/policy/pdfs/ASA_VAM_Statement.pdf*)

Amrein-Beardsley, Audrey. 2008. "Methodological Concerns About the Education Value-Added Assessment Aystem." *Educational researcher* 37(2): 65-75.

Annenberg Institue. 2013. “Developing Great Teachers and Leaders in Knox County Schools: Interview with Superintendent Jim McIntyre.” Brown University. Retrieved October 12, 2017. (http://www.annenberginstitute.org/publications/developing-great-teachers-and-leaders-knox-county-schools-interview-superintendent-jim-)

Apple, Michael W. 1996. *Cultural Politics and Education*. Teachers College Press.

Apple, Michael, and Anita Oliver. 1998. "Becoming Right: Education and the Formation of Conservative Movements." *Sociology of Education*: 91-119.

Apple, Michael. 2006. *Educating the ‘Right’ Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. New York: Routlege.

Apple, Michael. 2013. *Can Education Change Society?* New York: Routledge.

Anderson-Butcher, Dawn, and Deb Ashton. 2004. "Innovative Models of Collaboration to Serve Children, Youths, Families, and Communities." *Children & Schools* 26(1): 39-53.

Arksey, Hilary and Peter Knight. 1999*. Interviewing for Social Scientists*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Au, Wane. 2014. “Seattle Times’ Gates-funded Education Lab Blog Experiment.” Comment on Mercedes Schneider Blog. Retrieved July, 30 2014. (https://deutsch29.wordpress.com/2014/08/24/seattle-times-gates-funded-education-lab-blog-experiment/)

Au, Wayne, and Joseph J. Ferrare. 2014. "Sponsors of Policy: A Network Analysis of Wealthy Elites, their Affiliated Philanthropies, and Charter School Reform in Washington State." *Teachers College Record* 116(8): 1-24.

Aviv, Rachel. 2014. "Wrong answer." *The New Yorker* 21: 54-65.

Banfield, Edward C. 1970. *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of our Urban Crisis*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1970.

Baker, Bruce, and Gary Miron. 2015. "The Business of Charter Schooling: Understanding the Policies That Charter Operators Use for Financial Benefit." *National Education Policy Center*.

Barkan, Joanne. 2013. "Plutocrats at Work: How Big Philanthropy Undermines Democracy." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 80(2): 635-652.

Basma, Dareen and Robert Kronick. 2016. “Lead Follow or Get Out of the Way: The Move Towards University-Assisted Community School*.” Universities and Community Schools*.

Bean, Betty. 2014. “West Knox Money Flows into Sanger Campaign.” Shopper News. Retreived November 1, 2015. (http://shoppernewsnow.com/betty-bean/west-knox-money-flows-into-sanger-campaign/)

Bean, Betty. 2015. “State of the Schools, Errr Super.” *Shopper News*. Retrieved February 24, 2015. (http://shoppernewsnow.com/betty-bean/state-of-the-schools-errr-super/)

Bean, Betty. 2015. “Hopson and Allies to Take Helm of Teachers’ Association.” Retrieved February 20, 2015. (http://shoppernewsnow.com/betty-bean/hopson-and-allies-to-take-helm-of-teachers-association/)

Benson, Lee, Ira Richard Harkavy, and John L. Puckett. 2007. *Dewey's dream: Universities and democracies in an age of education reform: Civil society, public schools, and democratic citizenship*. Temple University Press,

Berliner, David C., and Bruce J. Biddle. 1995. *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Beyer, Landon E., and Michael W. Apple, 1998. *The Curriculum: Problems, Politics, and Possibilities*. SUNY Press.

Biernacki, Patrick and Dan Waldorf. 1981. “Snowball Sampling: Problems and Techniques of Chain Referral Sampling.” *Sociological Methods and Research* 10(2): 141-163.

Bishop, Matthew, and Michael Green. 2008. Philanthrocapitalism. *London: A & C Black Publishers*.

Blank, Rebecca. 2011. *Changing Inequality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Blyth, Mark. 2013. *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*. New York: Oxford UP.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. “The Forms of Capital.” Pp. 46-58 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. Richardson, translated by R. Nice. New York: Greenwood.

Bourgois, Phillip. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. New York: Cambridge.

Bostrom, Meg. 2003. “No Child Left Behind” and the Reframing of Public Education. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

Breiger, Ronald L. "The Duality of Persons and Groups." *Social forces* 53(2): 181-190.

Brenner, Neil and Nik Theodore. 2002. “Cities and The Geographies of ‘Actually Existing Neoliberalism.’” *Antipode* 34(3): 349-379.

Broad Center. 2016. “The Broad Center: Education Leaders, Community Partners, Lasting Results for Students.” Retrieved November 6, 2016. (https://www.broadcenter.org/)

Broad Foundation. 2016. "Gerun Riley Named President of The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation”. Retrieved October 8, 2018. (https://broadfoundation.org/gerun-riley-named-president-eli-edythe-broad-foundation/)

Brown, Wendy. 2015. *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. MIT

Press, 2015.

Bruenig, Matt. 2015. “Why Education Does not Fix Poverty.” *Demos*. Retrieved, May 10 2018. (http://www.demos.org/blog/12/2/15/why-education-does-not-fix-poverty)

Cahill, Damien. 2010. "‘Actually Existing Neoliberalism and the Global Economic Crisis." *Labour & Industry: A Journal of the Social and Economic Relations of Work* 20(3): 298-316.

Castree, Noel. 2003. “Commodifying What Nature?” *Progress in Human Geography* 27(3): 273-297.

Collier, Stephen J. 2012. "Neoliberalism as big Leviathan, or…? A response to Wacquant and Hilgers." *Social Anthropology* 20(2): 186-195.

Collins, Jim. 2001. *Good to Great*. Harper Business.

Cookson, Peter W., Caroline Hodges Persell. 1985. *Preparing for Power: America’s Elite Boarding Schools*. New York: Perseus Books Group.

Cooper, Daniel, Byron Lutz, and Michael Palumbo. "The Role of Taxes in Mitigating Income Inequality Across the US States." *National Tax Journal* 68(4): 943.

Coote, Anna, Jane Franklin, and Andrew Simms. 2010. “21 hours: Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century.” New Economics Foundation.

Crouch, Colin. 2011. *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Culbert, Samuel A. 2010. *Get Rid of the Performance Review!: How Companies Can Stop Intimidating, Start Managing--and Focus on What Really Matters*. Business Plus.

Czerniawska, Fiona. 2016. *Management Consultancy: What Next?* Palgrave.

Dahms, Harry F. 2008. *No Social Science Without Critical Theory*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.

Darling-Hammond, Linda. 1997. *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2007. "Race, Inequality and Educational accountability: The Irony of 'No Child Left Behind'." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 10(3): 245-260.

Davey, Monica. 2012. Teacher's Strike in Chicago Tests Mayor and Union. NYT. Retrieved May 7, 2018. (https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/education/teacher-strike-begins-in-chicago-amid-signs-that-deal-isnt-close.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=077826953A6696FEA7DFA69E610EDF27&gwt=pay)

Davidson-Harden, Adam and Daniel Schugurensky. 2009. "Neoliberalism and Education in Latin America: Entrenched Problems, Emerging Alternatives" Pp. 13-33 in *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives*, edited by D. Hill and E. Rosskam. New York: Routledge.

Davies, W. (2014) *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition.* London: Sage.

Dávila, Arlene M. *Barrio dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

Davis, Angela J. 1996. "Crime and Punishement: Benign Neglect of Racism in the Criminal Justice System." Pp. 1160-2673 in *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America*, edited by M. Tonry. New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Mike. 2006. *Planet of Slums*. New York: Verso.

Dee, Thomas S., and Brian Jacob. 2011. "The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Student Achievement." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 30(3): 418-446.

Delgado-Ramos, Gian Carl and John Saxe-Fernandez. 2009. "World Bank and the Privatization of Public Education: A Mexican Perspective." Pp. 34-52 in *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives*, edited by D. Hill and E. Rosskam. New York: Routledge.

Denzin, Norman. 1970. "Strategies of Multiple Triangulation." *The Research Act in sociology: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Method* 297: 313.

Domhoff, William. 2009. *Who Rules America? Challenges to Corporate and Class Dominance*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Dryfoos, Joy G. 1995. "Full Service Schools: Revolution or Fad?." *Journal of research on adolescence* 5(2): 147-172.

Dryfoos, Joy G., and Sue Maguire. 2002. *Inside Full-Service Community Schools*. Corwin Press.

Dumenil, Gerard and Dominique Levy. 2011. *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Duncan, Greg J., and Richard J. Murnane. 2011. *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Duneier, Mitchell. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Eitzen, Stanley, Baca Zinn, and Kelly Smith. 2012. *Social Problems*. Pearson.

Elbert, Joel. 2017. "Randy Boyd, Wife Earned $30M in Last Two Years, Tax Records Show." Tennessean. Retrieved January 20, 2018. (https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2017/12/28/randy-boyd-wife-earned-30-m-last-two-years-tax-records-show/987177001/)

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. [1995] 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

Enten, Harry. 2018. "Surprised a Teacher's Strike Succeeded in Trump Country? Don't Be." CNN. Retrieved March 10, 2018. (https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/06/politics/enten-teachers-strike/index.html)

Erickson, Megan. 2015. *Class War: The Privatization of Childhood*. Verso Books.

Feagin, Joe. 1998. *The New Urban Paradigm: Critical Perspectives on the City*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Fetterman, David. 2010. *Ethnography: Step-by Step*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fish, Stanley. 2009. "Neoliberalism and Higher Education." *New York Times,*

March 8.

Flory, Josh. 2007. High-Rise Memories of the Andrew Johnson Building. Knox News Sentinel. Retrieved July 1, 2015. (http://archive.knoxnews.com/business/flory-high-rise-memories-of-the-andrew-johnson-ep-412297731-360054371.html/)

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*. Cambridge UP.

Forbes. 2018. “The World’s Billionaires.” Retrieved May 15, 2018. (https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/list/)

Foster, John Bellamy. 1999. "Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology 1." *American Journal of Sociology* 105(2): 366-405.

Foucault, Michel. 1991. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*. Eds. Burchell, Gordon, and Miller. University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2001. L'hermeneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France, 1981-1982. Paris: Gallimard Seuil.

Freeman, Richard. 2004. “What, Me Vote?” Pp. 803-728 in *Social Inequality,* edited by K. Neckerman. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation. 703-728.

Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Galbraith, John K. 1998. *The Affluent Society*. New York: Mariner Books.

Gardner, David P. 1983. "A nation at risk." *Washington, DC: The National Commission on Excellence in Education, US Department of Education* (1983).

Gellert, Paul K., and Jon Shefner. 2009 "People, place and time: How structural fieldwork helps world-systems analysis." *Journal of World-Systems Research*: 193.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984 *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley, CA: U of California Press.

Gintis, Herbert, and Rakesh Khurana. 2007. "Corporate Honesty and Business education: A Behavior Model." *SSRN*.

Giroux, Henry. 2004. *The Terror of Neoliberalism: An Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy*. Herndon, VA: Paradigm Publishers.

Giroux, Henry. 2018. *Pedagogy and the Politics of hope: Theory, Culture, and Schooling: A Critical Reader*. Routledge.

Glaeser, Edward L., Matthew G. Resseger, and Kristina Tobio. 2008. *Urban Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Goldhaber, Dan D., Dominic J. Brewer, Eric R. Eide, and Daniel I. Rees. 1999. "Testing for Sample Selection in the Milwaukee School Choice Experiment." *Economics of Education Review* 18(2): 259-267.

Goldstein, Dana. 2014. *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession*. Anchor.

Gorz, Andre, and Chris Turner. 1989 *Critique of Economic reason*. London: Verso.

Gorz, André, 1976. *The Division of Labour: The Labour Process and Class-Struggle in Modern Capitalism*. Harvester Press.

Gottdiener, Mark and Ray Hutchinson. 1994. *The New Urban Sociology*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gradstein, Mark. 2005. *The Political Economy of Education: Implications for Growth and Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Gramsci, Antonio. 1996. *Prison Notebooks, Volume 2*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Green, Preston C., Bruce D. Baker, Joseph O. Oluwole, and Julie F. Mead. "Are We Heading toward a Charter School Bubble: Lessons from the Subprime Mortgage Crisis." *U. Rich. L. Rev.* 50 (2015): 783.

Gibbons, William. "Tennessee Tussle: The Struggle Over Tennessee's Collective Bargaining Curtailment and Its Potential Future Impact." *Tennessee Journal of Law & Policy* 8(1):142-165.

Greenhouse, Steven. 2012. “In Standoff, Latest Sign of Unions Under Siege.” *New York Times*. Retrieved May 10, 2018. (https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/education/in-chicago-teachers-strike-signs-of-unions-under-siege.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=1A536096338C3F90E28A8873EDF 5C783&gwt=pay)

Groenke, Susan. “Social Reconstructionism and the Roots of Critical Pedagogy: Implications for Teacher Education in the Neoliberal Era.” Pp. 3-17 in *Critical*

Pedagogy and Teacher Education in the Neoliberal Era: Small Openings, edited by S. Groenke and A. Hatch. New York, NY: Springer

Groenke, Susan and Amos Hatch. 2009. *Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education in the Neoliberal Era: Small Openings*. New York, NY: Springer

Guidestar. 2016. “Philanthropy, Voluntarism, and Grantmaking Foundations: Haslam Family Foundation Inc.” Retrieved. April 12, 2018. (https://www.guidestar.org/profile/62-1692007)

Gurney, Joan Neff, and Kathleen J. Tierney. 1982. "Relative Deprivation and Social Movements: A Critical Look at Twenty Years of Theory and Research." *The Sociological Quarterly* 23(1): 33-47.

Harris, Suzy. 2007. *The Governance of Education: How Neo-liberalism is Transforming Policy and Practice*. New York: Continuum.

Hanushek, Eric A., John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin. 1998. *Does Special Education Eaise Academic Achievement for Students with Disabilities?*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

Harvey, David. 2003. “The Right to the City.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27(4): 939-941.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford UP.

Harvey, David. 2010. *Social Justice and the City*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books.

Harvey, David. 2014. *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. Oxford University Press.

Haslam, Bill. 2012. “Haslam: The Right Experience.” Campaign Materials.

Hanushek, Eric A., John F. Kain, and Steven G. Rivkin. 1998. *Does Special Education Eaise Academic Achievement for Students with Disabilities? National Bureau of Economic Research.*

Heyrman, Christine. 1982. “The Fashion Among More Superior People: Charity and Social Change in Provincial New England 1700-1740. American Quarterly 34(2): 107-124.

Hess, Frederick M. 2005. *With the Best of Intentions: How Philanthropy Is Reshaping K-12 Education*. Harvard Education Press. Cambridge, MA.

Hill, Dave and Ravi Kumar. 2009. *Global Neoliberalism and Education and its Consequences*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hill, Dave and Ellen Rosskam. 2009. *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives*. New York: Routledge.

Ho, Karen. 2009. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Horn, Jim and Denise Wilburn. 2013. The Mismeasure of Education. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Huisman, Kimberly. 2008. "’Does This Mean You’re Not Going to Come Visit Me Anymore?’ An Inquiry into an Ethics of Reciprocity and Positionality in Feminist Ethnographic Research." *Sociological Inquiry* 78(3): 372-396.

Hutter, Michael and David Throsby. 2007. *Beyond Price: Value in Culture, Economics, and the Arts*. Cambridge UP.

Illich, Ivan. 1976. *Deschooling Society*. Harmondsworth: Middlesex.

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. “Tennessee Hall Tax Repeal Would Overwhelmingly Benefit the Wealthy, Raise Tennessean’s Federal Tax Bills by $60 million.” Retreived December 18, 2017. (https://itep.org/tennessee-hall-tax-repeal-would-overwhelmingly-benefit-the-wealthy-raise-tennesseans-federal-tax-bil/)

Jacob, Brian A., and Steven D. Levitt. 2003. "Rotten apples: An investigation of the prevalence and predictors of teacher cheating." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118(3): 843-877.

Jessop, Bob. 1998. “The Rise of Governance and the Risk of Failure: The Case of Economic Development.” *International Social Science Journal* 50(155): 29-45.

Jones, Robert G., and Satoris S. Culbertson. 2011. "Why Performance Management will Remain Broken: Authoritarian Communication." *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 4(2):179.

Kee, Robert, F. Rupley, and J Miller. 1989. "Sandia Report SAND89-8009B." *Sandia National Laboratories*.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2003. *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Knox County Education Association. 2011. “KCEA: Stronger Than Ever.” The Advocate. Retrieved July 29, 2015.

(https://issuu.com/jenowen/docs/kcea_advocate_2011_september)

Knox County Schools. 2009. “Building on Strength: Excellence for All Children.” Retrieved July 10, 2014. (https://www.knoxschools.org/cms/lib/TN01917079/Centricity /Domain/1105/KCS-09-Plan-Summary-Final.pdf)

Knox County Schools. 2013. “2013 Teacher Survey.” Retrieved April 17, 2014. (https://mgtvwate.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/teachersurvey.pdf)

Knox County Schools. 2014. “Deepening Our Work: Excellence for Every Child. Five Year Strategic Plan.” Retrieved October 13, 2014. (https://www.knoxschools.org/cms/lib/TN01917079/Centricity/domain/1105/2015-2019%20materials/fullplan-8-20-final.pdf)

Knox County Schools. 2014. “Educational Return on Investment Report: 2012-2013 Program Evaluation.” Office of Accountability. Retrieved May 18, 2014. (https://www.knoxschools.org/cms/lib/TN01917079/Centricity/domain/1044/accountability/2014%20Educational%20Return%20on%20Investment%20Report%20-%20Final%20Version.pdf)

Knox County Schools. 2015. “General Purpose Budget.” Retrieved March 18, 2017. (https://www.knoxschools.org/Page/12550)

Koenig, Thomas and Robert Gogel. 1981. Interlocking Corporate Directorships as a Social Network. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology,* 40(1): 37-50.

Koray Caliskan and Michel Callon, “Economization, Part 1: Shifting Attention from the Economy Towards Processes of Economization,” *Economy and*

Society 38 (2009): 369–98.

Kozol, Jonathan. 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Random House.

Kronick, Robert. 2005. *Full Service Community Schools: Prevention of Delinquency in Students with Mental Illness and/or Poverty*. Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Kronick, Robert, and Nissa Dahlin-Brown. 2010. "Collaboration and prevention: Looking back on eleven years of a university-assisted community school." *Universities and Community Schools*: 45.

Kronick, Robert, Jessica Nina Lester, and D. Gavin Luter. 2013. "Introduction to Higher Education's Role in Public School Reform and Community Engagement." *Peabody Journal of Education* 88(5): 519-524.

Kvale, Steinar. 1996. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Kuttner, Robert. 2013. *Debtor's Prison: The Politics of Austerity Versus Possibility*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Lamis, Alexander. 1999. *Southern Politics in the 1990s*. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press.

Lawson, Hal. 2010. 2010. "An Appreciation and a Selective Enhancement of the Developing Model for University-Assisted Community Schools." *Universities and Community Schools* 8(1/2): 5-20.

Li, Tania. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Translated by E. Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Lipman, Pauline. 2011. *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*. New York: Routledge.

Lorenz, Chris. 2012 “If You’re So Smart, Why are You under Surveillance? Universities, Neoliberalism, and New Public Management.” *Critical Inquiry*: 599-29.

Lowes, David. 2012. *Cuts Privatization and Resistance: Neoliberalism and the Local State 1974-1987*. London: Merlin Press.

Luter, Gavin, Jessica Lester, and Robert Kronick. 2013. "" Remember, It's a Pilot": Exploring the Experiences of Teachers/Staff at a University-Assisted Community School." *School Community Journal* 23(2): 161.

Luter, Gavin and Robert Kronick. 2017. "Community/School/University Partnerships as Catalyzing Reform in Districts and Across the State: The University Assisted Community Schools Project in Knoxville, TN." *Researchgate.* Retrieved May 10, 2018. (Researchgate.net)

Marx, Karl. 1867. “Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1.” Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin.

Mayer, Jane. 2016. *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. New York: Anchor.

Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor, and Kenneth Cukier. 2014. *Learning with Big Data: The Future of Education*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

McAdam, Doug 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford

Mason, Richard and Ian Mitroff. 1981. *Challenging Strategic Planning Assumptions: Theory, Cases, and Techniques*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

McAlevey, Jane. 2018. “Teachers Are Leading the Revolt Against Austerity.” The Nation. Retrieved May 20, 2018. (https://www.thenation.com/article/teachers-are-leading-the-revolt-against-austerity/)

McCracken, Grant. 1988. *The Long Interview*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

McGarity, Thomas O. 2013. *Freedom to Harm: The Lasting Legacy of the Laissez Faire Revival*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP

McIntyre, James. 2013. “Measuring Teacher Performance.” *C-SPAN*. House Education Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education. Retrieved August 12, 2015. (https://www.c-span.org/video/?311237-1/measurement-teacher-performance)

McGoey, Linsey. *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*. Verso Books.

McLaren, Peter. 2000. *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

McLaren, Peter, and Kris Gutierrez. 1997. "Global Politics and Local Antagonisms: Research and Practice as Dissent and Possibility." *Revolutionary multiculturalism: Pedagogies of dissent for the new millennium*: 192-222

McMurtry, John. 1991. “Education and the Market Model.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 25(2): 209-217.

McNeil, Linda. 2000. *Contradictions of school reform: Educational costs of standardized testing*. New York: Routledge

Meadows, Donella. 1994. “Envisioning a Sustainable World.” in *Getting Down to Earth: Practical Applications of Ecological Economics*, edited by R. Costanza, O. Segura, and J. Martinez-Alier. Washington DC: Island Press.

Mills, C Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford UP.

Miller, James Edward. 2014. *War Report on Education.* Retrieved April, 3 2014. (https://bbsradio.com/thewarreport)

Miraftab, Faranak. "Public-Private Partnerships: The Trojan Horse of Neoliberal Development?" *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 24(1): 89-101.

Miron, Gary. 2008. *Educational management organizations*. In: H. Ladd & T. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*. New York: Routledge.

Miron, Gary, and Brooks Applegate. 2009. *Review of “Multiple choice: Charter School Performance in 16 States.”* Boulder, CO and Tempe, AZ: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit.

Mirowski, Philip. 2013. *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books.

Mohan, Giles, and Kristian Stokke. 2000. "Participatory Development and Empowerment: The Dangers of Localism." *Third World Quarterly* 21(2): 247-268.

Muller, Jerry Z., 2018. *The Tyranny of Metrics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Nader, Laura. 1972. “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives gained from Studying Up.” Pp. 284-311 in *Reinventing Anthropology,* edited by D. Hymes. New York: Random House.

National Assessment of Educational Progress. 2003. “America’s charter schools: Results from the NAEP 2003 pilot study.” National Center for Education Statistics.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983. *A Nation at risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Nichols, Sharon L., and David C. Berliner. 2007. *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Nickel, Patricia Mooney, and Angela M. Eikenberry. 2010. "Philanthropy in an Era of Global Governance." New York: Springer.

No Child Left Behind. 2002. "No child left behind act." *Washington, DC: US Department of Education*.

Parthenon Group. 2013. “‘Smarter School Spending:’ Resource Alignment Initiative.” Retrieved December 20, 2014. (https://www.knoxschools.org/cms/lib/TN01917079/Centricity/Domain/958/Smart%20Spending%20Documents/SmartGroupSpending9-16-2013Final.pdf)

Pastrana, Jill Pinkey. 2009. “Legacy Against Possibility: Twenty-Five Years of Neoliberal Policy in Chile.” Pp. 90-108 in *The Developing World and State*

Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives, edited by D. Hill and E. Rosskam. New York: Routledge.

Pattillo, Mary. 2007. *Black on The Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. Chicago: Chicago UP.

Peck, Jamie. 2010. *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*. New York: Oxford UP.

Peck, Jamie, Brenner, & Theodore, N. 2008. "City as Lab. AREA Chicago." *Art/ Research/ Education/Activism* 6.

Peck, Jamie and Adam Tickell. 2002. "Neoliberalizing Space."Antipode 34(3): 380-404.

Peck, Jamie and Adam Tickell. 2007. "Conceptualizing Neoliberalism, Thinking Thatcherism." Pp. 26-50 in *Contesting Neoliberalism: Urban Frontiers*, edited by H. Letiner, J. Peck, and E. Sheppard. New York: Guilford Press.

Peters, Thomas and Robert Waterman. 1982*. Excellence in Management*. Harper Collins.

Petras, Elizabeth McLean and Douglas Porpora. 1993. "Participatory Research: Three Models and an Analysis." The American Sociologist 24(1):107-126.

Piketty, Thomas. 2013. "Capital in the 21st Century." Harvard UP.

Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A. Cloward. 1979. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Vintage Books.

Polanyi, Karl. [1944] 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Polletta, Francesca. 2002. *Freedom is an Endless Meeting. Democracy in American Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Priyadharshini, Esther. 2003. "Coming Unstuck: Thinking Otherwise About ‘Studying up.’" *Anthropology & education quarterly* 34(4): 420-437.

Pulakos, Elaine, and Ryan O’leary. 2011. "Why is Performance Management Broken?" *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 4(2):146-164.

Putnam, Robert D. *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Simon and Schuster.

Quiggin, John 2010. *Zombie Economics: How Dead Ideas Still Walk among Us.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.

Raddon, Mary-Beth. 2008. "Neoliberal legacies: Planned giving and the new philanthropy." *Studies in political economy* 81, no. 1 (2008): 27-48.

Ravitch, Diane. 2013. *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools*. New York: Alfred A. Knopff.

Ravitch, Diane. 2011. *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*. New York: Basic Books.

Ravitch, Diane. 2001 *Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform*. Simon and Schuster.

Reckhow, Sarah. 2013. *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford UP.

Reeves, Richard V. 2-14. *Saving Horatio Alger: Equality, Opportunity, and the American Dream*. Brookings Institution Press.

Reich, Robert. 2012. *Beyond Outrage: What Has Gone Wrong with Our Economy and Our Democracy, and How to Fix It*. New York: Vintage.

Reich, Robert. 2013. “What are Foundations For?” *Boston Review*. Retrieved July 15, 2015. (http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR38.2/ndf_rob_reich_foundations_philanthropy_democracy.php)

Richardson, Jeanita. 2009. *The full-service community school movement: Lessons from the James Adams Community School*. Springer, 2009.

Rikowski, Glenn. 2003. “Schools and the GATS Enigma.” *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 1(1): 1-32.

Robertson, Susan, Karen Mundy, and Antoni Verger. 2012. *Public Private Partnerships in Education: New Actors and Modes of Governance in a Globalizing World*. Northhampton, MA. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Robin, Corey. 2018. “Liberals and the Strike.” *Jacobin*. Retrieved May 2, 2018. (https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/04/oklahoma-teachers-strike-democratic-party-liberalism)

Robinson, William. 2008. *Latin America and Global Capitalism: A Critical Globalization Pespective*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP.

Rockoff, Jonah E. 2004. "The Impact of Individual Teachers on Student Achievement: Evidence from Panel Data." *American Economic Review* 94(2): 247-252.

Ross, Wayne and Rich Gibson. 2007. *Neoliberalism and Education Reform*. Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Rosskam, Ellen. 2009. “Contextualizing Education Liberalization Through Neoliberal Reforms, State Governance, and Stability of Nation-States.” Pp. 1-

12 in *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives*, edited by D. Hill and E. Rosskam. New York: Routledge.

Rouse, Cecilia Elena and Lisa Barrow. 2006. “U.S. Elementary and Secondary Schools: Equalizing Opportunity or Replicating the Status Quo?” *The Future of Children* 16(2): 99-123.

Rubin, Herbert and Irene Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Saltman, Kenneth. 2009. "The rise of venture philanthropy and the ongoing neoliberal assault on public education: The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation." *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 16.

Saltman, Kenneth. 2010.*The Gift of Education: Public Education and Venture Philanthropy*. Springer.

Samuels, Christina. 2011. “Critics Target Growing Army of Broad Leaders.” *Edweek*. Retrieved May 1, 2018. (https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/06/08/33broad_ep.h30.html)

Saunders-Hastings, Emma Mary. 2014. "Private Virtues, Public Vices: Governing Philanthropy." PhD dissertation. Harvard.

Schor, Juliet. 2010. *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*. New York: Penguin Press.

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP.

Scott, Janelle. 2009. "The politics of venture philanthropy in charter school policy and advocacy." *Educational Policy* 23(1): 106-136.

Shefner, Jon. 2008. *The Illusion of Civil Society: Democratization and Community Mobilization in Low-Income Mexico*. University Park, PA: Penn State UP.

Shefner, Jon and Robert Gay. 2002. “The Politics of Field Research: Lessons from Brazil and Mexico.” Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. 27(54):199-213.

Schervish, Paul G. 2003. "Hyperagency and high-tech donors: A new theory of the new philanthropists." Boston, MA: *Boston College, Social Welfare Research Institute*.

Shields, Vickie and Brenda Dervin. 1993. “Sense-making in Feminist Social Science Research: A Call to Enlarge the Methodological Options of Feminist Studies.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 16:65-81.

Shirley, D. 1997. *Community Organizing for Urban school Reform*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Skocpol, Theda. 2011. *Reaching for the New Deal: Ambitious Governance, Economic Meltdown, and Polarized Politics in Obama’s First Two Years*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Sousa Santos, Boaventura de. 2006. *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Smith, Adam. [1776] 2008. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. New York: Oxford UP.

Smith, Carolyn D and William Kornblum. 1996. In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers.

Smith, Melissa M., and Larry Powell. 2014. *Dark Money, Super PACs, and the 2012 Election*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Smith, Neil. [1984] 2008. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. 2nd Edition. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Smith, Neil. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London: Routledge.

Smith, Neil. 2008. "Neoliberalism is Dead, Dominant, Defeatable–Then What." *Human Geography* 1(2): 1-3.

Spears, Andy. 2016. “BEP. BEP 2.0. BEP1.5?” Tennessee Education Report. (http://tnedreport.com/2016/04/bep-bep-2-0-bep-1-5/)

Stacey, Judith. 1988. “Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 11(1): 21-27.

Stiglitz, Joseph. 2012. *The Price of Inequality: How Today’s Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.

Swanson, Christopher, and Janelle Barlage. 2006. "Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy." *Editorial Projects in Education*.

Sycamore Institute. 2018. Healthy Debate 2018: Understanding Tennessee’s Budget.” Retrieved February 21, 2018. (https://www.sycamoreinstitutetn.org/2018/01/05/healthy-debate-budget/)

Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury. 2012. “Teacher Planning Time in Tennessee: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Planning Time Laws,

Policies, Initiatives and Practice." OREA: Offices Of Research and Accountability. Retrieved June 3, 2015. (http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/Repository/RE/Teacher%20Planning%20Time%20Final.pdf)

Tennessee Department of Education. "State Report Card." Retrieved April 20, 2018 (https://www.tn.gov/education/data/report-card.html)

Tennessee Education Association. 2015. "Salary Rankings." Retrieved December 5, 2017. (http://teateachers.org/salary-data)

Thompson, E. P. 1974. "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture." *Journal of Social History* 7(4): 382:405.

Tolich, Martin and Carl Davidson. 1999. *Starging Fieldwork: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Work in New Zealand*. New York: Oxford UP.

University of Tennessee. 2016. "UT Dedicates Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research." Campus News. Retrieved February 6, 2017. (https://news.utk.edu/2016/04/18/ut-dedicates-boyd-center-business-economic-research/)

Vande Panne, Valerie. 2018. "How Privatization Sparked the Massive Oklahoma Teacher Uprising." *In These Times*. Retrieved June 2, 2018. (http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/21055/Oklahoma-privatization-teachers-workers-austerity-strike-west-virginia)

Venugopal, Rajesh. 2014. "The Antinomies of Neoliberalism." LSE.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

Walsh, Catherine. 2010. “Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional Arrangements and (de)Colonial Entanglements.” *Development* 53(1): 15-21.

Ward, Steven C. 2012. *Neoliberalism and the Global Restructuring of Knowledge and Education*. New York: Routledge.

Warren, Carol A. B. 2002. “Qualitative Interviewing.” Pp. 83-101 in *Handbook of Interview Research*, edited by J. Gubrium and J. Holstein. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

WATE 6 News. “Teacher Roundtable.” Retrieved March 8, 2014. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jygleUfGkk8)

Weiss, Robert. 1995. *Learning From Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press.

Wilson, Frank Harold. 1996. *Race, Class, and the Postindustrial City: William Julius Wilson and the Promise of Sociology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Wilson, William Julius. [1978] 2012. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, William Julius. [1987] 2012. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Winters, Jeffery. 2011. *Oligarchy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wolcott, Harry. 1999. *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

VITA

William Taylor grew up in southwest Virginia. He attended Hampden-Sydney College where he played varsity basketball and graduated *summa cum laude*. He has worked as a trim carpenter, taught English at a boy's home in Honduras, assisted with economic development projects in Central America, and worked for a marketing firm in Nashville, Tennessee. He completed his PhD in Sociology at the University of Tennessee in 2018 while teaching sociology full-time at Chattanooga State Community College.