REGIMES, REFORM, AND RACE:
THE POLITICS OF CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH
AND SUSTAINABILITY IN HARLEM

by

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ABSTRACT

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The complex and thorny relationship between school-district leaders, sub-city political and community figures and teachers’ unions on the subject of charter schools- an interaction fraught with racially charged language and tactics steeped in civil rights-era mobilization - elicits skepticism about the motives of education reformers and their view of minority populations. In this study I unpack the local politics around tacit and overt racial appeals in support of New York City charter schools with particular attention to Harlem, New York and periods when the sustainability of these schools, and long-term education reforms, were endangered by changes in the political and legislative landscape. This dissertation answers two key questions: How did the Bloomberg-era governing coalition and charter advocates in New York City use their political influence and resources to expand and sustain charter schools as a sector; and how does a community with strong historic and cultural narratives around race, education and political activism, respond to attempts to enshrine externally organized school reforms? To answer these questions, I employ a case study analysis and rely on Regime Theory to tell the story of the Mayoral administration of Michael Bloomberg and the cadre of charter leaders, philanthropies and wealthy donors whose collective activity created a climate for growth of the sector. I then construct a lens through which we may view African American leadership as having varied
temporal and philosophical associations to the civil rights movement, shedding light on how some, with stronger ties to the business community, may be amenable to school choice policies.

Results show that a pro-charter regime in New York City rapidly expanded the sector using colocation and through attempts to elect charter-friendly members of the state legislature, through direct campaign donations and targeted parent organizing. While the latter largely failed as a means to obtain electoral influence, a shift in tactics enabled charter leaders to keep pro-union Democrats from dominating the charter policy debate. In Harlem, the community’s response was mixed. While demand for seats increased, so did the tension as activists and elected officials expressed concern over loss of traditional public-school spaces which doubled as community-based institutions, and encroachment on their long-held view of self-deterministic education policy. Much of the pushback by the community may also be a proxy for the effects of rapid gentrification occurring in the neighborhood, exacerbating tensions over external influence in local communities and a disruption of social capital. Finally, I show that through the loss of political allies at City Hall, in the State legislature, and a reduction in the political theater around parent mobilization, the charter sector locally and nationally may experience slowed growth in terms of charter authorization, public support and applications by potential students.
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Dedication

To my mother, father and grandmother who came to this country with nothing, so I could have everything.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

That which commend the charter school movement to such a daunting task is the diversity of the personnel it has attracted to its ranks: former teachers, clergy, social change activists, lawyers, philanthropists, community organizers and parents of school-age children (Bounds & Walker, 2014).

-Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

Charter schools emerged as the latest form of school choice marketed largely to economically disadvantaged households, but their presence has often roiled the politics of education at the national, state, district and neighborhood levels. Originally framed as rejections of the highly placed-based traditional public schools, the broader discussion of charters has downplayed the relationship between charter schools, the particular places in which they are located and the local politics they engender. This dissertation explores the notion that oftentimes in evaluations of public policy, \textit{process} can be just as important as \textit{outcomes}. As charters began to take root in neighborhoods like Harlem with narratives inextricably tied to race, residents already anxious about rapid demographic changes wrestled with the political and social ramifications of charter growth even while demand for seats remains high.
The Challenge of Creating Something New in Historic Spaces

C.B.J. Snyder became New York City’s Superintendent of School Buildings in 1891 and his innovative H-shaped designs allowed light and air to flow freely, creating functional spaces (Cutler, 1989) meant to be “architectural centerpieces of the neighborhoods in which they were built”. ¹ Snyder’s modernizations echoed a common theme of school construction at the time which admonished architects to:

Let the school building, then, be solidly constructed…let it be cheerful and attractive with-out and within, well placed and supplied with adequate playgrounds and pleasant surrounding and it will be not only a source of pride, but a blessing to the community ²

One of Snyder’s schools, The Wadleigh High School for Girls, opened in 1902 on 114th Street in Harlem between 7th and 8th Avenues (now known as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. and Frederick Douglass Blvd respectively) and is beloved among Harlem residents. The impressive structure was named for Lydia F. Wadleigh, a pioneer in education for women (Gill, 2011) who became principal of the “old Girls High School” on 12th Street in Greenwich Village amid bitter opposition to her insistence that more institutions provide formal education to women.³

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Construction of Wadleigh began toward the end of Harlem’s building boom in the late 1800s when German, Irish and Italian residents formed a solid majority, and the Catholic Church established seven parishes to accommodate these populations. During that time, Black New Yorkers found themselves increasingly unwelcome below 96th street and began moving uptown, joining a growing number of immigrants from the West Indies, who were largely Catholic. The politics of the community shifted with these new residents and outside institutions took notice. The Catholic Church found Harlem to be fertile ground for organizing efforts and initiated a decades-long campaign to create faith-based schools and programs for Harlem’s new residents. Tammany Hall and the Democrats looked to these new populations also, particularly West Indians, as diminishing political power depleted their ranks (Moore, 2003). Later, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and Black migration from the South, which began in earnest during the 1930s, pushed Harlem to its seams and spurred white flight.

Throughout Wadleigh’s 116 years of operation, Harlem experienced periods of growth, decline and revitalization. Wadleigh changed with the times, eventually welcoming co-educational instruction in 1954 – the same year Central Harlem recorded its highest concentration of black residents at 98% (233,000 black residents).4

Campaigns for community-centric policy in the 1960s reflected national movements of the time but similar control over the physical space seemed elusive as a massive wave of disinvestment, decline and abandonment descended like a pall over a once bustling community. Wadleigh fell into disrepair and garnered a ranking as one of the most decrepit schools in the City. By the mid 1970s, 30% of the black population moved out of the neighborhood (Neumann, 2017).

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Twenty years later, both Wadleigh and Harlem began a dramatic transformation. In 1994, a rebranded and thoroughly renovated building reopened with three smaller schools under the Wadleigh umbrella dedicated to writing and publishing, science and technology, and the arts. That same year, New York City conferred landmark status on the structure. Wadleigh’s zip code, 10026, saw median income rise from $22,491 in 2000 to $52,082 in 2017. Across the street, a row of federally funded low-rise apartments for the poor was gutted and rehabilitated into mixed income units with only 147 of the original 452 dwellings available for publicly subsidized housing. To the West on Frederick Douglass Blvd., new construction complements Harlem’s restaurant row, which boasts haute cuisine in the form of reimagined soul food though price points remain prohibitive for most long-time residents.

At the other end of the block on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd, older residents can still find a home among the grand pre-war buildings, but landlords are feeling pressure from changes occurring four blocks South on 110th street where multi-million-dollar condominiums adorn the northern border of Central Park. One such building on the corner of Frederick Douglass and 110th St. (now called Central Park North) boasts the sale of a 627 square foot one-bedroom for close to 1 million dollars.

Tensions mounted over substantial changes within Wadleigh’s walls as well. Truncation (the trimming of grades) due to low academic performance and decreasing enrollment remains a constant threat such that Wadleigh’s three schools were forced to condense into one- the Wadleigh Secondary School for the Performing & Visual Arts. But the City placed two new schools in the building: Frederick Douglass Academy II and Success Academy Harlem West

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5 U.S. Census Data on median income in the 10026 zip code in 2000 and ACS from 2017
7 https://streeteasy.com/building/circa-central-park#tab_building_detail=2
Charter School. Parents and community leaders accuse New York City’s Department of Education (DOE) of routinely discouraging new registrants in an effort to create more room for the charter school’s expansion. Preferential treatment for Success is alleged and many notice the disparities: Windows in classroom doors at Success are smaller - allegedly to limit distractions; the paint is fresh, and the lights are brighter while Wadleigh’s resources dwindle. Activists announced a reprieve at a press conference that will keep Wadleigh’s middle school open a bit longer, but more conflict lies ahead. State Senator Brian Benjamin remarked, “Wadleigh Middle School is part of Harlem’s integrity; it’s part of Harlem’s culture”, and Hazel Dukes, President of the New York State Conference of the NAACP added, “We don’t need any more charter schools. We don’t need them to come in and be the answer”.8

Charter advocates led by Success Academies CEO Eva Moskowitz argue their case for more charter seats using increasing student achievement scores while citing data not dissimilar from recent research at the Manhattan Institute that found 192 buildings in the City had 300 empty classroom seats during the 2016-2017 school year. While charter school enrollment continues to increase, Mayor de Blasio approved only 59 colocations in his first 5 years in office compared to Mayor Michael Bloomberg who authorized 150 in the final five years of his administration (Sahm, 2018).

A 2016 Quinnipiac Poll found 45% of New York City voters believed Mayor de Blasio should increase the number of charter schools, while only 21% say he should reduce it (27% want to see it remain at its current level). Eagerness for change began to grow. For the first time, over half of voters (51%) said they would send their school-aged children to a charter

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8 McQueen, Gregg. (May 2, 2018). Wadleigh is withdrawn: Harlem middle school wins last-minute reprieve. Manhattan Times
school. Support for charters among voters coincided with a relatively low 46% approval of the Mayor’s stewardship of the school system - 65% feel he should share authority rather than maintain sole control. Though the mechanism for such action has been unclear, State lawmakers are often pressured to reduce the Mayor’s control over schools by creating legislation to require their approval for certain policy modifications.

Meanwhile, the charter sector has more than tripled over the last ten years and considering all choice options – charter, private, parochial and gifted and talented (G&T) schools - Black and Latino parents exit the traditional public-school system in favor of schools with higher achievement scores at an astonishing rate. Nearly 60 percent of all Black children opted out of their zoned schools in the 2016/2017 school year – up from 38% ten years ago -and are more likely to go to a charter school than their white or Asian counterparts who typically choose G&T programs. Black students are roughly one quarter of all kindergartners in public schools but comprise over one-third of all school choosers. Up to 39% of Hispanics exited traditional public schools in 2016-17. Only 29% of white and 28% of Asian kindergarten children left their zoned schools.

Today, 227 charter schools educate 114,000 of the city’s children. Of all charter schools, 49 are in Harlem (school districts 4 and 5; portions of 3 and 6) dominated by Success Academy schools (11), Democracy Prep schools (7), and Harlem Village Academies (5). KIPP and HCZ

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9 Quinnipiac University Poll. (August 2, 2016) New York City Voters Oppose Mayor School Control 3-1, Quinnipiac University Poll Finds; De Blasio Gets Low Marks On Ethics Retrieved from https://poll.qu.edu/new-york-city/release-detail?ReleaseID=2370

10 Choice in this context is not limited to charter schools and include gifted and talented programs, un-zoned schools and dual language schools though most of those children who exit will attend a charter.

each have 3 schools. A French language school sits just around the corner from the Harlem Hebrew Academy - each with a majority minority (African, African-American, and Latino) student body.

Still, despite the fact that charters only educate roughly 10% of the K-12 student population and account for only 12% of all schools in the City, education activists argue their rapid growth and lack of accountability exacts a deleterious toll on the communities in which they serve, the children who are unable to attend, and those counseled-out for various disciplinary or academic reasons. Eva Moskowitz, a handful of African American celebrities and local parents are among the most visible defenders of the movement and receive frequent criticism for failing to seek support among local leaders. The concerns of parents, activists and elected officials within, and outside of, New York City have propagated for some time, motivating one of the nation’s oldest and most respected organizations dedicated to civil rights, to engage formally on the issue. In October 2016, the NAACP’s national board ratified a resolution calling for a moratorium on charter schools using unusually strong language. According to the resolution:

- charter schools have been a rapidly growing sector of the education system, targeting low-income areas and communities of color

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13 New York City Charter School Center website Retrieved from: (http://www.nyccharterschools.org/sites/default/files/resources/factsheet-Growth-Demand.pdf)

14 From the NYC Department of Education and NYC Center for Charter Excellence data. Charter schools for 2015/2016 school year enroll 106,600 students compared to 1,038,727 total student population. There are 216 charter schools across the 5 boroughs.
• their privately appointed boards do not represent the public yet make decisions about how public funds are spent

• charter schools have contributed to the increased segregation rather than diverse integration of our public-school system

• research and reports have documented disproportionately high use of punitive and exclusionary discipline in addition to differential enrollment practices that violate protections of student rights for public schooling

• research and civil rights organizations have documented violations of parent and children's rights, conflicts of interest, fiscal mismanagement, and psychologically harmful environments within several 15

That the nation’s oldest civil rights organization has taken a forceful public and unprecedented position against charter schools that largely serve parents and children of color in urban areas, signals the complexity of school choice as a public policy issue. It also emphasizes the knotty relationship between school-district leaders and administrators, sub-city political and community figures and teachers’ unions - an interaction fraught with racially charged language, tactics steeped in civil rights-era mobilization, and vigorous skepticism about the motives of reformers and their view of minority populations.

This dissertation answers two key questions arising from the complicated relationship between governing coalitions, private market interests, minority populations and electoral coalitions in the close quarters of sub-city politics:

• How did the Bloomberg-era governing coalition and charter advocates in New York City use their political influence and resources to expand charter schools as a sector and survive threats to their sustainability, including a change in Mayoral Administrations from one highly supportive of charter expansion to one of skepticism and restraint; and
• How does a community with strong racial and cultural narratives entwined with education and political activism, respond to attempts to enshrine externally organized school reforms, and what does the tension reveal about challenges ahead for school choice?

Consider the polarizing effect of negative racial imagery invoked by one charter advocate. In a private meeting with New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, State Senate Democratic Leader (now Senate Majority Leader) Andrea Stewart Cousins, an African American woman, reportedly took the Governor to task for his perceived racial/gender insensitivity on an issue unrelated to school choice. Using the incident to make a case that many Black leaders are politically unsophisticated and obstructionist when engaging public education, Loeb, a white hedge-fund manager and Chair of Success Academies Schools, used a 2017 Facebook post to advocate for the economic opportunity and mobility charters provide. He added that, “hypocrites like Stewart-Cousins who pay fealty to powerful union thugs and bosses do more damage to people of color than anyone who has ever donned a hood.”

Loeb quickly resigned his board position after the inflammatory remarks surfaced. Earlier, President of Democrats for Education Reform, Shavar Jeffries, an African American

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who has voiced strong opposition to the Trump Administration’s policies, resigned from the Success Board after he appeared to come to loggerheads with Eva Moskowitz over her relationship with the President and controversial Secretary of Education Betsy Devos.17

Away from the charter movement’s more public and controversial battles, substantial shifts in sub-city politics, apprehension over gentrification and aging political networks aggravate anxieties among residents such that schools like Wadleigh lie physically and thematically at the nexus of Harlem’s transition – or revitalization. Its bricks and mortar absorb the community’s politics, culture and the aggregated, sometimes fluctuating, narratives of its residents, from the neighborhood’s incomparability in African American political and cultural authority to, according to one article, the end of Black Harlem18 through the systemic and methodical crowding out of local interests.

Concerned residents argue that education policy reforms should center on the relationship between school and community and hold reformers accountable for failing to forge strong alliances between school and families over time (M. Orr, 1999). Will failing to do so lead to loss of black identity as expressed and institutionalized in a community’s social and built environments – like Wadleigh (Hyra, 2017)?

The political activity of government leaders, public institutions, elected and appointed leaders nationally, in state capitals, and in select districts is well documented with respect to school choice and charter schools. There is also ample research on teacher quality, curriculum, pedagogy, funding and the effect of charters on student achievement. Another set of literature


looks at parents’ influence on government and non-government actors when adequately cultivated. But little research is done on the sub-city politics of parents, community leaders and local elected officials in dialogue and debate around school choice with focus on the politics of implementation and the prioritization of certain powerful interests (Ferman, 2017).

That is, if the macro politics of education describes the interplay between aggregated mobilized parents, activists and the institutions that supply and manage education services at the state and district level, a turn to policymaking and effects on sub-city institutions and social networks in this study will reveal how parents negotiate the local politics of school choice as well as their decision to mobilize around that issue. How much of their decision to exit, exercise their voice or remain loyal to the public-school system is based upon conversations with peers, the influence of community groups, or political leadership?

By highlighting voter and parent responses to charter advocates, school leaders and Bloomberg Administration appointees who attempted to localize their political influence from outside the community, this dissertation illustrates how governing regime participants endeavored to sway micro political behavior by deploying resources to fend off attacks on school reforms. It also demonstrated that while Regime Theory is a useful frame to explain how cities are governed, it provides little accounting for the destabilizing effect of rapid and often disruptive changes in political order that regime participants encounter in highly charged political environments.

I also show that the Harlem community’s reaction to regime activity stems from its strong racial, historic and cultural narratives. While regimes vigorously recruit local allies, their success in implementing reforms may be predicated on diffuse local political power and a subgroup of black political leadership openly amenable to the role of private interests in shaping policy as opposed to those who have garnered substantial political clout from their affiliation with civil
rights era-mobilization – a gulf exacerbated by gentrification. The research will explain to a lesser extent how residents make political decisions based on their social networks – friends, family relationships and purposefully selected relationships, and political networks – individuals with whom one discusses politics, elections and governance (Sinclair, 2012).

**Framework of the Dissertation**

The purpose of this study is to unpack the local politics around tacit and overt racial appeals in support of New York City charter schools with particular attention to periods when the sustainability of these schools, and long-term education reforms, were endangered by changes in the political and legislative landscape. To do so, I relied on prior and ongoing professional involvement with Harlem’s political leadership and engagement in the school choice community through board membership and advocacy. Significant steps were taken to construct a study that would gather data consistent with accepted standards and allow for free-flowing and unfettered dialogue with respondents through interviews.

I begin the study by delving into relevant concepts and themes of governance, ultimately relying on Regime Theory to tell the story of these charter advocates with elite influence in the Bloomberg administration. Regime Theory also considers that elite philanthropies and business leaders take a proactive role engaging the State in policy-making though this relationship is reciprocal as elected officials often need, and solicit the support of, the private sector to alleviate political conflicts, fiscal stresses or engage their own reelection imperatives. Regimes themselves constitute patterned and relatively stable relationships among formal and informal actors and institutions. Resulting coalitions represent a relatively secure alliance between mutually supportive government and non-government actors, each sharing the responsibility to implement policy, and poised to guard against potential threats to their sustainability.
Regime theorist Clarence Stone (C. N. Stone, 1980; C. N. Stone, 1989; C. N. Stone, 1998) eventually incorporates Path Dependence (C. N. Stone, 2004, 2015), a subtopic within APD, adding important historical context to the analysis of local racial and education politics. I adapt Path Dependence to education policy by tracing the history of major reforms, each relying upon the positive or negative feedback from previous policies, leading to the emergence of neoliberal politics and its influence on education and city governance. The dissertation looks specifically at New York City’s brand of neoliberalism beginning with Republican Rudy Giuliani’s tenure as Mayor and his response to high crime and racial tensions in favor of pro-development, law and order, and anti-union positions which roiled activists and communities of color, paving the way for attempts at marketization of public spaces including schools.

I then construct a lens through which we may view African American leadership as having varied temporal and philosophical associations to the civil rights movement, shedding light on how younger African American leaders manage expectations of shared fate when at times they must rely on the private sector to play a key role in achieving equity outcomes. While ample political science literature discusses the engagement of political leaders in their own districts relative to majority white populations (within district) or at the city and state level, I reveal challenges for post Obama candidates with stronger ties to the business community in primaries against older leaders more directly connected to civil rights movement. Sub-city models of black leadership in competition with prevailing themes and ideologies of political activism prove critical to the policy environment in which charter advocates chose to operate.

The dissertation will train its focus on how charter schools developed in New York State and the conversations, concerns and aspirations for charter policy in New York City. Elites were careful to assuage concerns about a center-right policy focused on communities of color, typically represented by liberals, but rapid expansion required a strong movement that ultimately
agitated leaders and activists whose political networks were replete with union-allied organizations. I argue that much of that dynamic came to focus in two instances when charter advocates sensed a threat to their sustainability. The first transpired during discussions around the federally funded Race to the Top program and its implementation in the State. The second occurred during transition from Republican/Independent Mayor Michael Bloomberg to liberal/progressive Bill de Blasio who was viewed as anti-charter by advocates.

This investigation employs a case study of the Harlem community and asks: How did charter advocates respond to sustainability threats, were they successful, and how was their activity perceived by Harlem residents? I argue that while charter advocates enjoyed strategic advantages by means of elite access and influence during the Bloomberg Administration, attempts to perpetuate reforms by engaging larger, more diverse grassroots populations failed. In terms of regime theory, they had power to engage and sway policy outcomes through elites but not power over voters.
Chapter 2
Regimes, African American Leadership and the Emergence of Charter Schools:
A Theoretical and Contextual Review

*Regimes* constitute patterned and relatively stable relationships among formal and informal actors and institutions to meticulously align ideas, interests and the bureaucracy toward producing substantial policy change (P. J. McGuinn, 2006; Pierson, 2011). Civic capacity among groups in a regime environment can be agenda specific, non-transferable, dependent on local history, and greatly impacted by racial and class dynamics (C. N. Stone, 1986) which can lead to substantial inequality. In education policy, new elite actors in regime environments make good use of their power to direct specific narratives and alter long-established bureaucratic arrangements (Ferman, 2017). Long term tactics and development strategies prevail but elites are careful to monitor escalating electoral power (C. N. Stone, 1993) at the sub-city level that may imperil their potential reforms.

Regime theory also considers that philanthropies and business leaders take a strong proactive role engaging political figures in policy-making though this relationship is reciprocal as elected officials often need, and solicit the support of, the private sector to alleviate political conflicts, fiscal stresses or satisfy their own reelection imperatives. For elites, building relationships with state lawmakers and institutions makes sense since power, influence, and broad policy directions often outlast shifts in local administration, leadership, and the adoption or abandonment of particular programs with newly elected leaders.

When race and class intersect to threaten policy goals, elites mobilize resources to convert their institutional power into political power (Imboscio, 1997; M. E. Orr & Stoker, 1994) or else risk disengagement from the agreed-upon agenda. Hard-fought cooperation between elites and local leaders notwithstanding, anxiety between activists seeking economic
equality and elites seeking efficiencies in government, may force regime actors to retool policy should a direct path to their goals prove untenable (Jones-Correa & Wong, 2015). Despite attempts to quell conflicts that could spur electoral mobilization against their interests, elites are often viewed as having the potential to abuse or misuse their power, diminishing the probability of authentic relationship-building with minority populations (Judge, Stoker, & Wolman, 1995).

Rather than aggravate political cleavages, regimes can choose to cultivate stronger relationships with vulnerable communities by bringing more of their leaders and institutions into the regime itself. Clarence Stone’s work in Atlanta sheds light on how big city public officials like former Mayor Maynard Jackson or U.S. Senator (former Newark Mayor) Cory Booker become attracted to private businesses while simultaneously encouraging the black middle class to engage - raising the prospect of growing and developing a black elite as a byproduct by expanding the regime itself to include those populations. The new informal arrangement becomes useful in managing conflict, and relinquishes electoral control to localized points of power (C. N. Stone, 1989), so that these communities were able to become part of a governing coalition with impact on local policy. Using Atlanta and other cities, Stone identifies four regime typologies:

Table 1. Regime Typologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintenance Regimes</th>
<th>Concerned mostly about status quo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development Regimes</td>
<td>Promote growth and economic development by engaging changes in land use and zoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class Progressive</td>
<td>Promote a mix of development, quality of life and liberal public policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-class Expansion</td>
<td>Largely hypothetical but focus on opportunity rather than simply redistributive policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applying regime typologies based largely on a city’s economic, political and social characteristics are difficult. Mayoral policy priorities, the composition of electoral coalitions, the role of government and the willingness of free market leaders to assist in governance vary and complicate empirical efforts to uncover cross-city patterns (J. S. Davies, 2002). Furthermore, based on typologies, regimes promote policies to affect change among defined groups with substantial social capital among them, such as the middle class, but policies like education reform and charter school expansion engage historic cleavages between mayoral and district leaders, parents and the poor; and between activists and school districts. Conflicts on multiple planes involving many constituencies may require long-term attention and deal-making which could persist through multiple mayoral administrations before any policy is fully absorbed by a district. Stone was not unmindful of such critiques and subsequently updated regime analysis by linking it to American Political Development (APD) and path dependence to allow for political, social and economic change even while the stability of the coalition is being hardened (Orren & Skowronek, 2004). This framing provides greater collaborative flexibility to Stone’s regimes despite the fragmented power of participants (Mossberger & Stoker, 2001), and strengthens Stone’s assertion that regimes will have power to (act) rather than power over (others, “social control”) (C. N. Stone, 1989).

**History Matters: Path Dependence and Education Reform**

APD’s explanatory power in the development of institutions reinforces Regime theory despite ambiguity about where in history the current policy originated. A subset of that genre, path dependence, strengthens the case that history matters. Current and future decisions depend on the path of previous states and action (Patashnik, 2003; Pierson, 2000) allowing researchers to investigate the role that shocks and events of varying magnitude play in shaping institutions,
policies and even the actions of key decision-makers (David, 1994). Additionally, the scope should be widened to include how those variables interact with one another, and their propensity to stimulate shocks themselves. Given the potential for subjective selection of the parameters of analysis, researchers remain mindful of potential challenges to the theory and exercise caution in their evaluation of policies themselves or their impact on target populations along a political and policy continuum.

Borrowing terminology from the field of economics, increasing returns lead to path dependence – that is, positive political and electoral feedback from incremental policy adjustments over time increases the likelihood that those policies will persist in some form, rather than be substantially altered or ended (Arthur, 1989). Similarly, a community’s cultural and political history greatly impacts responses to policy (education reform, for example) and path dependence allows for an analysis of why those reactions occur and why they may persist. Considering the impact of the preceding factors collectively, policy change will likely follow a narrow path along a historic continuum of activism, legal frames and institutional resilience. New public policies are often guided by such constraints placed on them, and political leaders are mindful of the cost of alternatives manifested in union contracts they negotiate, federal and state regulations to which they must adhere, their credit claiming and re-election imperatives, or significant collective action. Furthermore, lack of consensus about the origins of problems and potential solutions, a preponderance of nonprofessional legislatures, high incumbency rates and the rise of issue-networks (like that of the school choice community) constrict policy toward a status quo (Jacobsen, 2006).

The durability of employment regimes, may also act as a restraint against substantial policy change and as such, unions, state legislatures and the courts play increasingly complex roles (J. R. Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedespleaux, 1999) in mediating arrangements between business
leaders and government officials or among local actors (Burns, 2003; C. N. Stone, 1998), which create limitations to which policies adhere. Chubb & Moe and Orr identified the rigidity of education institutions as the culprit. The supply of education services has changed little for the vast majority of students and parents. Policy makers, in an effort to pursue broad-based positive feedback, rework and layer historically successful policies that enhance confrontation. But even as researchers attempt to define the role of historical settings and the ambitions of private actors to lock-in specific policy tracks to the exclusion of others (Gilens & Page, 2014; Sharkansky, 1967), the power of path dependence as an analytic tool is tempered by unpredictability and its vulnerability to exogenous forces, making elected and appointed leaders wary of activities that endanger their ambitions (Patashnik & Zelizer, 2009).

Depending on their priorities and perhaps in response to unfavorable feedback, governments and state-level actors can alter institutional arrangements and weaken the influence of local activists, reshaping governing regimes in favor of policies created and implemented outside of those constraints. Any policy change, therefore, will be a response to the strongest users of political power - typically elites – who likely suffer little political cost among their peers (certainly none electorally) and whose activity can more quickly resolve political conflict among or between politically stratified groups.

The belief (often by the private sector itself) that the free market can help government solve problems of inefficiency in school systems is an attempt to translate success in land development, for example, into reform. Elites view themselves as able to dismantle inelastic constructs like employment regimes to avoid policy churn and move beyond collapses in problem agreement by acting unilaterally, circumventing a form of cognitive dissonance among stakeholders who cannot agree on best solutions (Cahn, 2012; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Despite regime attempts to mute concerns over privatization (Burns, 2003; J. R. Henig et al.,
1999; C. N. Stone, 1998), elite-driven education policy adoption is often blunted by enduring local historical components: cultural narratives, significant collective activity, race, or policies that resolved (even temporarily) debates between governing regimes and electoral regimes. Elite-led quick fixes to avoid these confrontations distract attention from such crucial issues as improving instruction, building positive school cultures, and encouraging and rewarding professionalism (C. N. Stone & Sanders, 1987).

Reforms - even those initiated elsewhere - play out differently in different districts and neighborhoods where they are interpreted, reinterpreted, and sometimes resisted based on how well or how poorly they align with local culture and needs. Coupling regime theory and path dependence to state and urban politics seems fitting since it allows examination of local narratives and the residents that helped shape them, ultimately revealing the path along which current education initiatives developed.

The aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education I, II and subsequent litigation around integration radically changed the population of public schools in highly segregated districts. Attempts at rapid restructuring of governance and the busing of students from black neighborhoods into white were met with a logjam of legal battles, violence and other forms of resistance.

While Brown lifted restrictions on where black kids could go to school within those legislative boundaries, white districts and families sought further protections from growing diversity and began to flee neighborhoods, creating a prolonged era of white flight. Red-lining, neglect by administrative leaders and other barriers ensured that predominantly black districts stayed poor. Legal restrictions that held funding formulas intact and reinforced regulations around zoned schools kept students mired in underfunded and inadequate schools. Parent
engagement within communities impacted by Brown’s mandates and subsequent white flight contributed substantially to enduring local narratives focused on system-wide equity.

Later, Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty and Great Society programs sought to address many of these concerns with funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Title I funds for poor schools, Head Start and other targeted programs expanded education equity geographically and racially. Aid for disabled children and bilingual education expanded in subsequent additions to the bill.

But in 1983, A Nation at Risk would profoundly change the philosophy behind education consumption. The report authored by the Department of Education for President Ronald Reagan was scathing in its repudiation of, in their view, complacency among educators and schools in not meeting the challenges of globalization and heightened economic competition with Japan and the Soviet Union. It also outlined several major policy changes that ultimately turned students into consumers of education and units of human capital development (Labaree, 1997). Even with this renewed effort to radically change education delivery, and the eventual reauthorization of ESEA with No Child Left Behind in 2001 (NCLB), policies may have shifted but entrenched governance structures in states and cities were perpetuated by strong principal/agent relationships.

On one hand, the reform of urban public school systems is almost always on the local agenda (Elmore, 1990; Hess, 1999). On the other hand, true reforms of urban school systems are elusive. Not only is there considerable disagreement about which educational reforms are appropriate for the problems observed in each district, but there are also very few success stories from which to draw inferences, leading to policy churn—a constant push for reform resulting in a reversion to an equilibrium state. Professional and institutional incentives discouraged policymakers from proposing effective reforms while encouraging them to pursue more
symbolic measures that created only modest improvements in education outcomes. Since
districts continually pursue new solutions in a start-and-stop, chaotic fashion rather than
committing to a multifaceted, integrated approach, little can be done to truly nationalize the
reforms (Hess, 1999; M. Marschall & Shah, 2005).

**Bringing in Political Trust**

If path dependence is a useful addendum to regime theory, political trust and legitimacy
add support to the discussion of regimes and sub-city political engagement. The link between
residents and governmental institutions and policies requires varying levels of political trust,
legitimacy, and social capital. *Particularized trust* is micro-level and differentiated by
immutable factors like race, ethnicity, geographic boundaries and is confined to intimate
relationships between family members, close friends or groups with strong, perhaps historic,
shared interests. These tight-knit groups band together in defense of their interests against
outsiders (M. E. Warren, 1999) and become stronger by repeated interaction with successful
cooperation (M. J. Marschall & Stolle, 2004). *Generalized trust* exists at the macro-level of
political and governmental action and involves broad interdependent social networks and
institutions. To understand this relationship, consider how a parent may feel about his/her
child’s school separate from how the school system as a whole is perceived; or how a voter may
support her member of Congress versus their overall favorability of Congress as a legislative
body.

Trust itself can be viewed at the micro- and macro-level when government pursues goals
upon which similarly situated groups or individuals agree, leading these groups to believe that
government institutions behave in line with their preferences (Hetherington, 2005). But if
government wishes to align the preferences of diverse populations with their own – particularly
those neighborhoods whose history with government institutions is fraught with tension – those relationships will be difficult to forge without engaging gatekeepers. Gatekeepers - political leaders, clergy members and others with strong local standing - play a substantial role in converting particular trust to generalized trust by leveraging the power and resources of regime participants in communities (Conover, 1988; Owens, 2008).

Political trust has the same theoretical relationship to political capital that social trust has to social capital and encompasses civic-mindedness, participation, concern for the public good and the ability to compromise. Characteristics of the individual matter but so do social interactions in determining trustworthiness. Reinforcing the link between neighborhood and social organizations, racial composition and feelings of alienation produce social and psychological responses that lead to degrees of trust or mistrust.

An important question for this dissertation is whether regime participants – perhaps through gatekeepers - convinced local residents that their shared fate and localized intimacy are points of commonality, united around school choice. Communities often feel their political and cultural strength gets coopted with few if any benefits accruing to these vulnerable constituencies. It is that exposure to outside interests that makes evaluations of trustworthiness - and by extension, authenticity - critical when maneuvering through complex political environments.

**Pro-Development Leaders and the Marketization of Education**

Neoliberalism produces political hierarchies that attract leaders committed to markets, often relying on elites to help manage austerity budgets, depoliticize public goods (Apple, 2006) respond to global pressures, and seek market-based solutions for political, social and economic decisions. Neoliberal leaders in older urban centers like New York, Newark and Chicago have
often viewed social and political policy-making through a center-right lens, promoting concepts such as fiscal and individual responsibility (Blanco, Griggs, & Sullivan, 2014). The elite nature of this order and its leadership concentrates power among a small number of individuals whose make-up tends to be homogenous in terms of race and class, and often excludes elected leaders of color though some African American and Latino mayors acquired their neoliberal branding through pro-business policy-making and alliances (Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2003).

The origins of neoliberalism date back to the repercussions from urban renewal policy programs between World War II and the 1960’s, and manifested in the fiscal austerity policies of the 1970s which sought to privatize or commercialize public functions (Lin, 2010). These new ideologies created political cleavages among community leaders, unions, political parties and advocates against systemic inequities that institutionalized deep reductions in, or the slow elimination of, the social safety network (Hursh, 2008).

By the mid-1980s, neoliberals pronounced that progressive approaches to education utilizing state-sponsored programming failed. Educational institutions adopted a sense of urgency around their preferred reforms that elevated local issues like curriculum and teacher standards from the school districts and States to the national dialogue (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Neoliberal actors soon developed an elite network premised on education reform with a national well-financed network (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Harvey, 2007) to capitalize on momentum within the business community and create markets in public spaces such as schools, housing, and infrastructure (Hackworth, 2007; Harvey, 2007). Outside political and academic circles, a plethora of think tanks engaged the debate as rather conspicuous partners of neoliberals providing intellectual support to school choice networks, making changes in the political landscape and helping align research with elite political action around education reform (W. Davies, 2016).
If the Reagan-era A Nation at Risk tackled the need for global economic competitiveness in terms of human capital development in 1983 (Apple, 2006), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 hardened that narrative by mounting an education policy culture centered around perceptions of schools that are either succeeding or failing with little accountability within historically change-resistant institutions. NLRB-era schools in the administration of George W. Bush relied on efficient management with less direct funding, unions became symbols of deepening malpractice and wastefulness (Taubman, 2009) and deracialization became a silent partner (E. R. Brown, 2010; Saltman, 2010) in reforms, favoring more egalitarian approaches (Haymes, 1995). Subsequent attacks on teachers and failing schools, some feared, would prevent social reproduction and destabilize neighborhoods (Slater, 2009), particularly as they gentrify.

In the over 30 years since A Nation, rapid job outsourcing, corporate downsizing, and international trade agreements put emphasis on student academic credentials, exacerbating the racial achievement gap (Jackson & Bisset, 2005) leaving parents more fearful about any competitive edge their children could have in a global economy. The transformation from a pure public education model into one of choice, governed by market principles, accountability, and efficiency (Robertson, 2000; Whitty & Power, 2000) saw failing schools and teachers as a target. In many instances, the marketization of education is part of larger shift away from public goods model to one of more corporate influence and corporate welfare with emphasis on personal responsibility and attenuating investment in the social safety net which, when combined with reduced government spending, enlarged inequality.

The geography of racial majorities - and perhaps the rise in intra-racial differences through gentrification – increased class division (Spence, 2012) such that race acts as a constraint against neoliberal policymaking. Rather than a two-way analysis involving
government and the markets, the racial dimension encourages us to understand changes in electoral politics, social order and creation of new alliances. While regime theory holds that governing coalitions matter more than electoral ones, adding race enables us to understand why political structures in majority-minority neighborhoods prevent regimes from having power over and must contend with compartmentalized mobilization (Horan, 2002).

Before portfolio models emphasized diversity in curriculum and school organization (J. R. Henig, 1995) under mayoral control, localized political pathways to electoral power through school board elections and parent organizing anchored schools as foundational to community empowerment. Given the challenges of neoliberal arrival into local communities, local leadership will vigorously set a strategic direction that reflects community priorities and build the political and social capacity to deliver on these priorities, in defense of their goals (Geddes & Sullivan, 2011). But as elites eschew traditional political pathways for their preferred forms of engagement, regime participants become at odds with the role education and school-based activism historically played in supporting democratic institutions and the leadership of senior politicians who are least likely to introduce neoliberal policies to their constituents. Neoliberal attempts to engage locally in mayor-led districts without school board elections as vehicles for community power, may interfere with a community’s interaction with its members (bonding capital) and casts doubt on the ability for local leaders and institutions to expand political influence on regimes (bridging capital). Both become difficult to configure if traditional political pathways become narrowed or interrupted by neoliberal mayors and regime actors (Putnam, 2000).

The evolving federal role in education policy notwithstanding, Brown still looms large among activists as equity concerns become generalized to include other areas of policy and government service. Prior to the 1970s, school choice policy saw creation of segregation
academies and suburbanization that shielded white students and families from integration measures imposed on them by the courts and the federal government. During the 1970s and the Black Power movement, school choice represented a variety of progressive education options that included free and alternative schools, magnate schools and inter-district transfer plans. Today, school choice is often considered analogous to the privatization and corporatization of education. For communities of color that engage particularized advocacy for their schools and generalized advocacy for equity in government resource allocation, there remains an open question about the role Black leaders can or should play in charter sector-based advocacy when issues of equity are still, to many, unresolved.

African American Politics and Leadership Cohorts

You have to learn to be an African American,

and we don't have time to train you.

-Mayor of Newark Sharpe James, an African American, speaking of his African-American challenger Cory Booker

In neoliberal governance, coalitions of minority and white liberal voters may confront the countermobilization of regime actors if elite policy goals are threatened. Such activity, when combined with the effects of gentrification, can upend and fragment older political machines that

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historically buoyed black candidates (Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1997), and diffuse the concentration of Black political power intergenerationally and geographically.

Those disruptions, the countermobilization of regime actors and concern over the allegiance of younger black leaders to older policy positions, likely contributed to the NAACP’s extraordinary step of urging a national mortarium on charter schools, mentioned earlier, which is important for two reasons. First, concentrations of power among Black activists in urban areas created a political base while schools within these neighborhoods became a significant component in the development of activism around shared goals and narratives. Since communities of color could own schools in this regard, schools were “defined organizationally [within the community] rather than contractually [with the school district]” (H. M. Levin, 1970, p. 93). Second, successful electoral cohesion benefiting black populations rested in part on forming meaningful coalitions with white liberals in the 1960s and 1970s, who rejected what they perceived as market-based education. But younger leaders in the African American community may not share older political ties nor seek policies connected to older coalitions that perpetuated employment regimes. In these instances, both the policies and the newer leaders become more highly scrutinized by the grassroots activists and among older political elites within the neighborhood.

Since neoliberal regimes may tout charters located predominantly in black-led districts as part of larger education reform initiatives, an analysis of changes in black political leadership reveals why, and which type of African American leaders offered charter advocates an opportunity to ramp up the opening of new schools in areas with substantial intergenerational changes in black power structures.

Gatekeepers in communities of color are often engaged at the onset to establish bridging capital between elite policy advocates in government or the private sector– for charter schools in
this case – and community leaders. They are often politicized actors charged with constructing collaborative environments where two or more governmental or nongovernmental actors consider mutually beneficial goals and engage in collective action toward achieving those goals. Solving local problems through this externally-driven solution is quite different from co-optation in which benefits and resources disproportionately support the dominant entity within collaborative environments for the purpose of sustaining that entity rather than supporting all partners. Though gatekeepers may satisfy their own ambitions they are presumed to function as mediators to guard against co-optation or harm against their communities (Fosler, 2002; Owens, 2008; Selznick, 1948).

In terms of education policy, gatekeepers can evaluate how policies interact with the concerns of parents and children. In other substantive areas, they could open the door for neoliberal policies, like land rezoning and charter schools, that are often not in line with the neighborhood’s collective political viewpoint. The emergence of school choice exhibited the full scope of how multiple phases of black leadership come into contact with a policy that would force parents, elected officials and external allies to take sides.

Prompted by the election of Barack Obama, scholarship examining the present and future course of African American leadership seized upon the race neutral tactics utilized by President Obama during his campaign (Browning et al., 1997; Glaude Jr, 2017; Harris, 2012; Marable & Clarke, 2009; Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008). Such tactics are not unique to the 2008 campaign but, rather, have been a frequent strategic choice among black elected leaders since the Civil Rights movement – a movement themed largely around egalitarianism and systemic integration incorporating reconstruction and integration into mainstream American society (Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). The meritocratic approach employed to advance the cause of
Blacks through integration frequently utilized racially neutral language that appealed to white liberals and some conservatives who embraced the personal responsibility mantra.

Toward the late 1960s and early 1970s, urban centers with concentrations of African American residents witnessed a burgeoning Black Power movement that still tackled egalitarianism but included strong messages of self-determination. Fragmented politics and rigid institutions were unable to enhance relationships between black leaders and governing regimes. In short, Blacks were encouraged to abandon their reliance on external supports in the form of government institutions; rather they strove to become the architects of their own destiny. But the race-specific language and confrontational tactics were off-putting to many Black and white elites.

Using the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s as a reference point, Andra Gillespie and Phillip Thompson separately present useful models of black political leadership (Gillespie, 2010; Thompson III, 2005). Gillespie suggests that there have been distinct cohorts of black leaders, the first of which came to power toward the end of the civil rights movement applying rhetoric and policy agenda items meant to halt or reverse deleterious policies instituted by a white-dominated political establishment. Elected leaders of this era were locked into a precarious position that relied heavily on white support at a time when redistributive policies using federal aid diminished, and the national economy declined (K. Johnson, 2004).

Gillespie’s second cohort points to 1989 as a milestone for African American politics. Jesse Jackson’s attempt to mobilize black voters and call for an independent black electorate combined themes of inclusion and redistributive policies, though within-group politics stifled universal buy-in among Black voters and activists (Reed Jr, 1986) largely over the conundrum of black issues versus black electability (L. F. Williams, 2017). Intra-group politics notwithstanding, Jackson mobilized lapsed and new voters among African Americans which
increased turnout and attempted to link political power with economic power. Many still wrestled however with striking a balance between the mantras of the civil rights movement and potential white resistance to black-specific strategies without white liberal assistance and creating their own political networks to enshrine their paths to power (Preston, 2012).

A confrontational Black Power movement considered more provocative and potentially hostile to white allies, eventually gave way to a spate of deracialized campaigns, notably those of David Dinkins, New York City’s first Black Mayor and Douglas Wilder, who became Governor of Virginia - the first black elected governor in the nation’s history. African Americans looking for electoral success softened racial polarization by adopting race-neutral rhetoric and avoided direct references to race-specific policies. Pro-black agendas were replaced by multicultural or race-neutral policy prescriptions.

Cohort 3 exhibits greater diversity in style, background and policy preferences. Many of these Obama-era leaders are politically ambitious and embrace the role of traditional and social media in electioneering and governing. Black leaders of this type tend to engage in deracialized campaigns similar to cohort 2 with a political style that is nonthreatening, avoids racial agendas, and makes no direct racial appeals (Gillespie, 2010). Their ambition makes them risk takers though the prior generations of leaders view them as unappreciative of the groundwork that enabled their ascendancy. Cohort 3 leaders are younger – the last of the baby boomers– than Cohort 2 leaders and much further removed from the Civil Rights movement having no direct involvement. While Cohort 2 leaders may have adopted a race neutral campaign strategy, third cohort leaders are often criticized for academic and professional socialization in predominantly white institutions that superficially appear to ignore race altogether. Cohort 2 leaders are strategically race-neutral while Cohort 3 leaders are deemed ideologically opposed to racialization.
Many in cohorts 2 and 3 are technocrats with a pro-business philosophy (Thompson, 2006) and seek political power and influence from nontraditional routes that often include going outside the party establishment to run for office (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Prior to public service, many were employed in fields not generally considered feeders for political life but they adroitly combine social and political capital to gain favor among voters not always connected to political institutions like Democratic clubs or labor unions. Older leaders often look upon these campaigns with disdain – leveling charges of hubris and disloyalty. In sum, the new black political order seeks preservation of their security and privilege, aligns with like-minded counterparts among other ethnic groups and eschews protest politics in favor of shrewd compartmentalized electoral engagement, even while class divisions within the African American community become more pronounced (Dawson, 1995).

We may be moving away from racial reasoning to moral reasoning, abandoning racial talk to build coalitions and demonstrate an ability to deliver benefits to all (Austin & Middleton IV, 2004; Gillespie, 2010). Fears of racial polarization may drive reductions in race-specific language and position Black leaders to compromise more than their coalition partners (Perry, 1991). Not inconsequentially, older activists often evaluate the 3rd cohort in terms of their relationship to enduring cultural narratives and its connection to place using social and cultural capital as a barometer for localized trust. In racially charged environments, group membership and allegiance to race become paramount and indicators of that allegiance, or belonging, are markers for authenticity.

Being racially authentic also implies the existence of inauthenticity. Power relationships among elites in governing regimes, and between elites and the governed, have important effects on authenticity such that those wielding significant power have some ability to appropriate
authentic behavior and language through their own usage, through the cooptation of race-specific agendas or of the leaders themselves (E. P. Johnson, 2003).

In his work, *The Accommodationists* Earl Sheridan (Sheridan, 1996) takes a rather disdainful view of modern black politicians. In his view, the expansion of black political power from the 1980s to 1990s produced skepticism and black leaders too willing to act as surrogates for white conservatives. Wilder, Dinkins, presumably President Obama, U.S. Senator (and former Newark Mayor) Cory Booker and former Massachusetts Governor Patrick, he believes, embrace mainstream politics in opposition to Jesse Jackson’s racialized politics. Noted scholar Manning Marable considered these political leaders,

Ethnically black...with little kinship to traditional agenda of the civil rights movement...[they are] political counterparts of the corporation man climbing the political ladder with the same sense of conformity and restrain that the aspiring corporate executive scales the corporate ladder (Marable, 1990).

The overall critique of new Black leaders calls into question their commitment to solving issues that disproportionally impact communities of color and their potential role as gatekeepers because they seek governing regime inclusivity for themselves and not their constituents. Compounding these concerns may be a lack of a national organization toward specific goals, adherence to the two-party political system with overwhelming support for the Democratic Party, and an inability to pressure government and private institutions for employment and services (Smith, 1996). In fact, no Democratic nominee for president has received less than 82% of the Black vote since 1960. No Republican presidential nominee has received over 39% since
Eisenhower’s reelection in 1956\textsuperscript{20} and from 1972-2010, Blacks benefited from federal policy the least (Brown-Dean, Hajnal, Rivers, & White).

Conceptualizing black leadership linearly by using the civil rights movement as a template to measure connections to the black community, appraise leadership styles, and evaluate campaign strategies, has shortcomings. First, Douglas Wilder, David Dinkins, Cory Booker, and former Tennessee Congressman Harold Ford Jr. are presented as second and third generation black leaders who sought political power by running \textit{from} the issues that disproportionately impact black communities. Since coalitions and constituencies change over time, the models presented are overly focused on embedding campaign style and policy choices into measures of authenticity instead of conducting an analysis of a leader’s relationship to governing regimes and delivery of benefits to their constituencies which may not always be readily apparent. Not articulated are the many constraints on both campaign strategy and governance they faced. Campaigns for elected office at the national, state or (large) city level require coalitions that are likely multi-racial and whose members often differ greatly in voting power and fundraising prowess. For example, the pursuit of vote goals in a campaign may engage \textit{likely} voters who may not be representative of constituent populations. In the case of fundraising, target donors may be external to the district in which the candidate is running for office. Even in those instances, narrowly tailored campaign strategies may yield broad governing strategies that provide benefits to black constituents.

Second, typologies of black leadership measure distance from, and connectivity to, the civil rights movement, which seems to rely on related historic and cultural narratives to form leadership cues. Consider, however, that political and policy symbolism which incorporates

these narratives and builds political trust, figures of speech, intentional ambiguity and use of metrics (D. A. Stone & Norton, 1997) can be manipulated and appropriated by white and nonwhite leaders mimicking the more authentic, civil rights-forged, black leader who is wholly attentive to agenda items targeted to the black community.

Third, black political power is also a function of changing intra-group dynamics. If typologies are correct in their evaluation of leaders in the third cohort, then older generations of black leadership may constitute an elite class reluctant to welcome younger generation into its ranks. An argument can be made that among burgeoning middle-class residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, new elites attached to modern governing regimes have different approaches to agenda-setting and policy formation than older elites but may be no less supportive of issues affecting race.

That point is particularly important for this study since older generations of leaders are often targeted in their re-election bids by young insurgents most recently emboldened by President Obama’s hugely successful campaigns that favored independence from political machines and a stronger embrace of the private sector that may include support for charters. Little attention across the literature is placed on sub-city models of black leadership engaged in intra-group electoral competition though ample political science literature discusses the engagement of political leaders in their own districts relative to majority white populations (within district) or at the city and state level (Fenno, 1978; Jacobsen, 2006; Mayhew, 1974).

Changes in black leadership among elected leaders and elites that focus on subsistence needs of the community but who now possess more access to regime participants experience tense relations with older black leaders tied more closely to civil rights era battles. Local political power for younger leaders involves, in large part, working with regime participants (Bullock III, 1974) but class differences and evaluations of authenticity often see the external
influence over these leaders as weakening bonding capital within communities. For the leader with stronger ties to the business community, substantial external engagement with regime actors (E. B. Brown, 2000; Dawson, 1995) is perilous if key local actors are unable to discern political affiliations or trace activism to individuals or movements with which they were familiar – social and political capital is important to the community’s evaluation of the policies leaders will promote. Traced activism and other cues for authenticity of black leadership among a modern cohort, place gatekeepers and those leaders supporting charters squarely in the sites of activists supporting traditional public schools, like unions, who strongly supported earlier cohorts of leaders.

**Charter Schools on the Local and National Stage**

The charter school movement in the U.S. from its beginning had a complicated relationship with issues of race. That relationship has changed, and in some ways become more complex in the bargain. One set of changes came about when the abstract theories behind charters were translated into practice. A second set of changes, still unfolding, occurred as the pioneer generations of charters have given way to a more institutionalized sector marked by multi-school charter networks, larger scale, greater geographic range, more attention to the authorizer function, and a more corporate style and approach. These changes are taking place to different degrees in different places depending on markets, policies, and state and local governance regimes. The early charter schooling regime comprised a loose combination of ideological proponents of market solutions, parents and teachers reacting local district bureaucratic constrains, and state-level policy entrepreneurs who promoted charter legislation as reform that would stimulate innovation, improve educational outcomes, and do these things by reallocating funding rather than increasing it.
What the early charter movement did not have was a constituency of established providers, invested parents, or grassroots organized minority support. But if these schools were to operate within predominantly African American and Latino communities, an open question for charter operators would be, who were the gatekeepers and elected officials most amendable to charter schools.

Charters were launched in Minnesota in 1991 and quickly diffused from state to state. By 1995, nineteen states had passed charter legislation; by 2000 this increased to 35 states plus Washington DC; and by 2012, 43 states plus DC had charter laws on the books.21 Passing enabling legislation is not the same thing as establishing a supply of operating charters, however, and while the expansion of schools and students also was impressive, the real action has had a narrower geographic focus. Just six states (CA, FL, AZ, TX, OH MI) account for over 55% of the nation’s charters. And within these states, charter penetration varies from place to place. The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools calculates a “market share” analysis based on the percent of all public-school students that are enrolled in charter schools. In the 2016/17 school year, three districts with the greatest charter market share were New Orleans school district with 93%; Flint, Michigan (55%) and Detroit (51%). Newark ranked 15th at 31%. While New York City is second (to Los Angeles) in terms of total enrollment (102,960 compared to 163,72), it ranks 196th out of 208 school districts observed in terms of enrollment share with only 10%. Overall, 58 districts have at least 20% and 208 districts at least 10% of their students in charter schools.22 What this narrower geographic focus means is that while nationally charter schools

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still represent only a small proportion of public school enrollment, in some places charters have shot past the threshold of an interesting curiosity to become a muscular competitor in market terms and a sizable political bloc available to mobilize as well.

From the outset, critics of charters suspected their racial motivations and feared their racial implications. This wariness and fear had complicated roots. It drew in part on the historical experience of “freedom of choice” choice schemes as used by Southern districts as part of their massive resistance to *Brown vs. Board of Education* But it also drew on suspicion of markets as sources of stratification on both the demand and supply sides of the equation (J. R. Henig, 1995; Orfield, 1969). On the demand side, those wary of charters worried that low-income parents would lack the information, time, and resources to maneuver effectively to maximize the benefits to their children (Cobb & Glass, 1999; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2002; Weiher & Tedin, 2002; Wells, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). On the supply advocates predicted that market incentives would impel charters to seek out places and populations that were easier and less expensive to serve, presumably those in which families had the education levels, resources, and commitment to ensure that their children would come to school able and ready to learn. Children raised in neighborhoods scarred by concentrated poverty, in contrast, seemed likely to cost more to educate and be less likely to post education gains that would be the metric by which schools marked—and marketed—their success (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002).

Charter proponents, for their part, simultaneously presented charters as a deracialized reform strategy and one that, despite—or even because of—its deracialized nature, would better address race-based inequities than race-conscious interventions like busing and affirmative action. Anchored as they were in racially and economically segregated communities, traditional public schools with their placed-based, mandatory attendance-zone approaches to enrollment,
had allowed and even encouraged families to sort out into internally homogenous schools, with structured advantage going to those with the wealth and mobility to live wherever they chose. A choice-based system, proponents argued, would enable white and non-white families to congregate in schools based on shared interest and learning styles rather than real estate and would do so without the disruptive political backlash often accompanying race-conscious interventions (H. Levin, 2018; Renzulli & Evans, 2005; Weiher & Tedin, 2002; Wells et al., 1999).

As theories were put into practice charters defied abstract notions of both critics and advocates. Although there were exceptions, the early generations of charters tended to locate in or near central city high minority neighborhoods. Many of the early charter founders were minorities themselves, often traditional educators looking for freedom to try something new or community-based organizations who saw in charter schools a new revenue stream to that could enable them to expand the services they already were providing to high need communities. Some charters offered explicitly Afrocentric themes, and others that were not so explicit nonetheless adopted styles of dress, staff, and other symbolic representations, either as part of a deliberate effort appeal to black parents or a reflection of the values and experience of the black educators who founded and staffed the schools (Yancey, 2004).

While some for-profit companies moved into the charter market, legislation barred for-profit charter schools in most states, and the challenges experienced by the high visibility EAI and Edison Schools, as they ventured into the area of providing private management of public schools under contract or via charter schools, took some of the enthusiasm out of the private investment community (M. Orr, 1996; L. C. Williams & Leak, 1996). Among charters with formal nonprofit status, some behaved much like for-profit firms would—with close attention to their growth and bottom line—but others were more “mission oriented,” often with well-
established traditions of providing services to those with the greatest need (J. R. Henig, Holyoke, Brown, & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005; Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2002).

Rather than targeting white and affluent clients, charters-in-practice disproportionately drew black and Hispanic populations. In 1999-2000, just under 53% of charter school students were black or Hispanic compared to just fewer than 33% in traditional public schools. Reflecting broad demographic changes in the student age population, the percentages have increased since then, with the gap narrowing only a little: 59% of charter school students were black or Hispanic in 2015-16 vs. just under 41% in traditional public schools.23

While assuaging critics’ fears that charters would racially cream the crop, this over-representation of minority populations also challenged the early proponents’ claims that charters would facilitate natural integration. Charters are substantially less likely than traditional public schools to be predominantly white, but even more striking is their significantly higher likelihood of being majority African American or majority Hispanic. In 2015/16, 48% of charter schools were either majority Black or Hispanic, almost twice as many as was the case in traditional public schools (25%). The heavy black concentration is especially distinct: 23.4% of charter schools were majority black in 2015/16 compared to just 8.9% in traditional public schools.24

This concentration of high minority charter schools has political implications. In simple “framing” terms it has at least partially inoculated the charter movement against the fears


24 Ibid 22. Additionally, The Latino concentration in charter schools for the same period is 25.2% but in traditional public schools, it is 16%. The gap between traditional and charter school concentration is greater for black students than Latino (14.5 percentage points and 9.2 percentage points respectively)
of racial creaming and uncoupled charters from the ugly history of the freedom-of-choice era of massive resistance. Moving beyond image, it creates a constituency of black and Hispanic educators and parents who have a direct stake in protecting charters and defending their interests. From early on, some conservative foundations tactically supported minority organizations and individuals who could dispel the fear that charters were a strategy by whites and conservatives to create a new privatized system of schools that would better cater to the needs of the affluent and foster white exit from traditional public schools. The Black Alliance for Educational Opportunity (BAEO) was launched in 2000 and the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO) the following year. Early BAEO funders included the Walton Family Foundation, John M. Olin Foundation, and Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, all conservative foundations firmly committed to markets and free choice.25

At least to date, however, this black and Hispanic constituency has not been a fully mobilized one. BAEO and Hispanic CREO provided more of a formal and symbolic representation than an ability to turn out large numbers of minority families to protest or vote. That minority charter school population has not been more fully mobilized may be due in part to fact that the founders of the early generations of charter schools were often educators who deliberately shunned politics either seeing it as a source of interference in their professional enterprise or out of a belief that staying below the radar screen of conventional politics battles is safer than getting pulled into partisan and ideological currents. The early charters tended

25 John M. Olin Foundation gave BAEO $100,000 in 2001, "to support parental choice in education;" Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation gave $500,000 in 2001 and $325,000 in 2003, to support general operations; and the Walton Family Foundation gave $621,374 in 2002 and $600,000 in 2003. Walton also gave H-CREO $1,029,500 in 2003.  
<http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Black_Alliance_for_Educational_Options>. Walton continues to provide both groups substantial support: over the five years from 2009-2013 it gave grants totaling $4.8 million to BAEO and $1.1 Million to H-CREO  
<http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/about/2012-grant-report>
overwhelmingly to be “standalone” schools—often started by ad hoc groups of educators and parents or community-based organizations and frequently referred to as “Mom and Pop” operations to denote their small scale and sometimes-amateurish business practices. Even when these Mom & Pops understood the importance of politics, they often served populations that were episodic in their political participation and therefore difficult to rally, and the standalones lacked the numbers to gain much attention even if they could turn people out (Fabricant & Fine, 2015; Ravitch, 2013; Scott & DiMartino, 2010).

This may be changing. Over the last ten to fifteen years, the charter sector has been undergoing a substantial reconfiguration in which smaller, standalone and Mom & Pop charters are being eclipsed by larger networks of charters. In 1998, there were 193 for-profit Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) and 92 non-profit Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), nationwide; the 2010/2011 academic saw an increase to 758 and 1,170. Compared to standalone charters, these networks tend to enroll larger numbers of students at each school and grow much more aggressively. Between 2001/2 and 2010/11, the number of EMO- and CMO-operated schools increased by 95% and 335%, respectively; over the same period the number of students increased 457% and 1,808% (Miron, Urschel, Yat Aguilar, & Dailey, 2012).

The growing scale of the charter operators raises the prospects for more muscular politics as does the fact that several of the largest management organizations have powerful sponsors and allies in the foundation and corporate sectors (Fabricant & Fine, 2015; Ravitch, 2013; Scott & DiMartino, 2010). These new style charter operators, along with their allies, are also quite attentive to the importance of public policy and receptive federal, state, and local governments to their ability to thrive. They realize that the public sector, as much as the preferences of the families who might become their customers, shape the market in which they compete: by determining per pupil funding levels, establishing either tight or loose authorizing
and oversight practices, and potentially by facilitating the expansion of charters through sanctions or closures targeting at traditional public schools that perform poorly on standardized tests.

Appreciation of the political dimensions of their nominally “market-based” sector has led to the cultivation of access and influence at high levels of government. Support in state capitals and the White House (from Clinton, through Bush, Obama and Trump) and some central city administrations has eased their expansion and obviated, to some extent the need for broader constituent backing (Mintrom, 2000). The Obama Administration used the leverage of its Race to the Top competitive grant process, for example, to pressure more reluctant or cautious state legislatures to raise or eliminate caps on the number of charters. While many local districts have been more reticent or hostile, the expansion of portfolio management models (PMM)\textsuperscript{26} among large urban districts, and most recently a small group of high-profile donors and foundations under the umbrella of The City Fund,\textsuperscript{27} has made some districts avid seekers of charters (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010; Paul Thomas Hill, Campbell, & Gross, 2013).

To date charter proponents have had less visible success in translating their numbers into more mass-based mobilization through protest or the ballot box, which may reflect the fact that charter proponents have not needed to do the hard work of political organizing; they have done quite well by cultivating elected leaders from both major parties as patrons without having to play that card. In part it may be a function of the fact that their numbers nationally remain low;

\textsuperscript{26}The portfolio management model is an approach that emphasizes decentralizing decisions to principals, closing nonperforming schools, and bringing in charters or other forms of new providers—has made some districts avid seekers of charters.

only in New Orleans and Detroit do charter parents make up the majority even of public school parents, and in the places Washington D.C. where that threshold is fast approaching, groups that see charters as a threat have deeper and more established ties to the community, so charter proponents may be reluctant to challenge them head-to-head in venues where mass turnout matters.

But it is also the case that the same emerging features that raise the potential clout of the charter sector also introduce new challenges to mobilizing their parent base. The scale of the networked charters means that there is more distance between the leadership and both the teachers and parents at the school level. Many networks operate in multiple cities and states, making it more challenging for them to know and adapt to idiosyncratic political contexts and constraining their discretion to target their message to particular settings and local histories. And, significantly, while the students remain largely black and Hispanic, CMO and EMO leaders and their patrons most often are white (Scott, 2008). While these national networks have close ties with important political allies, in government and the corporate and philanthropic sectors, to reach the grassroots and predominantly minority constituencies they may need to mobilize in order to protect their interests within local political regimes, they have to depend on intermediaries who are known and have credibility at the community level. And while generational changes provide a pool of younger aspiring black leaders who share values, style and perceptions with charter leaders, converting that potential local support into a reality is slower and more problematic than some charter proponents presumed (J. Henig & Smikle, 2014).28

Civic Capacity and Parent Engagement Around School Choice

Despite the flurry of activity that sparked charter growth, elites alone could not guarantee their durability and the question of who else would advocate on behalf of the sector and how were those populations to be recruited and trained. Properly conceived, and comprised of engaged partners, civic capacity can have a positive effect on education policy. Historic racial and ethnic strife may impede success (J. R. Henig et al., 1999; P. McGuinn & Kelly, 2012) particularly when leaders benefiting from school reforms who also happen to be external to low-income or minority communities become tagged with imposing white middle-class regimes on non-middle-class neighborhoods where the value of “other” is viewed as ideal. Without the imprimatur of local leadership, these external players will meet weak participation among parents and community-based, so-called low social capital groups, which accelerates breakdowns in cohesion and durability (M. R. Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

In addition to external middle-class actors and elite institutional players, we must consider the role of private actors and foundations in working to develop capacity – often in direct opposition to the communities in which they want most to impact. Bulkley and Burch researched the role of the education marketplace in bringing voices together toward reform, arguing that privatization in its many forms, including contracting schemes as a result of government divestiture or market-influenced activity, significantly influenced coalition formation (Bulkley & Burch, 2011). Private for-profit entities like textbook publishers, nonprofit charter management organizations (CMOs) and reform advocates like New Visions for New Schools and Families for Excellent Schools, collaborated to create capacity on multiple levels of government.

Foundations that created a space for the intellectual grounding of choice also play a role in political engagement on this issue. In New York, after Republican control of City Hall in the
early 1990s and pro-reform Bloomberg/Klein Administration ten years later, foundations ramped up their commitment and poured large sums of money into building capacity among other elites rather than community-based organizations or parents (Reckhow, 2012). Political professionals know that so-called *grasstops* organizing as opposed to *grassroots* organizing has a place in campaign and outreach efforts, but the reforms become more sustainable if they are community-driven. Regimes are rooted in civic capacity, have origins in political economy (C. N. Stone, 2005), and reformers embraced this top-down strategy with little local buy-in, the lack of which thwarted attempts to construct particularized trust.

As charters began to cluster in rust belt cities with large minority, immigrant, and working-class populations, they experienced opposition (Bridges & Kronick, 1999). Expending resources to engage the grassroots on a variety of issues beyond simple school advocacy (Mitra, Movit, & Frick, 2008) assuaged some of the intra-group conflict perpetuated by generational and class tensions but they also created opportunities for successful neoliberal framing of education reform aimed squarely at parents (Nygreen, 2016) with a unique, almost proprietary, set of coalition actors.

Parents who become members of these charter advocacy networks have likely experienced marginalization due to race, class, language or immigrant status (M. R. Warren et al., 2009), which means regime actors must work harder to support their concerns otherwise creating and maintaining stronger civic capacity across race and class will be elusive (Ansell, Reckhow, & Kelly, 2009). If charter advocates find success organizing grassroots parents and community leaders, *affirmed* community power can then be used to influence institutional policy, practices and structures, becoming a resource for schools and school systems interested in organizing them (Fuentes, 2012). Another sticking point in getting stronger parent buy-in stems
from perceptions of their needs/concerns by white elites who typically have little history working with these populations.

Indeed, educators’ perceptions of African American children, and the widely held view that the system’s ideology toward engagement of African American children and their families is steeped in cultural logics of *scarcity* (finite investment in education policy), *merit* (competition resulting in winners and losers) and *deficit* (poor children of color limited by cultural and situational deficits) forms the basis for parent organizing throughout history (Oakes, Rogers, Blasi, & Lipton, 2008). Black parents, often cast as absent in their children’s lives or otherwise unable to support their children (Cooper, 2009), mobilized to reverse hardened stereotypes institutionalized at the district-level and among elites. Ironically, modern choice advocates, adopt similar civil rights framing as a means to mobilize parents and blame school systems for not seeing district children as having certain potential and unwilling to pour more resources into schools.

Even with framing of school choice designed to reverse the perception of young African American and Latino children, a parent must still be motivated to act, and parents must then consider their opportunity costs to do so (McGuinn and Kelly 2012). Those costs will be explained in some detail later but parents then need, or will be led, to choose their venue of engagement: by level (school, district, political, state or federal); or by issue. They must also make choices about with whom they wish to align and the tactics for which they are best suited (Henig, 2010). Parents must overcome substantial history in siding with charter advocates but their external origins means organizers must create intimacy and forge deep roots within communities akin to what local development organizations, churches and other trusted institutions provide (Oberschall, 1994; M. R. Warren et al., 2009).
Local historic narratives that promoted self-deterministic educational priorities provided a substantial roadblock for regime leaders as they struggled to bridge ideological differences between parents of poor or lower-middle class children and elites. These tensions are exacerbated in the close quarters of coalitions and reinforce socioeconomic disparities rather than dissolve them (Stone, 2005). Some elite-sponsored programs tried to eliminate the gap and sought to introduce concentrated and specific measures that helped parents “influence their world” via school-based and home-based partnerships with educators to identify areas where they could develop stronger parenting skills, for example (Jeynes, 2007; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Black parents, contrary to their depiction, possess a well-documented history of involvement in their children’s education toward self-determination and racial uplift. This deliberate though clumsy attempt to achieve stronger community intimacy with, and among, parents to build their capacity is meant to foster more community awareness and connectivity to larger public policy issues (Doherty, Jacob, & Cutting, 2009) but it exemplifies a pernicious theme undergirding elite-led parent organizing efforts: parents often view such opportunities, though well meaning, as patronizing and paternalistic.

Charter leaders see an opportunity to produce highly engaged parents who are loyal to their school and will engage in policy or political activism at the behest of school leaders toward larger reforms of the system. But reformer influence extends only to those parents being serviced by the reforms – charters in this case. School needs are prioritized over the needs of the community, potentially alienating non-parents or parents with children in traditional public schools. Connecting their movement and charter parents to broader themes with a more inclusive framing in the language of civil rights may secure changes in rule-making that promotes their agenda and leverages local support to increase political and electoral power.
(Oakes et al., 2008). But in neighborhoods like Harlem whose narrative was borne through intense battles for political, economic and social justice, potential exists for friction between old coalitions and new.

**Charters Come to New York**

In heavily unionized and reliably blue (in terms of Presidential elections) New York State, promotion of charter schools would be a tricky proposition. For minority – mostly Black – residents, employment regimes and pathways to electoral power were predicated on the involvement and cooperation of unions, partnerships with white liberals and the support of older sub-city political leaders. The convergence of conservative and minority group interests around alternatives to traditional public schools provided an odd grouping of allies for it to work.

George Pataki, a former State Senator from Peekskill, was virtually unknown to New York voters when he announced his quixotic bid against incumbent Democrat Mario Cuomo in 1994. Relations with fellow Republican, New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, soured from the onset when the Mayor endorsed Cuomo for reelection. After his longshot victory, Pataki quickly extended bridges across political, racial and geographic divides and later enjoyed a relatively comfortable gubernatorial tenure from 1994 until 2006, fending off strong Democratic attacks and collecting the endorsements from Democratically-aligned organized labor in two reelection bids. Black leaders, including clergy, typically viewed New York’s brand of moderate Republicanism more favorably than national GOP politics, which subsequently provided political cover for both sides to negotiate programmatic and financial partnerships often to the disapproval of Democratic leadership trying to hold their alliances together. The majority of Black activists’ viewed Pataki and Giuliani as antagonists to the community and quietly questioned the loyalty of rogue leaders like prominent Harlem pastor Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts from
Abyssinian Baptist Church, who believed an alliance with a moderate Pataki could yield economic benefits for their communities.

One year after Pataki’s election, the center-right Heritage Foundation rated each State on its receptiveness to school choice, stating outright that “Unlike his predecessor, Democrat Mario Cuomo, newly elected Republican George Pataki favors school choice, particularly vouchers.”

Similar programs already underway in New York City gave charter advocates hope that reforms would be welcomed. East Harlem had experimented with public school choice since 1976 and Central Harlem even earlier. Mayor David Dinkins in the early 1990s instituted what could be construed as precursors to charters – Beacon Schools. These were public, neighborhood-based programs that paired schools with community-based organizations to provide a mix of social and academic services during and after school hours. Starting with ten in 1991, Beacons grew to almost 80 centers at their peak, sparking national interest in this particular model of community-based education, managed by Mayors, in urban school districts. Upon taking office, Giuliani rolled back much of the program but not before Beacons left an indelible mark on parent organizations, school leaders and activists in Black-led school districts who lauded their counterbalance the crack-induced violence of the early 1990s.

Already of the belief that communities of color needed a more targeted approach, and perhaps to rile his foe Rudy Giuliani in competing for the credit, Pataki pursued his view that school-based innovations through choice affected substantial changes in outcomes for minority children despite legal and political constraints. He recruited two operatives to oversee the effort. Peter Flanigan was a former Managing Director of the financial firm Dillon, Read & Co.,

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30 Personal Interview September 30, 2018
former trustee of the Manhattan Institute and founder of its Center for Education Innovation. Flanigan, who died in 2013, served as Richard Nixon’s deputy campaign manager in 1968, and oversaw national fundraising efforts. Pataki also enlisted the help of Richard Nixon’s son-in-law Edward F. Cox. Cox is a scion of some of America’s earliest families and the current Chair of New York State Republican Party.

Both Flanigan and Cox consulted with, and organized, early pro-choice groups like Change-NY and the Student Sponsors Partnership -which Flanigan founded – to build a political base that advocated for charter legislation in the State. With early backing assembled through these partnerships, Pataki introduced a bill in his first legislative session which passed the Republican-led Senate but failed in the Democratic Assembly. Believing the bill would ultimately succeed, Pataki named Cox a Trustee of the State University of New York (SUNY) in 1995, which would later become a charter authorizer, to create protocols for charter approval.

Republicans in the State Senate introduced charter legislation each year from 1995 to 1997. Persuaded by the promise of local community-based support and tied to a bill proposing pay increased for members, the State legislature in bipartisan fashion approved choice legislation in 1998 with the blessing of Harlem Assembly Member Keith Wright and then-State Senator from Harlem, David Paterson.

The Education Mayor

There was great promise for charter schools now that Pataki, the legislature and some influential African American critics were on board, but the effort lacked a true champion – someone who could take on school choice as a policy entrepreneur and position allies to push district-wide reforms through the bureaucracy. Also missing was a network of elites willing and
able to assemble the governmental and nongovernmental resources to make it successful in a City where the Mayor had enough power and political independence to reshape education policy.

Early support from Pataki and Giuliani put systems in place to authorize schools, but school choice was still unfamiliar to most parents. If the State’s biggest City was to be the fertile ground for charters that Pataki, and later Paterson, had hoped, strong local backers were needed. Despite a role in creation of the first charter in 1999, Giuliani had only two years remaining in his mayoralty and by then was reviled by most minority and white liberal New Yorkers. His neoliberal policies ranged from strong law and order tactics to aggressive growth of the tax base that favored an explosion in commercial and residential development aided by historic reductions in crime. Low and moderate-income residents were largely overlooked and began a slow outmigration from neighborhoods due to increasing rents.

The attacks on September 11th, 2001 moved safety and security to the forefront of policy discussions. Stabilizing New York City economically dominated the Mayoral race that year allowing Michael R. Bloomberg’s prominence in the business and philanthropic communities to dwarf his lack of political experience. But two opportunities allowed Bloomberg an opening: where Giuliani seemed mean-spirited and heavy handed toward communities of color, Bloomberg could take advantage of his status – and registration – as an independent voice, eschewing machine politics and forging new relationships with old political players in an attempt to reset their experiences with City Hall. Furthermore, running as an independent meant he could avoid the Party primaries and be guaranteed as place in the general election.

Bloomberg, like his predecessor, was a New Mayor (Kirst & Edelstein, 2006) who rejected old political pathways and patronage in favor of meritocratic hiring practices and a management style based on private sector principles. His personal wealth obviated the need for public campaign financing, donor solicitation or institutional endorsement. He embraced
developmental policy imperatives that favored economic growth over clubhouse politics and redistributive policies that typically appease the most disadvantaged and politically active residents (Peterson, 1981). Some New Yorkers, particularly those that relied on Democratic channels of influence, after a short honeymoon period, bristled at his refusal to adhere to these protocols but Bloomberg presented himself as doggedly independent though accessible to minority leadership where Giuliani eschewed such engagement.

Previous Mayors articulated the case for Mayoral control of schools though their arguments failed to penetrate local and state political barriers mostly due to fragile relationships with the State legislature in Albany. But there was widespread agreement that the system needed repair. Consider that from 1898 to 1958, New York City had 6 school chancellors. From 1960 to the present, there have been 26 (Ravitch, 2000).

Adding to the argument for more centralized control, Albany began siphoning power away from New York City’s former central 9-member board and 32 separate community district school boards since 1996. Local boards linger in collective memories of residents who fought for local control after the 1968 Ocean Hill Brownsville protests that shed a light on a system increasingly populated by minority children and whose teachers and principals where overwhelmingly white. Subsequent to the peak of the Progressive movement in the 1920s, New York City Mayors in the latter part of the 20th century began to question the efficacy of an anachronistic system that by then serviced over 1 million children. Each of the 32 school boards had become fiefdoms where political favors were de rigueur. Community leaders used school board elections as platforms to engage higher political aspirations. The 9-member central board operated with no real oversight and was not directly accountable to voters except through the five borough presidents who each appointed one member and the Mayor who appointed the remainder.
In the State legislature, Republicans favored school choice models at the urging of Republican Governor George Pataki, while Democrats focused on parent engagement and community control— a sentiment echoed in the subsequent reauthorization hearings in 2009 and 2015. Delicate negotiations pit elite and conservative interests against Democratic legislators and community-based advocates who supported traditional public schools (Shen, 2011). Soon, New York City’s powerful teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), endorsed mayoral control after receiving a strong incentive in the form of a union contract (McGlynn, 2010). With their blessing, Mayor Bloomberg won control of New York City schools a year after his first election. The media, interest groups, and parents remained cautiously optimistic.

Bloomberg named Joel Klein, a former corporate lawyer and Justice Department attorney in the Clinton Administration, as Chancellor, who proceeded immediately to install pervasive reforms. He disbanded the old school boards in favor of administrative districts and created broad structural reforms built on Leadership, Empowerment and Accountability31 collectively referred to as the Children First initiative. These changes, enacted over several phases, were intended to build system capacity across substantive areas from governance and management, teaching and learning, human capital development and high school reform (Paul T Hill, 2011). Among the initial changes, Bloomberg and Klein:

- Abolished the 32 school boards in favor of 10 administrative districts and replaced the central 9-member governing Board with a 13-member Panel for Education Policy (PEP). The Mayor would appoint 8 members of the panel. 5 Members appointed by each of the 5 democratically elected borough presidents. The previous central board had only 4 Mayoral appointees and hired the chief administrative officer of the Department of

31 Taken from the Department of Education website which has since been changed to reflect the priorities of the de Blasio Administration
Education – the Chancellor. Now, the Mayor could appoint the head of the school system.

- Created autonomy zones and slowly gave principals throughout the City power over their own budgets and curriculum within parameters
- Instituted parent coordinators throughout the system and
- Created an office of family engagement
- Created a leadership academy that trained principals – many of them with little or no classroom experience – and provided avenues for support for existing school leaders
- Center for Charter Excellence established to provide support to new and existing charter schools

Scholars categorized this package of reforms as a portfolio management model (PMM) which featured system-wide accountability and performance standards to overlay school-based differentiation strategies (Bulkley et al., 2010). The model calls for schools to assume greater discretion budgets and curriculum. The PMM provides a mix of options to parents with emphasis on choice, new contracting models, small schools and new schools creates in part when others would be closed for low performance. PMMs, like charter schools in New York, seemed fit for urban areas accustomed to contracting regimes and a desire a turn away from top-down service delivery, greater efficiencies and strong quality measures (J. R. Henig, 2010). Reviews were mixed but there was an unwillingness to return to the old model. But a bedeviling matter emerged: While Bloomberg’s first election for Mayor was historic, senior staff members close to him believed he would serve only one term. His education agenda rolled out with a sense of urgency that rankled local stakeholders.32

32 Personal interview with former high ranking Bloomberg administration official. October 16, 2018
In time, parents grew increasingly concerned about lack of access. An early lawsuit initiated by the UFT and joined by the NAACP accused DOE and Klein of racial discrimination in firing of paraprofessionals. Within two years, the media noticed growing instability among the coalitions that supported mayoral control – a discontent punctuated in 2004 when the Mayor summarily dismissed three of his PEP appointees over their refusal to support a proposal to end social promotion. But by this time, Bloomberg’s governing regime consisting of philanthropies, wealthy New Yorkers and school choice advocates were firmly embedded within the City’s political environment and sought wholesale changes in education delivery, but communities of color and activists found themselves isolated as the governing regime itself began to ossify.

Despite escalating concerns from activists, labor support and surprising results from communities of color propelled the Mayor to victory in his 2005 reelection bid against a prominent Latino Democrat, Fernando Ferrer. Forty-seven percent of black voters found Bloomberg on the Republican line and voted for him; 38% of the Latino voters supported his candidacy.33 Bloomberg’s roughly 20-point margin of victory was the most for a Republican in New York City – ever. Ferrer received the fewest Democratic votes of any party nominee since 1917. Democrats had now lost 4 straight mayoral elections.34 That Bloomberg spent over $70 million was disconcerting to good government groups but voters seemed to reject any re-occurrence of old-style patronage politics. The elimination of much-maligned patronage politics, though welcomed by some, also created an undercurrent of apprehension over forfeiture of local control and loss of traditional paths of accountability and recourse. It would portend an almost parallel loss of physical space within some of the most vulnerable communities.

33 Analysis conducted using Board of Election data and exit polling of the 2005 mayoral election.

New attitudes among voters were transforming city politics and the policies from City Hall. “The election outcome … suggested that Mr. Bloomberg and his Republican predecessor, Mr. Giuliani, have set a standard by showing that voters across party lines want a commanding and independent-minded mayor who shows measurable results on crime, education and quality of life.” Furthermore, to the Bloomberg Administration, the large margin of victory and unprecedented support from minority communities validated reform efforts despite needling from community groups.

Three years later, the Mayor and his allies would begin a yearlong campaign to renew mayoral control. Three major groups advocated for different positions on Mayoral Control

lobbied the State legislature: LearnNY, heavily funded by the Gates Foundation, was the Administration’s coalition of community-based organizations that sought to extend control with some concessions to community groups toward more transparency within the PEP. The Campaign for Better Schools pushed to create better checks and balances among other resolutions that would amend rather than abolish mayoral control. The Parents Commission, comprised of grassroots organizations and middle income parents that were primarily engaged in progressive education wanted to bring back the 32 school districts and return to community control (J. R. Henig, Orr, & Silander, 2010). But the media, and business leaders – particularly those that funded charter schools - were firmly behind renewal with few significant changes.

The Obama Administration’s praise of Bloomberg to national audiences did not fully inoculate him from the ire of grassroots organizations locally who felt ostracized and locked-out of discussions amid what many critics saw as the privatization of the education system. Indeed, many of the reforms in New York City relied on significant partnerships and contracting regimes with big businesses (J. R. Henig et al., 2010) adding to the discomfort. Diane Ravitch, a frequent

35 Ibid 29
critic of Bloomberg’s education policies wrote: “all this unchecked authority has been used to turn New York City’s public schools into a demonstration of choice and free markets in education” (Ravitch, 2010).

Most of the Mayor’s support in the Black community came from a growing number of gentrifiers in Harlem, Brooklyn, and middle-class enclaves in the southeast Queens neighborhoods formerly represented by Rev. Floyd Flake in Congress. Bloomberg used this election mandate to more forcefully expand charters within the Portfolio Management Model, believing that Black and Latino communities had fully embraced his reform measures. That same year, Eva Moskowitz, who had been a City Council Member and Chair of the education committee, lost her election for Borough President of Manhattan and later opened her first charter school in Harlem in 2006.

Bloomberg also faced blistering criticism after a maneuver that extended term limits to three terms from the two that were codified in the New York City Charter after a ballot initiative 20 years earlier. To his critics, this was a power grab of epic proportions, underscored by the over $102 million he would eventually spend on his campaign for reelection – totaling nearly $300 million of his own money on 3 successive campaigns for Mayor. The Mayor narrowly defeated his Democratic opponent, William Thompson, who spent less than one tenth of the Bloomberg’s campaign cash, by 4 percentage points. The UFT stayed neutral realizing they made significant gains in the first two terms with a generous contract and, despite ongoing contention, needed an open channel to City Hall during upcoming contract negotiations. The stage was set for the reengagement of electoral coalitions toward electing the next mayor who would likely be more amendable to expanding parent engagement and claw back Bloomberg’s vigorous support for charters.
An Open Seat and Concerns over Sustainability

The end of Bloomberg’s administration provided an opportunity for charter advocates to shape the next Mayor’s stance on school choice and, since City Council Members are elected at the same time, advocates could prime the new legislature on pro-charter policy as well. But the Mayor’s race proved to be more challenging since all three Republicans and only one of the Democrats showed any interest in pursuing a school choice agenda.

In New York City, Democrats hold a six-to-one advantage over Republicans, but a Democrat had not been elected Mayor in over 20 years since the election of David Dinkins, the City’s first Black Mayor, in 1989. The next steward of City Hall was likely to be a Democrat with executive power over a $70 billion-dollar budget, over 250,000 municipal but the electorate’s lack of enthusiasm was bipartisan. Largely missing from the campaign season was an overall narrative promoting a vision that motivates voters to the polls but education advocates on both sides – charter and traditional public schools – watched closely as each candidate staked out positions on education reform. The first open seat for Mayor in twelve years required careful engagement by charter advocates if reforms were to survive the first few years of the new Administration.

In 2013, 10 candidates – 6 Democrats, 3 Republicans and 1 Independent - vied to replace Bloomberg. Of the 6 Democrats, Council Speaker Christine Quinn led the polls early in the cycle, but support evaporated precipitously from a high of 37% to roughly 19% as ties to Bloomberg during budget negotiations, a sign of strength to some, became a liability to a restive electorate. William Thompson, the City’s former Comptroller who narrowly lost to Bloomberg in 2009 consistently polled in second or third place. As the only African American candidate in a majority-minority City, some expected his presumed lock on African American votes to propel
him into one of the top two positions eligible for a runoff election. Thompson was a former member of the Board of Education and was its president from 1996-2001. He received endorsements from several high-profile elected officials and unions including the UFT and CSA which represents school principals and administrators with their hopes that he could constrain rapid charter growth and roll back much of the Bloomberg-era education policy. But Thompson’s connections to the business community as City Comptroller also gave him access to members of the Bloomberg regime and other wealthy interests. GothamSchools.org, a prominent education blog reported that Thompson long courted Bloomberg education allies including the Meryl Tisch – a big supporter of charter schools and the wealthy Chair of the Board of Regents that oversaw State education policy.

Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and Comptroller John Liu remained clustered at the bottom for much of the campaign. de Blasio was the favorite to win overwhelming labor support. Ties to Hillary and Bill Clinton and close relationships with Black leaders garnered him preferred status among liberal voters. Though his relationships are broad, they did not appear deep. Coveted labor support dispersed among most Democratic candidates and his policies, while generally sound, came off as too idealistic after twenty years of Giuliani and Bloomberg in office. Republican, Joe Lhota eventually received his Party’s nomination. Lhota, a supporter of school choice, held several positions in the Giuliani Administration including Commissioner of Finance, Director of the Office of Management and Budget and Deputy Mayor of Operations and had been appointed by Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo as Chair of the massive Metropolitan Transportation Authority overseeing a budget of $11 billion.

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36 If a City-wide candidate fails to win 40% of the vote in a primary, the top two candidates will vie for the nomination in a run-off election.
GothamSchools.org, hosted a mayoral forum that yielded some insight into candidate positions on education policy. Candidates like Thompson, Liu and de Blasio signaled positioning away from controversial policies. But despite pre- and post-primary positioning, the next mayor would need to contend with much of the same regime actors Bloomberg cultivated during his mayoralty. One Panel for Education Policy (PEP) member noted that over 12 years, Bloomberg built a “substantial house around the education system” and if too much is done too soon without a vision; “kids will be the collateral damage”. Though others felt collaborative engagement with hedge funds and other private sector organizations would not be sustainable in the long run. Debbie Meyer, a parent advocate living in Harlem suggested that without “replicable” results across the system, reform efforts would likely end up being experimental rather than supportable over the long term.

David Banks is President and CEO of the Eagle Academy Foundation and founding Principal of the Eagle Academy of the Bronx, the first of six all-boys high schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Newark, Manhattan and Staten Island. Mr. Banks formed partnerships with DOE, civic organization 100 Black Men and other public and private institutions to support his schools which have been featured on local and national media for the amazing results of its mostly African American and Latino population. Banks wanted to see the next Mayor foster similar public/private partnerships which had been beneficial to his work. Though Eagle schools are not charters, they relied heavily on support from Bloomberg allies in the business community in ways similar to charter leaders, particularly Geoff Canada, but despite its attractiveness as an alternative to charter schools, creation of new single-sex public schools in no longer permissible under the law. So, for Black business and community leaders that seek alternatives to traditional

37 Personal interview with Harlem community leader conducted September 15, 2018

38 Personal interview conducted September 15, 2018
schools, charters were one of a few remaining options, but the political and financial challenges remained prohibitive.

The UFT, supporters of traditional public schools, and many activists sought a Mayor who would encourage expansion of parent engagement and parent voice that many argued was stymied under mayoral control. Bloomberg opponents maintained his management of PEP (often described as farcical), and unsympathetic school closures exemplified haughtiness and heavy-handed control over the system. In fact, attendees at hearings charged that PEP decisions are a done deal well before the meeting takes place. The new Mayor was unlikely to relinquish control of schools, but many education advocates wanted a slowdown of what they felt was a free hand to promote rapid reform of the system. Choice advocates watched as de Blasio, the least likely candidate to support their reforms, won the general election in November of 2013 and a reelection in 2017.

Since Pataki’s first election for Governor in 1994, school choice’s largely conservative allies enjoyed support at the highest levels of New York State government. In the ensuing years, parents, education activists, clergy members community leaders – many of them African Americans- joined a nascent and rapidly growing movement that relied heavily on the support of elites who had little connection to the communities these schools serve. The unique circumstances that aligned political, social and economic forces at the State level could not be replicates as easily in heterogeneous local districts whose history of education activism is well-documented and steeped in narratives around racial and political equity. Reforms needed champions and powerful media allies who were willing to be advocates, but in key moments when the distinctive political climate that enabled policy adoption at the state and local level threatened to shift, advocates sprang into action to ensure their reforms survived threats to their sustainability.
Chapter 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

In the minds of many, political and social analysis is best approached at arms’ length, better enabling a stance of objectivity and lack of investment in particular findings. This makes sense in many ways, but it can also impose some costs. Researcher distance can purchase objectivity at the cost of insights, access, and understanding. Those costs can be especially significant when the focus of a study has to do with relationships and beliefs held closely in tight communities. In the instance of this dissertation, my prior and ongoing involvement in both the community of Harlem and the political movement around charters and choice played roles in both the establishment of my research questions and elements of my research design.

Background

In 2005, I joined New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein in meetings with community leaders, pastors and elected officials to promote charter schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan. Speaking with the urgency of a coach during halftime of a critical game, Klein exhorted local stakeholders to be creative, innovative and unafraid to introduce charters to parents in their communities. Many in attendance found the Chancellor’s proposition compelling– help young people achieve academic success now or wait until the bureaucracy, elected leadership and union priorities regarding governance and curriculum align – intimating that such an arrangement may never occur.

Klein’s appeals elicited strong, positive reactions among ministers of smaller congregations that lacked strong political and private sector allies. Black churches often sponsor their own education and after-school initiatives as part of a larger social justice mission. Big churches with middle-class congregations often engage in more complex economic development or affordable housing projects but since small churches exist on the political and financial
periphery, such endeavors prove financially risky. Klein encouraged smaller congregations to pool their resources and political capital through partnerships with more established clergy or local nonprofits while offering himself and the Bloomberg Administration as de facto political guarantors. African and Caribbean populations in Brooklyn and Harlem remained skeptical for some time but still viewed charters as an opportunity to infuse more of their history and culture into the curriculum. Despite a growing interest in charters though Klein’s advocacy, the financial barriers for smaller less established groups remained prohibitive.

The Bloomberg Administration and charter leaders remained attentive to calls for more grassroots engagement to promote their nascent reforms and turned aggressively to parent organizing. In 2006, the New York City Center for Charter Excellence hired me as a consultant to engage select charter schools in a pilot program to mobilize parents. The endeavor maintained three goals: gauge parent satisfaction with their school, assess the willingness to become parent advocates for charters broadly, and take steps toward expanding civic capacity among those parents. A final report highlighted many challenges. First, parent organizations in most of the pilot schools suffered from poor attendance at meetings or were moribund. Second, organizers external to the parent organization lacked credibility and though school leaders were more effective at galvanizing their parents around school-based issues, most parents had little interest in engagement with anyone outside their specific institution. Furthermore, financial difficulties and high teacher and school-leader turnover created anxiety over the long term viability of smaller mom and pop charters.

**Impetus for the Study and Research Questions**

Given my history with school choice and parent engagement, I was approached in March 2010 by leaders of the charter movement (donors and school leaders) in New York City and a
handful of Manhattan’s elected leadership to consider running against incumbent State Senator for the 30th District, Democrat Bill Perkins. Before redistricting after the 2010 census, the sprawling Senate district extended from just above the Museum of Natural History on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, through Harlem, and to the border of Washington Heights. Among the zip codes in the district, median income in 2010 ranged from $26,000 (in East Harlem) to $118,594 (closer to the Museum on the West Side). Policy priorities among residents varied considerably though the office is viewed as the Harlem (and symbolically - Black) Senate seat. Perkins, a popular incumbent with close ties to the Harlem political machine, antagonized charter school leaders with decidedly pro-UFT stances during the 2010 Race to the Top negotiations. The compressed time frame – only seven months between March and the September Democratic primary- underscored the need for early, sizeable campaign donations. Despite my concerns about an overall narrative for the race, charter advocates framed the contest as a pro-charter vs. anti-charter endeavor replete with attacks on the UFT and the Harlem political establishment.

During the campaign, older African American activists and white, liberal/progressive Upper West Side residents closely tied to political clubs viewed me as simultaneously elitist for my Catholic school and Ivy League education and ties to Bloomberg (which by proxy, meant Wall Street), and brazen for challenging an incumbent “out of turn”. The common refrains of “We don’t know you” and “You’re not really from here” were ubiquitous despite the fact that I lived in the district for over fifteen years. Both statements taken literally or euphemistically suggested I did not have a traceable – and thus trustworthy – history of activism in the community. Perkins won the race handily and charter advocates were denied legislative support in the State Senate, which created skepticism about their tactics and prompted my questions about the real attitudes of parents and voters about education reform.
On the surface, Perkins’ victory played like any other political campaign where insurgents struggle to gain traction against a formidable political machine, but underneath lay tension resulting from a complicated relationship among charter advocates, an increasing number of Black and Latino charter parents, established local political leaders, and the Bloomberg Administration. Charter advocates concerned themselves with critical questions similar to those that emerged after the 2006/2007 pilot program: How can parents become advocates for their schools? Can these parents become activists for education reform and school choice toward expanding the sector, and who should lead these efforts?

Reflecting on the local dynamic between charters, parents and community leaders over a decade since the pilot study and eight years after the Senate campaign, these questions continue to fuel serious inquiry among education advocates and researchers. Considering the literature on these topics, my additional experience and continued engagement in the field, the research questions for this study are twofold:

- How did the Bloomberg-era governing coalition and charter advocates in New York City use their political influence and resources to expand charter schools as a sector and survive threats to their sustainability, including a change in Mayoral Administrations from one highly supportive of charter expansion to one of skepticism and restraint; and
- How does a community with strong racial and cultural narratives entwined with education and political activism, respond to attempts to enshrine externally organized school reforms, and what does the tension reveal about challenges ahead for school choice?

To answer these questions and considering the concentration of charters in the upper Manhattan school districts, I returned to Harlem and began my investigation with select schools
from the aforementioned pilot study whose growth exemplified successful gubernatorial and mayoral policies that legitimized charter schools as a viable option for parents.

**Location of the Study**

Viewed through the lens of its African American population, Harlem maintains an inimitable place in the cultural, political and social fabric of New York City and America. The community’s demographic and political evolution, which continues today, provides a unique opportunity to view the sub-city politics of school reforms.

From the 1940s to 1950s, the migration of Blacks to New York contributed to a 62% increase in their population while the white population grew only 3%. White teachers in Harlem were poised to instruct many more black children but the issue of who should be teaching them was yet to be resolved (Perrillo, 2012). To address these concerns, the NAACP exerted pressure on the education bureaucracy to hire more black teachers and adopt more inclusive curriculum, and subsequently created an early iteration of tension between Harlem parents and New York City schoolteachers. Not surprisingly, white teachers and white parents rejected calls for integration and emulated the anti-integration protests of the south in the late 1950s in response. All throughout, African American activists and parents asserted their appeal for more inclusive, self-deterministic education policies without external influence from the education bureaucracy and teachers’ unions.

Passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 generated electoral success and diversified coalitions that could alter the racial and ethnic composition of governing regimes. Diversified power structures in New York City politics would help ease the tension of parent/teacher relationships but initially, very few blacks and Latinos achieved significant levels of political influence to address anxieties on the ground (Mollenkopf, 1986). Assertions of cultural inclusion
became more pronounced and extended well beyond the issue of public schools to include broad categories of government spending on the physical, economic and cultural development of communities of color.

Despite cross-neighborhood alliances and broad city-wide influence, black communities like Harlem still suffered under racial segregation, concentrated poverty and tremendous economic isolation. But they also felt a strong sense of identity, showed solidarity and produced higher rates of political participation that benefited the Democratic Party. Stronger racial unity led to enhanced mobilization against discrimination across multiple political venues and created organizations intended to improve the status of black citizens in favor of developing strong cohesive black communities (Bledsoe, Combs, Sigelman, & Welch, 1996). So for members of the Harlem community who were engaged in fights for increased political representation, regime inclusion and improved childhood education, effective school reform necessarily included strong relationships between the school (as an important neighborhood institution), community and engaged parents with little outside influence (M. Orr, 1999). Harlem was asserting its identity, creating social capital and building the framework for how racial and political authenticity would be evaluated.

The neighborhood developed political economies that bound the community and its cultural history closely together, and conceptually established a collective interest which itself was a local force (Stinchcombe, 1983). Elites built businesses, cultivated reputations and directed a consensus to eliminate any alternative vision of issues that reached the public agenda or became vulnerable to pluralist investigations. For those living there, Harlem provided a sense of physical and psychological security that comes with the familiar and dependable (Jacobs, 1961). Signs of commonality like skin color, engagement in collective activities such as worshipping and eating, created a distinction between insiders and interlopers (Lofland, 1971)
even as the community welcomed national and international leaders to its churches and restaurants.

Harlem’s history of collective action and parent activism would eventually produce New York’s first charter school. Located in School District 5, Sisulu-Walker, was widely viewed as the model for community-driven schools due to substantial early support from elected officials, clergy leaders and education activists. Three years earlier, the New York Times said District 5 was “where 5 of 18 schools are in danger of losing state accreditation because of poor academic achievement and where test scores have ranked near the bottom in the city… [T]he fiercest fights always seem to be about politics”.39

Within a few years, the neighborhood developed one of the largest concentrations of charter schools in the State with some activists feeling these newer schools strayed far from the original framework of Sisulu’s community-based structure. The NAACP’s opposition to charters owing largely to co-location, the outsized role of conservative-leaning philanthropies, and the extraordinary political and monetary resources external to Harlem, is juxtaposed by the fact that an overwhelming majority of students in these schools are African American and Latino.

Race, place and history create political economies that are hardened over decades of activism in an effort to keep the character of neighborhoods intact. Harlem, like many other historically African American and Latino communities, simultaneously reinforces its own uniqueness while protecting itself against external forces looking to coopt political and economic resources. Residents have a skepticism that often requires the use of gatekeepers - clergy members or community leaders - whose mediation is crucial for outsiders looking to gain

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footing. This skepticism abounds in the midst of rapid gentrification and sun-setting of the careers of aging political leaders and the institutions they funded - hurried by changes in the balance of power with new and younger racial/ethnic coalitions. The ability of regime participants to promote sustained policies within neighborhoods like Harlem is predicated upon the ability to deftly navigate local politics in the midst of these dramatic changes.

**Geographic Boundaries**

Harlem served as the specific geographic boundary for this study. Its borders shift depending on the context, be it historic, political, cultural or for city planning purposes, but the dissertation will train its attention on areas encompassing or within 8 zip codes in central Harlem (10026, 10027, 10030, 10037 10039), East Harlem (10029, 10035) and West Harlem/Manhattanville/Hamilton Heights (10031). These zip codes correspond to New York City Community Boards 9, 10 and 11. Generally speaking, City agencies and the New York City Center for Charter Excellence consider the Harlem districts to be school districts 4 and 5, though I included District 3 above 110th Street and bounded by Manhattan Avenue to the West and 5th Avenue to the East. District 6 was also be included in the area from the south side of 155th street from the Harlem River to Bradhurst Avenue. These additions were made because many older residents still refer to these areas as Harlem rather than newer designations by the City of New York.

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40 Community boards are local unsalaried representative bodies, half of whose members are nominated by local City Council members. They are tasked with land use and zoning issues, make recommendations on City budget matters and hear concerns about matters such as housing, liquor licenses for local businesses, traffic patterns and bus routes.
Qualitative Research and Data Collection

To estimate the reaction of Harlem residents to charter schools, those who support charters and their elected leadership, I employed realist ethnographic research to examine the behavior and language of a culture-sharing group (Creswell & Clark, 2007) - residents in the Harlem community. The intent was to develop a framework that can be applied broadly to other geographic areas with similar demographic or cultural history across New York City and the country, or toward the evaluation of other public policies implemented in similar communities.

This study probed associations through specific interactions or relationships and I hoped to uncover how residents and parents become more psychologically absorbed with politics and current events and recruit each other to become more engaged (Klofstad, 2007) - a key point for charter advocates looking to “deputize” parents. Thus, homogeneity (across certain factors like race, partisanship, income), cohesiveness (self-assessment of one’s attachment to others in their group), density (how much and to what extent there is intergroup discussion) and sophistication (politically interested and knowledgeable) may be determined (Parsons, 2014).

I assume that Harlem’s cultural/historical narrative shapes localized social identity and if shared group characteristics among the African American population are evident, the study would uncover who shares these characteristics and views, and who does not; we can therefore reveal notions of authenticity and legitimacy among residents. The results of this analysis are integral to the study because network homogeneity (such as what may be developed by Harlem residents or other tight-knit communities over time) produces strong associations and strong identities and will test if residents react similarly to receive political information. A snowball strategy allowed me to ascertain from residents their associates based on level of closeness.
Interview Recruitment Protocol

For an ethnographic study, I collected data through observations, interviews and documents, though interviews were the main instrument for data collection and play a central role in data collection.

I used a standardized open-ended interview that provides some structure and standardization – particularly across similarly grouped respondents- but allows participants to contribute more detailed information, providing an opportunity for more probing questions (Turner III, 2010). Interviews provided a unique opportunity for individuals to speak freely and contributed to the understanding of their experiences in the community and with education reforms a local policy issue. Respondents answered 10-15 open-ended questions with the intention of diversifying interviewees based on age, length of residence in Harlem, voting history and engagement with the school system.

Purposeful Sampling

In order to immerse myself in a culture-sharing group that has common language and patterns of behavior within Harlem, the study intentionally (but not exclusively) focused on locations where large numbers of Harlem community members gather regularly and discuss local and national issues. Four churches with considerable political and symbolic history in the neighborhood- Abyssinian Baptist Church (Abyssinian), First Corinthian Baptist Church (FCBC), Convent Avenue Baptist Church (Convent), and Canaan Baptist Church (Canaan)-were chosen to recruit interview subjects. Abyssinian was founded in 1809 and is the third oldest Baptist church in America\(^\text{41}\). Located in central Harlem on 138\(^{th}\) street, Abyssinian counts among its members much of Harlem’s political, nonprofit and business elite. Abyssinian is

\(^{41}\) Abyssinian Baptist Church. September 1923. *The Crisis* pages 203-205.
considered a landmark in African American political and civil rights history thanks to its former pastors.

Among them, Adam Clayton Powell Sr. served from 1908 to 1936, and was a founder of the National Urban League and trustee of three historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Powell Sr. attended Virginia Union and graduated from Yale Divinity School. He was succeeded by his son, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. who pastored from 1937 to 1971 and presided over the biggest increase in Abyssinian’s congregation to date. Powell Jr. also gained notoriety after being elected the first African American Member of Congress from New York State when sworn in to office in 1946, eventually serving twelve terms. A fighter for social and economic justice, Powell Jr. coined the phrase “Don’t shop where you can’t work” urging both social and economic justice from the pulpit and the halls of Congress, and instrumental in much of the education legislation known to us today. Current pastor, Rev. Dr. Calvin Butts III, advances the mission of the church through substantial and lucrative economic development and housing programs. His close ties to former Mayor Bloomberg and former Governor Pataki during their Administrations ran contrary to the political leaning of many in his congregation but demonstrates shrewd political strategy that has provided support for his initiatives. Under Governor Pataki, Rev. Butts was named President of the State University of New York (SUNY)-Old Westbury.

Founded in 1942, Convent Ave Baptist Church in northern Harlem maintains an older, dwindling congregation but remains active through programs installed by early Pastors such as the Harlem Boys and Girls Club once attended by some of Harlem’s best known local heroes in entertainment and public service. One of its most prominent pastors, Mannie L. Wilson grew the young church’s membership substantially and purchased Convent’s current building on W. 144th Street. He was the first African-American Protestant clergy member to preach in St. Patrick’s
Cathedral in New York City and the first Black pastor to preach in the White House. A growing Hispanic community prompted Rev. Wilson to organize the Washington Heights Spanish Baptist Church. Rev. Jessie Williams is now Pastor after the long tenure of Clarence Grant from 1982 to 2005.

First Corinthian Baptist Church was organized in 1933 and is viewed by many to be the fastest growing church in Harlem. Housed in an old Vaudeville theater, fading attendance at services and church functions caused the church to flirt with closure years before Rev. Michael Waldron was charged to lead its revitalization in 2004. A Morehouse College graduate who raised a child with his college sweetheart while living in their dorm room, Walrond rose quickly to become a political force in New York City politics. In 2013, Mayor-elect de Blasio appointed Rev. Walrond to his transition team. Though Walrond ran unsuccessfully against Charles Rangel in a Democratic primary for Congress the next year, he continues to engage on issues like increasing the minimum wage, affordable housing, LGBTQ rights and prison reform.

Three years ago, FCBC added a third Sunday service to accommodate worshippers turned away by long lines to get into the church. FCBC attracts hundreds of socially active, college educated young professionals among Harlem’s new residents but also draws from all over New York City. In 2010, 60% of the church’s members had never been baptized suggesting FCBC’s appeal to young African Americans and Latinos is significant with the potential to mobilize these new congregants for other purposes.

Canaan Baptist Church was also targeted for recruitment. Founded in 1932, it is known by the reputation and activism of legendary Pastor Rev. Dr. Wyatt T. Walker. I delve more of into Walker’s history and that of the church later in the case study but its role in founding New York’s first charter, Sisulu-Walker Academy, is critical to the investigation into the relationship between charter schools and the Harlem community.
Older congregations at Canaan, Convent and Abyssinian, had unique knowledge of community-based civic engagement and interaction with external leaders in business and politics. Engaging a younger, active congregation at FCBC, I was able to interview parents considering education options for their children but whose political engagement does not necessarily involve long-standing alliances with organized labor. In other words, they would mostly likely be young people who were either raised in a non-union household or where themselves not unionized at any time in their professional careers. They may be mindful and active in social justice through their own organizing efforts, attendance at events or donations to political campaigns. As many are newer residents, they exhibited more independence from older elected officials and community leaders.

My overall goal with choosing these churches was to increase geographic and income diversity among high religiosity residents who routinely engaged other Harlemites at large gatherings i.e. engaged in forming bonding capital. After beginning with individuals whom I knew attended these institutions either through my own knowledge or from attending services for the purpose of the study, I employed a snowball strategy to ask interview participants for five recommendations of parents that have, or may know of others who, send children to charter schools. Parents who did not have children, or sent children to other types of schools, were included in the study and referred to me through the same process.

Democratic Club meetings are also open to the public. Members talk about local issues and threats to specific preferred policies. Clubs engage specific campaign activities for candidates they collectively support and listen to appeals made by candidates for endorsements. I attended meetings at 4 local Democratic clubs - Martin Luther King Democratic Club (MLK), Fred Samuel (of which I am a member), Sojourner Truth and Uptown Democrats. I was present at Community Board meetings, which are localized units of City government whereby members
are appointed by the Borough president (a countywide office) and the local City Council Member. They vote on issues ranging from re-zoning of public land to awarding liquor license to businesses – though some votes are not binding i.e. they only serve as the neighborhood’s recommendations to City Agencies on policy matters.

Community Boards, like Democratic Clubs, also serve as launching pads to elected office, especially in the absence of school board elections. The current State Senator for Harlem, Brian Benjamin, was a Chair of Community Board 10. Where charter schools are concerned, the Board has no formal role in the creation or citing of a charter schools but schools in the application process often go before the full Board and the Board’s education committee to discuss plans and assuage any concerns –colocation being the most controversial.

Each group will have an elected or appointed leader (Pastor, Chair or President) that may act as a gatekeeper for those looking to engage Harlem residents. Each provided qualitative data on policy ideas and concerns among “grasstops” and “grassroots” residents. I expected, and noted through interviews, any overlapping membership in the aforementioned organizations or institutions as well as any that were not part of my purposeful sample.

Toward differentiating the views of grasstops/grassroots, for every organization leader interviewed, I selected individuals within those institutions and gathered demographic and contextual information likely to provide more insight into how residents across different levels of income, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, length of residence in the community, perceive or interact with external political forces – especially on the issue of charter schools.

The study relied heavily on archival data and newspaper articles from the 1950s until the present that mention or focus on the intersection of Harlem, civil rights, education policy, parents and school governance. Meeting minutes from community based organizations, local community board meetings and those from charter school board meetings were examined.
Culturally, I looked at themes that may regularly present themselves: religiosity, membership in other community-based organizations or membership in organization southside of the community, board memberships and volunteer activities (the number of organizations and type are relevant). Other important questions that emerged were: How many organizations do participants have in common with each other? Are specific organizations looked at as culturally unique or prestigious? What voting patterns exist among these individuals or do patterns emerge by grouping? How long have residents lived in the Harlem community?

As a political consultant and Democratic Party leader, I have long-standing relationships with some of the individuals I interviewed. Additionally, I ran for State Senate in Harlem as one of the charter-backed candidates. A potential limitation of the study is that interview subjects may already have some familiarity with my position on school choice or couch their positions on choice in a manner consequent to my position in the Democratic Party. While recruiting for interviews, I was clear that my research was an unbiased investigation and solicited open and honest discussion. Conversation flowed freely with no evidence that participants took care not to respond to my questions or limit their responses. In fact, I feel my professional experience aided in obtaining interviews with high-level individuals whose insight proved valuable to this study. Furthermore, given the preexisting relationship in some cases, subjects may have felt some comfort in sharing sensitive information and ease in knowing I could comprehend the nuance of local politics and pressures. At no time did I feel that my requests for interviews were impeded or denied due to my political stances, instead sensing that many subjects were eager to speak on many of the issues and concerns raised in the discussion of this study.
Recruitment of Charter Advocates and Government Leaders

Democracy Prep, Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ), Sisulu-Walker, Village Academies and Success Academies served as initial targets of inquiry for four reasons. First, they took part in the initial pilot program sponsored by the New York City Center for Charter Excellence and the preexisting relationship could portend a more open discussion. Second, since the pilot program in 2006, they continued to engage their own parents individually and through larger parent mobilization efforts by third party organizations. Third, as early adopters of charter policy, they benefitted from strong political support without substantial organized response from charter opponents and thus able to navigate the political terrain more freely. Finally, their Boards are active in both political advocacy on behalf of school choice and fundraising for their schools. Initial contact with school leaders and board members via email and phone calls led to discussions with multiple board members and parents who had or have children in these schools.

My work with the Bloomberg Administration prior, and subsequent to the pilot program, allowed me to engage high ranking (current and former) staff in the New York City Department of Education and executive staff of former Mayor Bloomberg. I also interviewed members of the Cuomo, Paterson and Pataki gubernatorial administrations. To verify the importance of these individuals and groups, I matched those names to mentions in mainstream and education-specific news publications, such as Chalkbeat, Politico’s Education newsletter, and Edweek, to substantiate their role in reform efforts. School leaders such as principals or chief operating officers of charter schools located in Harlem constituted a second tier of charter advocate for their direct engagement with schools, parents and presumed advocacy role in broader education reform activism are important to the study. Staff at independent expenditures (IEs) like

\[^{42}\] An independent expenditure is an expenditure for a communication "expressly advocating the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate that is not made in cooperation, consultation, or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate, a candidate’s authorized
Families for Excellent Schools, Democrats for Education Reform, and StudentsFirstNY, constitute a third tier of charter advocate, and are likely to regularly participate in formal communications and design a mobilization infrastructure for when parents and supportive community members are needed to engage political institutions on behalf of reformers. Specific former and current elected officials, former and current nonprofit and clergy leaders that live, raised children, or have substantial work history in Harlem, Washington Heights and Upper West Side were selected. Union leaders and union-allied activists that support traditional public schools were interviewed. A total of 41 interviewees were classified into 11 categories:

committee, or their agents, or a political party or its agents." 11 CFR 100.16(a). Taken from www.fec.gov
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION/COMMENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bloomberg or Giuliani Mayoral Administration Official (3)</td>
<td>Former members of the Giuliani or Bloomberg Administrations; Some may still work in the current Mayoral Administration under de Blasio; If specific job was with the Department of Education at the State or City levels, that will be noted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pataki, Paterson or Cuomo Gubernatorial Administration Official (3)</td>
<td>Former members of the Pataki or Paterson Administrations; Some may still work in the current Cuomo Administration or moved to other parts of government at the State and local level. That will be noted when applicable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Advocate (4)</td>
<td>Anyone that directed/worked for an organization that promoted the mission of charter schools broadly but was not specifically connected to a charter school; A staff member of leader of a charter advocacy organization; Donors who wrote checks upwards of $1000 to campaigns or organizations aligned with charter schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Leader (5)</td>
<td>Any person employed by, consults with or sits on the board of a specific charter school or charter school network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public School Leader (3)</td>
<td>Any person employed by, consults with or advocates for a specific public school or traditional public education broadly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Labor (2)</td>
<td>Member or leader of a labor union that may or may not be representing public school teachers or other employees associated with public schools; This person could be in a leadership position of the union or a member employed elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leader (4)</td>
<td>Member of the clergy, leader of a local civic, community based or political organization; Tenant Association President; Community Board member or on the executive committee; They are not elected to office but may be appointed to local positions by elected officials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected Official (2)</td>
<td>Current or former elected official representing the greater Harlem area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Parent (5)</td>
<td>Parent that has (or has had) at least one child in a charter school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public School Parent (5)</td>
<td>Has at least one child attending traditional public schools or has had at one time but has not had any children in a charter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parent (2)</td>
<td>Parent whose child/children attend or attended a school other than a traditional public school or charter school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media (3)</td>
<td>Reporters that often cover education and/or politics – mostly State government; Also includes members of the editorial board, producers or bookers for television.</td>
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</table>
Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Four interviewees did not feel comfortable with a recorded dialogue, at which time I took careful notes with their approval. Potential bias in interviews was a concern given my public appearances and the earlier campaign for political office on a choice platform - the issue central to this study. I knew many interviewees from professional and personal interaction over the course of my career and anticipated that some respondents would be fearful of offending me or be concerned about revealing too much about their own deeply held beliefs. They could potentially tailor their comments to be politically appealing to audiences they anticipate reading the finished product. For added integrity and security measures beyond the written statement of consent, I adopted similar rules to that of journalists in developing stories since many of the respondents were elected officials and community leaders with experience speaking to media. Some of the interviews, or portions of them, were on background - that is, I would use the information to provide context to the study but not attribute information directly to the interviewee. Speaking on background allowed respondents to provide detail and, in some cases, explanations for concepts and behavior not available through other means. Occasionally, an interviewee would ask that his or her comments be used off the record which meant that I could not use any information provided, but I could, and would be led to, locate other sources that could confirm the information. Direct quotes were given on the record with permission (written or verbal via a recording) of the respondent.

**Campaign Finance Data**

A major component of the study centers around engagement of regime actors, charter advocates and political candidates, evidence of which required information from the New York State and New York City Board of Elections. I investigated the Senatorial districts of the three incumbent State Senators targeted in 2010 for the names of their campaign committees and the
committees created by insurgents running in those districts. From there, I tracked donations using the New York State Campaign Finance website. A previously established database of charter supporters, when paired with donations, provided a representation of how reformers supported insurgent candidates. Similarly, I gauged the increased support incumbents received including any unusual donations (by source or amount). Campaign finance documents shed light on whether these same individuals or groups donated to independent expenditures (IEs) that supported pro-charter candidates including incumbents on the State and local levels.

**Analysis of Newspaper Articles**

Media can drive the political debate, package and frame issues that have social, and political impacts and act as a conduit for the narratives of others (Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). There is also a strong relationship between the media and the ways in which people absorb and interpret issues, the framing of which may convey specific themes, emphasis and meaning (Miller, 1997). Guided by the studies of Dardis, Werner and Schnell (Dardis, 2006; Riff et al., 2014; Schnell, 2001; Werder, 2002), an analysis of newspaper articles was conducted as a secondary confirmation measure of personal interviews with charter advocates, elected officials and regime actors some of whom reported pitching stories to media outlets. No hypotheses were developed, nor inferences made, based on the specific content of the articles. There was no attempt to determine if articles had influence on readers’ opinions about school choice, Race To The Top or specific schools or actors.

Adhering to a systematic and replicable analysis of newspaper articles involving school choice, I sought only to provide a broad characterization of how specific media outlets framed the issue at crucial moments in local and statewide discussions. The full text of each article was examined, and rudimentary coding procedures included the identification of the newspaper title,
date of article, and overall tone—negative, positive, or neutral (Werder, 2002) were employed to represent the predominant feeling of the article. As a final confirmation measure against researcher subjectivity, I looked at the language of stakeholders, like the UFT or specific charter advocates and school leaders, when they articulated positions in these publications. I crosschecked their language in other media or from their own press releases and presentations to address any ambiguity or judgement about their distinct positions.

Table 3: Framing Codes for Media Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TONE</th>
<th>FRAMING DESCRIPTION AND THEMES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>In support of charter schools and school choice; media framing tended to be anti-legislature and unions; charters and their supporters viewed as “helping”, “saving”, poor and/or minority students; raising or producing good achievement scores; provides options; attached to civil rights rhetoric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Charter schools, leaders or advocates viewed as anti-labor; sense of exclusivity; at odds with parents and elected officials on curriculum, disciplinary procedures; engaged in creaming or cherry-picking; colocation tied to pushing out other students; Reduction in parent voice; low/moderate achievement scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Reflects both positive and negative views of a charter school or school leader; highlights variables that would encourage a parent to send their child to that school with cautionary comments about the school or sector.</td>
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\textsuperscript{43} Annual circulation data can be found in Top Dailies in New York Area. \textit{Crain’s New York Business} retrieved from www.crainsnewyork.com
newspapers by circulation in New York for the last 8 years and are considered important and influential among elected officials for their sought-after political campaign endorsements. The Amsterdam News enjoys long-standing presence in New York City’s African American community. The paper distributed its first copy in 1909 and its endorsement of candidates for elected office is a sign of viability among African American voters. Though a weekly publication with lower circulation, it was included in the analysis for its importance to Harlem residents. The Wall Street Journal and Newsday also report high circulation in New York City. The Wall Street Journal rarely endorses candidates. Newsday focuses much of its local coverage on Queens, Long Island, city-wide and state-wide politics but less so for Manhattan and Harlem. Both were excluded from the study. News Corp, founded by conservative business leader Rupert Murdoch, owns The New York Post and The Dow Jones Co. - which owns the Wall Street Journal. In 2013, News Corp spun-off 21st Century Fox, which owns Fox News Channel.

I used the search engine of each publication in addition to a Lexis/Nexis search for the following keywords: school choice, charter school, education policy, education reform, UFT, teachers union, public school and State Senate, Bill Perkins, Bloomberg and schools, and Joel Klein. The search used articles from January 2010 to December 2014 inclusive. Race to the Top Phase 1 applications were due on January 19, 2010. That year, the State held elections for its offices (Governor, Controller, Attorney General, State Senate and State Assembly) and insurgent Senate candidates received substantial backing from charter advocates. While 2012 was another election year for the State Assembly and Senate, 2013 was a New York City Mayoral election that saw the transition from the Bloomberg to de Blasio Administrations. In 2014, New Yorkers voted for their State legislators and governor again. It was also the first year of the de Blasio Administration, when he waded early and significantly into the charter debate.
Early Political and Parent Organizing

Coalition building became a useful tool for special interests looking to gain power in New York City, and the growing cultural and electoral significance of Harlem proved fertile ground for these efforts. Democratic leaders of New York’s Tammany Hall, who noticed their power waning, recruited Harlem’s new West Indian immigrants. White anti-segregationist laborers from the Teachers Union (TU) (Perrillo, 2012) and the local communist party fighting for worker’s rights (Taylor, 2013), enlisted black Harlemites as allies. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr.’s replacement on the City Council, Benjamin J. Davis, ran and won on the Communist Party line. But the Democrats, with local and national influence, offered a young Harlem leader named J. Raymond Jones, dubbed the Harlem Fox, resources to create a framework for a new Democratic coalition that would provide Harlem with political agency and bridging capital for decades to come.

While Jones strove to gain more clout in city, state and national politics, Harlem activist Ella Baker linked Democratic Party-aligned political organizing to broad policy engagement by spearheading the neighborhood’s push for reforms in social welfare and education. Baker had been an active member in the NAACP since 1938 and was a close associate of W.E.B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph and Thurgood Marshall. In 1952, she became the first woman to run the New York City chapter of the NAACP and under her leadership, the civil rights organization put much of their weight behind uniting parents. Baker had a close working relationship with Dr. Kenneth Clark (researcher of the famous doll study from Brown v. Board of Education’s Footnote 1144 and together, their deep interest in community-based education and the role of

44 Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie Clark were psychologists who studied the effects of segregation on Black Children in the so-called “doll study” and testified during the Brown that
parents in school-based reforms led to collaboration on an advisory committee organized by the Board of Education to examine African American and Latino instruction (Stulberg, 2008).

Baker and the NAACP exerted tremendous pressure on the education bureaucracy, which subsequently created the first iteration of tension between Harlem parents and New York City schoolteachers. The issue of black education became far more acute as the schools began to accept students whose parents moved from the south during the migration. From the 1940s to 1950s, the Black population increased by 62% and the white population only 3%. White teachers were poised to instruct many more black children but the issue of who would teach them was yet to be resolved (Perrillo, 2012).

J. Raymond Jones’ political leadership atop the Harlem Democratic machine gave him the ear of Democratic Mayor Robert Wagner but his efforts to broker peace between teachers and activists were unheeded among factions that included liberals, teachers and white parents rejecting calls for integration. White teachers and parents borrowed civil rights tactics and began to mirror the anti-integration protests of the south in the late 1950s and early 1960s even before the pivotal 1968 Ocean Hill/Brownville protests (Walter, 1989) to demand new systems if they were going to teach the diversifying youth of Harlem and New York City and under what conditions their services would be rendered. The Voting Rights Act in 1965 sparked electoral success that could alter regimes but despite the successful elections of white leaders based on biracial coalitions, few blacks and Latinos achieved significant levels of political influence and power at City Hall or in State Government to address these tensions on the ground (Mollenkopf, 1986).

“prejudice, discrimination, and segregation” created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem.” The Court, citing the tests in Footnote 11, found that segregation was injurious to African American children. http://www.naacpldf.org/brown-at-60-the-doll-test
In the 1960s amid extensive racial unrest at a time when Black Power movements called for autonomy and control of their policy destiny, community development corporations like the Harlem Urban Development Corporation and the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (K. Johnson, 2004) were the beneficiaries of government funding to assist neighborhoods with revitalizing themselves. This period also saw stronger assertions of cultural inclusion, and the growth of school choice propelled by parents in East and Central Harlem, and Brooklyn.

While Harlem was tending to its physical and economic infrastructure, the philosophy of self-determination was being integrated into local education initiatives. The Black Panthers and Young Lords from East Harlem created community schools independent of the Department of Education and tension was palpable: landlord v. tenant, teacher v. student, principal v. parent and activists v. the legal community.

In 1968, after the Ocean Hill Brownsville teachers’ strike, the state legislature passed the 1969 Decentralization Law (Podair, 2002). Mayor Lindsay relinquished control of the schools and gave partial control to 31 locally elected school boards and instituted a seven-member central board comprised of one appointee from each Borough President and two from the Mayor. With decentralization, Harlem residents saw rapid growth of African-American community-led independent schools representing a strong repudiation of the educational status quo. These alternative schools were the brainchild of Columbia University Professor Preston Wilcox.

Wilcox was a crusader for Harlem’s aspiration to teach its own children and forge partnerships with whomever it chose without City Hall’s influence. He was part of a large growing movement of leaders pushing for community control of schools. Other activists in this endeavor include Dr. Kenneth Clark who consulted with Dr. Madelon Delany Stent from Teachers College, and Cyril deGrasse Tyson (father of Astronomer Neil deGrasse Tyson) to found HARYOU, Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, in 1962. HARYOU pushed at the
local, state and federal level for community-based education reforms, eventually securing millions of dollars from the Johnson Administration. Government largesse notwithstanding, the decision of whether or not to accept public dollars was never truly resolved. Foundation monies from Ford and Rockefeller were already flowing to the neighborhood for pilot programs but wary of the constraints on use, Wilcox and others eventually sought separation from the bureaucracy of philanthropic politics. The rationalization for activists was clear: schools must be autonomous and children and families must be held accountable for the learning of relevant curriculum (Vann, 1970).

Madelon’s Stent’s daughter, Michelle Stent, was born in Sydenham Hospital (the hospital Mayor Koch later closed amid protest) and raised in Harlem. Among her jobs in the public and private sectors, she worked for the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate, Republican Edward Brooke from Massachusetts, and was mentored by Shirley Chisolm and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. for a time. Her family was approached by the elite Ethical Culture Fieldston School in Riverdale, New York to attend their middle school. Part of the Ivy Prepatory School League, Ethical Culture is a private school that boasts a wide array of groundbreaking political, literary and business figures among its alumni.

After graduating from Music and Art High School, she attended Tufts University, which heavily recruited African Americans from Harlem in those days. Six children in a four block radius of her home went to Tufts while she attended. Assembly Member Keith Wright (who also went to Ethical Culture), mayoral candidate – and former Board of Education President - Billy Thompson, Bernard Harleston (a former President of the City College of New York) and Kathryn Chenault (an attorney and wife of former American Express CEO Ken Chenault), were her friends on campus at the same time.\(^{45}\) In fact Bill Perkins, the “enemy of charters” was sent

\(^{45}\) Personal interview conducted on October 2, 2018
by his mother to a non-zoned middle school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and, through the A Better Chance program, went to the prestigious Collegiate High School, eventually graduating from Brown University. Opportunities for Harlem residents to attend non-zoned or independent schools were prevalent in the late 1950s through 1970s, perhaps as a way for predominantly white schools to heed the call for integration without the political tumult of busing and potential white flight. While Harlem schools were being shaped by community leaders committed to improving educational opportunities in their own neighborhoods consistent with local narratives, parallel opportunities were being created for some of Harlem’s elite that eventually allowed them to bridge the neighborhood’s more prominent members with elites in business and government at the local, state, and federal levels. In one exchange, Ms. Stent said:

I believe Ethical Culture’s humanistic vision of recognizing the potential of the rising Black middle class in the 1950’s and offering scholarships to young Black professionals’ children in nursery school set the Black professional groundwork for “affirmative action” baby boomers. This early preparation for “elite” college, graduate and professional schools created the first significant generation of Black professionals integrating into mainstream white American culture. Personally, although I knew as a Black woman in white America with my chosen career in law and public policy -mentoring and opportunity would be through the Black professional networking world - I also knew I was prepared for any substantive situation I was placed in.46

46 Interview with Michelle Stent conducted October 18, 2018
Lisa M. Stulberg’s ethnographic investigation of reforms in Oakland and New York City (Stulberg, 2008) suggests that parents and community leaders believed student success would be best served by highlighting an explicit connection between academic achievement, racial identity and community development but in New York City, the battle between integration and place/race-based education had not fully resolved. Racial integration has often been viewed as a means to combat America’s race problems by shaping informal contacts social and cultural capital and professional networking (Welch, Sigelman, Bledsoe, & Combs, 2001). Harlem wrestled with questions around neighborhood-based education versus the lure of integration which was further complicated by an influx of Puerto Rican residents in East Harlem and the related movement for independent culturally inclusive education. Parents and teachers on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, which was predominantly white, attempted to establish more integrated educational spaces believing these could only be achieved through independence from the district (Meier, 2003). Whether through inter-neighborhood integration strategies or intra-community race and place-based programs, Harlem developed social and political networks that created pathways for communication and resource sharing among contiguous neighborhoods and between government and residents.

Despite cross neighborhood alliances and broad city-wide influence Black communities like Harlem still suffered under racial segregation and concentrated poverty. The growing economic isolation of Harlem Blacks produced solidarity and higher rates of political participation connected to the Democratic Party. With a strong sense of shared fate, they were more likely to see themselves as victims of discrimination and joined to organizations intended to improve the status of citizens in favor of developing prosperous African American communities rather than integrating them (Bledsoe et al., 1996). So for members of Harlem who were concerned about the connection between political representation, regime inclusion and
childhood education, effective school reform involved relationships between the school (as an important neighborhood institution) and engaged parents (M. Orr, 1999). Harlem was asserting its identity, creating social capital and building the framework for how local authenticity would be evaluated.

From 1980 to 1989, a series of racially charged incidents exposed Mayor Ed Koch’s turbulent relationship with Harlem’s leadership typified by the closing of Sydenham Hospital, and the Mayor’s categorization of Black social welfare advocates as “poverty pimps”, which sealed his fate ahead of the 1989 primary election against David Dinkins. Koch’s derogatory statements about Harlem, and shrinkage of funding for social programs as a result of tight fiscal policies, irreparably damaged his reelection chances. Harlem leaders planned for substantial gains in the coming election in a diverse governing regime under Dinkins. An inclusive economic message was critical – one that Harlem residents felt encompassed their needs but would not alienate the outer boroughs nor white voters who comprised the majority of the electorate.

That strategy helped David N. Dinkins become New York City’s first African American Mayor in 1989, and regime change was atop the agenda (Mollenkopf, 1986; Sites, 1997). He was a Harlem resident and a close ally of Congressman Charles Rangel, Percy Sutton - businessman and lawyer to Malcolm X, and political and labor leader Basil Paterson. Black political actors and white elites who were unaccustomed to welcoming minority groups into the governance structures at this level, set the bar incredibly high for Dinkins. The new Mayor, an


example of Gillespie’s second cohort of black leadership, embraced race neutral and multicultural language, running as a unifier of the City’s “gorgeous mosaic”. Shortly after entering office however, he was plagued by highly charged racial incidents, constant prodding by activist Rev. Al Sharpton who used the language and tactics of civil rights to call out Dinkins and Democratic leaders (Rich, 2012). Sharpton and others began questioning the efficacy of Dinkins’ attempts to appease whites by not directly engaging race and ethnicity despite having been elected by a coalition that relied heavily on African American and Latino voters. Dinkins served a single term and his successor, Rudy Giuliani, would become a template to some for racial enmity.

The elections of Mayors from Lindsay to Dinkins featured the strength and influence of Harlem-led coalitions that secured successes for white elites. Harlem developed political economies that made the community and its cultural history indispensable to the political establishment in New York and nationally. If you were branded by Harlem, then you were branded symbolically by the African American community. Establishing a collective interest was imperative for the narrative to succeed, which was itself a local force (Stinchcombe, 1983). Black elites built businesses, cultivated reputations and guided consensus to eliminate any alternative vision of issues that reached the public agenda or became vulnerable to pluralist investigations. For those living there, Harlem provided a sense of physical and intellectual security that comes with the familiar and dependable (Jacobs, 1961). Signs of commonality like skin color, engagement in collective activities such as worshipping and eating, created a distinction between insiders and interlopers (Lofland, 1971).

From these considerations of race, place and social capital, development of racial authenticity evaluations attempt to measure the trustworthiness of individuals of and by a shared racial or ethnic group and their social networks. The community achieves collective identity and
assesses external and internal players by their authenticity – less a quantifiable variable than a measure of cultural cues tied to a community’s history. Thus, in order to affect change from those socialized in this specific place, a gatekeeper or emissary is engaged. The role of political deliberation here may be to assist external actors in negotiating the details of initial neighborhood engagement even before benefits are conferred for doing so. On a range of policy issues and for individuals engaged in the public or private sector, Harlem’s political and cultural heritage is a legitimizing and validating resource. Harlem became a brand and being labeled inauthentic or unfavorable to Harlem was generalized the represent one’s relationship with African Americans in the community.49

Demographic Changes Alter the Landscape

The collective interests that bound Harlem together included protection of its history as well as its physical space. But decades of neglect took its toll and by the late 1980s, residents believed that rapid changes would soon overtake the community, putting pressure on its economic and political institutions. In fact, by the mid 1980’s New York City owned nearly 60% of the housing stock in Harlem but an aggressive plan by Mayor Ed Koch, later implemented by C. Virginia Fields (both Democrats) when she was Borough President in the late 1990s and early 2000s, created 150,000 new housing units with 60% designated for low to moderate income families (Van Ryzin & Genn, 1999). Neoliberal policy toward gentrified neighborhoods empowered City agencies to sell off the New York City’s housing stock after long periods of abandonment and disinvestment (Bernt, 2012; DeFilippis & Saegert, 2007),

49 Drawn from interviews with elected officials and community leaders in Harlem during the course of this study. Interviewees spent considerable time talking about Harlem as a brand and the importance to communities of color nationally. A general assessment of a candidate as inauthentic for example, came to stand for that candidates’ inability to relate to Black residents.
yielding a common blight-to-revitalization theme found in countless articles on Harlem’s renaissance (Lipman, 2013).

New housing accelerated significant demographic shifts and expanded residential opportunities for a new generation of highly educated Black professionals while the overall political muscle of Black residents, the more reliable primary voters, shrank.\(^{50}\) The community is undergoing an outmigration— a reverse of the great migration of the 1940s and 1950s that brought most of Harlem’s Black community to New York. The greater Harlem community saw a 16% drop in its Black population, and a 23% increase in its white population from 2000 to 2010 settling into a mix of new developments and older housing stock that has been renovated for rent or purchase. In all eight zip codes studies, the black population shrank – in one case as much as 41% - and the white community increased, with the number of whites doubling or tripling in half the zip codes. The Latino population remained relatively unchanged in that period but has increased their percentage in the Congressional district which extends into Upper Manhattan and the Bronx with a more diverse mix of nationalities represented.\(^{51}\)

New York saw the greatest proportion of its white residents leave between 1975 and 1980 but in a startling reversal that outpaced much of the rest of New York City, central Harlem saw the white population increase 846% from 2000 to 2015 (2,235, to 21,152 persons). Here also, the Black population decreased ten percent.\(^{52}\)

A study by New York City Comptroller found that from 2007-2012, the number of black owned businesses in the City declined by more than 30% citing black community’s

\(^{50}\) Ibid 1

\(^{51}\) Information gathered from US Census Data.

disproportionate exposure during the financial crisis and diminishing presence in the City as a percent of overall population. Overall, in gentrifying neighborhoods, 21% of Black and Hispanic youth (age 18-24) are out of school and out of work compared to just 12% of Whites. Ten percent of Black and 9% of Hispanic adults (age 25-65) are unemployed, versus 3% of Whites. Blacks, in particular, are significantly underrepresented in business overall accounting for 22 percent of the city’s population but only three percent of local businesses. Over the last five years, these numbers have grown steadily worse, with the exception of health care and social-assistance related businesses.53

Income levels have also changed dramatically and on average, Harlem has become wealthier. Fewer individuals making under $40,000 live there compared to the year 2000 and the number of persons making over 100K grew by over 5% since that time. Median income in central Harlem between 2006 and 2016 increased from $36,732 to $46,244 accompanied by a 33% increase in the number of persons with a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Harlem’s new racial and class composition is ripe for the type of integrated schools that education activists sought, and many current scholars and activists still seek (Stillman, 2011). But the effect of gentrification on the fabric of Harlem as a community is varied (Stulberg, 2008) and though some integrated charters are emerging, there is yet to be a community-wide, externally organized push for SES and racially integrated schools. The growth in Harlem has largely occurred among charter schools through the work of school leaders well-connected to the regime actors and funders. Since the first charter in New York State opened amid a rapidly changing environment uptown, those seeking to expand sector with their own choice models

employed varying degrees of community engagement, exemplified by the creation and expansion of the Village Academies, Democracy Prep, Success Academies and the Harlem Children’s Zone.

Sisulu-Walker and the Early Days of School Choice in Harlem

During the early 1990s, those looking to support education reform in Harlem did so through innovations at existing schools rather than through an unsympathetic Giuliani Administration viewed as unwilling to engage communities of color constructively on policy. Beacon schools that existed during the Dinkins Administration and dramatically defunded during the Giuliani years proved to be a pre-charter blueprint and kick-started the career of one of Harlem’s most notable charter advocates, Geoff Canada. Beacon Centers, as they were called, created hubs in the community for a range of after school programs and partnerships with local CBOs including mental health experts. New charter school legislation enacted during Giuliani’s second term would encourage a far more controversial iteration of this community-based education innovation.

Rev. Floyd Flake, a former Democratic Member of Congress who represented a historically middle class Black neighborhood in southeast Queens found tremendous success in working the levers of government in both Democratic and Republican administrations to fulfill economic development and affordable housing goals for his constituents and congregants. Not unlike Harlem’s Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Flake was keen on the type of economic empowerment that middle class status could provide, seeing first-hand how his constituents, through unionization, careers in government and entrepreneurship, found financial success. But unlike many African American elected officials who enjoyed support from labor, he was also a proponent of vouchers. Though Flake’s vision of vouchers in New York City never
materialized, his relationship with conservative groups and Republican elected leaders and think tanks, endeared him to a broader community of school choice advocates. Marshall Mitchell, an aide to Flake, introduced him to Harvard-educated venture capitalist Steve Klinsky. The two approached Harlem pastor Rev. Wyatt T. Walker in the hope that their political relationships, access to funding and concern for poor and Black students would produce a sustainable solution.

Rev. Walker was minister of Canaan Baptist Church on 116th Street in central Harlem from 1967 to 2004 – and the only New York pastor installed by Martin Luther King Jr. A seasoned education activist with history in local and national political engagement, Rev. Walker was chief of staff to Dr. King and active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Later in life, as Chair of the Central Harlem Local Development Corporation, Rev. Walker became well versed in real estate finance and development, which led to an appointment as Urban Affairs Specialist to Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller. For most of his life until his death January 2018 at the age of 88, Walker believed strongly in racial equality and the liberating promise of a good quality education.

Foreseeing the impact of the new charter law and potential challenges ahead, Klinsky used his connections to found Victory Education Partners for the purpose of providing financing and technical support to charters schools. His and Walker’s deep interest in education and the potential of charters provided an important synergy. Soon after Governor Pataki signed charter school legislation in 1998 and a request for proposals (RFP) for the first round of schools was issued, Klinsky and Rev. Walker submitted their application and the Sisulu-Walker Charter School - named for Rev. Walker and South African anti-apartheid activist, Walter Sisulu- opened in the Fall of 1999. But many close to Walker still harbored reservations about Klinsky’s influence, fearing a financial motive more so than one favoring educational achievement for local students – a theme that continues to reverberate throughout Harlem on the issue of charters.
Rev. Walker was adamant that parents and community leaders be consulted at every turn. He was able to harness talent from Teachers College, local education activists and local clergy toward creation of a school akin to the independent schools of Harlem’s past. William Allen, a Harlem Democratic District Leader and sixth generation Harlem resident, has been a board member since 2003 and was involved in the school’s founding. Allen, whose nephew and two nieces were enrolled in Sisulu, say organizers “made sure that our board was made up of people that were known in the community. They had some recognition and there was accountability. These were major people around here”. Founding board members included Bill Perkins who would become a City Council Member and later, a State Senator from Harlem.

The first few cohorts of students outperformed the district but, according to one of the early organizers, were “not stellar” and began to decline in the 2008/9 and 2010/11 academic years, possibly owing to debates over curriculum and financial efficiencies. Though Sisulu does not share space, concerns about achievement scores in charters broadly and skepticism of charter advocates specifically, trained activists’ attention on rapid co-location in traditional public schools. While some parents in traditional public schools felt disadvantaged by increasing attention to charters, achievement scores in the growing charter sector aided by the brisk pace of charter authorization, buoyed enrollment numbers as parents began taking their children out of local parochial schools to take part in this community-based experiment.

Community leaders and education advocates across New York City sought to replicate Sisulu’s success and by 2006, forty-seven schools opened in New York City with Bloomberg

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54 Personal Interview with a charter leader and former co-founder of Sisulu-Walker. October 27, 2017.

and Klein as de facto partners. Democratic Party activists within Harlem grew increasingly concerned that the charter school formula called for an uncomfortable triad of external school leaders, external funders and local kids. Cordell Cleare, a political activist who worked for Senator Bill Perkins and then an official of the community education council for District 3, said of charters, "If they're so rich and golden, why aren't they everywhere?". Robert A. Reed, President of the Central Harlem Council of Parent Associations, said, "They've picked this population as a guinea pig district." Tension had not abated three years later and in the Fall of 2009, on the first day of school, returning students were welcomed by protestors in front of PS 123 on 140th street where Success Academy 2 was set to open. PS 123’s parent association President, Antoinette Hargrove said, "Our school was not ready. The same people who got their [charter] school ready were supposed to get our school ready. What are we - dogmeat?"

An “Education Entrepreneur”

One of the early charter proponents with perhaps the least public profile was Deborah Kenny whom Esquire Magazine called a “Radical Education Reformer". After the sudden death of her husband in 1999, Kenny founded Harlem Village Academies, opening three schools by 2007. Her philosophy toward urban education centered around academic achievement and a

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“strict code of behavior”\textsuperscript{59} Ed Lewis was an early board member with credibility among African Americans, particularly Black women, for co-founding Essence Magazine, a historic national publication dedicated to black women. But many past and present board members - including journalist Katie Couric, actor Hugh Jackman, media mogul Rupert Murdock and singer John Legend – have little or no connection to Harlem or New York City’s Black community.

In 2007, a visit from President George W. Bush elevated Kenny’s standing among reformers, and New York City’s broader education community took notice. Of all the schools the President could visit, he chose a charter school in Harlem. To be clear, Harlem as an enduring symbol of Black political power exists in part because Presidents and world leaders visit the community when seeking votes, or to connect to African Americans for political, symbolic or other purposes. That a sitting Republican President visited an experimental and controversial school run by white educators external to the neighborhood, annoyed Democratic and parent activists.

During the program at Harlem Village’s 144\textsuperscript{th} street school, President Bush called Kenny an “education entrepreneur” - with Rangel and other Harlem electeds listening uncomfortably in their seats. Continuing, Bush admonished the audience, “If you’re interested in helping your community—whether you be an individual, such as a Deborah, or a corporation, for example—promote school excellence, do something for the community in which you live.” Another statement, by the President encapsulated a key source of anxiety for teachers’ unions and public-school activists in their battle against City Hall’s rush to reform. Touting No Child Left Behind, Bush put the old education bureaucracy on notice by tying accountability to funding:

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid 12
I don’t see how you can solve problems unless you measure problems. How do you know whether a child needs extra help in reading unless you measure? In other words, the accountability system is step one of a diagnostic process that ends up making sure that each child gets the help that’s needed to meet standards, high standards. And so the No Child Left Behind Act—a simple way of describing it says, if you set high standards, we’ll give you money, but we expect you to meet those standards, and if not, there ought to be different options for the parents. 60

The Biggest Charter Footprint

When Bill de Blasio and Eva Moskowitz were colleagues in the New York City Council, Moskowitz represented the wealthy Upper East Side of Manhattan and was appointed Chair of the coveted Education Committee by her colleague from another Upper East Side district and Council Speaker, A. Gifford Miller. Many argue that a heated council hearing in which former UFT President (now AFT President) Randy Weingarten became the unwitting recipient of Eva’s searing questions cemented Moskowitz as the chief booster of school choice and set the tone for a toxic relationship with de Blasio that has existed well into the latter’s mayoralty 19 years later. Since that hearing in 1999, the year Sisulu-Walker opened and to perhaps preview a narrative for her electoral ambitions, Moskowitz leveled many of her attacks against the teachers’ union and elected officials with common refrains about their embrace of the status quo for children and schools.

Eva Moskowitz ran for Borough President in 2005 and in the loss, set her sights on operationalizing her own views on school reform with Success Academies Schools. Public feuds with the Mayor and her sharp critiques of the education bureaucracy garner her outsized attention among the choice community. But 11 schools in Central and East Harlem provide a substantial platform – or bully pulpit. In a battle of wills with Mayor de Blasio and dueling marches in Albany within the first few months of de Blasio’s tenure as Mayor, Governor Cuomo spoke at her rally to push the legislature to authorize raising the cap on charters. The Governor did not attend Mayor de Blasio’s event just blocks away, though they are all Democrats. For all the critiques of Moskowitz’s political engagement and tactics, Success schools maintained high scores and made strides in closing the achievement gap.61

Local Investment for Mutual Benefit

On election day in Harlem, young children sporting yellow t-shirts with “I can’t vote. But you can!” emblazoned on the front, are ubiquitous though the neighborhood’s legendary Democratic clubhouses are not responsible for their deployment. The shirts and the activity are courtesy of Democracy Prep – a network of charter schools in Harlem founded by Seth Andrew who imbues the curriculum of each school with the same passion for civic engagement that he and his family shared growing up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a predominantly white, liberal area of the City with the highest voter turnout in the five boroughs.

His parents worked on the campaigns of Congressman Ted Weiss - a staunch progressive and civil rights advocate. Andrew’s mother was a social worker and his father Ralph co-founded

the 3 Parks Democratic Club on the Upper West Side whose membership produced some of New York’s liberal lions. A young Seth accompanied his parents to collect signatures in the State’s arcane ballot access process to make certain club-endorsed candidates secured a line on the ballot. Andrew was a page for Congressman Rangel in the House and received recommendations for the job from activists and future elected officials Gale Brewer (now the Manhattan Borough President) and Keith Wright (former Assembly Member). While a student at Brown, Seth ran for State legislative office in a district that included the University where one-third of the residents were low income, one-third were students and the remaining were high SES White protestants. Primary elections were held in the summer so his base (fellow students) could not vote for him. The lesson in losing forced broader engagement of policies related to ballot access, voting rights and income inequality.

By 2006 there were a handful of charters operating in Harlem with skepticism abounding over their ultimate intentions with Harlem’s children, so Andrew girded himself to pitch his school in front of central Harlem’s Community Board 10. Community Boards have no specific oversight or authority over charter placement or approval, but its membership carries weight with local elected officials. The Board was not particularly warm to Seth’s school, so he sought political cover from widely respected Board 12 Chair Pam North further uptown in Washington Heights, who was more amendable to school choice and provided Andrew the necessary bona fides to carry back to central Harlem. In the process to get the first school opened, he realized an “Alinsky-styled”62 organizing apparatus was needed to offer equal parts political movement and political theater since time was of the essence - much needed to be done before Mayor Bloomberg left office when his two-term limit was to end in 2009. To provide the needed political apparatus, Democracy Builders opened as a 501(c)(4) to launch parent advocacy

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62 Personal Interview with Charter Leader. January 25, 2018
initiatives and advance into a door-to-door canvass operation to win over scores of tentative parents.

Most of the politics completed, special considerations for charter space consistently proved troublesome at City Hall and in the community among education activists who were growing highly resistant to colocation. Seeking an inexpensive option that provided space for the school and an important connection to Harlem’s cultural past, Andrew approached St. Philip’s Protestant Episcopal Church for a unique and mutually beneficial solution. The church’s congregation dates back to 1809 and the building on 134th street was erected in 1910 by Vertner W. Tandy, a Cornell University graduate and the first African American licensed architect in New York State. Despite the age and prestige of the church, its membership flagged considerably by the early 2000s resulting from an outmigration of Black residents from the neighborhood. After six months of negotiation, Democracy Prep signed a 30-year lease for space in a building on the church property offering a substantial lump sum payment to save the church from closing its doors while providing ample space for the school. Though this real estate transaction would seem smart but unremarkable, it sets up a narrative for the school as a strong and dedicated community partner and saves a beloved institution. Both outcomes serve to inoculate the school and its leadership from local claims of malicious intent.

**Comprehensive Education Uptown**

Among early charter founders, Geoff Canada has the deepest roots in Harlem and may be viewed as one of the more authentic to African American shared interests for his localized comprehensive approach to education, but charter schools were not his initial vehicle. Originally from the South Bronx, Geoff was a teacher and graduate of Bowdoin College and Harvard’s School of Education before working at the Rheedlen Center for Children and Families.
Rheedlen was a school-based anti-truancy program with a mission to stem youth violence through after school programs co-founded in 1970 by Richard Murphy, a social worker and advocate for youth development. Canada took over Rheedlen’s leadership in 1990 and became a nationally known advocate for children by scaling-up Murphy’s programming and cultivating a large donor base that included former Bowdoin College school-mate and hedge fund investor, Stanley Druckenmiller. Early expansion from the original Rheedlen model included the 1991 creation of one of the first Beacon Centers in Harlem’s Countee Cullen Community Center. In 1997 Rheedlen was renamed the Harlem Children’s Zone for the 24-block (now 97-block) area of Harlem and since 2004 has opened six Promise Academy schools ranging from Lower Elementary to High School. "I feel good because a surprising number of folks in the community really care: about the basis of community, about family," he said. The grassroots orientation of HCZ and Promise Academies caught the attention of President Obama who, in 2010, allocated 10 million dollars to replicate its success in twenty US cities.

Canada’s relationships with political and donor heavyweights is enviable among charter advocates and affords substantial and crucial political independence. He endorsed Mayor Bloomberg in two re-election bids including his controversial third and final term in office in 2009. By then HCZ ran asthma prevention programs, made fresh produce deliveries to homes and schools, offered dental, medical and psychiatric support services – in all, 20 programs – with

hundreds of staffers engaging over 8000 young people. But his relationship with the Harlem community – particularly its poorest residents – would get tested the following year. 64

St. Nicholas (St. Nick) Houses sprawls across a superblock from 127th to 131st Streets between Adam Clayton Powell Jr Blvd and Frederick Douglass Blvd. Built in 1954 primarily for veterans and their families, over 1,500 residents call its 13 buildings home. Before the merger in 1995, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) maintained its own police department with a constant presence. HCZ ran many of its 20 programs in St. Nicholas Houses including food delivery and paid for children of St. Nick to attend instructive field trips. Tenants took part in housing conferences sponsored by HCZ and Willie Mae Lewis, St. Nick’s tenant leader in 2009, found these partnerships empowering for her neighbors.

Willie Mae, grew up in the South and can remember her family picking cotton and tobacco; they ate off the land. She moved to Harlem in 1963 not far from the Audubon Ballroom where Malcolm X was killed that same year. Lewis moved into St. Nick Houses in 1968, the year Martin Luther King was also assassinated. Both events and the response in Harlem among young people had a profound impact on her views of Black political power. Willie Mae raised her children in the development and stressed education, making her close working relationship with Geoff Canada both meaningful to the aspirations she had for her own family and to the fulfillment of her goals for the neighborhood children she came to know over the decades. In 2009, Lewis took a phone call from Canada who proposed a radical idea. He spoke to President Obama and NYCHA’s Chair John Rhea -who was only one year on the job - about an idea to build a new Promise Academy in the middle of the housing development.

Tenants swiftly and vociferously bemoaned the loss of open spaces – their benches, trees and areas where they could congregate in the summer with their families. Anti-charter residents bound Canada ideologically to Moskowitz and Bloomberg and despite Willie Mae’s twenty years as a tenant leader, she was routinely disparaged as a pro-Bloomberg operative. Those in support were not pro-charter per se but felt their homes were being so ravaged by drugs and crime that a new school would heighten safety and security in addition to providing a good education for St. Nick’s students. Regardless of positions for or against the school, palpable uneasiness permeated the room at a community hearing held at the Oberia Dempsey Community Center on 127th Street. An angry resident shouted, “You’re not doing this the right way. You’re going all around us.”

Concerns for the school were also a proxy for the fears that rapid gentrification heaps on the long-standing residents, throttled by the ever-present rumor that public housing will be privatized. One tenant suggested the school might precipitate what she sees as the weakening of Harlem: “Churches selling off land. Harlem [is] not Harlem any more. We just didn’t stick together.” The $100 million school opened in 2013 using $60 million in City funds and the remainder from the private sector.

The Bloomberg-led regime, after marshalling sweeping policy changes that would allow for curriculum and organizational autonomy through charter adoption, approved co-located schools at a rate and in a manner that could be viewed as the first, and potentially the most significant, movement from broad policy overhaul to highly localized influence on students and

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parents in their day-to-day interaction with school leaders and other parents. The subsequent tension became unsettling for a neighborhood unaccustomed to such in-fighting about the future course of public education. Furthermore, not all charter leaders adopted or could afford Geoff Canada’s philosophy of being both community-based in their approach, and housed in independent, non-co-located space. As in the case of Wadleigh, spaces of local historic importance began spitting into parts and distributed to Bloomberg-allied entities at a rate that even Governor Paterson and Assemblyman Keith Wright, who voted for charter school legislation, could not ignore.

While charters gained more of a foothold in Harlem, so did the local and national debate around standards, accountability and college readiness. As early as the 1930s battles over the path toward African American economic and political empowerment through curriculum featured debates between W.E.B. du Bois and Booker T. Washington who argued, respectively, for liberal arts or more industrial education (Hughes, 2012). Where Brown tackled equity, many parents now trained their attention to the promise that charters and their embrace of standards, school safety, achievement scores and extracurricular activities would lead to success in college.

**The Attraction for Parents**

School clubs and sports teams have been a fundamental part of the American school experience since public schools were built across the nation. Extracurricular activities, such as athletics and student government, promote soft skills, and can strengthen social ties across race, class and religion (O’Hanlon, 1980). They can also enhance educational achievement and prosocial behavior, a strong work ethic and increased social capital among athletic and academically oriented peers (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Chess clubs, debate teams, school bands, and student councils similarly cultivate leadership
skills, encourage initiative, and allow youth to develop emotional competencies and social skills. High school extracurricular activities correlate with political and civic engagement in adulthood (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996) (Putnam, 2000) potentially leading to managerial occupations and higher wages (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005).

Harlem families, which are on average wealthier now than in previous decades, match national trends among middle class households in expenditures on learning experiences for their children (Kaushal, Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2011; Kornrich & Furstenberg, 2013) investments in books, tutoring, sports and arts, reading to their children and time at playgrounds, museums, and soccer practice (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). While low-income parents expanded their investment in their children, the increase in time spent is twice as large for college-educated than for less-educated parents in the last 40 years (Schwebel, Brezausek, Ramey, & Ramey, 2004).

Movement toward a knowledge-based economy that privileges college and advanced degrees to secure middle-class life (Powell & Snellman, 2004), forced schools to tighten their belts and prioritize core competencies over sports and clubs. Poorer districts may simply cut back on their offerings, reducing the opportunity to learn soft skills in comparison to affluent districts that maintain their extracurricular programs through substantial fundraising activities.

In New York City, two-thirds of public elementary schools have no art or music teachers. Of the 32 school districts in New York City, just two have an art and music teacher in every school, making achieving the state requirement that students take one arts course before graduation, impossible. Forty-two percent of schools that do not have state certified art teachers
are clustered in low income areas and between 2006-2013, spending on art supplies and equipment dropped 84%.  

Harlem parents at every income level are mindful of these trends, and the disparity, when compared to wealthier districts that typically garner top scores on statewide exams and build soft skills. The Anderson School is located on West 77th Street in Manhattan’s District 3, which covers southern Harlem and the Upper West Side. Anderson is a public school for gifted and talented students where the suggested annual parent donation is $1,300. The alumni group and PTA combined to raise over $1,000,000 in 2012. Another Upper West Side school raised $1.57 million. On the other side of town, parents at P.S. 6 on the East Side raised over $900,000. When the city reduced the amount of funding to schools by an average of 13% from 2007-2012, these schools filled the gaps via parents and outside fundraising, and Harlem were unable to follow suit.  

Charters stepped in to fill the void, advertising academic and extracurricular programming that mirror schools in wealthier districts to mostly poor African American and Latino parents. Many parents who were educated in Harlem are particularly receptive and view the dearth of such programming less as a Citywide phenomenon and more endemic to neighborhoods of color correlated with longstanding disinvestment in the community. Additionally, Harlem’s growing population of young middle-class families were likely already priced out of the neighborhood by the time they decided to buy homes, unable to build equity. Some parents interviewed plan to leave for the suburbs, or know many families who have done

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so, for less expensive homes to purchase while still sending their kids to charters in Manhattan since many work and maintain social ties in the borough.  

There is a subset of parents who support charters for the academic rigor and after school programs, but feel the rigid structure and discipline stifles their child’s development, and subsequently pulled their children out, opting instead for other non-zoned schools (private or parochial). One parent commented on her child’s class at a Success Academy where specific hand signals were used by teachers and students to communicate with each other - self-expression, she believed, is frowned upon. Idiosyncratic school culture aside, activists call attention to zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that generate suspensions at more than double the rate of the New York City public schools and fuel a concern that charter children are becoming “automatons”. Interestingly, the discipline and culture are not unlike what parochial schools provided to many of these parents a generation ago, which suggests that charter parents are mindful of the criticism over charter disciplinary policies but opt to send their children anyway, still wary of school leader motivations. One parent articulated the attraction and subsequent concerns about charters this way:

“The attraction of Charter Elementary Schools for us were several, but to list a few: quality elementary instruction based in phonics and Singapore Mental Math, focus on art instruction and experimental learning – like trips to cooking schools, farms, museums; no tuition (huge for parents still paying college debt);

69 Parent Interviews on September 5, 6 and 12, 2018

70 Charter Parent Interview October 4, 2018

breadth of extracurricular options like music, martial arts, chess, dance, debate, etc. It worked well for us through the elementary years. Middle school presented many challenges however which led us to seek other options. The strong emphasis on discipline and structure during the puberty years when the children are finding their voice was not only a challenge to work through, but I feel limiting to the growth of the student. Especially if your end game is to raise a lifelong learner and not a socially awkward test taking robot.”

Some parents expressed willingness to acquiesce to the creation of a new policy equilibrium that involved charter schools and Bloomberg-allied education activists in their community, but they eventually felt efforts to do so disregarded cultural/historic narratives and anxieties tied to political economies. For this and other reasons, interviews with parents suggest daily trepidation with the charter “experiment” and an ongoing challenge to convince themselves and others that the school will be a sound means to college acceptance and can withstand the political and policy vicissitudes that come with any new reform measure.

Furthermore, parents and some local activists believed the “education-lab” function charters were designed to fulfill went largely ignored. This occurred in part because heavy reliance on donors to fund schools and emphasis on school-based metrics meant that donors

72 Personal interview and email exchange with Kenyon Reece conducted October 14, 2018

73 Personal interviews with three parents and two former education activists on October 1, 3 and October 7, 2018

74 Personal interviews with several parents throughout the study
wanted exclusivity and kept charters siloed, unable to share best practices with the district. Charters saw themselves as “competitors and not partners”.

During the campaign in 1989, David Dinkins talked about a “Marshall Plan for Education - to treat teaching as a profession, to increase community involvement, to set up special units to intervene in crisis schools”. Though charters were not known publicly to uphold the tenets of the Dinkins plan, his Beacon schools still resonate in the community’s collective memory and similar models have been attempted by trusted local leaders that intentionally avoid the politics and controversies around charters. In 2004, influential Harlem minister Rev. Calvin Butts opened Harlem’s first new High School in fifty years, the Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change, with the assistance of New Visions for new Schools and $38 million in mixed private and government support. Marshall is a public school in the traditional sense and Butts’ experience with high profile economic development projects in Harlem prepared him for the politics of engaging the Bloomberg Administration. Rev. Butts is one of the Big Four pastors that includes Rev. Floyd Flake in Queens who assisted with Sisulu’s opening, Rev. A. R. Bernard in Brooklyn with the biggest congregation in the city at over 30,000 members, and relatively young Harlem Pastor in Michael Waldron.

Butts, Flake and Bernard enjoyed strong relations with Bloomberg, eventually endorsing his third term. All pastors and their congregations are essential stops on the campaign trail for any state-wide or city-wide candidate and all but Walrond created schools tied to their churches that rely heavily on models that differ from traditionally zoned schools but not unlike Sisulu-Walker in their innovations.

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75 Personal interview former Bloomberg Administration official. October 9, 2018

Bloomberg expended considerable political capital to win his race in 2009 and his ability to champion education reform remained unclear. A decade after the first charter school opened in Harlem, the very fabric of the coalitions that brought Sisulu-Walker to fruition would be tested as America’s first Black President, New York’s first Black Governor, and high-profile charter school backers trained their attention on a new initiative centered around accountability, teacher evaluations and raising the cap on charter schools.

**Trouble on the Horizon**

David Paterson is part of Harlem political royalty. His father, Basil Paterson, was a long-time labor leader who, during his career, was appointed Secretary of the State of New York in 1979 and served the New York State Senate in roughly the same seat his son occupied from 1985 to 2006. As Senator, David Paterson initially rejected charter school legislation believing they skimmed students and provided a path for conservative interests to operate with unchecked authority in Harlem. After all, many early charter supporters in New York were affiliated with the for-profit Edison schools which was toxic for any New York Democrat. But traditional public schools, their teachers and the bureaucracy were under siege by powerful interests that could gather their considerable financial resources to defend themselves against the fusillade.

Schools in Districts 4 and 5 consistently performed among the lowest in the City and since they were in his Senate district, Paterson felt compelled to act. By the end of the 1990s, in Paterson’s view, teachers were more representative of the communities in which they taught, and their unions had struck a different tone with Harlem residents and local leadership from previous skirmishes. The historically tenuous relationship between teachers and Harlem parents did not deter African American civil rights activist and charter supporter from Milwaukee, Dr. Howard Fuller. Originally from North Carolina, Fuller set his sights on building support among
apprehensive New York African American elected officials already feeling threatened by gentrification. Largely convinced by Fuller’s passion for education reform, Senator Paterson signed onto the 1998 charter school bill in the hope that this experiment could help his constituents.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite skepticism among Black leadership, Black and Latino parents began driving substantial demand for charter seats, vastly outpacing existing supply and leaving thousands on wait lists throughout the City. On the issue of charters, advocates in conservative circles, the Bloomberg Administration and minority parents saw their interests aligned under a unique set of circumstances: Advocates in conservative circles pushed the market-based approach to education reform that promoted charters as competition against traditional public schools; the Bloomberg/Klein partnership saw charters as one of several options at their disposal in the portfolio model and, collaborating with charter advocates, promoted a strong overt civil rights rationale. Some parents accepted the argument that charters could do a better job for their child’s academic achievement and seemed content to buck Democratic political leaders in their own neighborhoods to find the best option for their children. The Bloomberg Administration saw this as an opening for themselves politically and on the issue of school choice.

During most of Bloomberg’s first two terms, there was a palpable sense of forward momentum, bolstering a belief that school reform would be a permanent and integral part of the mayor’s legacy. But rapid expansion of charter schools in the preceding years prevented advocates from appreciating the ample political cover Bloomberg provided their movement. As his second term entered into its final stretch in late 2008/2009, charter leaders in Tarrytown, New York heard the Mayor discuss running for a third term, urging them to rally the troops for a final push. In 2010 after the Mayor’s victory and with Paterson now Governor, the two executives

\textsuperscript{77} Personal Interview with Paterson Administration official. June 26, 2017
faced clashes over Race to the Top providing an episode in which Mayor Bloomberg, school reformers, and the charter school community prevailed but with collateral damage.

Race to the Top initiated a competitive process by which states received points based on their approach to several criteria and providing conditions for charter schools to expand and thrive was a critical part of the mix. Charter schools were a prickly issue as the State, with Governor Paterson’s support, sought to raise the cap on charters from 200 to over 400. Then-Public Advocate Bill de Blasio was among those who staked out a contrary position: grudgingly supporting raising the cap in order to make it possible for the state to win valued deferral support but opposing its total elimination and pushing for increased transparency and oversight. In a letter sent to the Governor signed by de Blasio and 26 Council Members in January of 2010, de Blasio cautioned that:

[Charter schools] must be more transparent by allowing the public to utilize the tools available through the State’s Freedom of Information Law to obtain more comprehensive information about charter school operations. Further, charter school officers and employees should be subject to the same financial disclosure and conflict of interest requirements as traditional public school employees.

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78 Applicants were eligible for up to 40 points for “ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools.” Reducing or eliminating caps on the number of charter schools was a featured element, as were providing charters with equitable funding and helping to address their capital needs. US Department of Education. Race to the Top Executive Summary. November 2009 Retrieved from: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf

New York missed the first application deadline and was rejected after the second round, embarrassing Paterson, Bloomberg, and charter advocates.\textsuperscript{80} Behind the scenes quarreling between a UFT-NAACP partnership and State legislators over provisions of New York’s application quickly turned into public demonstrations against raising the cap, co-location of charter schools in traditional public-school buildings, and teacher performance evaluations.

Co-location became highly polarizing in Harlem. The vast majority of charters in the city are co-located and some parents with children in traditional public-school buildings resisted the applications of the Success Academies led by Eva Moskowitz. Parents, at the urging of New York NAACP’s Hazel Dukes, UFT President Michael Mulgrew and Democratic elected officials, fought against Moskowitz’s push to obtain space arguing co-location would force children from the traditional public schools to lose their space and lead to overcrowded classrooms. They argued the gap in resources between traditional schools and charter schools within the same facility amounted to within-neighborhood segregation. Harlem Assemblyman Keith Wright and State Senator Bill Perkins sided with the parents,\textsuperscript{81} while Congressman Rangel and Council Member Inez Dickens were somewhat muted.

The UFT initially balked at Paterson’s campaign for their support. The union saw RTT as a band aid at the expense of teacher stability and grew concerned about civil rights rhetoric of charter leaders, fearing the union would be perceived as racist and uncompromising in their approach to teaching children of color. But hearing concerns from parents on the issue of colocation, the NAACP and UFT were united on the matter of charter schools’ rapid expansion.

\textsuperscript{80} Blain, Glenn and Monahan, Rachel. (January 20, 2010). Charter School Association continues fight to raise cap in hopes of collecting federal cash. \textit{New York Daily News}.

Neither sought a return to school boards but a partnership between them solved key challenges: it could inoculate the UFT from charges of racial animus or insensitivity, and the NAACP had a powerful ally adept at organizing and with deeper pockets to help communicate to stakeholder parents and rally more elected officials to the fight. Furthermore, the Governor, Speaker of the Assembly Sheldon Silver and Majority Leader Sampson were keen on getting money for the State and the UFT did not want to stand in their way.\textsuperscript{82}

Tension mounted on the ground between parents of traditional public school students and charter parents. The UFT and NAACP in conjunction with ACORN began a campaign against the reformers’ demands in the Race to the Top legislation though this was likely a proxy for overall anger and frustration with Bloomberg reforms, Moskowitz’s tactics and her general disposition toward local leaders. Furthermore, unlike the Sisulu-Walker model with a decidedly more community-driven leadership model, school leaders and board members of newer and larger charters remain white, somewhat anonymous and disconnected from the Harlem community. Instead of broad community-wide partnerships and programs like Beacon schools, one of which HCZ maintained from its earlier iteration as Rheedlen Centers, charter leaders were establishing what long-time Harlem residents viewed as outposts of the Bloomberg-centered governing regime. Charter schools had not been so successful that a broad coalition would protect and sustain them. Paterson, Bloomberg and New York charter proponents accordingly adopted a multi-pronged strategy for regaining momentum or, at the very least, minimizing the damage that would come once their major champion no longer led City Hall.

One prong consisted of administration efforts to accelerate school closings and charter co-location decisions in order to make it more legally and politically difficult for the next mayor to reverse course. Scholars and practitioners, through their attention to policy feedback, have

\textsuperscript{82} Personal Interview with Labor Leader June 16, 2018
grown increasingly aware of the ways in which policies and programs can generate supportive constituencies, and the administration was watchful of this as well (Mettler, 2002; Mettler & Soss, 2004).

National reform and charter supporters who were generally concerned about opposition to their efforts saw New York City as a critical battleground due to its high visibility and the prominent role that Bloomberg and Klein played in their behalf. An article by Steven Brill in the New York Times Magazine in May of 2010 amplified the conflict and initiated a broad public relations campaign to pressure the UFT and Democrats. Brill’s piece adroitly cast the hedge fund managers, foundations and school leaders of the charter movement – almost exclusively white – as heroes carrying out the education mission of the first African American President. Paterson and Bloomberg were also sympathetic figures while the UFT and Democratic elected officials tied to machine politics and old coalitions were the impediment to Black and Latino children receiving a good education. Charter advocates enjoyed support from many young Black and Latino elected officials. But Harlem did not have a President Obama or Cory Booker to champion reforms and were confronted instead by strong leaders with decades of service to Harlem, supported by the machine, allied with organized labor (not just the UFT) and need not rely on heavy fundraising to get elected.

Relatively new Harlem State Senator Bill Perkins, who replaced Paterson—and despite being a co-founder of Sisulu-Walker—was specifically called out for his alliance with the UFT and subsequent legislative votes against raising the cap on charter schools. Brill referred to Perkins as the “Legislature’s leading opponent of charters” who “enjoyed teachers’ union support.” 83 Two documentaries released that year, The Lottery and Waiting for Superman, highlighted the reform efforts of Moskowitz and Geoffrey Canada and portrayed non-reformers

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(the UFT especially) as incompetent and antithetical to the success of minority children. Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) used the films as fundraising tools and a parallel political independent expenditure was created to mobilize parents whose children are in charter schools or had been placed on the wait-list.

According to interviews with reporters, charter advocates at that time routinely pushed stories to the media that centered on an unresponsive and politically compromised state legislature to motivate wealthy board members and supportive parents. A coup in the State Senate occurred a year earlier that ousted the Majority Leader (Democrat Malcolm Smith) from his leadership position and altered the leadership structure from a Democratic-led Senate to a power-sharing arrangement that included an independent conference of Democrats that caucused with Republicans, later dubbed the IDC. The IDC’s moderate Democratic composition proved attractive for charter advocates who viewed them as natural allies but too few to overcome the more liberal leanings of the entire Democratic conference. The 2010 elections provided an opportunity to test electoral capacity to unseat incumbent office-holders in favor of pro-charter elected officials. Support could come in the form of direct donations to candidates, access to media and a parallel campaign operation in the form of independent expenditures. Some print and television media, particularly conservative outlets like the local Fox television affiliate and the New York Post, reported on charter school battles though stories and often intertwined ongoing turmoil in the legislature.

Paterson was perceived to be torn politically though not unsympathetic to the cause. Senate minority leader Malcom Smith, ousted from his Majority leader seat in the Senate during the coup, and a friend of Paterson’s, had denied financial support for charters and was reluctant

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84 Personal Interviews with reporters covering charter schools and the State legislature during 2010 conducted on September 29, October 3 and October 8, 2018
to publicly help them in the RTT process. Harlem leader, Keith Wright, who voted for the charter law but was torn over the issue, had sights on a larger political foe.

Wright was a State Assembly Member and had only been in office for 4 years before charter legislation was signed into law. He, like Paterson, was hopeful that innovations in curriculum yielded results for the central Harlem school district he represented but as the number of schools in his Assembly district increased, so did complaints from school administrators and parents of traditional school students about colocation and within-building disparities.

Wright, wielded power beyond his role as a legislator. He was (and is) the New York County (Manhattan) Democratic Chair and former co-Chair of the State Democratic Party. His father was Judge Bruce Wright whose 25-year legacy on the bench informed a groundbreaking book on Black youth in the justice system, *Black Robes White Justice*. Police unions derisively called the judge, “Turn ‘em loose Bruce”, but he continued to use his platform to advocate for racial equity. Assembly Member Wright voted to make charters law but pressure from activist parents, the NAACP, school leaders and liberal whites from the Upper West Side remained consistent. Wright found a way to thread a political needle: work with parents to solve tensions in co-located schools and help the charter advocates defeat their nemesis, Senator Bill Perkins. Two other State Senators representing neighborhoods in New York City, Shirley Huntley (South East Queens) and Velmanette Montgomery (Fort Green, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Park Slope Brooklyn) were deemed anti-charter and regime actors with the help of local leaders, recruited candidates to oppose them in a primary. I would challenge Perkins; Lynn Nunes and Mark Pollard were recruited to run against Huntley and Montgomery respectively.
Pro-charter Campaigns for the State Senate

In many ways, these campaigns were exceptional in that substantial media coverage gave young inexperienced candidates instant credibility and augmented their messaging on school choice. An analysis of news articles in the three major daily newspapers, the center-right New York Post (The Post), the moderate New York Daily News (The News) and the center-left New York Times (The Times) provides important insight on how school choice was framed in the local media and their frequency.

Articles, columns, guest opinions and editorials were searched and categorized as being positive, negative or neutral toward school choice, charter schools or their advocates including school leaders. Findings show that from 2010 and 2014 inclusive, the Post ran 630 articles of which 91% were positive- supporting charters, their leaders and advocates. The Daily News and New York Times respectively ran 445 and 188 stories. Fifty-two percent of the Daily News articles were positive compared to 45% of the New York Times articles (Table 4). The Amsterdam News, the oldest running African American paper in the country and a weekly publication, posted 45 charter school stories during the same time period and only 14 of them were positive.

As can be expected, stories about charters spiked in 2010 when the threats to their agenda seemed most urgent. The market-based nature of school choice embodies themes of efficiency, competition, and accountability – and the media often portrayed charters as solutions to dysfunctional government.\(^ {85}\) Among the common media frames were conflict, funding in crisis, solution-driven, leadership, with parents as consumers (Ferman, 2017). Advocates, through conservative media outlets that tended to favor choice, furthermore painted charters as a vehicle

to ending cycles of poverty and economic distress in their communities, while negative articles tied charter advocates to Bloomberg and Wall Street excess. Some articles rejected the characterization of charters as the education panacea while others highlighted preferential treatment by the DOE at the expense of traditional public schools.

Direct monetary support to candidates was another way charter advocates believed they held a strong advantage over incumbents unaccustomed to fending off well-financed opponents. In doing so, donations needed to adhere to strict contribution limits, which were $6,000 in the primary election and $3,500, in a general election. By any measure, State Senate candidates do not raise large sums of money and rarely engage national hot button issues. Though the role of

Table 4: School Choice Articles appearing in 4 New York Newspapers 2010-2014

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>14% 188</td>
<td>48% 630</td>
<td>34% 445</td>
<td>3% 45</td>
<td>100% 1308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>45% 84</td>
<td>91% 575</td>
<td>52% 233</td>
<td>31% 14</td>
<td>69% 906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>31% 58</td>
<td>6% 40</td>
<td>30% 137</td>
<td>56% 25</td>
<td>20% 260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>24% 46</td>
<td>1% 15</td>
<td>17% 75</td>
<td>13% 6</td>
<td>11% 142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>21% 40</td>
<td>12% 75</td>
<td>18% 83</td>
<td>27% 12</td>
<td>16% 210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

86 29% of the New York Times stories were of national interest and did not have a specific New York focus but were included in this analysis. Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding error.
outside contributions in federal, city-wide and state-wide elections is somewhat known, new research on the role of national donor networks on city and sub-city elections casts a bright light on the influence of a well-funded regime partners across multiple cities (Reckhow, 2012) (Reckhow, Henig, Jacobsen, & Alter Litt, 2017).

Early in the campaign, I met many of these donors at the home of Boykin Curry, Managing Director of Eagle Capital, in a penthouse apartment with northern views of Central Park. The juxtaposition was not lost on most in attendance. We listened to well-heeled donors with vastly different political and economic circumstances discuss the children of Harlem, the challenges their families faced and ineffective leadership as they pointed fingers to the neighborhood that began just above the tree line in the distance. Many like Whitney Tilson and John Petry would lead efforts in corralling monies from charter leaders across the country to support candidates running on their message.

Curry, Deborah Kenny, Eva Moskowitz and other school leaders circulated around the room with their board members to question candidates running against incumbent Senators. We each gave a short speech about our background, vision and tactics for respective races. Such coming out parties are not uncommon when issue-based donors come together to consider candidates, but State Senate primaries rarely attract such high-powered interest. A similar gathering was held among real estate professionals and developers connected to the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY), their lobbying association, a few weeks later.

Several smaller gatherings galvanized donors who heard from key charter influencers like Curry, Petry and Tilson who, through his blog, encouraged donors to start funding candidates. They then set their sights on reinforcing the media narratives around these races, but early funding was critical to show viability. In the three election cycles prior to 2010, Senator Perkins averaged $79,072, Senator Huntley, $62,803 and Senator Montgomery $53,776 in campaign
contributions. But in 2010, their donations, particularly from unions, increased substantially to compete against their charter-backed competition.

Table 5: Campaign donations to pro-charter State Senate candidates prior to and during 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average Donations for 3 Cycles Prior 2010</th>
<th>TOTAL 2010</th>
<th>2010 % Union and Union-allied donations</th>
<th>2010 % Education Reform Donors</th>
<th>Charter-Supported Candidate? (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perkins</td>
<td>$79,072</td>
<td>$222,822</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntley</td>
<td>62,803</td>
<td>250,169</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>53,776</td>
<td>85,389</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunes</td>
<td></td>
<td>228,590</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollard</td>
<td></td>
<td>119,930</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smikle</td>
<td></td>
<td>216,495</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 30th Senate district, the setting for my race against Perkins, was very diverse. It encompassed central Harlem, parts of Washington Heights up to 163rd Street, and East Harlem; It ran south to 81st Street from Central Park West to Amsterdam. Campaigning at subway stops in the on the Upper West Side, I encountered many of my donors who were attuned to issues related to governance. Upper West Side residents whose public schools typically rank among the City’s best, concentrated on Albany politics which, in their view, was highly dysfunctional. But farther north, as the population became more African American and Latino, older voters expressed little concern about charters while some raised concerns about Congressman Charles

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87 Data taken from the New York State Board of Election and Campaign Finance websites. For Perkins, Huntley and Montgomery, Union or Union-allied donors were organized labor that typically support incumbents, the UFT itself or advocacy groups aligned with the UFT or otherwise against school choice. For Nunes, Pollard and Smikle, Education Donors were aligned with charter schools or school choice advocates. LGBT community donors largely supported Mr. Nunes since Senator Huntley was fiercely against same sex marriage. Pro-charter advocates sent donations to other races believing he would be sufficiently funded by LGBT sources.
Rangel’s ethics violations. He was Ranking Member for ten years before Democrats regained control of the House in 2006 and subsequently appointed Chair. Black Harlem residents feared loss of seniority and power from censure or expulsion from the House – a similar situation that hobbled Adam Clayton Powell Jr. decades earlier, making him vulnerable to Rangel’s electoral challenge and victory.

The New York Daily News and the New York Post editorial pages endorsed all three charter-backed candidates citing support for education reforms to improve student outcomes and the potential for thoughtful leadership to a splintered Senate chamber.\(^{88}\) Despite strong media attention and initial funding largess for insurgent candidates, donations slowed by the end of that summer with no substantial monies forthcoming and little explanation as to the reason. Advocates and donors including Tilson and Petry, were urged for additional donations of up to $750,000 – an amount unprecedented for such local races but necessary to unseat incumbents.

Just before the primary, a member of my campaign met with a State Senator who revealed that charter advocates reached a tacit agreement with Senate Democratic leader John Sampson that would secure his support for Race to the Top if challengers were denied additional funds to challenge incumbent Senators.\(^{89}\) Pro-charter insurgent campaigns were all but over at that point and all three challengers lost their races by wide margins. Comparison to previous elections involving these incumbents proves difficult since Perkins and Huntley were not elected

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\(^{89}\) Description and timing of events taken from personal experience and subsequent interview with former campaign staffer on September 10, 2018
to their Senate seats long before this particular challenge in 2010. They may also have avoided a contested primary in previous elections for office if their opponents were barred from the ballot because of technicalities in the law. This is a frequent tactic used by party machines to challenge insurgents which would result in the incumbent running unopposed and therefore not listed on the ballot. In this case, winning a spot on the ballot in the primary caused enough consternation among the party stalwarts that their resources were galvanized to beat back challenges – which had the effect of tamping down, even if temporarily, charter advocate ambitions for strong legislative support. Notwithstanding the election results, tensions between pro- and anti-charter advocates subdued since “policy objectives” were achieved even though the “political objectives” were not.  

Table 6: 2010 Democratic State Senate Primary Results in Select Districts
(Bold print denotes incumbent)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senate District</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harlem-30</td>
<td>Perkins</td>
<td>20,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smikle</td>
<td>5,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens-10</td>
<td>Huntley</td>
<td>11,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nunes</td>
<td>4,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn-18</td>
<td>Montgomery</td>
<td>13,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pollard</td>
<td>3,203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During the campaign, I encountered three types of voters: Activists were mostly older Black central Harlem residents and white, liberal/progressive Upper West Side residents who were closely tied to Democratic clubs. Connections to Bloomberg and Wall Street (through the charter backers) were pilloried and these voters viewed me as either elitist or too closely aligned with Bloomberg. Many activist voters did not have children in K-12 schools and routinely championed traditional public schools and the unions representing them. They were primary election voters and active in political clubs. Their concern for education policy in public settings or in private conversations focused on support for traditional public schools and organized labor though, interestingly, support for unions did not always lead to articulation of support for teachers per se. Governance Voters voiced strong desire for a functioning, efficient State government. These voters were diverse, ranging from young professionals (African American, white and Latino) -often gentrifiers, to wealthy older Upper West Side residents who may donate to campaigns regularly and are willing to support new candidates for office. They were not political activists in that they may not have been reliable primary election voters nor a member of a specific political club, but they often attended community board meetings and engaged on issues related to government services like sanitation, transportation, taxation and policing - but little on public education. Lapsed voters, also largely Black and Latino, could identify their elected representatives but had inconsistent voting histories in primaries. Most were parents of K-12 students, and many had children in charter schools. Lapsed voters seemed open to new leadership but required frequent “touches” ⁹².

The strategy to recruit and donate directly to candidates proved problematic for three reasons. First, charter-supported candidates received donations from mostly white financial

⁹² Voter “touches” is campaign parlance for the manner and frequency a campaign engages a voter. Touches can include phone calls to a household, door-to-door canvassing or mail sent to the home of a voter.
sector executives and employees who, after the collapse of 2008, were deemed unwelcome corporate citizens. Donors’ ties to conservative groups also proved damaging to insurgent candidates in the heavily African American and Democratic neighborhoods in which these races occurred. Second, charter-supported candidates were pushed to consistently promote school choice talking points in order to receive funding and media support making them single-issue candidates in the minds of voters. Such candidates do not typically win elections since benefits they promote target a small and discrete population. Voters in primary elections may not necessarily have children in charter schools and are therefore not directly impacted by the policy, rendering urgency arguments less effective. Third, despite substantial direct financial support, candidates were legally barred from accessing funds being funneled to the independent expenditures. Thus, limited direct donations to campaigns were insufficient to overcome perceived incumbent differentials, raise name recognition and hire staff.

Another losing State Senate campaign took place in the New York City suburbs of Long Island and further hobbled charter advocate electoral strategies. Craig Johnson was a pro-charter State Senator first elected in 2000 and raised over $1.2 million to run in 2010 – an extraordinary and unusually large amount for a re-election bid for a state legislative office. He lost to Republican Jack Martins in a general election and though Martins was not a charter-opponent, school choice advocates found themselves without a Democratic champion to persuade his/her colleagues in the conference.


Campaign strategies for State legislative races were abandoned by advocates after the results in 2010 turning all eyes toward the Congressional races in 2012. Hakeem Jeffries, a former State Assembly Member looking to succeed retiring Congressman Edolphus Towns in Brooklyn voiced strong support for charter schools. Advocates funneled donations at the maximum $2,500 per candidate per cycle federal limit and ran an IE that paralleled his race. The media seized on Jeffries’ alignment with Wall Street executives causing consternation among the many Democratic grassroots organizations poised to support him in his primary and general elections. Seeking refuge from the barbs coming from constituents and good government groups, Jeffries asked that the IE be dismantled, and support given directly to his campaign. Choice advocates complied and ceased to push his pro-charter stances to media outlets.

**Change in Tactics**

Electoral victories under any circumstance may be elusive but after a few attempts between 2010 and 2013, advocates learned a few valuable lessons. First, candidates vary in their appeal to voters and maintain differing levels of campaign competence. They may be strong supporters of charters but not good on other issues pertinent to voters. Second, donors preferred writing large checks, rather than the small ones from which individual candidates benefit the most. Pro-charter advocates donated large sums of money during the 2012 presidential race to Democratic and (mostly) Republican-leaning IEs and PACs. Large checks not subject to strict campaign finance rules governing contributions to individual candidates increased efficiencies and accountability for donors themselves. Third, parent engagement was the purview of the IE but difficulty identifying nonregistered parents, registering them and then motivating them to the polls proved expensive and ineffective.95

95 Personal interviews with three charter advocates on August 10, 14, 25, 2018.
Disappointing and expensive electoral defeats forced changes in tactics by adopting two alternate strategies. Learning from 2010, advocates believed their reforms could be more successful if pushed through elite engagement rather than support for legislative candidates through individual donations which made them, in some cases, unelectable. By supporting statewide and citywide leaders that raise massive sums of money in New York elections, advocates could make substantial donations and curry favor without being obvious in their support. That strategy worked for contributions to conference PACs – the organizations set up to support the Republican State Senate conference for example. Second, they invested in the political theater. Mobilizing parents to create shows of political force should, charter advocates believed, scare elected officials into siding with these black and Latino voters vs. entrenched labor unions and Party bosses.

Candidates in the 2013 city council primaries avoided open engagement with the school-choice agenda, fearing backlash. Small margins and low turnout in these races meant any major departure from a liberal/progressive Democratic agenda risked incurring the wrath of unions and activists. At the mayoral level, a Bill de Blasio victory was the worst-case scenario for the choice advocates and they needed to tread carefully. Financial and tacit support was provided to all but one of de Blasio’s challengers but by the end of the summer, de Blasio branded himself as the most progressive candidate in a crowded field at a time when Democratic activists grew increasingly anxious to return the City to liberal governance. Even though choice advocates spread their financial resources generously among multiple candidates and independent expenditures, 2013 turned into an investment in grooming future leaders, forgoing a major role in the post-Bloomberg governing regime.

As debates progressed, the conflict in communities involving charter schools would emerge in stark contrast to the first two terms of Bloomberg’s mayoralty. In the past, the UFT
and NAACP joined forces to combat the Administration on everything from school closures to colocation of charters within traditional public school buildings, but charters faced their biggest fears as they contemplated existence in a post-Bloomberg New York. If colocation was no longer a readily available option and since real estate costs in areas where charters are likely to locate are prohibitive for some CMOs and smaller mom-and-pop charters, efforts to tax space or charge rent would, in effect, reduce the number of start-ups and force some existing schools to become unsustainable over time.

Just two months in office, Mayor de Blasio struck the first blow of the charter battle by denying Moskowitz’s Success Academy permission to co-locate three schools. Under Bloomberg, Moskowitz and others who desired to co-locate were given the opportunity to do so notwithstanding, in some cases, strong community opposition. The new Mayor’s decision to reject Moskowitz’s application despite approving several others during the same period was used as an opportunity for both sides to test their mettle, and public battles with Moskowitz specifically began to extend to other charters who feared broader retribution from political leaders at a time of relative calm toward the end of Bloomberg’s tenure.

Moskowitz herself went on the attack and the school choice activists and elites marshaled their considerable media resources to assist. “We have a mayor in the City of New York who says he’s a progressive on the one hand but wants to deny poor kids in Harlem an opportunity, a shot at life,” Moskowitz said on MSNBC. She added that the Mayor is “trying to disenfranchise poor minority kids who want a shot at the American dream.” “I was never expecting in my wildest dreams that the mayor of the city of New York—a so-called progressive—would throw children in Harlem out in the street.”

Though the Mayor made several attempts to promote his

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point of view, he seemed unprepared for the media’s overall support for choice advocates against his policies.

With the help of allies in the progressive community, and piggybacking on his recent push for universal pre-K, de Blasio staged a protest in Albany on March 4th of 2014 ostensibly to push the governor and legislature for pre-K funds but to also rally support for his position against Moskowitz. The plan failed miserably. Moskowitz and other charter leaders used their proprietary contact with parents to mobilize almost 4000 of them to Albany while de Blasio’s pre-K rally drew a few hundred. But the real evidence of the choice community’s strength was the surprise appearance of Governor Cuomo speaking in support of charters, spurning de Blasio, causing the Mayor to retreat considerably from his current position. The blow to the Mayor essentially silenced his opposition and the media took notice. In late April, De Blasio finally cut a deal with the Success Academy to locate the schools in former Catholic school buildings that could actually cost the city more in the long run.

Governor Cuomo’s reelection and the midterm elections later that year created huge competition for dollars at every level of government and choice advocates considered the benefits of shifting strategies. One PAC, DFER, still engaged in primary elections. They maintained a national footprint by working with the Democratic Governors Association and multiple leadership PACs connected to the House and Senate.97 Other groups and donors sought greater efficiency and shelter from unnecessary and unwelcome attention. Among Democratic strongholds in the State, Cuomo’s unabashedly centrist politics renewed interest in flipping the State Senate from Republican to Democratic control. Choice advocates found a strong supporter in Cuomo and among Republican State Senators, so to support the reelection campaigns,

97 Personal Interview with Charter Advocate September 11, 2018
advocates funded IEs that pushed conservative talking points using messages that had little to do with schools and centered more on taxation and government spending.

Pro-charter coalitions focused on specific districts: Senate Districts 3 (an open seat), 8, and 7 (located in wealthy Long island areas with no charters); 5 upstate districts were also targeted. They were victorious in all but one, district 60, where the Democrat won with only 34% of the vote. Little funding went directly to candidates leaving room for a coalition of IEs to focus on broad statewide strategies; New Yorkers for A Balanced Albany coordinated with other PACs such as Jobs for New York (Republican operated) and Balanced New York (a real estate PAC). Together they spent 4.3 million dollars on outreach. That year, charter advocates spent roughly $19 million on lobbying and campaign-related advocacy.\(^9\) Meanwhile, the two unions representing teachers, The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), led a coalition of charter opponents that spent $11.77 million on similar activities.

Charter advocates also found strong support in the Independent Democratic Conference within the State Senate led by State Senator Jeff Klein. The IDC intentionally created a cleavage among Democratic members by caucusing with Republicans as what some termed a horrible power grab that prevented progressive legislation from passing the chamber. Comprised of moderate Democrats mostly from the five boroughs of New York City, the IDC provided pro-charter Democratic Senators to the movement that could be used as leverage against Democrats in the Assembly and Senate who may have been at times less willing to support pro-charter legislation. An interesting ideological conflict emerged. Choice advocates backed Republicans

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toward enshrining support for their issue, in effect going against Mayor de Blasio and Democratic political leaders in the State. But they received tacit support from the Governor, also a Democrat, who supported charters and worked well with Senate Republicans who would likely vote against legislative items supported by the minority and poor parents that send their children to charter schools.

**A New Political Paradigm in Harlem**

Politically, Harlem has been preoccupied by the seismic change in leadership after the retirement of Congressman Charles Rangel in 2016. Rangel represented the district for 46 years in the House. Central Harlem is represented by one Member of the City Council, one State Senator and one member of the State Assembly. Rangel’s decades-long tenure froze ambitious elected officials in their offices and created an intergenerational waiting list for open seats that even a New York City term limits law did little to alleviate.

Prior to retiring, Rangel won tough reelection bids in 2010, 2012 and 2014 though the last two races featured State Senator Adriano Espaillat who proved increasingly difficult to fend off. In 2016 the seat was open for the first time in decades after Rangel announced his retirement. Espaillat won a heated campaign to become the nation’s first Dominican-American in Congress, beating out, among others, Rangel’s chosen successor Assemblyman Keith Wright. Espaillat’s political base is north of Harlem in the Dominican enclave of Washington Heights, causing some political mainstays in central Harlem to lament the political and geographic shift away from Black Harlem.

Wright, now out of the Assembly, maintains his position as County Democratic Leader. Inez Dickens, term limited at the City Council now service in the Assembly in Wright’s vacated seat and was replaced in the Council by Bill Perkins. Brian Benjamin now represents the Perkins
seat in the State Senate. The electoral musical chairs coincide with substantial changes in the physical and economic landscape of Harlem. Composition of the old political establishment frayed and to charter supporters, organized opposition became more porous than ever. Protests that dotted Harlem’s educational infrastructure subsided, but the battle still raged in other venues through a vehicle known as Families for Excellent Schools (FES). FES opened its doors in 2011 to manage the broad strokes of parent organizing – that is, they were in charge of producing the political theater meant to broadside major targets like Mayor de Blasio, the State legislature or the City Council. It would be a successor of sorts to StudentsFirstNY, DFER and other IEs with Jeremiah Kittredge, who previously worked unsuccessfully in 2010 to organize parents around Senate races, at the helm.

Largely funded by donors to some of the larger CMOs like Success Academies, FES spent over $9.6 million to lobby elected officials in 2014 and raised over $20 million in 2015 as de Blasio ran for re-election (its biggest budget year) spending over $10 million in cable TV and radio advertising. Unlike 2010’s strategy of direct donation to candidates and loosely structured parent organizing efforts, investments in a data infrastructure provided an advantage: charters began integrating their parent information into massive mobilization efforts not directly tied to voting for individual legislative candidates; fundraising created metrics around advertising without the inefficiencies associated with campaigns and elections; and though FES was technically independent of specific charters, Moskowitz grew to be their public face, which conflicted others in the charter community. On one hand, they were happy to have her absorb

the public’s vitriol toward charters, and since her schools outperformed most others, she succeeded drawing attention to the need for more schools. But her caustic responses to the Mayor and the UFT also drew anger from tentative elected officials and community members that these same advocates were courting on the ground.

FES was responsible for sending parents and charter supporters to Albany in 2014 to protest de Blasio’s refusal to site three Success Academy schools. The march solidified the charter movement as a vigorous collection of energized and committed voters – less a niche constituency - in ways the subtlety of donating to candidates could not accomplish. Democrats who were heretofore concerned about engaging with charters found political cover with the force of this new parent mobilization. FES used the opportunity to soften public opposition rather than convert pessimists and found opportunities to establish partnerships with prominent organizations through donations made to the Democratic Black and Latino Caucus Foundation – a collection of Black and Latino legislators in State government – and the conference of Latino legislators, Somos El Futuro.100

Focus on the big picture and on big targets hammered home the issue of charters through the media in ways hard to ignore by elected officials or pundits, which helped pressure the Mayor and lawmakers into receding into smaller, less public spaces for opposition. Furthermore, the elite-oriented tactics used to increase the supply of charter schools, whether advocates knew it or not, was their biggest advantage. The transition of parents from the waiting list into a school of their choice developed new advocates which in turn would keep electeds and activists from pushing back too strenuously as more and more of their constituents left their zoned schools.

100 The Foundation Center-Charitynavigator.org (https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.irs&ein=452870970)
FES employed stronger uses of civil rights rhetoric to further cast the movement in similar egalitarian tones as parent organizing in Harlem under Ella Baker and Preston Wilcox and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Testing of these messages was conducted by leading Republican strategist Frank Luntz. Luntz was instrumental in developing language for national Republican battles against Democratic policies – most notably, by crafting the terms “death tax” for a provision of Affordable Care Act instead of estate tax, and “climate change” instead of global warming. At the 2014 National Charter School Conference in Las Vegas, Luntz presented attendees with 28-page PowerPoint outlining in extraordinary detail the importance of this new tightly-crafted messaging. In the presentation, advocates were implored to focus on “effective education” as opposed to education reform and highlight preparation for “real life skills”. “think[ing] critically, and “real world achievements”.101

A subsequent development in post-Bloomberg era occurring away from New York City proved to be the undoing of FES and signaled a critical moment in the life of pro-charter parent mobilization. New York-based FES in partnership with charter advocates across the country attempted to nationalize the movement by joining the fray in a Massachusetts referendum, Question 2, which would be on the ballot at the same time voters chose their President in November 2016. A ‘Yes’ vote for Question 2 would compel the State to raise the cap on charters, twelve schools per year, adding to the 78 already established with 30,000 students on waiting lists. Voters rejected the measure with a 62% to 37.9% vote against the initiative. Only 15 of 256 counties supported Question 2 – the same counties where Hillary Clinton won over

101 Presentation entitled “The Language of Effective Education in America 2014”. Delivered by Frank Luntz at the National Charter School Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada June 29-July 2, 2014
60% of the vote in the general election. On top of an already embarrassing loss, FES was fined over $426,500 for violating campaign finance rules which forced them to reveal their donors who included allies to Massachusetts Republican Governor Charlie Baker. The fine levied was a record for the State and one of several “indignities” that Politico.com alluded to in its report on the ballot initiative. They went further, stating:

A year after the ballot question failed, FES has put its national ambitions on hold and started the grueling work of searching for a fresh political identity at home. It’s an unenviable crossroads for a group that once served as a key power broker in New York’s charter world — and one with significant implications for the local and national charter advocacy movements.

Joe Williams, former Executive Director of DFER who now heads the Walton Education Coalition -an arm of the Walton Family - commissioned a study from the Global Strategy Group (Global) to assess the Massachusetts debacle. Global maintains an impressive client list which included 9 of the 17 Democratic Members of Congress in New York State (including Harlem’s Adriano Espaillat), U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Governor Cuomo, the New York Democratic Party, the national Democratic and Senatorial Campaign Committees, the

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Democratic Governors Association and Priorities USA, the independent expenditure that paralleled Hillary Clinton’s in the 2016 campaign. The Global-authored postmortem enumerates the initiative’s failures:

- FES failed to move legislation at the State level to avoid a ballot initiative
- The ballot question was ill-worded and ill-timed in a year of intensely partisan and polarizing presidential politics
- FES failed to penetrate the electorate with a persuasive narrative and message
- Opposition from teachers’ unions in the State as well as Senators Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Warren (D-MA), were instrumental in defeat
- Advocates failed to persuade key groups such as Republicans broadly, conservative independents and parents- all of whom are strongest charter supporters.\(^\text{104}\)

FES shuttered following the Massachusetts setback and after a subsequent unrelated scandal involving its head, Jeremiah Kittrich\(^\text{105}\), exposing the organization to substantial criticism of its tactics and leadership. Political theater elicits broad and unfocused emotional response from audiences rather than personal engagement from persuadable validators converted from previously unsupportive positions. Civil rights rhetoric implies equity, fairness and


egalitarian approaches to policies, but those policies are redistributive in nature. Such tactics may work to level the playing field when the balance of power tips in favor of non-diverse institutions and majority constituencies. However, such strategies may have the opposite effect when dealing with charters where articulating equity outcomes could be viewed as siphoning money from traditional public schools.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY PRACTICE

This study sought to answer two main questions. I investigated how the Bloomberg Administration and regime actors influenced charter school growth and sustainability. Co-location of charters within public school buildings was one way that regime participants could exert control over expansion within specific communities.

A second avenue of influence involved a sympathetic Governor Paterson and President Obama who perhaps provided the political and racial imprimatur that encouraged charter leaders to seek electoral influence by supporting champions of choice in legislative campaigns with the support of parent advocates who were presumed to be likely voters. Parent mobilization for electoral campaigns required three major areas of engagement:

1. Field and Parent Organizing, which involves direct mail and canvassing. It is effective but is hugely inefficient;
2. Candidate recruitment and support which has traditionally been through direct campaign support or in-kind services; and
3. Raising money for the independent expenditures that can expressly advocate for or against a candidate but cannot consult with the candidate or his/her agents.106

Attempts by charter advocates to mobilize Harlem voters, particularly parents with children in charter schools, by supporting a pro-charter candidates failed in part because they believed urgency among existing charter parents and those on the wait list could be harnessed into electoral success. Particularized support for individual charters, they assumed, would convert to generalized support toward the entire education reform community. Conversion to

electoral regimes utilized specific policy agendas and regime-aligned networks (Heclo, 1978) while abandoning the old pathways such as political clubs, unions and local elites. This policy-focused perspective is not a new concept, but it does stress the connection between the policy itself, voters, pro-charter coalitions and funders.

Elections are unpredictable affairs, but electoral success is only one component of regime conversion efforts. For policy structures to endure new policies must supplant deep-rooted coalitional patterns and stimulate the emergence of new vested interests and alliances (Patashnik, 2003). The difficult politics around school choice broadly and the related issues of colocation, restrictions on the number of schools authorized, teacher evaluations and unionization, tested the resilience of old coalitions against newly formed and well-funded advocacy networks with little electoral experience. Regime actors whose racial and class homogeneity prevented large-scale stakeholder buy-in locally, revealed vulnerabilities to pro-charter persuasion strategies. Emphasis on the long game with a distinct set of players, strategies, extended time horizons and substantial organizing capacities beyond one or two election cycles, would have been more advantageous.

Local elections themselves present a unique challenge as they tend to be managerial rather than existential or ideological. Harlem, according to one elected official, “supports incumbents no matter what”107, both anecdotally in terms of individual voter and elite organization preferences, and operationally with respect to the mobilization of political clubs. Predictable support for incumbents perpetuates high incumbency rates in state legislative positions - which have existed since World War II and across multiple levels of government - prove vexing. A perceived lack of collective responsibility and the ability of State Senators to deliver resources to specific elite-led local interests produced positive returns for their policies.

107 Personal interview with Harlem elected official August 10, 2017
Interviews with parents suggest\(^{108}\) they will engage one another frequently on the issue of school quality, but neighborhood networks that address education options may not overlap those in which parents will discuss political views or candidate preferences. Parents who are regular voters in Harlem rejected broad conjectural exchanges about the benefits of school choice over traditional public schools and opted instead to rely on information shortcuts such as party identification or endorsements, constituent casework and support for local organizations (Oliver, Ha, & Callen, 2012) to make their choices at the polls. The neighborhood’s political machine, though showing signs of wear, excelled at maintaining the stature and power of elites through successful protection of its political networks using messages that are tailored toward voters already nervous about incursions by Bloomberg-allied businesses and gentrifiers. Incumbents focused on the issues Harlem voters cared most about: Crime, jobs, housing and education broadly but not charter-specific choice options. Insurgent charter-backed candidates lacked strong allies already rooted in the neighborhood to bridge that informational gap, creating questions of their authenticity among the Black voters who dominated the Democratic primary and were intrinsically motivated by their associations at church, or local organizations.

Primary election constituencies are different from re-election constituencies which also differ slightly from governing constituencies (Fenno 2003), further muddling goals for a potential pro-charter coalition. Voters attached to Democratic institutions or community-based organizations that engage in social justice are routinely reminded of when and how to vote – often engaging in GOTV (get out the vote) activities on behalf of candidates. Gentrifiers with whom charter advocates shared political and policy kinship, given their relative newness to the neighborhood, may not have strong primary voting history but could be solid general election voters. Without considering changes in Harlem’s demographics nor fully sympathetic to

\(^{108}\) Personal interviews with Harlem public school parents September 25, 27, 2018
historic narratives, charter advocates collectively failed to understand that the average parent is not the average voter – that is, the average parent with a child in a charter school is unlikely to be a regular voter in a Democratic primary.

Advocates then moved to financially support through donations and other means, Republican Senators and conservative-leaning PACS to prevent Democrats from taking control of the legislature, a tactic with which they had some success. But their worst fears came to fruition when Bill de Blasio was elected Mayor and he, despite an awkward early attack on Eva Moskowitz, dramatically slowed co-location of schools.

Regime actors and charter advocates retooled strategies frequently in response to substantial pushback from the electorate and older union-aligned leaders with whom they had little connection, which suggests regimes are far less stable than the theory purports. The very nature of regimes as a relatively homogenous governing coalition lacks needed flexibility in environments with substantial racial and SES heterogeneity that are characteristic of many cities where charters thrive. Governing and electoral coalitions may be distinct from one another but regimes, in the urgency to push reforms, spent little time bridging these coalitions and constituencies. Stone’s analysis of Atlanta makes clear that Maynard Jackson’s success rested largely on his ability to increase social capital among African Americans and between Black and white middle class residents which ultimately solidified his power base and strengthened policy buy-in. This study uncovered no evidence that a similar strategy was undertaken during the Bloomberg Administration, which likely hampered community support and left reforms vulnerable to rollback.
Gentrification, Social Capital, and Civic Engagement

Evaluations of authenticity frustrated pro-charter campaigns and cast candidates as pro-pro-Wall Street and pro-market whose policy positions aligned with Gillespie’s third cohort of African American leadership. Some regime actors who focused on rapid expansion of charter schools and broader reforms under the portfolio model underestimated the toxicity of the connection they attempted to build between their abundant financial and media resources and Harlem’s tight-knit community whose voting strength showed signs of distress. The dynamic is not unique to Harlem politics. Long after the death of Harold Washington in Chicago, and decades after the mayoralty of Dinkins in New York, Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young in Atlanta, political power in Black communities is still often indexed to movements of the civil rights era. A potential loss of political power through gentrification forced new questions about how authentic community citizenship would be evaluated.109

The second important question for the study concerned the response of the Harlem community and its leaders to attempts at fortifying and promoting school reforms. The answer depended largely on the extent to which Administration officials, charter leaders and regime actors could—perhaps through gatekeepers - communicate shared fate and urgency around school choice. Substantial demographic shifts and lack of local cohesion may have provided an opening for charter leaders to siphon support despite largely distrustful political leadership. But dramatic changes in the social landscape, including many of Harlem’s most influential and enduring institutions like the black church, fueled the community’s overall response to Bloomberg and charter schools.

In fact, gentrification exacerbates an already growing problem within the faith community. Over last ten years, almost two dozen churches were sold to developers due to dwindling membership and skyrocketing costs to maintain properties. Even the churches and schools painstakingly organized by Catholics at the turn of the 20th century have lost ground. Two historic Catholic schools, Rice High School and St. Thomas the Apostle (along with its church), were closed by the Archdiocese of New York and subsequently leased to charter schools. Child’s Memorial Church, the only congregation that would hold the funeral of Malcolm X after many prominent Harlem churches declined, was torn down and will be turned into apartments. Where churches were the center of political and social activism in Harlem, organizations like Rev. Al Sharpton’s National Action Network and the Black Lives Matter movement suggest individuals are becoming organized less by geography, and more around issues.

Between David Dinkins’ loss in 1993 and Obama’s victory in 2008, Black (largely symbolic) political power shifted from its base in Harlem to Brooklyn revealing a Black vote not necessarily tied to Party, trending independent, and in constant debate with itself about the tradeoff between stronger electoral power or better programs to address enfranchisement and

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equity. Gentrification and more diffuse political power come with sharp generational cleavages between residents seeking more amenities and improved conditions of the physical space, and older residents who view gentrification’s disempowering effects as a sign of class warfare (Hall, Robinson, & Kohli, 2014).

Increased heterogeneity (Oliver, 2001) and anger resulting from the loss of landmarks and cultural institutions led to a belief that changes in education policy amounted to cultural sanitization. Growing spatial inequality within schools and in the neighborhood creates predominantly white zones that subsist among income stratified blocks reducing the ability to brand institutions with a Black identity and fueling the loss of bonding capital. Consider the example of Wadleigh whose century-long presence reflected Harlem’s growth and culture but whose internal and external environments exemplify the community’s transition, as some would argue, away from the culture that made the neighborhood iconic. As the community experiences these vicissitudes, Harlem residents fear education reforms by external regime actors halts the creation of bonding capital and slows perpetuation of a culture of civic engagement, ceding control to “interlopers” (Hyra, 2008). Charter advocates attempted to connect parents, donors and the movement to broader civil rights themes in an effort to bridge racial and ethnic divides but instead were viewed as the agents of gentrification and manipulators of established political order.

Until the 1950s, East Harlem was largely Italian, and Vito Marcantonio represented the community in Congress from 1934-1950. Marcantonio supported the civil rights movement and endeared himself to Italian Americans, a growing Puerto Rican population and African-Americans, by sponsoring pro-civil rights bills that eliminated the poll tax and called for lynching to be designed a federal crime. His district included Benjamin Franklin High School (now the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics) whose student body reflected the
diverse East Harlem community and whose principal, Leonard Covello, implemented reforms meant to celebrate ethnic diversity. A racial incident at the school in September of 1945 - one year after future United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan graduated - sparked days of protest that pushed Black, Latino and Italian leaders toward months of community-based dialogue to heal the rift. In 1969, 24 years after the incident, race relations improved dramatically due largely to newly minted local political coalitions. That same year, Robert Jackson graduated from Benjamin Franklin with his sights on attending college at SUNY New Paltz.

After New Paltz, Jackson returned to West Harlem and Washington Heights to organize residents around local issues, and by the 1980s he and many of his associates began urging inactive parents to vote in school board elections. He met charismatic young leaders in Rolando Acosta, Isabel Navarro, Guillermo Linares and Luis Miranda, with whom he forged strong political alliances and lasting friendships. Through the 1980s, Jackson and his colleagues used school board elections as a proving ground for themselves. Each had their own talents with similar views on policy goals for their neighborhood and agreed to support one another for elected or appointed positions in government and the nonprofit sector whenever opportunities presented themselves.

They each took different paths toward fulfilling their pact. Linares ran for office and became the first Dominican American elected to city council in 1991 representing Washington Heights. He was appointed by President Bill Clinton to the President’s Advisory Commission on Education Excellence for Hispanic Americans and in 1999, he was made Chair. Linares later served as the New York City Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs in 2004 and the served briefly in the Assembly before retiring from public life.
Isabel Navarro, her husband and five children were one of the first Mexican-American families in Washington Heights when they moved to the area in 1969. Her husband worked for decades at Columbia Presbyterian and recently retired. Isabel pushed for bilingual education and new opportunities for Mexican Americans all while her children attended local public schools. Luis Miranda became an aide to Mayor Edward I. Koch then afterwards, Chair of the New York City Health and Hospital Corporation and later, founder of the Hispanic Federation - a network of social service organizations supporting Latino communities across the State. He eventually co-founded the MirRam Group that consults political candidates and provides private and nonprofit firms access (acts as gatekeeper) to Latino populations in New York. Miranda is also known through his son, Lin-Manuel Miranda of Broadway’s Hamilton fame.

Rolando Acosta was raised in the Dominican Republic and graduated from High School in the Bronx. He studied at to Columbia University (’79) and Columbia Law (’82) before taking a job at the Legal Aid society. After an impressive career as a public interest attorney, former Governor Eliot Spitzer appointed Acosta to the Appellate Division of the First Judicial Department. Later, Governor Andrew Cuomo made him Presiding Justice in 2017.

Robert Jackson went on to champion changes in the school funding that would benefit New York City public schools and joined the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) in a lawsuit against the State with attorney Michael Rebell as lead counsel. A New York judge sided with Jackson and Rebell in a 2001 ruling, ordering the State to pay New York City over $4 billion. Buoyed by the success of that effort and years of education activism prior, Jackson ran successfully for City Council later that year. He lobbied heavily for Chairmanship of the prized Education Committee but lost to Eva Moskowitz.

Decades of work in their communities and keen awareness of the importance of political institutions produced a remarkable convergence in their lives. Navarro testified in the original
CFE case that Jackson and his allies brought to court. Rolando Acosta was the Presiding Justice of an appellate court that had final say in lawsuit and sided with Jackson and the CFE after the State appealed the original decision.

Familiar accounts of career-long collective activism underscore ubiquitous political war stories that produced significant policy improvements for Harlem and surrounding neighborhoods. These local leaders and many of the younger political operatives they trained fear the mechanisms that produced such activism are being dismantled by choice advocates, their regime partners and the effects of gentrification that regime members are blamed for exacerbating.

Embedded deeply within Harlem’s intra-community relationships and networks, bonding capital largely determines how and with whom residents talk about politics, how they resolve neighborhood-wide problems and who fosters the introduction of residents to one another in the tight spaces of organizing and mobilization (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). Even if not articulated as such, Harlem residents fear the loss of social capital among parents, and weakened social reproduction among students that builds shared identities from youth to adulthood toward resolving policy problems (Putnam, 2000).

In fact, reflecting on the charter movement and neighborhood trends uptown, one high ranking official in the Bloomberg administration remarked they were “unaware how disruptive their policies were going to be”. Collocation of specific middle school grades may also contribute to the tension. K-8 schools established a specific culture for children and their parents in the early grades. Rapid collocation of charters in grades 6-8 caused conflict within the school and for parents who already bought into the ethos of the existing traditional public school.

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113 Personal interview with former Bloomberg Administration official conducted September 17, 2018
Complicating matters was the urgency within the Bloomberg administration to move their reforms quickly that, combined with rumors about cherry-picking Harlem students, contributed to a sense among activists and parents that the City closed middle schools to cherry-pick high-performing students to attend charters.\textsuperscript{114}

Government institutions can disrupt or manipulate social capital, perhaps unintentionally, through specific context or be enlarged for broader initiatives (Cox & Witko, 2008) by imposing or championing policies that alter relationships within communities or between communities and those same institutions. For example, the end of school boards brought about the end of school board elections and employment regimes via political patronage. With the end of school board elections, grassroots parent organizing ceased in some manner for that specific end, only to be replaced somewhat by charter advocates for their discrete purposes, and what remains is vastly different from the mobilization in which Jackson and his colleagues participated decades earlier. Furthermore, immigrant, non-citizen parents with children in public schools could vote in school board elections. Thus, similar to Tammany Hall’s embrace of these populations in the early 1900s, school board elections offered immigrants a path to political empowerment across the City. Now, Harlem residents fear the only path for bridging capital with regime members akin to the type established by J. Raymond Jones decades ago, is exclusive to charter parents - locking out other residents, parents and leaders from access to City Hall and city-wide political power.

Schools themselves are community institutions and serve as anchors in the face of crime, loss of affordable housing, lack of jobs or services, and play an important role in fostering democratic politics by perpetuating political values and civic culture (Schneider, Teske, Marschall, Mintrom, & Roch, 1997). Policies that destabilize schools undermine this important role and disrupt families (Lipman, 2013). In New York City, more than half of all parents

\textsuperscript{114} Personal interview with charter advocate conducted October 16, 2018
exercise choice in gentrifying neighborhoods and white families are 22% more likely to move into low-income communities of color when those neighborhoods had substantial choice options. These same white parents enroll their children in schools with fewer minority parents and poor parents, than their citywide average. Black, Hispanic, and Asian parents in gentrifying neighborhoods enroll their children in schools with nearly the same proportion of Black and Hispanic students as their zoned schools.\textsuperscript{115} Charters then remain segregated even with a more integrated community but since a large percentage (40%) of Harlem children attend a charter kindergarten, civic engagement acculturation will likely occur at the hands of external school leaders, and formation of social cohesion among families will become difficult when such institutions are taken over by actors unfamiliar with the community.\textsuperscript{116}

Political campaigns such as those heavily funded by charter advocates in 2010 demonstrate the relationship between social capital, social networks, electoral and policy outcomes. Voters judge candidates not only on merits of policy positions but against tightly held norms of civic behavior, authenticity to local narratives and close personal relationships. Social and political activities like going to church or attending community meetings shape political attitudes and create a culture of civic engagement. Gentrification occurring in Harlem and cities with historically Black or Latino populations exacerbates gaps in social and political networks through loss of housing and in reduced membership in local institutions like political clubs and churches. Demographic and political changes are assumed to trickle down to the poor and working classes to create more socially mixed, less segregated, more livable and sustainable communities but have had little such impact. Instead, benefits are sorted – families, children

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid 11

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid 11
within neighborhoods and within school buildings could have vastly different levels of access based on their decision of whether or not to attend a charter school. Networks, generally homogenous in SES and behavior, play a substantial role in providing or changing political information (Sinclair, 2012) but now individuals and causes are more compartmentalized and electoral cohesion around issues of shared fate becomes more difficult.

Everyone brings collective history to the table and considering regimes and social capital as frames, when partnerships are fragile and cooperative relations do not share identity or fate because of lack of local authenticity and trust, racial cleavages may become more pronounced (M. Orr, 1999). Whereas Democracy Prep, HCZ and others may be good community partners and remain somewhat inoculated from anger directed at charters broadly, middle class self-segregation produces new apprehensions (Butler, 1997, p.161). Notions of diversity were prevalent in the intentions of gentrifiers rather than in their actions, reflecting one way in which they defined themselves as a specific class (Butler and Robson, 2001) and mirroring one-sided social mixing of the type advocated in wealthier neighborhoods that may be just as socially homogeneous (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2010).

**A New Cohort of Black Political Leaders**

Demographic shifts and loss of local institutions may have an impact on the future of black political leadership and returning to Gillespie’s analysis, the next generation of black leaders is likely to exhibit similar characteristics to her third cohort but with some important distinctions. This latest cohort will still be diverse in style, background and policy preferences. They will be relatively young and even further removed from the civil rights movement in terms of age and their professional associations will, like cohort 3, involve predominantly white academic and professional institutions.
Though tangentially mentioned by Gillespie, cohorts of black leaders are overwhelmingly Democratic or said differently, the vast majority of black elected leaders at the local, state and federal level have run and won as Democrats. A new cohort will increasingly view the Party as a vehicle for their campaigns and causes but not necessarily as the platform. In other words, they will be less likely to embrace the Party but, rather, attempt to shape it from outside – running against it at times and focusing more on the candidate and less the institution. New African American leaders are younger than the last of the baby boomers and will likely find a clearer path to engage race-specific policies – like gun control or criminal justice reform– since recent movements have garnered white allies in the form of elected officials, activists, donors and think-tanks. In short, a more recent cohort of black leader may be a fighter for social and economic justice alongside white allies who may have funded similar movements.

**Education Reform and Charter Sustainability**

Charter schools remain controversial but the tensions on the ground have ebbed as shifting demographics, transformations in Harlem’s leadership and steady growth of the parent base moderated opposition, though the future of school choice and education reform broadly remain fragile. The main parent advocacy firm, FES, is now defunct and though a knee-jerk reaction by advocates would be to rely more heavily on Moskowitz’s political and donor network to defend the movement against City Hall and the State legislature, many advocates concede diminishing returns to parent activism and political theater. Regime actors that managed to hold onto power in the Bloomberg-to-de Blasio transition find their influence waning as media stories focused on parent mobilization delve more into process and logistics and less the merits of charter expansion.
The 2016 election of President Trump may not have stimulated widespread grassroots engagement against school choice per se, but anger toward the President and his Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, deterred many Democrats from taking public positions in support of the movement, reducing any gains made from elite engagement of Democratic leaders on the issue. Complicating matters further, the Administration’s tendency to conflate education reform and privatization largely due to Secretary DeVos’ own history with vouchers and for-profit education initiatives, fueled a 2017 report highlighting the “racist” origins of vouchers\(^{117}\) authored by the Center for American Progress, a center-left think tank widely respected among progressive decision-makers.

StudentsFirst, the national organization created by former Washington D.C. school’s chancellor Michelle Rhee, ended operations and merged with 50Can in 2016 to conduct broad education policy though the New York City chapter remains operational.\(^{118}\) BAEO, the only national Black organization dedicated to expanding school choice closed in December 2017. Its founder Howard Fuller, whom Governor David Paterson credits for swaying him and other black elected officials in New York to support school choice, ultimately determined localized resistance to the NAACP and unions effected stronger results than a national movement.\(^{119}\)


North East Charter Schools Network downsized considerably, shifting most operations to Connecticut leaving only their CEO to manage efforts in New York City as part of her portfolio.

Pressure mounted in the last two elections cycles as the Progressive Caucus of the State Democratic Committee lobbied Governor Cuomo to force IDC members to re-caucus with Democrats. Considering his interest in national office and tense relationship with the New York State Teachers Union (NYSUT) who bristle at his pro-charter stance, the Governor pushed the IDC to return to the Democratic conference, but in a stunning turn, 6 of the 8 IDC members lost their primaries and were replaced in the State Senate with far-left representatives unlikely to stand up for charter advocates legislatively. Incidentally, Robert Jackson from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, defeated IDC Member Marisol Alcantara in the West Harlem district he once served as a Council Member.

The focus on lobbying efforts shifts now to the State Assembly where Democrats have been in control since 1965 except for a brief period from 1969-1974. The Assembly’s track record has been decidedly anti-charter prior to, and since it authorized legislation tied to pay raises in 1998. Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie from the Bronx and Majority Leader of the State Senate, Andrea Stewart Cousins from Westchester County (the same Senator whom Success board member Dan Loeb insulted) are African American, represent areas with few charter schools and have shown resistance to charter advocates despite parent advocacy on behalf of school choice. Elite deal-making will be relegated to a handful of sympathetic members rather than the chamber leadership as in previous years. Small fundraising events or meet-and-greets to introduce choice advocates to Assembly Members in more intimate settings is among the few tactics discussed among regime participants. Another strategy puts elected officials in direct contact with charters themselves where community-based meetings among charter parents would
invite local electeds to discuss community needs by introducing parents as both charter advocate and voter.

An urban version of the “suburban veto” deserves some attention here as charter schools expand into middle class neighborhoods within cities. Suburban leaders often provide a block against pro-charter rule-making, viewing choice and reform agendas broadly as specific to poor, minority communities but syphoning resources from their schools (Erickson, 2011). Though rapid suburban and rural charter growth in New York State is nonexistent, the real analog exists among the City’s predominantly white middle-class neighborhoods where homes for rent and purchase have increased substantially, making the cost of private schools prohibitive for those families. In 2011, Eva Moskowitz proposed a second Success Academy school servicing the Brooklyn upper-middle class areas of Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill and Carroll Gardens. At a public meeting, one parent responded to the proposal by saying "Resources should go into the public schools instead of this idea that there should be new schools. If you want to do something, expand our schools and give them more seats or give them the resources to do a better job."¹²⁰

That second school did not materialize but a Success school did open on the Upper West Side in 2011. UWS schools outperform most in the City and though Moskowitz touts racial/ethnic integration within her schools that exceed that of traditional public schools in the area,¹²¹ her presence aggravated a larger concern among some white residents over mixing poorer students from adjacent districts into the higher achieving, predominantly white, schools.


As recently as Spring of 2018, UWS parents battled new Department of Education Chancellor Richard Carranza over a plan to integrate District 3 which includes the UWS and parts of southern Harlem. Video of white parents angrily engaging the chancellor went viral, but the City stayed its course. Incidentally, though some parents are concerned about integration on the UWS, no such outrage was shown when the Harlem Hebrew Academy opened in the Harlem portion of District 3. Harlem Hebrew is integrated with Black, Latino and white students from across the district and though majority-minority enrollment, many white parents send their children as an alternative to pricey private schools, or Yeshivas.122 This reinforces an earlier point that many white families will gentrify neighborhoods as long as school choice options exist but are reluctant to seek such diversity in neighborhoods and schools with higher SES and racial/ethnic homogeneity.

The growth of charters in New York and potential for increased anti-charter sentiment in the State legislature has prompted a search for new partners. In an interesting turn, from the overwhelmingly white donor class, a new group of Black executives emerged to establish a political action committee to support education initiatives (mostly choice but not exclusively) and thought-leadership to inform political debate and recruit candidates for office. Leaders of this new PAC include William Lewis from financial and asset management firm Lazard,123 who was listed on Black Enterprise Magazine’s 75 most Powerful Blacks on Wall Street in 2011. Also involved are Marva Smalls, the global head of inclusion at Viacom and Charles Philips, CEO of Infor.124

122 I am a founding board member of the Harlem Hebrew Academy

A community-oriented Black-led PAC could address the concerns of Leda Nereida, founder of CommunityLinkED, who organized parents for Democracy Builders and Families for Excellent Schools. Nereida canvassed households in Harlem and Brooklyn, counseling families about their education options and opportunities for advocacy. In fact, she developed a curriculum for parents that taught education reform policy, public speaking, how to write talking points and how to advocate for their individual schools and their children. Nereida believed FES grew more concerned about charter advocacy than community-wide mobilization and fears the future of parent mobilization as it was originally conceived under choice, has faded. A black-led funding stream could supplement diminishing advocacy efforts around education reforms and scale-up activities to include community-wide engagement around broad policy issues similar to the way parents were organized in lockstep with political organizing under Ella Baker and J. Raymond Jones in Harlem.

The early work of Democracy Prep to root their schools into Harlem’s political and social fabric may have yielded an important intended outcome. Founder Seth Andrew commissioned a study that found an offer of admission to Democracy Prep produced a statistically significant increase in students’ probability of voting in the 2016 election (about 6 percentage points) though the effect on voter registration is not statistically significant. Students *enrolling* in Democracy Prep had a larger effect – roughly 24 percentage points (statistically significant for voting but not for registration). Interestingly they do not find significant effects on the registration and voting rates of Democracy Prep parents.¹²⁵

In New York City, a pro-charter Mayor like Bloomberg is unlikely to replace Mayor de Blasio when his term ends in 2021 and Governor Cuomo’s support for the movement will be

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tempered by emboldened Democrats in a re-unified State Senate and more activist Assembly. A change in media coverage refocused the public’s attention on the Mayor’s political choices more so than the strength of the charter movement and its effect on student achievement relative to traditional public schools. This study sought to determine if regime actors had power over the electorate in New York City but at the heart of this dissertation is the larger question about charter school sustainability and the ability of advocates to lock-in their reforms. Reform advocates of late have reached a sobering conclusion: They are losing allies quickly and must dramatically restructure advocacy networks and recruit new leaders if the sector is to survive. Three African American gubernatorial candidates supported by the liberal activists gained momentum in Georgia, Maryland and Florida gubernatorial races which could have slowed charter expansion in those states, but Republicans prevailed in each case with potential to increase school choice in the Trump era.

Lengthy investments in community-building undertaken by the Catholic Church and political parties in the early 1900s created institutions that survive today, and charter advocates may find that abandoning rapid expansion in favor of careful and thoughtful integration with existing schools and institutions achieves their long-term goals. Furthermore, Black and Latino voters are integral to any city- or state-wide electoral coalition but Black and Latino elected officials are largely prohibited from advocating for all the policies they feel would benefit their constituents for fear of exacting a political penalty from other coalition members.

The CEO of New Leaders and former Bloomberg official Jean Desravines still believes in the sector’s vibrancy:

In every type of school, great leaders ensure children have access to great teaching in every classroom, every year. By studying our diverse alumni community -- one-quarter of whom serve as charter school leaders -- we’ve
been able to distill the actions high-performing leaders take to build schools, across contexts and sectors, in which teachers and students thrive. We’ve also been able to isolate the conditions that support school leaders to be successful as well as those that make their jobs harder. By working directly with district and charter partners, sharing lessons and best practices across sectors, and advocating for policies that support effective leadership, we are actively contributing to the success and sustainability of leaders in both traditional public schools and public charter schools.126

Fears persist. In the case of Harlem, will the community that produced New York City’s first Black Mayor and City Council Member; New York State’s first Black Member of Congress, first Black Governor and the nation’s first Black Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, lose its stature – lose control of its narrative and ability to reproduce its culture of political engagement. In the minds of many that have called Harlem home for a generation, new Harlem histories are being reproduced and authenticated by school leaders with little to no connection to Harlem’s past or future.

Loss of mobilization and political clout to raise the cap in each state, a critical element in expanding charter schools as a sector, may substantially reduce the number of charters approved and opened. Charter leaders will need to focus on growing horizontally (more seats per grade) and vertically (more grades per school). As charter advocates contemplate their future and search for allies, sub-city leaders across the country are increasingly hesitant to sign on, fearing backlash, particularly in a Trump environment. Neoliberal leaders face scrutiny by party activists on the left and at a time when Democrats are refocusing efforts on revitalizing their

126 Personal interview with Jean Desravines October 19, 2018
relationship with organized labor. Leaders and community residents are left to manage the adverse effects of gentrification, the diffusion of place-based Black political power and potential loss of opportunities to mobilize residents on a mass scale for education policy reforms or reclaim the community’s physical spaces with schools and among residents.
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Appendix A: Charter Schools in Harlem by district
(adapted from New York State Department of Education)

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<td>SUNY</td>
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FOR STATE SENATE: BASIL SMIKLE
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Full Text:
The Post today enthusiastically endorses educator - and public-education reformer - Basil Smikle for the Democratic nomination in the state Senate's 30th District (Harlem, Upper West Side and Washington Heights).

Smikle's campaign is a response to the pleas of countless Harlem parents who are frustrated with incumbent Bill Perkins - the product of a private- school education who consistently stands in the way of educational opportunity for his constituents' children.

During one of the most important educational-policy battles in years - raising a legislatively imposed cap on charter schools - Perkins' loyalty was to the teachers union. He did everything he could to block charter expansion - including holding a show-trial hearing packed to the rafters with charter opponents.

Such behavior - which endangered New York's chances of qualifying for hundreds of millions in special federal school aid - propelled Smikle, a former aide to President Bill Clinton and ex-Sen. Hillary Clinton, into the race.

"When this community most needed [Bill Perkins'] help and support, he [stood] against receiving $700 million in federal funding. The days of playing both ends against the middle are over. We must stand for something nobler and more sincere," Smikle says.

That challenge and other outside pressures finally forced Perkins to support charter expansion.

Thus, even though educational choice remains the foundation of his campaign, Smikle calls the overall effort a "referendum on ineffective leadership."

He points to Perkins' meager Senate legislative record and inability to develop creative policy solutions for a community racked with high unemployment.

"It's time for a new generation . . . a new voice to step forward and address these problems," Smikle says.

As Wilma Brown of Harlem's Frederick Samuel Democratic Club explained the club's endorsement of Smikle: "It had to do with change. Members saw a young person with new ideas and a fresh vision."

New York desperately needs such vibrant leadership. The Post urges enrolled Democrats in the 30th District to cast their vote for Basil Smikle on Sept. 14.
Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)
"FOR STATE SENATE: BASIL SMIKLE." New York Post [New York, NY], 7 Sept. 2010, p. 22. Biography In Context,

ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

By waging war against the expansion of public charter schools, Manhattan state Sen. Bill Perkins fought to deny low-income city kids the quality educational options available to richer kids. Democrats in the 30th District, covering Harlem, the upper West Side and Washington Heights, should now deny him reelection in the Sept. 14 primary. They should send to Albany Basil Smikle, a fresh-thinking former aide to both Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Crucially, Smikle has signed former Mayor Ed Koch's pledge to support key reforms in Albany. Perkins claims that he's similarly a reformer, but he backed elevating the odious Pedro Espada to majority leader.

In Manhattan's other races, there's a test for determining whether an incumbent is mired in Albany muck: Did he or she commit in writing to the reform agenda advanced by Koch's organization, New York Uprising?

FULL TEXT

By waging war against the expansion of public charter schools, Manhattan state Sen. Bill Perkins fought to deny low-income city kids the quality educational options available to richer kids. Democrats in the 30th District, covering Harlem, the upper West Side and Washington Heights, should now deny him reelection in the Sept. 14 primary. They should send to Albany Basil Smikle, a fresh-thinking former aide to both Bill and Hillary Clinton.

The district's children have long been forced to attend failing public schools. But in recent years, hope arrived with an influx of high-performing charter schools that are delivering tremendous academic results.

Doing the bidding of the teachers union, Perkins kicked the gift horse in the rear. He ran a cynical "oversight" hearing that cherry-picked charter school horror stories to distort the record. And he resisted the push to lift the state charter school cap until it was clear the bill would pass.

Smikle, who has also been a political consultant to Mayor Bloomberg, is poised to serve the district well. A friend of charter schools, he was involved with One Hundred Black Men when it founded the Eagle Academy in the Bronx, the first all-male high school in the city in 30 years.

Crucially, Smikle has signed former Mayor Ed Koch's pledge to support key reforms in Albany. Perkins claims that he's similarly a reformer, but he backed elevating the odious Pedro Espada to majority leader.

Finally, Perkins also showed himself a hypocrite by voting to swipe promised revenue from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority - and by then attacking the MTA for the service cutbacks that resulted.
Smikle wins hands down.
In the 31st District, stretching from the upper West Side into Washington Heights, Inwood and Riverdale, four candidates are vying for the seat being vacated by Eric Schneiderman. Mark Levine - a sharp, reform-minded former public school teacher - is the class of the field.

After a stint in the classroom, he oversaw Teach for America in the city, founded a 4,000-member credit union and has most recently run the Center for After-School Excellence.

By far Levine outshines the other well-known candidate in the race, Adriano Espaillat, who is trying to jump from the Assembly to the Senate. Vote for Levine.

In Manhattan's other races, there's a test for determining whether an incumbent is mired in Albany muck: Did he or she commit in writing to the reform agenda advanced by Koch's organization, New York Uprising?

The agenda includes abolishing partisan gerrymandering of legislative districts, putting the Legislature under real ethics policing and imposing honest budgeting procedures.

Those who signed Koch's pledge are dubbed Heroes of Reform. Those who refused are Enemies of Reform.

Here's a second test of credibility: Many lawmakers, like Perkins, voted to slash funding for the MTA, then slammed the agency - by letter or public testimony - for cutting service. Any who participated in this flimflam are flagged as Fare Hike Hypocrites below.

- 68th Assembly District (East Harlem): Seven candidates are vying for an open seat. Robert Rodriguez is a Hero of Reform. Marion Bell, Edward Gibbs and Evette Zayas are Enemies of Reform. Alvin Johnson, Felix Rosado and John Ruiz were not reached by New York Uprising.

- 71st Assembly District (West Harlem, Washington Heights, Inwood): Incumbent Herman (Denny) Farrell is an Enemy of Reform. Challenger Ariel Ferreira is a Hero of Reform.

- 72nd Assembly District (Washington Heights, Inwood, Marble Hill): Five candidates are running for an open seat. Nelson Antonio Denis, Julissa Gomez and Guillermo Linares are Heroes of Reform. Miguel Estrella and Gabriela Rosa were not reached by New York Uprising.

- 73rd Assembly District (Upper East Side, East Midtown, Sutton Place, Turtle Bay): Incumbent Jonathan Bing is a Hero of Reform and a Fare Hike Hypocrite. Challenger Gregory Lundahl is a Hero of Reform.
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

DISSERTATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for current and former officials with New York State and New York City government

1. What current or former position(s) do you hold with New York City or New York State?
2. What engagement did you have with charter schools, their leaders or advocates during your tenure? When did it begin and how?
3. How would you characterize their engagement with your office?
4. How would you evaluate their engagement with leaders from the communities in which they were located?
5. Did you work with them to engage community leaders or activists?
6. Did you interact with any unions representing teachers?
7. Describe your interaction with them. Have you interacted with these unions often for work? Did you discuss school choice with union leaders and how would you characterize those conversations?
8. What would you say were the biggest hurdles to getting school choice implemented as an option for New York City school children?
9. What would you foresee are the challenges to come for their sustainability if any?
10. For community leaders who have expressed concern about charter schools, how have you worked to address their concerns?
11. For those community leaders who have been supportive of school choice and charter schools, have you tried to use them as advocates for reform efforts?

Questions for Harlem community leaders (elected, appointed or leaders of organizations)

1. Where were you born?
2. Where were you raised?
3. Did you go to school in Harlem? Where and when?
4. Have you been active in Harlem politically? Education activism?
5. Where you ever a school board member?
6. Are you active in local organizations or churches?
7. Do you have a position on charter schools?
8. Do you feel they have been a benefit to children/families in Harlem? Why or why not?
9. Do you feel that Harlem has benefited from their presence? Why or why not?
10. How do you feel about the school leaders (if known)?

Questions for Residents/Parents

Basic Questions About Household

1. On what street do you live?

Individuals in this category, and Harlem community leaders below it, are considered “elite interviews” for the purpose of this dissertation. Questions are meant to be open-ended.
2. Do you consider your residence to be in Harlem?
3. How long have you resided there?
4. Were you raised in this neighborhood?
5. Where did you live immediately before coming here?
6. How many adults, including you, live in the household?
7. How many children live in the household under 18?
   a. Age?
   b. Gender?
   c. Race/Ethnicity?
   d. What grades?
   e. Do they attend school locally?
      i. If yes, is it a traditional public, parochial, private or charter school?
      ii. Which school (optional)?

Questions about their views and understanding charters
1. If charter school, can you describe what differentiates a charter school from a traditional public school?
2. Did you know a lot about charter schools prior to your child attending?
3. Do any of your friends or family members object to sending your child to a charter school?
4. Have you been engaged to attend rallies, meetings, events in support of charter schools other than your own? How? Did you attend?
5. Would you recommend charter schools to other parents?
6. Do you attend scheduled Parent/teacher meetings?
   f. If so, how often? If not, how many times during the school year did you attend a parent meeting?
   g. What if anything prevented you from attending more meetings?
   h. Do you attend other types of meetings and/or events at, or related to the school?
8. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is Not Happy and 5 is Very Happy, rate your happiness with the school.
9. On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is Did Not Meet Expectations and 5 is Exceeds Expectations, rate your satisfaction with the school.
   a. Would you be interested in sending your child to another school?
   b. Another type (for example, if they are in a traditional public school, are you interested in sending to a parochial, private or charter)

Questions about Extended Family and Friends
1. Do any children in your extended family (grandchildren, nieces, nephews) attend school in Harlem?
   a. What is the relationship to you?
   b. Age?
   c. Gender?
   d. If so, what type: traditional public, parochial, private or charter?
   e. Which school? (optional)
2. If you know, on a scale of 1 to 5 grade how happy the parent(s) or guardian(s) are with the school?
3. Do the parent(s) or guardian(s) attend parent/teacher meetings regularly?
4. Are the parent(s) or guardian(s) active in the school at all?
5. Has that child/those children, ever been on the wait list for a charter school?
6. Do you have any friends or colleagues with children in charter schools?
7. On a scale of 1-5, how happy are they with the child’s experience in schools?

Questions about their engagement in the neighborhood and local politics
1. How often, if at all, do you attend religious services?
   a. Are these services located in this neighborhood?
   b. How long have you been attending this particular place of worship?
2. Does the religious leader speak often about campaigns and elections?
3. What community-based, civic or political clubs do you belong to or whose meeting do you attend regularly?
4. Are you registered to vote?
5. If you can recall, have you voted in the last 4 general elections (not just for President)?
6. Do you regularly vote in primary elections for state and local offices?
7. Name any individual(s) in the community who you feel is/are trustworthy when it comes to providing information about issues impacting your neighborhood.
8. Who do you trust on education-related issues?
9. What news publications do you read frequently (print or online)?
10. What televised or video news programs do you watch frequently?

On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is Strongly Disagree, 3 is no opinion and 5 is Strongly Agree, please evaluate the following statements:

1. I believe the schools in Harlem are doing a good job of education children
2. Charter schools are as good or better than traditional public schools
3. Leaders of traditional public schools represent my interests and concerns for my community
4. Unions representing teachers have the best interests of my community in mind
5. Unions representing teachers have the best interests of children in mind
6. Charter school leaders care about my community
7. Charter school leaders care about this community’s children
8. The people that support charter schools are from my community
9. Mayor de Blasio is a strong supporter of education and schools
10. Mayor de Blasio supports charter schools
11. Former Mayor Bloomberg was a strong support of education and schools
12. Former Mayor Bloomberg cared about my community
13. Leaders in my community have done a good job
14. The elected leaders in my community support charter schools
15. There should be more charter schools in my community
16. I would support a candidate for office that talked about putting more charter schools in my community
17. Have you seen commercials about charter schools on television? (y/n)
18. What about the internet and social media? (y/n)