

RECOVERY DISTRICTS AND WEIGHTED STUDENT FUNDING: HOW TWO EDUCATION POLICIES ARRIVED ON POLICY AGENDAS IN THREE STATES

By

STEPHEN JOSEPH OWENS

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth DeBray)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this state comparative multi-case study is to explore decision makers' perceptions of the many elements that led to weighted student funding and state recovery districts arriving on the education policy agendas in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. Through document review, archival analysis, and interviews with 24 stakeholders close to education policy in the three states, this study traces the evolution of the two policies from relative obscurity to a limited number of policy options to address stated problems. Through a case study methodology, this research resulted in three primary findings. First, the impact of governors in state agenda setting was ubiquitous, powerful, and far-reaching. Second, the Great Recession played a significant role in defining the problems that recovery districts and weighted student funding purported to solve. Finally, nation-wide intermediary organizations exerted political influence primarily through tight policy communities and targeted policy actors with shared political ideology. Implications for further research are also presented.

INDEX WORDS: Recovery districts, Weighted student funding, Intermediary organizations, Agenda setting, State education policy, Multiple streams

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DEDICATION

To Brie. Without your strength, encouragement, and sacrifice this work would have never been accomplished. I promise I will never ask you to read it.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Neoliberal policies in American K-12 public education have enjoyed an elevated position on state agendas the past two decades. This trend, towards programs and initiatives that contain elements of free market structure (Treanor, 2005), is manifested in numerous disparate policies depending on a state's sociopolitical context. In Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania, two such educational policies gained significant attention in 2015 from decision-makers: recovery districts and weighted student funding.

Recovery districts are a state-level reform created via state takeover of individual schools regardless of school district, for the purpose of increasing student achievement. Recovery districts are most well known through the initiatives in Louisiana (Recovery School District) and Tennessee (Achievement School District). Georgia's Opportunity School District was one such recovery district that showed up on the state agenda in 2015. In November of 2016 the people of Georgia voted on a resolution that, if it had passed, would have amended the state constitution to allow for state takeover of a select number of "chronically failing" schools (St. Claire, 2015). The bill to vote on Opportunity School District, and that passed the state's general assembly in 2015, was modeled after the Recovery School District in New Orleans, Louisiana (Percy, 2015).

According to the legislation, failing schools were defined as those that have scored below 60 on the College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI) for three consecutive years (Downey, 2015). The CCRPI is the Georgia Department of Education's accountability measure set up

under the state's flexibility waiver from certain requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). A governor-appointed superintendent would have been granted the authority to select twenty schools a year for removal from local school board authority and place them within the Opportunity School District for a number of possible state interventions (e.g. closure, transferred ownership to a charter school company) (Percy, 2015).

While the Opportunity School District resolution was navigating the state legislature in Georgia, a governor-appointed commission met regularly throughout 2015 to, among other directives, recommend a change to the method by which all public schools in the state were financed. The final recommendation of the Education Reform Commission (2015) was for school districts to be funded based on the characteristics of the individual student (e.g. gifted, economically disadvantaged) instead of the programs offered by the school (e.g. remedial education program, high school vocational laboratory courses) as required by the previous funding mechanism. Some measure of this policy, called weighted student funding (or backpack funding, student-based funding), have been put into place in six other states (California, Indiana, Nevada, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Hawaii) and several large school districts (e.g. Denver, New York City) (Snell, 2013).

The recent arrivals of recovery districts and weighted student funding onto the state education policy agenda was not unique to Georgia. In June of 2015 the governor of Nevada signed Assembly Bill 448, approving the passage of the Achievement School District ("AB448," 2015). This law allows the Achievement School District Executive Director to take control of six schools a year. The Executive Director is appointed by and reports to the state's Superintendent of Public Instruction (Nevada Department of Education, 2015b). Nevada's foray into weighted

student funding, meanwhile, was voted into law the same year but would take years before full implementation (SB508, 2015). Beginning 2015 the state assigned funding weights to special education students, English Language Learners, and those students born into poverty (Nevada Department of Education, 2015a).

Pennsylvania policymakers also debated and passed weighted student funding legislation, but only for additional funds that are unaccounted for in the current funding system (DeNardo, 2016). In 2015 a legislature-appointed commission met to discuss weighted student funding as a way to address the state's complete lack of a funding formula for schools ("Basic Education Funding Report," 2016). The novel formula that came as a result of that commission takes into account students' economic status and whether they are English Language Learners when calculating the amount each district receives ("A Fair Funding Formula," 2016). As to recovery districts, in 2015 the state's general assembly debated one such reform via Senate Bill 6, garnering heated discussion across Pennsylvania (Limm & Mezzacappa, 2015). Senate Bill 6 passed the state senate that year, but failed to progress through the state House of Representatives ("Senate Bill 6," 2016).

Within a year, three states that share few obvious similarities (e.g. geography, political landscape) openly debated and, in several instances, passed two specific types of education reforms that had the potential to exact significant change to their K-12 state education landscapes. These events have not occurred in a vacuum: it is worth investigating the actors, groups, research, etc. that may have contributed to each policy arriving on Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania's state political agendas. As these three states were the only states to have both policies at the fore within the time of this case study, they offered an intuitive set of sites for case study.

Background of Recovery Districts and Weighted Student Funding

Weighted student funding is distinctive as a reform due to the fact that its supporters are not limited to one political ideology (Suggs, 2015). Some proponents of the policy assert it answers the calls for financial equity because it offers administrators more site-level financial control and allows for finances to be tied to needs of students (Miles & Roza, 2006; Public Impact, 2008). For many individuals and organizations this policy has represented an opportunity to increase school choice, as it simplifies a per pupil funding calculation that previously would have been tied to school programs (Ladd, 2008). Since money in weighted student funding is based on the characteristics of the student, school-choice advocates have encouraged passing the finance reform arguing that it allows the money to follow the child to the school of their choosing (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008).

The research on each initiative is mixed. Regarding recovery districts, the Recovery School District in New Orleans is the best comparison since it has been in effect the longest: it was passed as a Louisiana constitutional amendment in 2003 (Bluestein, 2014). In 2015 student outcomes in New Orleans had modestly improved from those before the reform (Harris, 2015). The fact that Hurricane Katrina caused a large-scale change in the makeup of student demographics makes these outcome improvements impossible to tie to the policy change (DeBray & Jabbar, 2013).

The bulk of the research on weighted student funding has examined the claims of funding equity. In the Netherlands, where weighted student funding has been in effect for 25 years, the schools with highest needs are allocated the most funding (Fiske & Ladd, 2010; Ladd & Fiske, 2011). In the United States, however, the reform does not appear to convincingly increase financial equity on its own (Baker, 2009; Miles & Roza, 2006; Carr, Gray, & Holley, 2007). The

promise to direct more money to schools (as opposed to districts) has also been cast into doubt (Chambers, Levin, & Shambaugh, 2010; Carr et al., 2007).

These two policies share little in common: recovery districts concern school governance while weighted student funding dictates how the state finances all public schools. Roza and Simburg (2013), however, assert that weighted student funding can be utilized to increase school choice via increased transparency and flexibility in resource use; enabling portability of funds. If recovery districts can be viewed as an outgrowth of the school choice movement (the thinking that charters provide superior education via flexibility and innovation, for example), then pairing the initiative with a more transparent and flexible way to fund schools might be smart politics for school choice advocates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this state comparative multi-case study is to explore decision makers' perceptions of the many elements (e.g. role of intermediaries, perception of policy effectiveness in other states, policy entrepreneurs, state characteristics) that may have contributed to weighted student funding and state recovery districts arriving on the education policy agendas in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania.

Research Questions

The following overarching questions guided this inquiry, with the sub-questions defining the research direction.

- How did a state recovery district and weighted student funding achieve consideration by policy actors in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania?

(a) How do policy actors describe the role of information, intermediary organizations and/or prominent individuals in the decision to recommend weighted student funding and a recovery district?

(b) How do policy actors describe the factors within the state that motivated the changes to weighted student funding and a recovery district?

- What similarities and trends exist between the separate agenda setting phases in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania?
- To what extent is Kingdon's multiple streams framework appropriate for explaining the arrival of these two education reform policies on the states' education policy agendas?

Theoretical Framework

The multiple streams framework is uniquely suited to address such an inquiry. Multiple streams framework was developed to address the question of why some policies found their way onto the U.S. federal agenda while others were overlooked (Zahariadis, 1999). Kingdon (1995) envisioned three "streams" flowing that contain independent but necessary portions of a system that must be coupled together for a policy to have a strong chance of widespread consideration. Policy entrepreneurs, under multiple streams, join the three streams together within a temporary window of time for the best opportunity for a policy to be put onto the agenda. Along with multiple streams' application analyzing the United States federal government agenda setting (Kingdon, 1995), the framework has been utilized to view European politics (Zahariadas, 2003), as well as American higher education (McLendon, 2003; Ness, 2010a), among other arenas.

In such an opaque system such as the United States federal government, only the meeting of three metaphorical streams (problems, policies, and politics) can bring an item to the fore of

the political agenda. Policy entrepreneurs are individual policy actors that opportunistically combine streams in order to get legislation passed (Kingdon, 1995). Kingdon (1995) writes that a temporary amount of time is available to each entrepreneur to act, which he calls policy windows. The concept of the policy entrepreneurs specifically has transcended frameworks, as these individuals have been located in myriad contexts beyond federal agenda setting (Sabatier, 1999).

Young, Shepley, and Song (2010) applied multiple streams on the state level in Texas, Michigan, and California to explain how reading education arrived on each states' government agendas. Multiple streams had been applied to state education agendas before (e.g. McLendon, 2003; Lieberman, 2002), but this three-state analysis allowed for a more uniform comparison, especially when it came to the role of the three states' governors (Young et al., 2010). Although the states all relied on different indicators to define the problem of deficient reading education, they each featured, "...an active and influential governor dominat[ing] the political stream in these three states" (Young et al., 2010, p. 15). As a caveat to future researchers considering multiple streams as a tool to understand state agenda setting, Young et al. (2010) write that the framework's suitability might vary based on the content of the policy being reviewed: when more advocacy groups are active around the policy, the model is increasingly effective as a descriptive device.

Significance of the Study

The caveat provided by Young et al. (2010) is important for the study of policy processes with multiple streams as well as establishing support for a possible connection between recovery districts and weighted student funding. In July of 2015 Andrew Diss (2015) wrote a blog post taking credit for introducing the concept of the Achievement School District to Nevada's State

Superintendent. Diss was the Nevada State Director for StudentsFirst, the intermediary organization started by Michelle Rhee (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). In March of the next year Ashley DeMauro (2016), the Pennsylvania State Director for StudentsFirst, wrote an op-ed in *The Patriot-News* (Harrisburg, PA Newspaper) calling for the commonwealth to adopt weighted-student funding.

Two articles do not a connection make. What is clear, however, is that StudentsFirst had representatives advocating for both policies. In Georgia, the state's StudentsFirst office financed a trip of legislators to visit New Orleans' Recovery School District in order to gain support for the Opportunity School District proposal (Simonton & McCullen, 2016). The presence of advocacy groups would seem to validate the decision to utilize multiple streams specifically and this research as a whole. The Roza and Simburg (2013) white paper out of the Center on Reinventing Public Education explaining how the funding method could enable school choice also lays the groundwork for the possibility of intermediary organizations (IOs) "pairing" weighted student funding and recovery districts.

This study offers a better understanding of the debate and actors surrounding weighted student funding and recovery districts that contributes both to an understanding of the reforms as well as deepening the multiple streams framework itself as it is applied to state agendas in the future. Concerning the latter, research on the continuing role of active governors and/or the influence of IOs sets the groundwork for multiple streams studies of additional state neoliberal policies. This study bore out both findings in studying these two policies across the three states. Current education policy research must seek out all possible drivers of reform in education if multiple streams can continue as a viable state-level theoretical framework.

Agenda setting cannot be adequately explained through clear-cut cause and effect narratives. Research like this study assist in demystifying the process that might differ dramatically based on the state under investigation. Further muddying the water, the policy landscape for school choice programs does not fit into any traditional analyses. This study shows that new people, organizations, and theories are present at the table where educational initiatives are discussed. A three state comparison has allowed the researcher to identify both widespread and unique elements of policymaking--thereby assisting the conceptualizations of context and policy process (Young et al., 2010).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review examines the policy foundations and sociopolitical contexts that bore out recovery districts and weighted student funding as viable policies, as well as the core constructs and key applications of the multiple streams framework within education and public policy generally. The reviews of both policies overlap somewhat as the cultural shift towards standards and accountability beginning in the 1980s in the United States produced several reforms. For this reason, this review might be relevant to a number of audiences that would study government programs that continued the disaggregation of power of the school district as an institution or came about as a result of this shift in authority. The purpose of this review is to illuminate (a) the initiatives and landscapes that proceeded, helped create, and shaped recovery districts and weighted student funding, (b) how both policies have been implemented in the United States, and (c) the conceptual basis and usefulness of multiple streams as an organizing framework that emphasizes the importance of timing, opacity, and independence of central elements that compose the policy process.

Recovery Districts

The current reform made famous by the Recovery School District in Louisiana is a new take on a decades-long school district turnaround strategy: state takeover. Smith (2013) defines these “recovery districts” as unique due to the state-created body that is charged with operating (and improving) individual schools, often by changing governance to charter schools and/or bypassing collective bargaining. Recovery districts are one of the latest reforms that are the

result of a tide-change on the suitability of local school control. The literature offers a combination of ideological shifts and government initiatives that made recovery districts possible as a lever for change.

Local Control

The center of authority for public schools in the United States has, until recently, unquestionably rested on localities (Saiger, 2006). Before the establishment of the country, colonial education was primarily a result of ground-up endeavors within communities (Kirst, 2004). Without a mention of education as a power of the federal government in the U.S. Constitution, states asserted authority over the institution with the assumption that schools would continue to be established and ran by already-existing local school districts (Kaestle, 2011). For much of American history this belief was confirmed as these districts maintained (and, oftentimes gained) educational authority (Orfield, 1969).

For much of American history the powers to implement education only nominally rested with states via language in state constitutions (Briffault, 1991). State leaders traditionally delegated these substantial responsibilities to localities due to ideology (Wirt, 1978), unfamiliarity with education logistics and bureaucracy (Saiger, 2006), aversion to financial responsibility (Yinger, 2004), or some combination of each. The unique mix of federalism (famously dubbed “marble cake” federalism by Grodzins [1966]) that saw schools run primarily by community stakeholders did not endure, however. Scholars assert that beginning in the mid-twentieth century local districts’ authority began to erode across several fronts (Tyack, 2002).

Federal interest in the workings of the local school increased significantly through the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Although Title I introduced a new funding stream to schools from the federal government, Derthick (2004) claims

that by relying on complex formulae instead of state discretion, the special political regard of local control continued. Saiger (2006) writes that the passage of legislation towards educating students with disabilities (IDEA) as well as the desegregation of schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*) represented more intrusive federal measures compared to ESEA. Regardless, it was clear that the federal government saw the need for additional government action within the local school.

On the state level, legislatures and governors across the country were compelled to supply increased portions of education finances by courts' equity rulings (Odden & Picus, 2004). By the mid-1970s state average spending nationwide surpassed local dollars; forty years earlier the state share was only twenty percent (Derthick, 2004). With the infusion of state money came the desire to assess its effectiveness. The result, according to Fuhrman (1994), was unparalleled state action in the local school.

Early State Takeovers of Local Districts

In 1988 the first state takeovers of local districts occurred independently in Connecticut and Kentucky (Ziebarth, 2001). Both Cleveland and Boston had had their city schools taken over by their states earlier in the decade but as the result of judicial rulings that school decision-makers had not complied with desegregation regulations (Hunter & Brown, 1999). Aside from desegregation orders, the late 1980s saw states focusing on the general quality of education and creating classifications geared towards accountability (Bowers, 1989). These new "accountability systems," according to Bowers (1989, p. 3), contained both the carrot and the stick: incentives for high performing schools and threat of decertification or state takeover for the low performers.

The growing accessibility of student outcome data made state accountability systems possible (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1992). Previously state education agencies documented only attendance and dropout rates, these newer measures offered a clearer picture of the compliance (or lack thereof) of state regulations (Hammer, 2005). At this point, state policy makers would tend to only increase state authority if it also allowed for achieving other esteemed ends such as financial efficiency (McDermott, 2007). At the close of the 1980s, six states had legislation that allowed for state takeover of “academically bankrupt” school districts (Bowers, 1989, p. 4). By 2004, 23 more states added takeover laws and they had been applied to an additional 52 districts (Ziebarth, 2004).

Complete takeover was not the only way that local school authority waned in this same span of time. Hanson (1990) writes that several states across the country implemented school based management (also known as school-based budgeting) in the 1990s, whereby decisions that were traditionally made at the district level were given to school principals. Although school-based management (SBM) decentralized power (and appeared to counter the centralizing trend), it also continued the pattern of state intervention to reassign power at the local level (Saiger, 2006).

In each of these aforementioned interventions, the states generally assumed the position that the local school districts’ leaders required stringent parameters in order to turn schools around (Fuhrman, 1994). McDermott (2007, p. 122) writes, “Policy makers’ sense of crisis and the link between financial and accountability reform were the keys to enactment of strong accountability measures.” Saiger (2006) notes that these programs fell under the “New Accountability” title from state-level policy actors. The New Accountability included other programs such as district consolidation, reconstitution, and increased demands for standardized

scores to surpass a state-mandated performance “floor” (Saiger, 2006). These programs created an immense amount of burden in some contexts, and had the tendency to last for decades. By way of example, by 2004 only 22 of the 54 school districts that had been taken over in the United States were returned to local control (Ziebarth, 2004). In 2001 the federal government considerably helped to bolster the programs under New Accountability in a way that was unprecedented up to that point (Smith, 2013).

No Child Left Behind

When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was passed as the reauthorization of ESEA, basic tenets of New Accountability were solidified in state and federal law (Saiger, 2006). No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) required that all schools improve student achievement to proficient by 2014 or be subject to corrective actions from the state. Failure to improve for five consecutive years would result in restructuring—state takeover was included as one such method (Education Commission of the States, 2002). Five years following the legislation’s adoption, McDermott (2007) noted that these sanction policies were clearly the most politically controversial element of NCLB specifically and the reform agenda generally.

Within six months of the law’s passage, three states had taken control over four school districts (Craciun & Ziebarth, 2002). State takeover was not the only element of New Accountability that eroded local control at this time, however. Local curricular decisions gravitated quickly to the medium by which progress was measured under NCLB: state mandated tests (Ryan, 2004). State authority similarly increased with state-level actors legislating additional regulations to ensure compliance to the novel federal law (Dahmus, 2003). Upon implementation, stakeholders under NCLB significantly restrained the actions of school district leaders (Harvey, 2003).

Charter Schools

It would be a mistake to claim that the power that school districts used to wield at the beginning of the twentieth century was totally transferred to the state, federal government, or individual traditional public schoolhouses. At the same time that a handful of states were passing school takeover legislation, states passed a new reform that posed an existential threat to the institution of traditional public schooling: charter schools (Saiger, 2006). The invention of charter schools is pivotal to the make-up of the state recovery district programs that states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Nevada had on the political agenda in 2015.

Albert Shanker, previously the president of one of the nation's most powerful teachers' unions (the American Federation of Teachers), first envisioned public charter schools in the late 1980s (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2015). Kahlenberg and Potter (2015) write that stakeholders initially created these unique schools to encourage academic innovation by being publicly funded but privately managed. Individual people, groups of parents, teachers, or companies could operate a charter school with the understanding that failure to live up to the standards written into the original charter may result in the school being closed (Paino, Renzulli, Boylan, & Bradley, 2014). As of 2014 over a million students in the United States attended one such school (Paino et al., 2014).

In this exchange of accountability for autonomy, the state and district either have to grapple with the competition for students as a way of funding (as is the case with the creation of a new school) or the loss in authority over the running of an existing school (as when a school is taken over by the state and authority is shifted to a charter management organization). Although the details of charter school laws differ depending on the state, the one constant across the nation has been the exponential growth of this particular reform (Craciun & Ziebarth, 2002).

Mayoral Control

Charter schools made plain that proponents for choice in education expanded the critiques of the local school district from the possible incompetence of district leaders to questioning whether they are necessary at all (Saiger, 2006). Governors and legislators in several states joined in the political assertion that districts are optional by giving control a number of urban districts to their local mayor (Henig & Rich, 2004). Since the 1990s, several American cities have seen their school districts given to mayor control (e.g. Cleveland, New York), and President Obama's administration began his tenure by lobbying (via federal grant incentives and public support) for more cities to follow (Shen, 2012).

In certain districts, such as Philadelphia, this new authority manifested itself only in a mayor-appointed school board (DeJarnatt, 2004). More recently, however, districts have had the entire school governance eliminated and the system folded into one of many city-run departments (Shipps, 2004). This reform pinpoints the traditional system of district control as problematic, and attempts to ameliorate it through "general-government politics" (Saiger, 2006, p. 885). With mayoral control and public charter schools, state decision-makers had the political and ideological solutions to the continued perceived academic bankruptcy of traditional public schools.

Recovery School District

As previously mentioned, the current iteration of state takeover districts took shape in the United States in New Orleans, Louisiana. Before the passage of NCLB, Louisiana had already implemented an educational accountability system that Smith (2012) writes was one of the toughest in the nation at the time. In 2003 the state of Louisiana passed a constitutional amendment to create a state-run school district called the Recovery School District (Burns,

2010). The state originally only took over five schools in New Orleans and converted them into public charter schools. This legislation gained national media attention, however, after Hurricane Katrina caused considerable damage to the city of New Orleans. In wake of the hurricane, the Recovery School District (RSD) took over all but seventeen of the city's public schools (Dreilinger, 2013).

Through the utilization of language borrowed from Chapter 11 bankruptcy legislation, the leaders of RSD had the power to void existing contracts, including those made with personnel (Smith, 2012). As a result, immense changes took place to the structure and employment within New Orleans public schools during the years of transition. Louisiana's governor at the time, Bobby Jindal, was vocal about the success of the RSD to provide students in failing schools options of schools to attend so as to not to be "trapped" in poor performing public schools (Bluestein, 2014). At the beginning of the 2014/2015 school year, RSD leaders had closed New Orleans' remaining traditional public schools and began operation as a completely charter-filled district (Layton, 2014).

RSD's inception and subsequent growth did not transpire without conflict. When the state voted to amend its constitution in 2003, the measure passed overwhelmingly (Burns, 2010). Burns (2010) writes that opposition to the reform surged in parishes where large percentages of African Americans turned out to vote in high numbers. The racial split over RSD is similar to the same divide over legislation in Massachusetts to restructure the Boston city school board under mayor control more than two decades prior (Shen, 2012). Scholarly work on referendums for mayoral control of schools also suggests a concurrent class-split over these same measures (Portz, 2004; Taylor, 2001).

Additional recovery districts. Seven years after Hurricane Katrina provided a distinctive opportunity for a state takeover of schools in Louisiana, Tennessee began a similar program with the power of removing the lowest performing schools in the state from the authority of local school boards. The schools that entered Tennessee's Achievement School District emphasized recurrent testing and data analysis. The city of Memphis, where 80 percent of the bottom-ranked schools were located, was seen as "ground-zero" for the state's new district (Rich, 2013). In the reform's sixth year, the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation & Development found that established institutional requirements (e.g. neighborhood enrollment policies, economies of scale) limited the effectiveness of school operators within the Achievement School District (Massell, Glazer, & Malone, 2016).

Elsewhere, Michigan also passed legislation for a state-run district similar to Tennessee's, bringing the number of states with these policies up to three at the time stakeholders in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania were considering the referendum in 2015 (Bluestein & Sarrio, 2015). Legislators in Virginia passed a comparable measure for a district named the Opportunity Educational Institution in 2013, but a Norfolk Circuit Court ruled the measure unconstitutional the following year (Chandler, 2014).

The effectiveness of RSD specifically and recovery districts generally to improve student outcomes is up for near-constant debate. A meta-analysis of school closures and increased charter school presence in Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. found that closing an established school did not result in the students being sent to better performing schools (Weiss & Long, 2013). Several studies have shown that students that do find a way to move to a higher performing school are disproportionately White, less likely to live in poverty, and usually higher-achieving students in the first place (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin 2004; Cullen, Jacob, & Levitt

2005; Xu, Hannaway, & D'Souza 2009). Welsh, Duque, and McEachin's (2016) analysis of student migration found similar patterns in New Orleans during implementation of RSD: higher performing students changed to high quality schools while lower performing students transferred to low quality schools.

A report by the Louisiana Legislative Auditor (2011) found that student outcomes in the RSD had improved since before Hurricane Katrina, although the absolute scores were still some of the lowest in the state. Buras (2012) asserts that these improvements were marginal and merely the result of shifting assessment standards. Since the audit, Harris (2015) wrote for the Education Research Alliance of New Orleans and found continued increases in district performance, but not for students who had lived in the city before the storm. There remains evidence, then, that the new school outcomes were a product of population change and not the reform itself.

Research from RSD mirrors the growing body of literature about school closures and charter conversions. A charter schools' impact on low-income students of color is mixed, a result of myriad factors not least of which is the tendency to layoff vast numbers of experienced teachers (Weiss & Long, 2013; Buras, 2014). Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes' (CREDO, 2009) wide-ranging research on charter school student performance found that twice as many students' test scores lowered after entering a charter than improved.

Intermediaries and recovery districts. Recovery districts as a reform represent the latest response to policy-makers' negative perception of the school district as a governing entity. It would be incorrect, however, to label the recovery districts enacted in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Michigan as purely reactionary. Since Milton Friedman (1955) first proposed the idea of school funding following the student to the school of their choice, the type of policy that introduces elements of the free market into public education has consistently had a core group of

supporters in the United States (Carpenter & Kafer, 2012). Interest groups advocating for increased school choice have been active in the policy arenas in each of these states, but the traditional policy actors have also been joined by a growing investment from philanthropic organizations (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Foundation-funded IOs surrounding RSD specifically have shaped the way research is produced and consumed concerning the efficacy of the reform (DeBray, Scott, Lubienski, & Jabbar, 2014). Scott and Jabbar (2014) conceptualized the work of national philanthropic foundations as the center, or hub, of a wheel where individual intermediary organizations—the spokes—affect local market-based reforms such as portfolio districts.

While state takeovers of districts offer one lever to fix ailing schools, the recovery district reform rethinks the concept of school districts altogether while adding the notion of consumer choice via charter schools. National foundations and advocacy groups have displayed a willingness to further these policies in myriad state contexts. Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Nevada are a few of the earliest states to consider (and in Nevada’s case, implement) said reform, but the trends—and dollars—in education policy in the United States suggest that they will not be the last.

Weighted Student Funding

Several states fund public education through a foundation program that offers additional dollars based on students’ participation in various programs (e.g. Kindergarten, gifted programs) (Rubenstein, Doering, & Gess, 2000). Weighted student funding, by basing dollars on the qualities of the student, represents a noticeable change from several traditional education finance policies in the United States. Weighted student funding in the literature is generally agreed to have three main components: (1) education dollars follow the student on a per student basis to

the school they attend, (2) the total amount of money that is allotted to each student differs based on their educational needs, and (3) schools are empowered to utilize this money as they see fit (Ladd & Fiske, 2011; Chambers, Levin, & Shambaugh, 2010; Ladd, 2008). Although the first implementation of this reform took place in Alberta, Canada, the application in the Netherlands since the 1980s of weighted student funding has drawn the bulk of the research due to its large-scale use.

Initial Programs: Edmonton and the Netherlands

In 1976 the superintendent of Edmonton, Alberta schools in Canada led the initiative to transition to weighted student funding (WSF), a wholly novel method for financing schools (Ouchi, 2006). The focus of the change was decentralization, as the district had experienced friction between central office and individual school principals (Tucker & Coddington, 1998). By shifting several decisions to the principals, the thinking went; the power struggle would be less pronounced. Nine years after schools in Edmonton began the initiative, this policy would be implemented over an entire country and provide a test case for an innovative take on equity in education finance.

Unlike the scenario in Edmonton, the Dutch implementation of WSF was driven by a concern for groups of disadvantaged students' school performance—namely children of immigrants and Dutch children with uneducated parents (Fiske & Ladd, 2010). With high concentrations of the aforementioned groups of people in the country's largest cities, it was clear to policymakers that equal funding across schools was not suitable to produce similar outcomes for the students (Ladd & Fiske, 2011). The WSF system was set up under the Educational Priorities Policy of 1985 and created four categories of students that could generate additional dollars for individual schools. The most significant weight allotted almost twice the dollar

amount to schools for a disadvantaged student than for his or her “regular” counterpart (Ladd & Fiske, 2011).

Equity and Adequacy

The basic principles supporting the Dutch system have deep roots in education finance literature and the debate over what constitutes fair funding. The concepts of equity and adequacy offer the clearest starting place within the literature, but there are numerous qualifiers that must be taken into account. Within equity, three “lenses” can be applied to determine if school funding is equitable: horizontal equity, vertical equity, and fiscal neutrality (Berne & Stiefel, 1999; Guthrie & Ray, 2008; Odden & Picus, 2004).

Horizontal equity refers to the equal funding for students with similar needs (Carr, Gray & Holley, 2007). This “equal treatment of equals” assumes that students across a state/district/etc. would not receive different funding amounts for schooling due to geography. *Vertical equity* is achieved when differences in student needs are taken into account and the funding is changed to “match” the need (Guthrie & Ray, 2008). Finally, *fiscal neutrality* refers to the necessity to disassociate school resources from the local capacity to fund them (Odden & Picus, 2004). These three elements deal in the inputs of a school, while *adequacy* refers to outputs (Ladd, 2008).

For a school funding system to be adequate, policy actors must determine what are the minimum education outcomes that every student should be able to produce (Rawls, 2001). After this determination, funding has to be allotted in such a way to make these goals obtainable if they are to be considered adequate (Ladd, 2008). School finances could be completely equitable without being adequate, depending on the educational standard required of the students. With school districts populated by disparate groups of students with varying needs, Ladd (2008, p.

405) writes that, “equality of outputs requires inequality of inputs”--a basic tenet of WSF in the Netherlands.

WSF in the United States

The promise of improved adequacy has made WSF an attractive policy option in certain parts of the United States at the turn of the millennium. Since Kentucky’s Supreme Court ruled that the state’s entire funding system was inadequate in 1989, adequacy has increasingly been the standard by which courts hold education finance claims (Ladd, 2008). The nationwide focus on higher standards in the same time period has also focused attention to outcomes as the primary goal of funding systems (Odden & Picus, 2004).

Starting in the late 1990s, several large districts began implementing WSF in the U.S.: Cincinnati, Hartford, Houston, Milwaukee, New York, Seattle, and Washington D.C. (Cooper, DeRoche, Ouchi, Segal, & Brown, 2006). In the 2000s this number grew to include major cities such as San Francisco and Oakland, California (Chambers et al., 2010). Eventually the entire state of California joined Indiana, Rhode Island, and Hawaii in adopting elements of WSF, but without giving individual schools complete decision making powers due to the nature of central school district governance (Snell, 2013). This focus on the importance for school-level budgeting decisions is tied to the trend of disempowerment of the U.S. school district that was recounted in the previous section.

The accountability provisions within NCLB applied to local schools--a result of policymakers looking past central offices (Ladd & Fiske, 2011). Additionally, charters represented a product of the new educational policy landscape for school districts; they exemplify the ideal situation for WSF since they have the capacity for site-level decisions. In this way, WSF is more than simply a reform geared towards financial adequacy. Chambers et al.

(2010) write that while equity is one of the reasons districts implement WSF, several more have varying motives from transparency to advocating for additional school choice.

Baker (2009) writes that coupling adequacy (via funding student needs) with decentralized governance (via site-level decision making) gives WSF wide political appeal in the U.S. When the Thomas B. Fordham Institution (a conservative-leaning think tank) released a proposal to wider implementation of WSF, in fact, three former Secretaries of Education (two who served a Republican administration: William Bennett and Rod Paige; one Democrat: Shirley Hufstедler) signed in agreement (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2006). Perhaps with this goal in mind, the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 included a pilot program available to 50 districts to implement WSF (Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015). Depending on the political/institutional context surrounding the implantation, however, it is questionable whether the promised benefits would arise.

Critiques of WSF. Concerning whole-state implementation of WSF, Carr et al. (2007) assert that changing the funding amounts for individual schools might not address intra-district funding disparities if the district administration is not compelled to follow the same formula that the state had. Money specifically earmarked to educating students born into poverty may be reassigned elsewhere when school district officials have final say in budgeting. West and Shen (2003) write that this financial inequity persists because school district administrators take more into account than just the educational needs of the student. Whatever the state considered as necessitating additional funds can go without funding as a result.

When school districts decide to use WSF apart from state policy (as when major cities applied the reform in New York City, etc.), these equity concerns are addressed between schools in the district but not between districts in the state. Equitable distribution of available funds

allotted to a district does not change the overall dollar amount that a district would receive from the state (Chambers et al., 2010). Fiske and Ladd (2010) write that this fact is one of the main reasons for their disbelief that WSF could easily be established in the U.S. The Dutch system, by way of a contrast, includes a longstanding commitment to paying for the education of citizens regardless of their school of choice (e.g. private, parochial), and is centralized nationally (Fiske & Ladd, 2010). WSF's longstanding connection to school choice is one of the selling points for proponents that favor market-based solutions to education (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2006; Snell, 2013).

Weighted student funding is a form of policy “Rorschach test” whereby decision makers from both sides of the political spectrum can see the reform as a natural expression of dissimilar ideological goals. The fact that this reform can look significantly different depending on the implementation context seems to beg certain questions and supply others’ answers. If, by way of example, a state were to move to WSF but without any changes to district authority, the result could be marginal changes in the amount of money that each district receives (as was seen in the case of California). Without additional policies addressing where the money should be allotted at the school-level, there appears to be no safeguard in place to combat funding inequity. This possibility seems to explain the relative lack of research on the reform if it does not necessitate tangible reform of funding at the school site.

On the other hand, one may question why a state would move to a reform that has the possibility of requiring significant change at the state level and nothing (or very little) at the school level. Here the actions of StudentsFirst (mentioned in the introduction) to support the reform find a possible incentive. The largest change that a move to WSF would incur centers on the complexity of the calculation that each school receives for students. Weighted Student

Funding unequivocally makes this process simpler; only requiring a base amount and the additional funds tied to student characteristics. In WSF, IOs that favor market-based policies have a reform that significantly eases the process of assigning state funding to schools that do not fit the traditional public school model.

From the first applications in Canada and the Netherlands, several urban areas and states across the nation have implemented WSF in the past two decades. The available body of literature has made it clear that claims of decentralized governance, funding equity, and increased school choice are all contingent on the unique political landscape of the implementing institution or state.

Multiple Streams Framework

Both weighted student funding and recovery districts deserve research study within state political agendas. The multiple streams framework has many core concepts that make it an appropriate lens with which to view these individual phenomena. The multiple streams framework has been used to illuminate the policy process across a wide range of domains and settings (Young et al., 2010; Kingdon 1995; Zahariadis, 1999). Across these differing landscapes, the framework has shown explanatory power of the education agenda in the United States (Edlefson, 1993; Holderness, 1992; Lieberman, 2002; Stout & Stevens, 2000) as well as other countries (DeJaeghere, Chapman, & Mulkeen, 2006; Houlihan & Green, 2006). Jones et al. (2016) performed a meta-review of the applications of multiple streams from 2000 to 2013, finding that the framework had been applied in 65 different counties across 22 different policy ranges over that time period.

Kingdon's (1995) starting point for multiple streams was a modification of the garbage can model, developed by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) and borrows from chaos theory to

explain the setting of the federal political agenda (King, 1994). Cohen et al. (1972) established this model in order to better explain decision-making in organizations that they termed “organized anarchies.” In these establishments, “Decision opportunities are fundamentally ambiguous stimuli” (p. 2). Ambiguity pervades the processes within these groups in part due to their three defining characteristics: fluid participation, problematic preferences, and unclear technology (Kingdon, 1995).

First, the amount of influence a person has could change with time or the decision at hand. Kingdon (1995) saw fluid participation inside the federal government where elections, appointments, as well as shifting bureaucracies constantly altered the list of actors able or available to make a decision. Complicating matters further, those in position to decide matters might not know exactly what goal they have in mind (Zahariadis, 1999). The limitations of human cognition mean that political actors have less time than what is necessary to process their rational preference, leaving them without a clear choice (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010). Finally, it is unclear in organized anarchies which process should be utilized in order to address the decision at hand. Group members might have to rely on simply reacting to past mistakes while choosing the technology with which to use (Cohen et al., 1972).

According to multiple streams, the choices themselves also do not tend to be clear or rational. Kingdon (1995) mentions one debate that has been on the federal legislative agenda on and off for a century, and that provides an excellent example of ambiguity: national health care. Several political actors are able to look at the same circumstance (the number of United States citizens without health insurance) and declare vastly different conclusions as to the appropriate policy to address it. Add in the fact that policies have a limited amount of time to be the center of attention and previous frameworks that depend on a rational behavior can only provide, as

Zahariadis (2003, p. 4) states it, “limited utility.” Multiple streams offers explanations of political happenings that rely less on rationality and more on the temporal confluence of independent events.

Three Streams

Kingdon (1995) conceptualized the necessary elements for agenda adoption as three streams: problems, policies, and politics. The first stream contains problems: those conditions that policymakers believe merit attention. Many elements can determine whether a condition is a problem in the eyes of political actors. Decision makers often rely on indicators to inform them of the status of a system (Kingdon, 1995). Indicators can take many forms: from average salary of Fortune 500 CEOs to the number of deaths resulting from DUIs. When a shift in an indicator is noticed oftentimes the point is exaggerated--moving the issue to prominence (Kingdon, 1995). Conditions can also become problems in the wake of a dramatic event. Finally, feedback from the system itself (program reviews, task forces, etc.) can serve to draw the attention of decision-makers of a potential problem (Zahariadis, 1999). Kingdon’s emphasis of indicators highlights the role of evidence in the policy process via problem definition. Several applications of the framework across public policy have shown the influence research can wield as long as the problem being identified is attached to a possible solution (Katikireddi, Hilton, Bonell, & Bond, 2014; Macnaughton, Nelson, & Goering, 2013).

The second stream holds policies, the ideas that vary in possible utility by, as Zahariadis (1999, p. 76) states, “technical feasibility and value acceptability” among other criteria. Kingdon (1995) borrows from evolutionary biology in his metaphor of the proposals floating in “policy primeval soup,” (p. 21) as they intersect or are combined with other possibilities. The volume of policies is large, as is the number of their origins. Think tanks, legislative staffers, academics,

interest groups, etc. all work within policy communities to create and revise the elements of this stream to increase the likelihood of adoption (Zahariadis, 2007). The policies are vetted not only by previous trial and error but also based on the possible opposition they may garner if pursued (Kingdon, 1995). What results is a narrow list of ideas that has any viability of success.

The last stream comprises politics. Swings in the tastes of the populace could allow for some policies' adoption and restrict the ability of others, a concept that Kingdon (1995) refers to as the national mood. What might have been defined as a problem ten years prior could currently be buried low in the attention of constituents. When the national mood is combined with a turnover in legislative personnel (e.g. election cycle), the effect can be quite powerful (Zahariadis, 1999). The politics stream also includes the interest group pressure campaigns (Kingdon, 1995).

These three streams (problems, policies, and politics), when joined together, significantly increase the chance that a particular issue will arrive on the national agenda (Zahariadis, 1999). It is important to note, however, the limited window of time a decision-maker may have to perform such a task.

Time

The multiple streams framework assumes that setting the political agenda comprises a level of complexity due to the factors already mentioned. For this reason, viewing the system as completely rational leaves much to be desired. It is more appropriate to recognize the importance of time, and therefore to view attention (of the people at large, of the policy actors) as scarce and valuable (Zahariadis, 1999). Streams can be joined together at opportune times (known as coupling), allowing for a greater possibility that an issue is discussed.

Kingdon (1995) refers to these critical junctures as policy windows that are opened by either problems or occurrences in politics. The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) provides an example for consideration. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centers occurred only a number of months following the election of a new president with an agenda to increase K-12 accountability. Such a large education initiative's federal adoption serves to illustrate what is possible when a policy window is open and streams are coupled together.

Policy Entrepreneurs

Streams do not couple together by themselves, but rather are combined by opportunistic policy actors. These *policy entrepreneurs* are individuals who are willing to devote their time and/or resources to further a proposal or problem (Kingdon, 1995). Since the initial concept of a rational train of progression (problems are noticed then policies are formulated to address the problem) cannot be relied upon, policy entrepreneurs are vital to the agenda setting process in order to couple the streams together (Ackrill, Kay, & Zahariadis, 2013). Kingdon (1995) writes of three assumptions about the policy process that laid the groundwork for shrewd opportunists to act at the appropriate time:

- Prevalence of ambiguity
- Limits of time on those making decisions
- Independence of problems

Parts of these three assumptions are challenged in the critiques leveled against multiple streams framework in the literature. Kingdon's conception of policy entrepreneurs has been borne out in several state applications of the framework, however.

Intermediary organizations. The past decade has seen IOs garner increased visibility (and in many cases, criticism) in United States education policy (Barkan, 2013; Ravitch, 2010).

It is possible to imagine these advocacy groups acting in a number of areas within the framework. Rios (2015) studied the effect of IOs on Hispanic environmental activism and found intermediaries most active in the problem stream via educating, networking, and organizing. Boscarino (2009) saw IOs acting more as policy entrepreneurs. A group concerned with forestry advocacy would “surf” for any problems to which they could attach their preferred policy (Boscarino, 2009). The growing body of literature that observes IOs affecting all three streams justifies the concept of intermediary-as-entrepreneur (e.g. Ackrill & Kay, 2011; Rozbicka & Spohr, 2016; Weber, 2014).

State Applications

The work of Young et al. (2010) that was mentioned in the first chapter goes a long way in setting the stage for this research as the authors utilize a multi-state case study comparison of K-12 reading education policy. Young et al. (2010) is just one of the most recent, however, in state-level applications of multiple streams framework. Kingdon’s model has been used to better understand school reform in Ohio (Edlefson, 1993), teacher tenure in Colorado (Elrod, 1994), gifted education in New Mexico (Holderness, 1992), as well multicultural curriculum in Minnesota (Stout & Stevens, 2000). Jones et al. (2016) found that state applications of the framework made up twelve percent of the applications of multiple streams in their meta-analysis, in fact.

A few common themes are evident across the literature. In several state-level applications of multiple streams, the governor played an active role in at least one of the streams (Edlefson, 1993; Elrod, 1994; McLendon, 2003; Lieberman, 2002; Stout & Stevens, 2000). Many of the studies’ authors argue that the use of multiple streams within state contexts (instead the federal level) left holes its explanatory power. Holderness (1992) writes that the framework must

incorporate the presence of a state's department of education and their role in setting the policy agenda. Stout and Stevens (2000) assert that multiple streams was unhelpful in the presence of the competition of two policies that were both proposed to address what populated the problem stream. What follows are additional critiques aimed at multiple streams, although not limited to its application in states.

Critique of Multiple Streams Framework

As the multiple streams framework has served as a political science framework for three decades, the critiques are myriad. First, critics contend that the framework's reliance on the changing nature of the streams does not take into account that which is incremental or static. Mucciaroni (1992) argues that the politics stream can be more structural than proponents for multiple streams claim, leaving the framework "too fluid" (p. 465). Although multiple streams might be well-suited to address individual events in history, it struggles if used to trace the life of a policy because certain fundamental factors might be at work that are unaccounted for in the framework (Mucciaroni, 1992).

Weir (1992) makes a similar argument, but directed at the policy stream. It is argued that previously enacted policies play a major role in determining future possible political solutions (Weir, 1992). Ness (2008) furthered the discussion with a revision of multiple streams, reassigning the policy stream as a field to better incorporate state and national trends and information. Both critiques address the assertion that the policy stream is independent, a major tenet of the framework. In view of these points, multiple streams looks bound to an ahistorical assumption (Zahariadis, 1999). One of the strengths of the framework, its ability to incorporate seemingly random events, is viewed as a weakness from this perspective. Jones et al. (2016)

assert that discussions about the framework's core concepts such as these are necessary in order to better define its foundational principles.

The second argument that will be mentioned here flows logically from the first: if the three streams are independent, then what is multiple streams' role in prediction of future policies on the agenda? Ironically, the assertion that many elements within the streams are incremental or static, if proven correct, would bolster multiple streams' proponents' claim as a holistic policymaking lens. By holding to the independence of streams, however, this framework can act efficiently only as a heuristic device (Zahariadis, 1999).

Even if limited to a heuristic device, multiple streams as a framework offers a necessary perspective of the policy process with its focus on ambiguity, chaos, and time. McLendon (2003) showed the substantial explanatory power of the framework when it was compared to two other theories while describing the decentralization policies in higher education in three different states. In one of the instances mentioned, the removal of a governor in Arkansas played a major role in the passage of a bill (McLendon, 2003). As a heuristic theoretical device, McLendon (2003) displayed how multiple streams was perfectly suited to explain how two disconnected events could be joined together due to the clever effort of a policy entrepreneur. In summation, multiple streams can be used to great extent to explain how an item arrived on an agenda in time periods experiencing some measureable shift (those in national mood, priority, personnel, etc.), but appears to lose strength if the policy's political consideration fits the criteria of having arrived incrementally, and therefore lacks any real power as a predictive device.

As a rebuttal, the claim that multiple streams as a framework fails as a predictive formula is based on a misunderstanding of the role of the framework. Assumptions underlying the framework would deny the ability of accurate predictions altogether. Kingdon (1995) is clear

about the complexity and “untid[iness]” (p. 2) of the agenda setting process; to argue that it could not be used to predict policy placement is to agree with the concept that the process is inherently unpredictable. Kingdon does not claim that rationality does not exist in the system, rather that it should not be assumed (Zahariadis, 1999).

The multiple streams framework shows impressive explanatory power in certain critical junctures of the policy agenda. Too many theoretical frameworks place a high emphasis on the superiority of rational decision making inside the policy process, and multiple streams provides a healthy counter-balance. As a device utilized to analyze the past and provide clarity where uncertainty reigns, this theoretical framework is ultimately successful and has been used to great effect. It is worth attempting to make sense of the chaotic nature of certain policy agendas with the tendency for policies and problems to evolve instead of appear. Multiple streams, even with its limitations currently, will continue to shed light on unique circumstances that do not fit into an easy narrative.

Chapter Summary

Taken together, recovery districts and weighted student funding in the three state contexts are an appropriate set of cases with which to apply multiple streams. Both recovery districts and WSF represent stark changes to state policy, therefore less susceptible to the claims against multiple streams concerning incremental shifts. The state applications of multiple streams help to illuminate the best practices as well as possible ways that the framework can/ought to be adapted to the current study. Multiple streams is appropriate for this research due to (1) the importance of ambiguity in the policy process, (2) the potential role of active governors, (3) conceptualizing the work of policy entrepreneurs (in and out-of state government, in the case of IOs), and (4) the independence of the three streams. This framework will also assist in better understanding the

policy actors and state contexts that made these policies fertile ground for state agenda adoption. In a policy landscape that has seen the infusion of funds from national foundations (as is the case with recovery districts), this research also deepens the framework to better conceptualize an already complex environment as it gains political players.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study illuminates the oftentimes opaque process of agenda setting for two neoliberal education policies in three states via qualitative research design. This chapter presents the methods that were employed in that research. There are five sections to the chapter: (a) the unit of analysis and observation, (b) a description of data sources, (c) a description of the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability, (d) the selection of research sites, and (e) the limitations of this study.

Unit of Analysis

Qualitative research has the benefit of drawing on multiple designs to analyze data that might not have a place in quantitative analyses (Creswell, 2013). Within the policy literature specifically, qualitative inquiry has the unique potential to include at once myriad possible reasons that a political phenomenon occurred (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Albee, & Spence, 2008). The result, according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 8), is an analysis that, “enjoy[s] the rewards of both numbers and words.” This ability to consider the (at times) messy/intermingled/ambiguous relationships between institutions, actors and policies (Fusarelli, 1998) makes qualitative research an ideal fit for the political agenda setting process.

With a focus on context and equipped with flexibility to adapt to evidence as it is discovered, qualitative research has traditionally been used to seek to understand a phenomena or problem in order to contribute to an existing body of knowledge (deMarrais & Lapan, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The case study method of qualitative research is appropriate for this

particular issue being researched because, as Yin (1994, p. 9) writes, “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control.”

Case studies are used to evaluate a situation or event that is “bounded by time and activity,” according to Creswell (2013, p. 14). Yin (1994) lists six primary sources of evidence for case studies: documentation, archives, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and tangible artifacts. Researchers in the social sciences have utilized those sources via the case study method to great effect to better understand complex social topics as they occurred over time (Yin, 1994).

Agenda setting lends itself to complex social interplay for several reasons, not least of which is the inclusion of problem definition. As indicators change, Kingdon (1995) writes that policy actors have the ability to redefine conditions as problems that merit a solution. Individuals that propose the policy, and the context in which it is proposed, shape any alternatives that would be introduced to ameliorate the stated problem (Bulkley, 2005; Kingdon, 1995). As such, weighted student funding and recovery districts, as well as the issues both were presented to address, may be socially constructed vastly differently depending on the state and policy entrepreneurs.

Since this study focuses on three states, the research falls within the multi-case design of the case study method (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Yin, 1994). Analyzing multiple cases allows for trends and patterns to emerge beyond the one state political context. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) assert that the possibility for competing explanations of a similar phenomenon can lead to a “strong inference.” Political science researchers have regularly used this particular research design to explicate the agenda setting (e.g. Kingdon, 1995; Baumgartner

& Jones, 1991, McLendon, 2003) and adoption (e.g. Cohen-Vogel et al., 2008) phases of the process, among others.

When the cases being considered are some occurrence or entity (as opposed to individual people), the research will suffer without a well-defined unit of analysis (Yin, 1994). By nature of the research design, the unit of analysis is the “case” itself. For this study the unit of analysis is the appearance of two K-12 public education policies—weighted student funding and recovery districts—within the agenda setting phase of the policy process in three states. Table 3.1 offers a description of where these policies stood in 2016 in each of the three states chosen as research sites. The rationale for each state’s selection will be discussed in later sections.

Table 3.1
Recovery Districts and Weighted Student Funding on state agendas in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania in 2016

	Recovery District	Weighted Student Funding
Georgia	Senate Bill 133, a resolution for a statewide vote to amend the state constitution to establish the Opportunity School District passed (2015).	Included as a recommendation of the governor’s Education Reform Commission in 2015, Governor Deal vowed to address the policy in the 2017 General Assembly.
Nevada	Assembly Bill 448 passed in 2015 establishing the Achievement School District	The Nevada Plan was amended in 2015 through Senate Bill 508, creating weights for special education, English Language Learners, and students born into poverty
Pennsylvania	Senate Bill 6, which would establish the Achievement School District, passed the state senate.	House Bill 1522 passed in 2016, creating weighted student funding for new increases in education funding (about 3% of the education budget at the time)

This research centers primarily on the “how” and “why” questions of these policies’ arrivals on the three state political agendas and the people, events, and other state contexts that shaped the phenomena. In order to achieve this end, the sources of data were carefully selected to address the research questions.

Description of Data Sources

Each state included within this research has a unique set of actors, industries, political landscapes, and sociocultural trends. As such, the evidence that was gathered had to be broad enough to consider a range of dissimilar events and narrow enough to focus on tackling the research questions. Yin (1994) lists three principles of data collection for case studies: (1) utilizing multiple sources of evidence, (2) making a case study database, and (3) preserving a chain of evidence.

When several sources of evidence are used, the researcher has an opportunity to complete what Patton (1987) calls data triangulation. Triangulation is the process of corroborating claims via different data sources; this process has been incorporated within naturalistic inquiry as a way to control for bias (Mathison, 1988). Any findings that are reached via this method are more convincing than if only one source of evidence is relied upon (Yin, 1994). Towards this goal of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 1994) this study utilizes three primary data sources: document review, semi-structured interviews, and archival analysis. Further discussion of each of these sources will be discussed in later subsections.

Although far from industry standard, a case study database allows future researchers the opportunity to review, critique, and possibly draw different conclusions from the evidence gathered (Yin, 1994). By keeping a separate depository of interview transcripts, notes, documents, and “counts” of various phenomena, the chance for a form of replicability is upheld

(Miles, 1979). Without a widely accepted online database for case study evidence, this principle for data collection will remain in the researcher's possession until requested.

The final concept that Yin (1994) discusses is the need to have a logical, written "chain" of evidence that would assist fellow researchers to see how conclusions were reached. Any evidence collected will be given sufficient clarifying information (date, location, etc.) that is consistent across the database and the final report. Through the report and subsequent references to evidence, a hypothetical auditor will have the ability to see the path that the researcher took to arrive at the final analyses. What follows is a deeper look into each of the sources of evidence that are used in this study.

Document Review

Document review is paramount to this study for two reasons: situating the policies in each state's political history and the selection of policy actors for interviews. First, in order to conceptualize each state's streams (policies, problems, and politics) of the agenda-setting process, it was necessary to study available documents of relevant literature. Through newspapers, blogs, podcasts, reports, etc. the researcher situated the policies inside a process that was constantly going through changes (Glesne, 1999).

Second, in Pennsylvania and Nevada, where the researcher has no previous experience, documents were necessary to locate the policy actors to interview. By searching for formal positions in and around each policy's origination, the researcher followed in the tradition of Jones (2002), as interviewees were chosen for their characteristics that were especially relevant to this study. Specifically, these primary participants were located via (1) media coverage and reports surrounding each state policy including but not limited to: advocacy organizations websites such as StudentsFirst.org, local newspapers, think tanks such as the Friedman

Foundation and Reason, professional associations such as the National Association of Educators and the American Federation of Teachers, (2) websites of state government agencies such as the governor’s office, education commissions, or state education agency, (3) legislation history and sponsors of state bills, and (4) conversations with individuals familiar with Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania state politics.

After the researcher chose and interviewed the first informants, the snowball method for choosing additional participants was utilized. Based on the recommendation of the original participants, the researcher expanded the group of informants to include policy actors whose work may not have a noticeable impact outside of the documented event (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Table 3.2 offers a list of the number of participants and general roles of each type of interview broken down by state.

Table 3.2
Distribution of Interview Participants

	Georgia	Nevada	Pennsylvania
Governor’s office	1	1	0
State legislature and staff	1	2	1
State education agency	2	2	1
Education commission ^a	2	1	1
Researchers, consultants, and observers	2	3	4
Total	8	9	7

Note: Each participant was sorted by the primary role he or she occupied in 2015 and 2016.

^a Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Nevada policymakers proposed weighted student funding during education commissions (Georgia—the governor’s Education Reform Commission; Pennsylvania—a bipartisan group made up the Basic Education Funding Commission; Nevada—Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding)

Interviews

This study relied on information gathered from 24 interviews with participants close to education policy decisions in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Nevada. The data from interviews had

to address several independent concepts that are related via the placement of these policies on state agendas. As such, the researcher employed the semi-structured interview process. Interviews allowed for the inclusion of state policymakers' understanding of the agenda setting process. With the flexibility to dive deeper into a question or series of questions based on the expertise of the participant, the semi-structured interview plays to the strengths of the case study method. Throughout the research as themes emerged or additional lines of inquiry appeared this particular data source had the ability to adapt with the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Interview questions were devised to be easy to understand and open-ended. A list of questions and prompts is provided in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3
Interview Protocol

Potential Interview Protocol
1. What is your role in education policy in the state? <i>Weighted Student Funding</i>
2. Describe to me what you knew about weighted student funding outside of the state before [state-specific policy] was introduced.
a. How did you learn about it?
Prompts:
i. Sources of information
ii. Advocacy groups, lobbyists, other policymakers, etc.
3. Who first introduced [state-specific policy] in the state?
a. Have there been any other notable supporters in the debate around [state-specific policy]?
b. How has this person supported [state-specific policy]? What specific actions?
4. What issues do [state-specific policy] address in the state?
a. Can you describe the moment you saw this as a problem in the state?
b. How does [state-specific policy] address this problem?
5. Beyond these problems, what factors, political and/or philosophical, contributed to [state-specific policy] becoming a viable policy option?

Recovery Districts

6. Describe to me what you knew about recovery districts outside of the state before [state-specific policy] was introduced.

a. How did you learn about it?

Prompts:

i. Sources of information

ii. Groups/individuals behind information

7. Who first introduced [state-specific policy] in the state?

a. Have there been any other notable supporters in the debate around [state-specific policy]?

b. How has this individual supported [state-specific policy]? What specific actions?

8. What issues do [state-specific policy] address in the state?

a. Can you describe the moment you saw this as a problem in the state?

b. How does [state-specific policy] address this problem?

9. Beyond these problems, what factors, political and/or philosophical, contributed to [state-specific policy] becoming a viable policy option?

Conclusions

10. Can you describe a connecting group or belief between [state-specific weighted student funding] and [state-specific recovery district]?

11. Is there anything else you think I should know about either policy in your state?

12. Who else would you recommend that I talk with about either of these policies?

By inviting the participant to offer insights into the process, the informant was encouraged to suggest supplemental evidence and was able to instigate the gathering of said data (Yin, 1994).

For the Nevada and Pennsylvania informants, the interviews were conducted over the phone. Except in a few cases due to scheduling conflicts, the Georgia interviews took place in-person. In order to compensate for the lack of control over the interview environment with out-of-state participants, the researcher, as Stevens (2007) writes, made a point to ask if the interviewee is ready, and whether or not it would be better to call back at a later time. The interviews lasted forty minutes on average, though the nature of the semi-structured format meant that they could be much shorter or longer depending on the participant. The shortest

interview lasted fifteen minutes and the longest was fifty-five minutes. The researcher recorded and transcribed all interviews, as well as took notes during and after.

Since the interviews depended on following the data wherever it may have led, the process of data analysis began before the interviews phase was complete. Once an interview was finished, the researcher coded the data—adding or removing code categories as more information became available. Once data saturation was achieved in each state, the number of interviews was capped (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The researcher obtained consent from each participant in the study as well as approval to work with human subjects from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board.

Archival Analysis

Archival analysis was necessary in order to (1) corroborate documents and interviews as well as (2) pursue lines of inquiry. Although similar to the original documents as a source of data, archival records are usually more formal and focused on recording items as opposed to analyzing events. Yin (1994, p. 84) writes of the importance of noting, “the conditions under which it was produced as well as its accuracy.” By considering these elements, each archival record was assessed for its usefulness to the study.

The data mining of each of these sources took place in two primary phases: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. First, the researcher made a significant effort to understand the events/individuals/setting of each state as if each is a comprehensive site standing alone (Merriam, 2009). Second, the cross-cases analysis took place via inductive coding. Utilizing both analyses allows for better understanding of each case, while still highlighting themes and ideas that bridge between the sites (Yin, 1994). Upon completion, a chapter has been dedicated to each state for the within-case analyses. With each of the within-case and cross-case analyses, the data

was coded, reviewed, and ultimately explained through the lens of the three streams that Kingdon (1995) offers within the multiple streams framework, as well as identification of the policy entrepreneur.

Selection of Research Sites

This study focuses on state-level agenda setting in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. Kingdon (1995) defines a government's agenda as the list of subjects or problems to which government officials and, more generally, policy actors pay serious attention. This agenda-setting phase is described in the public policy literature as the time whereby an issue moves from relative obscurity to become one of a small number of policy options and is being discussed by policy makers to address a problem (McLendon, 2003).

Each state had the two policies on their education agenda in 2015 and 2016, so these two years acted as the focal point for this study. In the interest of consistency in parameters, a policy is defined as having been placed on the state agenda if a bill had passed either chamber of the state legislature, or was the center of discussion (as evidenced by a published report) for a legislature- or governor-appointed task force or commission. After a review of the policy landscapes in the United States, it was determined that three states met these criteria.

Without any exhaustive measure that an issue had entered the policy stream for states that the researcher did not live in (Georgia), a search on the Google online search engine has served as a useful proxy. Utilizing search terms such as "weighted student funding," "student-based budgeting," "backpack funding," "recovery district," and "state takeover district," the researcher was able to find that Pennsylvania had convened a legislature-appointed commission to discuss the possible adoption of weighted student funding in the state and had a recovery district bill up for consideration in the state legislature (SB 6). Both policies garnered moderate attention from

local newspapers and advocacy groups alike (see Rogers, 2016; DeNardo, 2016; DeMauro, 2016; Limm & Mezzacappa, 2015). Nevada met the criteria by passing laws for weighted student funding (NRS 387.121) and a recovery district--tabbed the Achievement School District (AB 448).

Validity and Reliability

Kidder and Judd (1986, pp. 26-29) summarize four tests that are common to social science methods to judge the quality of research:

- Construct validity: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied
- Internal validity: establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships
- External validity: establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized
- Reliability: demonstrating that the operations of the study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results

Since this study utilizes multiple sources of evidence and a documented chain of evidence, construct validity will be addressed (Yin, 1994; Berry, 2002). Concerning internal validity, problems can arise when inferences are made about a chain of events that cannot be directly observed (Yin, 1994). While the possibility that rival conclusions could be reached based on the data will never be totally erased, diligent adherence to interview protocol and robust field notes has made internal validity concerns less substantiated.

Generalizability (external validity) and reliability are addressed through the method of this case study itself and a commitment to making the steps of this research, “as operational as possible” (Yin, 1994, p. 37). Having three states in this case study has made this research design

automatically more generalizable than one focusing on a single state (King et al., 1994). Furthermore, since Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania share few obvious characteristics in common (e.g. different geographical regions of the country, major businesses, and political climates), any findings that are noted have a tendency to be academically stronger than those out of three similar states (Schofield, 2000). As to reliability, the researcher has--as mentioned--taken notes, performed interviews, etc. in a manner as if a hypothetical future researcher were watching with the intent of doing the exact same study and could arrive at the same conclusion (Yin, 1994).

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative inquiry always carries the potential for the biases or subjectivities of the researcher affecting the conclusions (Crotty, 2004). While quantitative research's credibility of a study is determined by the instrument, within qualitative inquiry, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). During interviews especially, the conflict arises when the researcher projects feelings/connections/etc. onto the participant instead of allowing them to tell their own perspective of the phenomena. Although a strong protocol can help curb this issue, it remains a challenging aspect of this research method. It was of the utmost importance for the researcher to be aware of previous experiences and how they may have the potential to shape the ability to understand another's perspective.

With this concept in mind, it is important to note the researcher's own experience as a source for possible coloring of events. While working on this research, the author was employed as a policy and research analysis at the Georgia Department of Education. Previous to that position, the author was a graduate assistant for several professors at the University of Georgia. More specific to this research, the researcher has previously worked on projects analyzing the

role of IOs within education policy arenas. This employment history has led the author to assume that the implementation of market-based reforms carries with it the presence of well-endowed advocacy groups.

While steps were taken to address the concept of generalizability, two potential factors stand out as a hurdle to this ideal: the unique policy actor experiences within these three states and the limitations of studying one phase of the policy process. First, the research had the chance to bear out that some previously unknown commonality among Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania made these three states ripe for weighted student funding and recovery districts as policies. That conclusion alone would severely limit the ability to generalize the findings to other states' contexts. Second, the agenda-setting phase of the policy process at the state-level is less researched compared to stages such as adoption or implementation (McLendon, 2003, Young et al., 2010). Future research may have the luxury of pinpointing the evolution of these policies within more static phases and more robust conclusions as a result.

Chapter Summary

In 2015 and 2016, policymakers in three states that do not appear to have much in common spent significant time and energy debating and (in a few cases) adopting two policies that represented significant changes to their educational norms. This case study method has greatly assisted in pointing the theoretical flashlight at these processes and asking “how” and “why.” Interviews as well as document and archival analysis have equipped the researcher to follow lines of inquiry wherever they appeared. Upon completion of this research, the narratives that resulted have the potential to explain much more than the logistics of discussion of two bills in three states.

CHAPTER 4

GEORGIA

In the tradition of case studies such as McLendon (2003), for each of the three states the cases “begin” in a time before the introduction of either policy on the state agenda. For each chapter, the introduction is used to explain specifics of each state’s specific recovery district and weighted student funding policy. The next section offers a truncated review of the history and context within each state that led up to the case study. Through response data garnered in personal interviews combined with document analysis, the next two sections provide a narrative explanation of how each policy arrived on state agendas. The case analysis then situates the data within the multiple streams framework, offering explanations for each of the streams and the policy entrepreneur. The findings address the following research questions presented by this study: How did a state recovery district and weighted student funding achieve consideration by policy actors in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania?

(a) How do policy actors describe the role of information, intermediary organizations and/or prominent individuals in the decision to recommend weighted student funding and a recovery district?

(b) How do policy actors describe the factors within the state that motivated the changes to weighted student funding and a recovery district?

Opportunity School District and Weighted Student Funding

In January of 2015, Georgia’s governor Nathan Deal announced the members of a special committee whose job it would be to recommend changes to the state’s three decades-old school

funding formula, the Quality Basic Education Act, or QBE (Office of the Governor, 2015). Within the recommended changes, instead of relying on hours spent in each school program (as was required under the previous legislation) the committee suggested that any money given to a school above a base amount should be based on student characteristics, called student-based funding (ERC, 2015). Weights for each of the characteristics (there were twelve total that included poverty, gifted, etc.) were based on comparison to other states, the money available (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2015), or anecdotes. Consideration was purposefully not given to the cost of programs in the interest of completing the recommendations in time (observation, July 16 & September 23, 2015). Dr. Charles Knapp, the chair of the ERC, explicitly stated that he planned to avoid any attempt to determine the overall cost of a suitable education (Jones, 2015).

Later in the same year the Georgia General Assembly voted in favor of Senate Resolution 287, a piece of legislation that provided the citizens of Georgia an opportunity to vote on a constitutional amendment that would allow the state to take control of a number of schools that had been deemed "failing" (St. Claire, 2015). Individual schools chosen as part of the Opportunity School District (OSD) would either (at the discretion of the state) be shuttered, converted to charter schools, or run directly by the state (Bluestein & Sarrio, 2015). The referendum defined failing schools as those that scored below 60 on the College and Career Performance Index (CCRPI) for three consecutive years (Downey, 2015). The CCRPI is the Georgia Department of Education's accountability measure set up under the state's flexibility request under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). The next section explains the events and individuals in Georgia's history that helped establish the education landscape in the state.

History and Context

1982 - 1998: The Quality Basic Education Act and State Growth

In 1982 then-Governor Joe Frank Harris appointed a blue-ribbon committee, the Education Review Commission, to evaluate the Georgia's funding formula and offer recommendations for changes to the system (Rubenstein, Doering, & Gess, 2000). According to Fuhrman (1988), by creating the commission and framing the reform discussion, the governor followed in a tradition of Georgia politics whereby governors initiate large-scale education policies:

The two major reform attempts prior to [the Quality Basic Education Act]...were gubernatorially-initiated programs that attempted to tie school finance reform to substantive education changes. Both earlier assays failed for lack of funding, but they shaped expectations about education reform in Georgia. Georgians tend to anticipate little from government, expecting to work out their own problems in the private sector or through individual initiative. However, when an issue gets defined as a matter meriting state attention, the governor can be expected to play a major role (1988, p. 66).

Governor Harris' Education Review Commission, headed by business leaders from throughout the state, took two years before offering its recommendations to the governor in November of 1984 (GSU Law Review, 1985). These recommendations served as the basis for the education finance legislation that went before the Georgia General Assembly in 1985 (Suggs, 2015). When signed into law, the Quality Basic Education Act (or, QBE) was a foundation program that weighted per pupil funding depending on the estimated costs of twelve different programs (Rubenstein et al., 2000).

Implementation. Funding for public schools increased significantly in the years following QBE's passage. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) in in one decade (school year 1979-80 to 1989-90) the state per pupil expenditures rose from \$1,625 to \$4,275. From fiscal years 1987 to 1990, local contribution to public education increased 78%--state funds increased 37% at the same time (NCES 1987/1990). Dayton (1995) writes that the additional financial investment in public education during these years was possible because of substantial growth in the state's population and economy in the late 1980s.

Teacher pay. Zell Miller, Joe Frank Harris' Lieutenant Governor, campaigned for governor calling for higher salaries for the state's teachers (Rubenstein et al., 2000). Once elected, Governor Miller publicly called for an increase in wages to the national average (Rubenstein et al., 2000). In order to achieve this goal, the General Assembly approved 4 years of 6 percent raises of teacher salaries, for a total 24 percent increase in pay (Watkins & Marsick, 1999). State funds provided for the bulk of the salary increases; local districts had to pay for a portion of employee benefits and any teacher wages above the minimum salary schedule (Georgia School Superintendents Association, 1997). Once the raises had taken effect, teachers in Georgia had the highest median salary of all states in the southeast U.S. (Sielke, 2011).

1998 – 2008: Reform and Budget Cuts

Under the new governor, Democrat Roy Barnes in 1998 convened a commission to review the effectiveness of QBE (Sielke, 2011). The recommendations that came from the Education Reform Commission's work were the basis for the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 (hereinafter A Plus) (Grant, 2003). The greatest attention paid to A Plus was centered on the elimination of teacher tenure (Ordyna, 2000). Sielke (2011) writes that the sweeping education legislation held several provisions that could be considered ahead of its time and, therefore, met

with considerable opposition. A Plus affected Georgia K-12 schooling in areas including but not limited to: class size requirements, school governance, discipline, standardized testing, P-16 plans, pay for performance funding, district busing, and teacher evaluation (Ordyna, 2000).

Governor's Office of Education Accountability. A Plus also set up a new office under the governor: the Office of Educational Accountability. Governor Barnes explained in a U.S. House of Representatives hearing that the purpose of this office was to, “set standards, measure results, and reward success” (2001). The office was given the power to grade schools A to F based on test scores, with financial incentives attached (Archer, 2000). Although the incentives were later removed, the scope of the office expanded significantly under future governors. By 2017 the office had changed names to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, had its budget increased eight-fold (to over \$20 million), and increased authority over areas that previously were the domain of the state's education agency (Tagami & Bluestein, 2017).

Cuts to QBE. In 2000, Georgia's economy was thriving based on a continued boom in population as well as growing housing and banking industries (Sielke, 2011). Shortly after Sonny Perdue defeated Barnes for the governorship in 2002, however, the United States experienced an economic downturn that would exact a deep toll on education funding (Sielke, 2011). Decreasing tax revenue was one of the reasons that Perdue pushed to loosen the class size requirements set-up within A Plus; the other was a response to what many Republicans believed was an overreach of state power in the Barnes administration (GSU Law Review, 2003). Beginning in 2003, the state decreased the amount given to QBE under “austerity cuts” (Sielke, 2011). During this time, Barnes' pay for performance was scrapped due to budget constraints (Max, 2008).

Investing in Educational Excellence. Near the end of his tenure, Governor Perdue called together another task force to review the state's funding formula: the Investing in

Educational Excellence (or IE2) Commission (Houck, Rolle, & He, 2010). The legislation that came out of the IE2 Commission dealt primarily in school governance and testing accountability. House Bill 1209 allowed school districts to enter into multi-year contracts with the state where increased flexibility is given from certain state laws (i.e. maximum class sizes) in exchange for heightened educational accountability (McNeill & Patterson, 2008). The state's investment in education would diminish during this time period via continued cuts to QBE inputs (Sielke, 2011). From 2006 to 2011, the state underfunded QBE by \$3.6 billion (Georgia Department of Education, 2016).

2008 – 2015: Additional Choices and Economic Recovery

By the end of Perdue's final term, the discussion of the place for charter schools in the education landscape took center stage (McClure, 2012). Charters were not new to Georgia: in 1993 the state passed a law that allowed for existing schools to become charters only if parents, faculty, and staff (required two-thirds majority), as well as the local school board voted in favor of the change (formerly O.C.G.A. § 20-2-255).

In 2008, the Georgia General Assembly repealed the previous law and in its place added provisions for, among other things, the creation of start-up charters and the Georgia Charter Schools Commission (formerly O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2080[b]). If a district rejected an application for one of these schools, the new law gave applicants the opportunity to petition directly to the state via the Commission (Flynn III & Holt, 2012). In 2011 the Georgia Charter Schools Commission was deemed unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court because it had approved schools that were rejected by local districts, subverting the constitutional provision for local control of schools (*Gwinnett County v. Cox*, 2011). In response to the court's decision, the General Assembly swiftly passed a proposal for a ballot measure to amend the state's constitution. In the

subsequent popular vote, Amendment One passed 58.6% to 41.4% and the state's Constitution was amended ("Georgia Election Results," 2012). During the 2011/2012 school year 130,492 students in Georgia attended a charter school, up from 26,299 students a half-decade earlier (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

Opportunity School District

The campaign that arose in the months leading up to the OSD vote saw millions of dollars from national groups around education. Participants described the impactful work of one of these groups particularly, StudentsFirst, in their ability to introduce recovery districts to the governor. The public appeared willing to engage in an open debate due to the perceived failings of the status quo via regular school performance reporting.

Climate

Data availability and reporting. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) (NCLB) data reporting requirements did not introduce the concept of grading school performance in Georgia, as Governor Barnes had initiated the practice under A Plus (Ordyna, 2000). Several participants did mention the federal law, however, as the source of increased and uniform school performance reporting beginning with its implementation in the state in 2003. Respondents noted the law's implementation led the way for the general public to be inundated with performance data on their school in a way unseen in the state before.

An official at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce explained that the increased data reporting, aided by *Atlanta Business Chronicle* and *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, brought attention primarily to the schools that were seen to be struggling in Atlanta, the state's largest city (personal communication, January 20, 2017). It was clear that each participant that mentioned data reporting as an impetus to OSD's arrival on the state agenda believed that the

publicity of school performance acted primarily to highlight a problem in the state's education system.

A number of participants argued that if there had been no “tier-ing” of schools under federal law, and if the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) had not continued this work in the years following, then it would have been much more difficult to introduce a policy like OSD in the state. Michael O'Sullivan, the Director of Georgia StudentsFirst, noted that the agreement among the public that some schools need help was an achievement on its own (personal communication, November 28, 2016). Dr. Bonnie Holliday, the Executive Director of the State Charter Schools Commission, asserted that school choice legislation, like the creation of the State Charter Schools Commission (SCSC), came as a direct result of this newfound awareness of Georgia's public schools (personal communication, January 12, 2017). By way of an example, the sponsor of the bill that created the Georgia Charter Schools Commission, Representative Jan Jones (2008), described charters as the solution to poor school performance by highlighting an individual charter school's performance on the state's standardized tests in the past.

Status quo. “I stand firm on the principle that every child can learn, and I stand equally firm in the belief that the status quo isn't working.” Governor Deal said the prior comment when unveiling the proposal for broad powers to be given to the state if OSD had gained approval by voters (Bluestein & Torres, 2015, para. 4). The status quo that Deal referenced was an integral element of the debate surrounding the policy; the governor repeatedly described the current state of education in Georgia as dying due to stagnation.

During campaign stops before the election, the governor often told potential voters that a person's ZIP code should not control the quality of schooling they receive (Bluestein & Sarrio,

2015). According to Deal the lack of choice in the state made support for the amendment an easy decision. The governor had stated that any decision maker who does not vote for OSD was “condemning” (Bluestein & Sarrio, 2015, para. 5) students, while proponents of the measure were “rescuing children” (Bluestein & Torres, 2015, para. 4). Using phrases like these the governor was able to describe traditional public schools as struggling from inaction and in desperate need of change.

Respondents acknowledged this sentiment, regardless of their personal stance on the constitutional amendment. Most participants described whole voting blocks as in favor of the status quo and, by extension, opposed to reforms such as OSD. B. Holliday explained status quo proponents as chiefly favoring, “...more money to districts and more traditional supports from the department of education or [Regional Education Service Agencies]” (personal communication, January 12, 2017). Many stakeholders claimed that teaching organizations in the state were the primary leaders of this group, and that most Democrats in the state voted in accordance. This claim is supported by the fact that in the vote to place OSD on the state ballot (Senate Resolution 287), only one Georgia Democrat state senator voted in support (Torres, 2015).

Several participants discussed the status quo as being a result of a lack of urgency or capacity: simply the consequence of no external force for change. A few policy actors described the inability for school leaders to leverage change due to restrictive school board members, the bureaucracy in education, and/or a lack of knowledge on how to impact an alteration. A senior official of the Georgia Department of Education asserted that as more people became convinced that a change was needed, the large teacher organizations in Georgia provided no satisfactory responses. The department official stated:

There's people that say there's a status quo model. We haven't gotten a lot of great results out of it. So we really need to turn it on its head. And to turn it on its head...they go to the traditional education groups, and they say, we see issues with X, Y, and Z. And the education groups...they have the same answer for everything, which is usually more resources. And then, another group comes to them with solutions, comes to them with an alternative method of addressing things... I think that's where the education groups have not been very proactive and have not really understood how the politics of issues can work (personal communication, October 27, 2016).

Other participants described more malice in the status quo proponents. One member of Governor Deal's staff asserted, "...the status quo defenders are staunchly encamped on their side, and are fairly vicious at efforts to reform the system" (personal communication, February 1, 2017). One Georgia House Representative argued that people who fought for the status quo in education were more concerned with keeping teachers employed than the education of students (personal communication, March 23, 2017).

Turn it on its head. Years of school performance grading and reporting left many people in the state unsatisfied with the condition of public education in Georgia. If schools in Georgia were mired in bureaucracy and ineptitude, then only a significant event would spur a redirection, the thinking goes. A number of interviewees mentioned that the traditional levers for change inside schools that were available to the state (e.g. school board removal, Department of Education intervention) were not satisfactory to meet the immense challenge of failing schools. A staff member for Governor Deal mentioned that the history in Georgia of providing support to turnaround schools always resulted in "tinkering on the edges" instead of the necessary "aggressive changes in leadership" (personal communication, February 1, 2017). Dr. Charles

Knapp, former President of the University of Georgia and the Chairman of the Education Reform Commission, echoed the response, arguing that the importance of student achievement necessitated avoiding the “same paths” and the need to explore “something different” to address the schools (personal communication, October 31, 2016).

Actors

Governor’s office. Every participant interviewed mentioned Governor Deal and his office as either the author or, at the very least, most significant champion of the Opportunity School District. Media outlets consistently referred to the policy as Deal’s, and when the ballot measure failed, Downey (2016, para. 8) wrote that it should be viewed as a, “conscious repudiation of what voters saw as a power grab.” A Chamber of Commerce official remarked that the Governor had a personal conviction to address schooling in the state, and “imparted” his concern and policy solution on the state’s General Assembly before the vote to place OSD on the ballot (personal communication, January 20, 2017).

Since the passage of OSD would have required a change to the state’s constitution, two-thirds of the House of Representatives and Senate had vote in favor of the resolution--requiring support from state Democrats. Participants disagreed on whether the resulting vote was a mandate or the result of political coercion. A Governor’s staff member claimed, “Certainly there was a lot of legislative support. You don’t get a 2/3rds vote... without having a lot of legislative support” (personal communication, February 1, 2017). Even with the legislature’s support, however, it was clear to participants such as C. Knapp that regardless of the thoughts of state legislators, “clearly the champion on [Opportunity School District] is the governor” (personal communication, October 31, 2016).

Inside the Governor's office, participants believed that Deal's education advisor, Erin Hames, had particular authority over the potential legislation. Half of the interviewees named Hames as a significant actor around OSD within Deal's office in one form or another. A Chamber official, when asked who advanced OSD, went as far as to say:

Erin Hames would be probably number one on everyone's list. Policy advisor to the Governor now major policy advisor for city of Atlanta public schools. Who, this was her child. I don't think anybody at the legislature had any misunderstanding that, yes this is Governor Deal's policy push but how it's going to happen is dependent upon what Erin does (personal communication, January 20, 2017).

Regardless of which individual proposed the policy to the governor, it was evident that Deal's office introduced OSD to the state agenda.

Similarly, although the Governor's Office of School Achievement sat under Deal, interviewees at times separated the two. C. Knapp was unsure if GOSA's Executive Director, Dr. Martha Ann Todd introduced the policy to the governor or vice versa (personal communication, October 31, 2016). Other participants saw GOSA as primarily providing support to the Governor's initiative. Regardless, there was no ambiguity that GOSA operated at the leisure of Governor Deal.

Intermediary organizations. Outside of the governor and the people whom he employed and appointed, a significant number of interviewees mentioned the input of StudentsFirst, the political lobbying organization started by former Chancellor of Washington D.C. schools, Michelle Rhee (Turque, 2011). Dr. Garry McGiboney, the Deputy Superintendent for Policy at the Georgia Department of Education, was one of three participants that mentioned that before the General Assembly voted on whether to place OSD on the ballot, the Governor, a select group

of state legislators, and a few additional education stakeholders took a trip to Louisiana and Tennessee to study those states' similar policies (personal communication, November 28, 2016). Simonton and McCullen (2016) write that StudentsFirst not only funded this trip, but also assert that the IO helped craft the original legislation with Erin Hames.

StudentsFirst's influence is not wholly unexpected considering the fact that the group donated over \$1 million to Georgia political races (primarily contributing to Republicans) in just a few years preceding the OSD vote (Salzer, 2016). 50CAN (The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now), a group that later merged with StudentsFirst, donated over \$300,000 to the Opportunity School District campaign (Salzer, 2016). M. O'Sullivan, the Director of Georgia StudentsFirst at the time, asserted that the Governor's office first identified the policy and O'Sullivan's organization worked in a supportive role (personal communication, November 28, 2016). Even without clarity on who initially introduced the policy to whom, clearly groups such as StudentsFirst played an impactful role in the forwarding of OSD. Participants also listed the Chamber of Commerce, Foundation for Excellence in Education, Walton Foundation, Broad Foundation, and the Arthur Blank Foundation as groups that supported OSD.

Policies

When asked about OSD's arrival in Georgia, almost unanimously the participants referenced the similar programs in Louisiana (Recovery School District) and Tennessee (Achievement School District). Deal's staff member noted that the Governor's office began with "extensive research" on those two states' legislation and Michigan, and decided early on to avoid the pitfalls of the Michigan policy (personal communication, February 1, 2017). The results of that research began an ongoing discussion with Deal over how to implement a similar policy in

the state. B. Holliday, M. O’Sullivan, and the chamber official all described OSD primarily in how it related to the Achievement School District and the Recovery School District.

A few of the participants talked about those two states’ policies as matter-of-fact successes. By way of example, M. O’Sullivan mentioned the benefits of Tennessee’s Achievement School District to spur change that otherwise would not have been possible:

They were able to get things done that they normally couldn’t have. The [Achievement School District] gave them the leverage that they needed... but that was tough to get some political buy-in... even though they knew it had to be done” (personal communication, November 28, 2016).

Other interviews mentioned the possibility for success, but noted the uncertainty of a new initiative in a unique setting.

Taken together, the interviews laid out a setting where there was growing dissatisfaction with the current work of public schools due to increase school reporting, and no viable course for correction from the traditional education groups. Governor Deal, either as a result of the work of Erin Hames, the urging of StudentsFirst, or at his own initiative, championed a policy that had gained national attention in two states that had implemented it. The authority of the governor and the participation of a Republican-heavy legislature was enough to place OSD on the state agenda.

Student Based Funding

Paradoxically, the debate over education funding in the state drew less political attention than that surrounding OSD. One measure of visibility, Google News results, bears out the stark difference. A 2017 Google News search for the phrases “student based budgeting,” “weighted student funding,” or “student based funding” with “Georgia” never returned more than 34 total

results. By comparison, the search terms “Opportunity School District” paired with “Georgia” returned over 2000 results. Those in favor of making a change of the state’s funding mechanism believed that the complexity and age of a particular legislation would be adequate reason to significantly alter the largest budget line in the state. What was less evident, however, was sufficient hard evidence to explain the problems that would be addressed by moving to a weighted student funding policy.

QBE: Rigid and Opaque

Among those interviewed, none argued for QBE as wholly appropriate to address the educational needs of the current age. Many participants did, however, assert that QBE performed admirably for the time it was created: the early-1980s. M. O’Sullivan pointed out that the commission that created QBE had done their due diligence to determine the cost of educating students, C. Knapp mentioned that the increased financial focus on public education brought on by QBE served the state well, and the Georgia Department of Education official praised the fact that the formula mandated smaller class sizes (personal communications, November 28, 2016, October 31, 2016, and October 27, 2016 respectively).

Those reforms brought on by QBE were seen by most of those interviewed as the chief drawbacks of using the formula in the current age. The term that came up repeatedly was “rigid,” as in: “[QBE] really has served its usefulness. I mean it’s very rigid and there are occasions, many occasions, where it seems to be providing funding in a kind-of counterintuitive way” (C. Knapp, personal communication, October 31, 2016). Governor Deal’s staff member provided a hypothetical of how QBE might not fund schools effectively due to rigidity:

So a district serving a large percentage of students that are English Language Learners may believe it’s in the best interest of those kids to serve those students in very intense

language support during the summer so that they're prepared to go into traditional classes with their peers during the school year. But right now basically no district would do that because they couldn't pull down any funds to provide those services during the summer (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Interestingly, M. O'Sullivan also mentioned this exact scenario (of English Language Learners being better served in a summer course) as an argument for the need to change QBE (personal communication, November 28, 2016).

The need for flexibility. Rigidity within a formula becomes a problem if flexibility is necessary to improve educational outcomes. Those in favor of WSF often mentioned school district flexibility as an obvious boon to public education. The governor's staff member spoke about how the current formula incentivizes LEAs to "game" the system, while flexibility in WSF would encourage school leaders to make decisions based on what is best for students (personal communication, February 1, 2017). M. O'Sullivan and the Chamber official both argued that the needs of a 21st century classroom are markedly different than those of the 1980s and 1990s and a formula is needed that can allow for a changing educational landscape.

According to B. Holliday, the belief that QBE mandated too much of LEAs had been around for decades, and was partly responsible for the state's first charter legislation. B. Holliday argued that Georgia's early charter laws were, "...sort of the camel's nose under the tent there... At the time it was really a nod to districts to say we understand what you're feeling, that you're being over-regulated so here's a way to deregulate" (personal communication, January 12, 2017). For context, many describe flexibility as a unique advantage of the charter school movement (Wohlstetter, Smith, & Farrell, 2013). Bulkley's (2005) analysis affirms this assertion

that charters in Georgia came about in response to worries over QBE and the signal of state control run amok.

This argument for flexibility and its ties to charter schools is paramount to the case made by participants on either side of the debate over QBE. C. Knapp mentioned that the strength of charter schools is in their hiring abilities (personal communication, October 31, 2016). The Department of Education official remarked that part of the allure of changing QBE was the desire to do away with the teacher's mandated salary structure (personal communication, October 27, 2016). The governor's staff member confirmed the claim, stating that until the teacher's compensation models were reformed, the funding formula would not be able to meet the needs of districts in the state (personal communication, February 1, 2017). By way of reference, from 2008 to 2017 the state allotted an additional \$900 million to teacher pensions to account for losses in the stock market (Salzer, 2017).

Opacity. The second-most mentioned argument against retaining QBE centered on the complexity of the formula. Respondents that supported the change towards a weighted student funding model argued that the inaccessibility of QBE was problematic in and of itself and was symptomatic of a policy that needed revision. Respondents described the complexity as the result of three decades of tinkering and resulted in a formula that is undecipherable by anyone outside school offices. An opaque formula also discouraged buy-in from the public. The Chamber official didn't rule out the possibility of making changes to QBE to address these concerns, but offered: "...but if you're going to fix one thing you might as well fix the rest while you're in there" (personal communication, January 20, 2017). The argument came up repeatedly in a way that suggested that education ought to be easier to budget for than the reality under QBE.

Education Reform Commission

By calling the Education Reform Commission, the Governor assured that stakeholders were “in there.” Both the Chamber official and the senior official at the Department of Education made the case that the Great Recession played a role in incentivizing the creation of the Education Reform Commission (ERC), however. Both argued that the economic downturn drew attention to the largest portion of the state budget (K-12 education funding), and began discussions on what could be done to change it.

Since Deal called the ERC and appointed each of its members, interviewees repeatedly spoke about the commission’s work as starting with the preference to the governor. C. Knapp, the chairman of the ERC, made it clear that WSF was initially debated during committee meetings due to the work of the governor’s offices: “The proposal was, I think on the table from the governor’s staff and the Office of Student Achievement, Office of Planning and Budget, so on in the Georgia state government” (personal communication, October 31, 2016). The Governor’s staff member added that Erin Hames had advised Deal to pursue this particular method of funding schools as well (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Participants did not agree on which individual or organization first brought the concept of WSF via student based funding in Georgia to the governor. Hames’ policy advice was supported by the Chamber of Commerce, and informed by the work of other states in similar discussions, according to the governor’s staff member (personal communication, February 1, 2017). The Department of Education official reaffirmed that the Chamber of Commerce was the originator of the idea that the governor, “[took] hold of” (personal communication, January 20, 2017). In 2012 the Georgia Chamber released a study recommending a student-based funding formula (Doyle, Hassel, & Locke, 2012). Three other interviewees mentioned studying other states in

how they each first found out about WSF as a policy, and a couple argued that the policy's mere presence around the country was enough to bring it to the forefront of the governor's agenda.

C. Knapp saw strong support from StudentsFirst, saying, "Surely the way it got on the agenda [is] because the Governor's staff had been listening to the StudentsFirst group, to the Michelle Rhee group, that's what got it on the agenda" (personal communication, October 31, 2016). C. Knapp stressed, however, that just because the governor initiated a particular discussion, it didn't force the commission to rubber stamp the idea without a thorough review of its merits. All the aforementioned participants were clear that regardless of who introduced the policy to the governor, it was Governor Deal who formally placed the policy on the state agenda by the calling of the ERC generally and the request to study WSF specifically.

Case Analysis

What follows is a review of the relevant data situated within the multiple streams framework, focusing specifically on the three streams as well as identifying the policy entrepreneur(s).

Problem Stream

In order to propose new legislation to reform public school funding as well as the type of state intervention for struggling schools, it would have to be clear that the preexisting policy landscape was unacceptable to stakeholders. Concerning funding, respondents commonly referred to QBE as complicated and inflexible, thus unable to meet the needs of the current generation of students. In the case of OSD, respondents were less likely to specifically address the policy levers that were present prior to 2015 to combat poor school performance: the state Department of Education, the governor's established powers, etc. Instead, those interviewed that

were in favor of the state constitutional amendment argued that the status quo of education in Georgia was intolerable and unlikely to change on its own without drastic action.

The majority of arguments against QBE as a viable funding calculation have been made for decades (Leisey, Murphy, & Temple, 1990). For this reason, the points made against the funding legislation could be viewed as a part of the larger rebellion against the status quo of public education in the state of Georgia. According to three participants, the recession assisted in turning the “condition” of a rigid funding formula into a “problem” that required legislative correction.

Indicators played a larger role in labeling struggling schools as a problem for OSD, on the other hand. Respondents consistently referred to schools with the lowest test scores as “failing,” a reference in part to the state’s accountability measure that was created under federal law, and furthered with the A-F grading by GOSA. If schools are indeed failing, they must need exceptional help, the thinking goes. Respondents mentioned the desire for a dramatic event to disrupt the dangerous cycle of education. One Department of Education official made the case that sowing discontent of public education helped move both weighted student funding and the Opportunity School District to the state agenda:

I think there has been cooperation among organizations for kind of this long-term direction for public education... I do think that there has been, whether pretty amazing coincidence or fairly long-term coordinated effort to be quite honest. ... There definitely has been a PR campaign to change the perception that people have of education... There’s lots of polls that have existed that people think that their own school is a really good school and their own teachers of their own kids are really good

teachers. However they think the overall system is bad (personal communication, October 27, 2016).

One commonly-cited poll, the PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, has verified this phenomenon (that people grade their local school highly while simultaneously grade public schools nationally harshly) for decades (Phi Delta Kappan, 2017).

Several interviewees that supported both proposed reforms offered a connected belief on what plagued the status quo of education in the state: a focus on the school at the expense of the student. Just as a state Representative argued that those campaigning for the status quo are only concerned with "grown people jobs" (personal communication, March 23, 2017) instead of the pupils, other respondents also proposed reconsidering funding apart from brick-and-mortar schools in order to benefit students.

Policy Stream

With both OSD and WSF, a few respondents referenced the presence of similar policies in other states as the jumping-off point for policy selection. No one, however, made the assertion that the policies were adapted wholesale. The governor's staff member mentioned, for instance, the recovery districts in Tennessee and Louisiana but with the clarification that particular elements were adapted to fit in Georgia's context. Similarly, C. Knapp, the chairman of the Education Reform Commission, referenced WSF as it existed in other states, while also making it clear that the funding committee of the commission worked hard to "get the weighting right on the formula" in order to address the needs of the state's school children (personal communication, October 31, 2016).

Policy entrepreneur. Stakeholders around both policies mentioned two foci of policy entrepreneurs for both OSD and WSF: the governor's office and reform-minded IOs or

foundations. First, Governor Deal was often referenced as the central figure in the debate surrounding the Opportunity School District, and easily figures as a policy entrepreneur with regards to weighted student funding due to his role in assigning the members of the ERC and placing WSF as the initial proposal for the funding committee to discuss. Participants often used the names Deal, Hames (his policy advisor), and the Office of Student Achievement interchangeably under one umbrella: the governor's office. A breakdown of references to each of the parties in the governor's office can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Distribution of Governor's Office References

References	Opportunity School District	Weighted student funding
Governor Nathan Deal	6	4
Governor's Office of Student Achievement	1	2
Erin Hames	3	2

Second, participants mentioned advocacy group representatives as either helping write potential policy or being in the room while it took place for both OSD and WSF. In addition to these claims, several respondents mentioned two specific acts of advocacy: the StudentsFirst-funded trip of stakeholders to New Orleans and the Chamber of Commerce's report *Smarter Funding, Better Outcomes* (Doyle, Hassel, & Locke, 2012). The trip, according to interviews, helped to sway state legislators who might be on the fence about OSD. The Chamber commissioned the *Smarter Funding* study for a similar reason in support of a change towards weighted student funding. Governor Deal's staff member remarks:

The Georgia Chamber was really supportive. We started the conversation right after Governor Deal was elected, really behind the scenes with the legislature to really talk about a student based funding formula. [The legislators] just weren't ready yet... they really weren't interested in thinking about how you could completely redesign the

formula. The Georgia Chamber was really interested in that conversation and dug deep on this; to understand the formula, the existing formula and the benefits there would be with the student based funding formula. So they contracted with... Marguerite Roza. And Marguerite worked for the Gates Foundation for many years and was their education finance person... And so, they contracted with her to look at our system and to make recommendations on moving to another system. (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Table 4.2 shows the number of references to both StudentsFirst and the Chamber of Commerce. Each mention of the legislative trip to New Orleans or the *Smarter Funding* report, even if the group is not explicitly named, is counted as a reference.

Table 4.2
Distribution of IO References

	Opportunity School District	Weighted student funding
StudentsFirst	6	3
Chamber of Commerce	1	3

Politics Stream

Many interviewees talked about the two issues of recovery districts and education finance as so preferable to the status quo to key stakeholders that their arrival on the state agenda appeared inevitable. When asked if there was a crisis point that brought the Opportunity School District to the forefront in Georgia (as there was in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina), the Chamber official refuted the concept, saying, “I think along that sense, you know, wading into an education policy like OSD you don’t need to be justified in saying you want to improve education, everybody already buys into that concept” (personal communication, January 20, 2017). Other participants noted more purpose behind the timing of this policy, however.

According to the Georgia Department of Education official, OSD was an idea that the governor mentioned in a limited context during his reelection campaign that gained traction. Governor Deal's staff member, on the other hand, talked about how this policy had been a priority of the governor's in his first term, but Deal needed to time OSD's introduction at a point where there were no other large legislative battles in order for the best change of passage (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

The recession also played a role in shifting the way that the general population viewed education. As the state continued to perceive education in the terms of what returns are earned on a large investment, the economic downturn offered a policy entrepreneur a window of opportunity to enact large-scale change. The introduction to the Education Reform Commission's report to Governor Deal bears this concept out in a rationale for changing the funding formula: "Funding for K-12 education has increased 21 percent since only 2011. But Georgia has not reaped the benefits of a 21 percent increase in student performance during this same time" (Education Reform Commission, 2015, p. 6). In the Chamber's *Smarter Funding* report explaining weighted student funding, it is made plain that changes to the funding mechanism are required so that the state can reap, "substantially higher return on investment" (Doyle, Hassel, & Locke, 2012, p. 28). The combination of the recession and the perception that public education had stagnated helps to explain the ubiquitous argument against the educational status quo by those in favor of these policy changes.

Conclusion

By 2017 Georgia had retained a Republican governor and Republican control of both houses of the legislature continuously since 2005 ("Georgia General Assembly," 2017). With such continuity of political power, the "mood" of the populace, as Kingdon (1995) labels it, can

play an outsized role in the politics stream of agenda setting. Participant interviews point to the governor's office and a small number of IOs led by StudentsFirst advancing both the Opportunity School District and weighted student funding by casting the education landscape as ineffectual and unable to change without considerable outside pressure.

Both policies can be viewed as a response to the problem of the status quo. Struggling schools in the state, the argument goes, need a change in leadership to affect the student outcomes. The flexibility of charter schools, some surmise, was the solution to the bureaucracy and regulations of traditional public schools that inhibit innovation. Flexibility featured prominently as the main selling point for a change in student funding as well. School districts cannot innovate while their every dollar is being regulated by the state. These problems were defined more by the common perception of Georgia's public schooling as inadequate than research.

G. McGiboney, a deputy superintendent at the Georgia Department of Education, made the case that any flexibility that OSD purported to give to districts was already available in State Board rules at the time. M. O'Sullivan, from StudentsFirst, lamented the lack of any real evidence in the public debate around OSD, arguing that nuance and details did not have any sway over a compelling anecdote. Similarly, the discussion over a possible change to funding appeared to focus more on school finance as a battlefield for ideological disagreement than debate over policy details.

The fact that the ERC refused to study the cost of educating a child and instead recommended reallocating the funding amount that the General Assembly provides (observation, July 16 & September 23, 2015) makes the case that the change was at least as ideological as evidence-backed. By way of example, the focus of education finance the last few decades has

been equity and adequacy (Ladd, 2008). Similarly, the two most influential lawsuits against Georgia's funding models have been on the grounds of inequity (*McDaniel v. Thomas*, 1981) and inadequacy (*CASFG v. Georgia*, 2005). When asked what issue WSF was supposed to address, G. McGiboney stated:

Equity, but essentially when you talk about equity because--as you recall the ERC recommended a weighted funding for gifted that's higher than the funding for [economically disadvantaged students]. Really? Everybody in the audience when that came up we're all just shaking our heads saying well you're going to weight gifted higher than economically disadvantaged kids, really? And then do away with--completely eliminate weighted funding for alternative education? (personal communication, November 28, 2016).

Georgia stakeholders might not have strongly appealed to the necessity for equity, but those in favor of making wide-scale changes had a ready-made argument for change that was as powerful as it devoid of details: a demonization of the status quo.

CHAPTER 5

NEVADA

In 2015, the Nevada legislature returned from hiatus to a bevy of education reform legislation proposed by Governor Brian Sandoval (Bortolin, 2017). Changing, and adding to, the state's education funding model (The Nevada Plan) was the keystone to the governor's reform package. In the testimony to Senate Bill 508, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dale Erquiaga, explained the broad goal of adjusting the state's funding mechanism, "...S.B. 508 updates the Nevada Plan for school finance by moving down a path of student weights, or multipliers" (SB508, 2015). Included in "modernizing" the state's formula was the provision to eventually include weights for students living in poverty and English Language Learners (Nevada Department of Education, 2015a, p. 4).

Governor Sandoval also introduced the Achievement School District in his wide-ranging, 25-policy reform bundle in 2015, as a type of accountability for the increased funding schools would receive if the new funding mechanism passed (Bortolin, 2017). Under the proposed legislation, Nevada schools at the bottom ten percent of the state as defined by their performance on the Nevada School Performance Framework would be eligible to be included in the Achievement School District (ASD) (Nevada ASD, 2017). The Executive Director of ASD oversees the selection of as many as six schools a year, and reports to the state Superintendent of Public Instruction (Whitaker, 2017). Once selected, ASD schools would be converted to charter schools and overseen by the new state office (Whitaker, 2017). Under the law, a school must

remain in the recovery district for six years before being eligible to exit the reform initiative (Nevada ASD, 2017).

History and Context

The Nevada Plan

In 1967 the state legislature of Nevada passed sweeping school finance legislation called the Nevada Plan (Portz, 2010). The purpose of the Nevada Plan was laid out in a Legislative Declaration, “The legislature declares the proper objective of state financial aid to public education is to ensure each Nevada child a reasonably equal educational opportunity” (Nevada Revised Statutes, 1967, p. 889). In the years after adoption, the state ranked fourth highest in the nation in per pupil expenditures, and the Nevada Plan has been characterized as providing equitable education opportunity during this time (National Education Association, 2011; Las Vegas Chamber Of Commerce, 2010).

Equity is a difficult concept in a state with the makeup of Nevada. Nevada is the seventh-largest state in the United States, but was the 35th most populous as of 2010 (U.S. Census, 2010). The state contains seventeen school districts, with size varying from over 300,000 students in Clark County (which holds Las Vegas, NV), to less than 70 in Esmeralda in 2013 (Verstegen, 2013a). When the Nevada Plan was originally enacted, the state was primarily rural with a homogeneous student population (Verstegen, 2013a)--the same would not be true in the new millennium.

1993 – 2006: Reforms and Funding Inadequacy

Although Nevada had joined the national push for educational accountability in the late 1980s, the 1993 requirement that school districts report performance statewide can be viewed as a pivotal moment for education reform in the state (McRobbie & Makkonen, 2005; Horsford,

2013). That legislation, NRS 385.347, was revised in 1995 and again in 1997 to become the Nevada Education Reform Act (Horsford, 2013). The focus of the Nevada Education Reform Act (NERA) was increased school performance reporting, creation of statewide standards and performance benchmarks, and mandating statewide student assessments (Jordan, 2006).

In 2003 NERA was revised to comply with the federal reauthorization of ESEA. Some impactful changes included:

- Adjustment from norm-referenced to standards-based standardized tests,
- Revision in the type of school district reporting, including how the state characterizes which schools are failing to meet requirements and what consequences should be applied,
- Added requirement that schools, their LEAs, and the Nevada Department of Education develop improvement plans (McRobbie & Makkonen, 2005).

This renewed push for standards-based accountability brought the Nevada Plan to the center of policy discussions. School leaders argued that they could not meet the higher expectations brought on by NERA without a significant change to how (and how much) schools were funded in the state (Chambers et al., 2012).

Adequacy Study. At the request of Nevada’s Legislative Committee on School Financing Adequacy, the firm Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. contracted with the state in 2006 to research the cost of an “adequate” education (Augenblick et al., 2006). Portz (2010) asserts that the presence of an adequacy study such as the one performed in 2006 could act as ammunition for any potential litigants against the state, especially considering that as of 2010 Nevada was one of only five states that had never encountered a constitutional challenge to its funding formula.

Augenblick et al. (2006, p. iv) summarizes their findings: “Regardless of the approach chosen to increase funding to schools and districts, the gaps between current spending and the amount needed to reach the starting point and ultimate funding goal indicate there is significant work to be done.” The adequacy study did not stop at recommending increased funding, but also suggested supplementary cost weights for particular student groups such as English Language Learners and students in Career and Technical Education (Chambers et al., 2012). The years following the release of the adequacy study saw a nationwide economic downturn, and no immediate legislative actions were taken to address the state’s funding system (Chambers et al., 2012).

2007 – 2015: Great Recession, Reforms, and Recovery

In the 2010 state of the state address, then-governor Jim Gibbons outlined the harsh toll that the recession had taken on Nevada:

Nevada has actually fared worse in this national and worldwide economic crisis than many other states. The combination of tight credit markets, sharp declines in discretionary spending and record-low consumer confidence has caused our two major industries, construction and tourism, to suffer drastic reductions. The numbers are daunting (Gibbons, 2009).

The case could be made that Governor Gibbons was understating the problems the state would face, as two years later Nevada had both the highest unemployment rate and the largest budget gap in the nation (Verstegen, 2013b).

Portz (2010, p. 849) described the subsequent budget cuts as, “merely the latest blow by the Nevada legislature to the quality of education in Nevada.” The Nevada legislature had decreased education budgets significantly, resulting in larger class sizes, no money for school

remediation, and the cancellation of innovation reform (Portz, 2010). The problems with the Nevada plan were not all tied to the recession either. Even as states were recovering from the Great Recession, the state was graded to have the most regressive funding distribution in the nation (Horsford, 2013).

During the state budget's nadir, Governor Gibbons commissioned a task force to apply for *Race to the Top* funds from the U.S. Department of Education (Horsford, 2013). Although the application went unfunded, several reforms that came out of the Nevada Education Reform Blue Ribbon Task Force became law in a 2011 education reform package (Horsford, 2013). Senate Bill 197 (2011) reorganized the State Board of Education, and granted the governor the power to appoint the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The reform package also included changes to teacher evaluation to include student outcomes and revisions of teacher tenure (Horsford, 2013).

Demographic shifts. In 2006 when Augenblick et al. studied the adequacy of the Nevada Plan, the report noted that the state held a higher than average proportion of English Language Learners. At that time, however, the state funding formula had no supplemental monies provided to educate that population (Augenblick et al., 2006). It wasn't until 2013 that the legislature passed a \$50 million allocation to do just that (Horsford, 2013). In 2013 the Nevada Plan still lacked additional funding to address students that were living in poverty and/or gifted (Verstegen, 2013a).

Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding. In 2012 the American Institutes for Research (AIR) completed a study commissioned by the Nevada legislature to, "evaluate options available to the state for improving the equity by which funds are distributed to districts serving students living in all parts of the state" (Chambers et al., 2012, p. 1). The next year, Senate Bill

500 established the Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding to review the AIR report and create a blueprint to revise the Nevada Plan (Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding, 2015). The Task Force (2015) recommended a significant change to the state's funding mechanism, including shifting the formula to include weighted allotments for English Language Learners and at-risk students (as defined by students that receive free or reduced lunch). Many of the aforementioned recommendations became a part of Governor Brian Sandoval's expansive education reform push in the following months.

Weighted Student Funding Formula

The fact that Nevada had not encountered a constitutional challenge to the Nevada Plan, and that it had stayed primarily intact since its creation in the 1960s, appears to follow in the same narrative laid out in the interviews that education was not a point of focus in Nevada for some time. The 2015 revision of the state's funding mechanism was possible due to stakeholders facing a schooling crisis and armed with studies and reports that supplied a possible policy solution by way of weighted student funding.

New Plan for a New State

Respondents described Nevada's economy, pre-recession, as unsupportive of education credentials. Mark Newburn, a member of the Nevada State Board of Education and a lifelong Nevadan, spoke about how the state relied on two main industries (gaming and mining), and any talk of diversifying the economy was tabled repeatedly due to the overwhelming growth in those sectors over the years (personal communication, February 1, 2017). The Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development publishes regular reports on the status of the state's economy. While other industries (e.g. logistics and operations) employ more Nevadans, the mining sector in 2014 employed almost twice the percentage of the state's residents than the national average,

and paid significantly higher average wages than the other major employers in the state (Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, 2015a). In 2014, the tourism, gaming, and entertainment sector of the economy employed over a quarter of a million more Nevadans than the next largest industry (Nevada GOED, 2015b). The financial success of those industries in Nevada, according to interviews, rendered difficult conversations about educational investment unnecessary.

What is the point of continuing education in a market that will reward unskilled labor with middle-class income? That's the question that a number of participants brought up as a way to illustrate the lack of focus on education historically. James Guthrie, a former Superintendent of Public Instruction in Nevada, explained:

The fact that literally thousands, tens of thousands, of low-income children don't learn anything doesn't matter too much because they go out and get jobs, actually rather good-paying, but not great paying jobs, in the casinos. And you can make \$50,000/year parking cars in Nevada, until your knees give out. And then I don't know what you do (personal communication, December 1, 2016).

J. Guthrie was not the only interviewee that mentioned the car valet example. A member of the State Board noted that any outreach by the university system to encourage advanced degrees was no match for the conversations amongst communities about the need to enter the workforce as quickly as possible (personal communication, March 2, 2017).

Students were not the only group that failed to invest in education during this time. The business community did not see a need for a highly educated workforce, thus wasn't incentivized to invest in the public education system. Without the urging of business and finance industries, any attempts to reform the school funding formula were left without a "champion" (J. Guthrie,

personal communication, December 1, 2016). Any educational investment, according to M. Newburn, centered on the building of new schools to educate the large number of students the state was taking on during these years of “massive growth” (personal communication, February 1, 2017). From 2004 to 2014, the total number of Nevada public schools increased by twenty percent (Nevada Department of Education, 2014)--nationally the number of schools increased less than three percent over the same time period (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Shifting demographics. A common theme that came up in the interviews was the growing number of students the Nevada public school system was educating and the demographics of those students. State Senator Moises Denis explained that the Nevada Plan was appropriate for the generation it was enacted, but did not adjust to the changing landscape of the past decades (personal communication, March 27, 2017). A majority of those interviewed mentioned English Language Learners specifically as a population that had enjoyed enormous growth in the state. In 2012 19% of Nevada students were English Language Learners, well over the national average of 9% at the time (U.S. Department of Education, 2014a). An English Language Learner is defined as, “an individual who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; or who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant” (Nevada Association of School Boards, 2015).

As English Language Learners grew, so too did the percentage of students that were living in poverty. In 2014, 55% of students in Nevada were eligible for Free and Reduced Priced Meals (a federal program; Nevada uses this measure as a way to estimate the number of students that are economically disadvantaged), an increase of 20% from a decade prior (NDE, 2014). A State Board member noted that schools that might have seen a large increase of these two

populations of students would not be allotted any additional funds under the Nevada Plan (personal communication, March 2, 2017).

Towards equity. The Nevada Plan was concocted for a state that was rural and overwhelmingly homogeneous. M. Denis framed the discussion around the need to change towards weighted student funding as one on equity:

Back in 1967 we didn't have those kinds of issues and so [the Nevada Plan] was a very fair way of doing it. Now you fast forward and it costs more, you have to spend more money to teach someone to learn English or to, you know, to make up for the differences even just in the family structure today versus 1967 where families did more to support their children regardless, part of that just has to do with the changing way people live and their work schedule and all of that and more two-parent families back then, now we got single families which create other challenges as far as parents wanting to be involved (personal communication, March 27, 2017).

The concept of equity came up in every interview conducted in the state. Most commonly, participants argued that the different needs of students demanded different dollar amounts; known as *vertical equity* (Brewer & Picus, 2014). If inequity was an issue in Nevada school finance, the shifting demographics of the state made it a problem and the Great Recession helped to make it a crisis.

New economy. When the recession hit, the discretionary income kind of went away, and the tourism sector income in Nevada got crushed. So Nevada got hit harder than any other state, and Las Vegas and the Clark County area got hit really, really hard. That was a bit of a wake-up call (M. Newburn, personal communication, February 1, 2017).

The Great Recession made the Nevada Plan untenable. The emphasis to diversify the state's economy brought with it arguments over how to produce a skilled, educated workforce. One policy expert stated plainly that the recession "humbled us" (E. Turner¹, personal communication, August 17, 2017). A couple of stakeholders mentioned the need to provide workers for Tesla, the electric car manufacturer that built an engineering facility in the years after the economic downturn. Originally the Nevada's GOED projected that Tesla would generate about 6,500 jobs for Nevadans, the forecast later expanded to over 10,000 jobs (Akers, 2017).

Dale Erquiaga, the Superintendent of Public Instruction during the reformation of the Nevada Plan, stated that the recession and the years of recovery afterward, "gave the state leaders some confidence that okay, things have to be done differently because our workforce is clearly not going to be ready for this new economy that is emerging" (personal communication, July 11, 2017). M. Newburn, after describing this economic recovery and school reform, stated, "So there is, for the first time in my lifetime I think, there is a real sense that education is important" (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Studies and Commissions

Stakeholders didn't have to wait until a recession for tangible evidence that there were structural issues with the state's funding mechanism. Over the last decade a number of organizations came together with the express purpose of studying the Nevada Plan with similar results: big changes would have to be made to finance education in the 21st century. The Augenblick adequacy study featured prominently in respondents' explanation of how weighted student funding became a viable policy in the state.

¹ Pseudonym

A number of interviewees mentioned the adequacy study as the state's introduction to the concept of weighting student allotments based on demographics. D. Erquiaga said that even though some stakeholders knew of weighted funding before its release, the Augenblick study served as the "modern introduction" of the policy (personal communication, July 11, 2017). There were, however, a few instances where stakeholders confused the Augenblick study with the one done by the American Institutes for Research in 2012 and the legislative committee's (Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding) report addressing said AIR report. At times, participants talked about all three studies as the overarching evidence that the Nevada Plan's funding was inequitable and inadequate. Instead of discussing specific data points that highlight the state's inability to fund schools fairly, these reports were mentioned in a sense of being just the latest examples that problems existed. M. Denis, who chaired the legislative task force, explained that by 2013 the belief that the Nevada Plan needed serious revisions was public knowledge (personal communication, March 27, 2017).

Actors

Civil rights groups. Several Nevada civil rights groups rallied around the possibility for a change in the Nevada Plan. Sylvia Lazos, a professor at the University of Nevada Las Vegas and an active participant in funding policy discussions with the Nevada legislature, underscored the importance of "Latino leadership" to drive the education funding debate (personal communication, June 17, 2017). S. Lazos provided testimony during the senate committee hearing over the proposed bill on behalf of the Latino Leadership Council (SB508, 2015). Two additional participants noted the Clark County Black Caucus as being influential in the agenda setting phase. Although these groups were well represented in the interviews, it is clear that

participants believed that the governor wielded the most authority in moving weighted funding to the fore.

Governor Sandoval. After the legislative task force, Governor Brian Sandoval “took up [the] mantle” (E. Turner, personal communication, August 17, 2017) of weighted student funding. Stakeholders mentioned perceiving that in 2015 the governor was ready to take dramatic steps to address education (S. Engell², personal communication, March 2, 2017), with funding being just one part of that push. D. Erquiaga recalled working with Governor Sandoval to select the most appropriate weights, “we settled on those... in part because it’s the right thing to do and in part because we wanted all Nevada families to be able to see themselves in the formula” (personal communication, July 11, 2017).

Since the governor appoints the Superintendent of Public Instruction, it seems appropriate that several participants talked about Superintendent Erquiaga as being a part of the governor’s office. Together, both Governor Sandoval and Superintendent Erquiaga focused the state agenda on education (S. Lazos, personal communication, June 17, 2017). An official at the Nevada Department of Education explained the state’s priorities in terms of the governor’s legislative sessions, with 2015 being dedicated to addressing what it would take for students to be prepared for a “new dynamic economy” (personal communication, July 13, 2017). Ultimately, D. Erquiaga explained that it was the governor who decided what was proposed (personal communication, July 11, 2017).

The study performed by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates was instrumental in introducing stakeholders to the concept of weighted student funding in Nevada, but participants described Governor Sandoval as carrying the idea across the finish line, so-to-speak. The Great Recession appeared to force those around education into reconsidering the place that schooling

² Pseudonym

must take in the state's priorities. If the state was going to continue growing its economy, then the way students were funded could no longer remain in the legislative background. Seizing on the moment, the governor did not stop with a change to the Nevada Plan, but included in his legislative package a proposal for state takeover of schools.

Achievement School District

Depending on the person around education in Nevada, the Achievement School District was either a necessary check on the increased education investment that Governor Sandoval proposed or a low-visibility bill that quickly passed through the state legislature without due diligence. Several stakeholders described a bill that a philanthropic foundation presented to the governor and that was initially crafted as a tool to spur change in the state's largest district. There is only consensus on the idea that this policy has garnered intense debate on the role of the state in individual schools in Nevada.

Reform Package

The first time many participants heard of ASD was in Governor Sandoval's State of the State address in 2015. In that speech, the governor stated:

Tomorrow our Department of Education will release a list of underperforming schools.

The list includes 10 percent of the schools in our state. Many have been failing for more than a decade. We must draw a line in the sand and say "no more." I am therefore requesting the creation of an "Achievement School District." This unique school district will manage failing schools without regard to location (State of the State, 2015).

Governor Sandoval introduced ASD with 24 other education policies in 2015 (Bortolin, 2017).

Three different participants mentioned the impact of the comment about being a "line in the

sand.” One official at the Department of Education that highlighted the comment explained further:

He painted a picture of the largest stadium in the state of Nevada--some 60,000 seats--you could fill that stadium with kids that are now in failing schools in our state and have kids spilling out of the arena onto the streets, it couldn’t hold all of them. And that was a pretty powerful image and a pretty powerful statement to start the Achievement School District conversation (personal communication, July 13, 2017).

This same stadium example appeared in D. Erquiaga’s testimony to the assembly committee’s hearing on the bill (AB 448) and a blog post from StudentsFirst Nevada’s State Director Andrew Diss two months after (Diss, 2015). For all the rhetoric around ASD, a few participants seemed surprised at the subsequent bill’s success in the legislature.

Low visibility. S. Lazos mentioned that ASD passed through the legislature without much attention being paid. S. Lazos explained how the sheer number of education initiatives that were proposed that session crowded the attention of the stakeholders around education; there wasn’t enough time to devote resources to each individual one (personal communication, June 17, 2017). M. Denis asserted that Democrats were not in favor of the bill, partially because it was “rammed” through the Senate (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Some participants, like one State Board member, made the case that there were not many public advocacy organizations that came out for ASD (personal communication, March 2, 2017). During assembly testimony, however, representatives for the Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce, StudentsFirst Nevada, and the State Public Charter School Authority all spoke in favor of the measure (AB448, 2015).

Accountability for tax increase. Those in favor of ASD tied it to the significant tax increase that the governor proposed to finance the increase in school funding that year. The \$1.3 billion increase was the largest in the history of the state (Hagar & Damon, 2015). D. Erquiaga stated, “it was a promise to all sides of the political aisle, yes, we’ll spend more but we’ll spend it more wisely and we will also ensure some accountability that the system was lacking” (personal communication, July 11, 2017). In this line of reasoning, the tax increase was something that state Republicans were reluctant to go along with unless there were concrete assurances that the tax money would be spent wisely. By including more accountability through reforms such as ASD, the governor was able to argue that districts would be prevented from blindly wasting tax dollars. M. Denis described the pairing of these two issues—increasing funding and addressing failing schools--as a “nexus” of opportunities (personal communication, March 27, 2017).

Intermediary Organizations and Foundations

Several respondents referred to this policy as the “governor’s policy” (M. Newburn, personal communication, February 1, 2017) or “a governor-pushed reform” (S. Lazos, personal communication, June 17, 2017). Those close to the governor, however, saw other groups and individuals as pivotal to getting ASD on the state agenda. While a few individuals talked about former Florida governor and presidential candidate Jeb Bush’s organization, the Foundation of Educational Excellence (now, Excel in Ed), D. Erquiaga asserted that while that group did support several school choice initiatives in the state, they did not take a position on ASD (personal communication, July 11, 2017).

Instead, several participants mentioned the Broad Foundation as the organization primarily responsible for introducing recovery districts to Governor Sandoval. One staff member for a state legislator stated that Broad was “the most active group” in getting recovery districts to

the governor (personal communication, August 9, 2017). A policy expert close to education in Nevada at the time asserted that by their knowledge, "...it was just Broad at the table" (personal communication, August 17, 2017). D. Erquiaga acknowledged that a member of the Broad Foundation had initially pitched the policy to the governor and himself (personal communication, July 11, 2017).

It is worth noting that in a StudentsFirst blog post concerning the policy, the State Director Andrew Diss (2015) writes as if his organization was at the forefront of introducing ASD to the state superintendent and eventually, the governor. One legislative staff member confirmed that StudentsFirst was a notable supporter, but attributed the bulk of the work to representatives for Broad (personal communication, August 9, 2017).

Clark County

Clark County, Nevada is the fifth largest school district in the nation, containing the city of Las Vegas (American School and University, 2014). When discussing recovery districts, this school district was mentioned repeatedly as a source of consternation for state leaders. J. Guthrie detailed the education political situation involving that district:

Well it is the fourth or fifth largest school district in the United States, and it is a complete educator-dominated bureaucracy. The teachers' union puts up candidates to the school board and then oversees their election and--so there are only sort of the teacher union-friendly policies that take place. There is virtually no evaluation of principals or teachers. Principals hold tenure as principals, not as educators. They can reclaim the classroom position, but they are tenured as principals, so accountability is virtually impossible there (personal communication, December 1, 2017).

Clark County came up in interviews as a possible reason that ASD arrived in the state legislature. D. Erquiaga said that the state leadership, and Republicans specifically, had an “absolute mistrust” of the district and how money would be spent to educate there (personal communication, July 11, 2017). Without a policy like ASD as an accountability check on the power of Clark County, the thinking goes, the governor would be handing over money to an LEA that had shown no ability to use it wisely.

Several times when stakeholders mentioned the low-performing schools that ASD purported to address, they would single out the struggling institutions within Clark County. One state board member observed that the most ardent protests of ASD came out of Clark County, where they believed majority of schools identified for possible takeover were located (personal communication, March 2, 2017). When the first ASD eligible list was published, Clark County did not have a majority, but the district’s schools did represent a plurality (45%) (Pak-Harvey, 2016). S. Lazos claimed bluntly that ASD was an attempt by the state to apply pressure to Clark County, a school district that consistently was being perceived as corrupt or inadequate (personal communication, June 17, 2017).

Star ratings. Stakeholders hoping to quantify Clark County’s schools’ performance were given a gift in the state’s accountability reporting measure, the Nevada School Performance Framework. Under the framework, schools are given a one to five-star summative score based on a number of school-level indicators of performance (Delaney, 2017). One policy expert, when asked about the phrase “chronically failing schools” that has been used in several states, attributed the usage to the star ratings, and the belief that the majority of schools in the state are awarded three or fewer stars. Indeed, for the 2014-2015 school year 69.3% of schools that were given a star rating scored three or fewer stars (Nevada Department of Education, 2015c). A staff

member for leadership within the Nevada legislature also cited the star ratings as the precursor to ASD due to highlighting the performance of struggling schools specifically (personal communication, August 9, 2017). D. Erquiaga connected the two as well, but insisted that the fact that rating schools did not cause structural change to institutions begged for a policy such as ASD since the accountability framework included, “no punishment” (personal communication, July 11, 2017).

The Achievement School District might have not enjoyed the political visibility of a similar-sized reform in the past, but it is clear from the interviews that this policy had a definitive role in the governor’s policy agenda. ASD, according to those in support of the measure, was a natural fit in a state that proposed increased spending for schools. IOs and foundations like the Broad Foundation were able to pitch the governor, and people close to education saw the opportunity for ASD to address student performance, particularly for the largest school district in the state.

Case Analysis

Problem Stream

For the state’s education funding formula, the economy acted both to reveal problems that needed to be addressed, and as a guidepost for what path to start down. On the front end, the impact of the Great Recession on Nevada’s economy was devastating. As budgets were cut to compensate for the lack of tax revenue, the state’s schools—which already were near the bottom for per pupil allocation in the country—were given even less. The inequities already present before the recession compounded during the downturn.

Inequity within the Nevada Plan was a problem according to those interviewed, as was the fact that the public school system was not equipped to supply educated workers necessary for

the “new economy” (D. Erquiaga, personal communication, July 11, 2017). In order to provide skilled workers for the next generation, the Nevada Plan would have to provide adequate funding levels:

What it’s going to take to be successful at Switch or Tesla looks a little different than what it’s going to take to be successful in a mining job or a hospitality job. And so we had to then pivot our work as a state to figure out what are we going to need to do to set all of our kids for success for a middle class job in the new Nevada economy (J. Vogle³, personal communication, July 13, 2017).

Switch is a company based in Las Vegas that builds and operates data centers (“About Switch,” 2017). This new economy’s needs, according to interviews, made the old funding mechanism a problem that had to be addressed via policy change.

Funding levels do not increase significantly without additional tax revenue. While raising taxes might have been a necessary evil for funding, several participants described it as a problem for state elected officials that were not interested in writing a “blank check” to schools (D. Erquiaga, personal communication, July 11, 2017), particularly schools in the Clark County School District. The performance of Nevada’s schools, and those in Clark County specifically, defined the problem for both weighted student funding and the Achievement School District in this way.

One noteworthy belief that interviewees espoused was that Nevada was always at the wrong end of each national “list” that came out ranking states in the United States. An article in the *Reno News & Review* on immunizations explained: “There is a local cliché that Nevada is at the bottom of every good list and the top of every bad list. The state has an almost unbroken record of poor quality-of-life rankings in national standings” (Myers, 2017). Within the state, the

³ Pseudonym

performance framework shined a light on which schools helped place Nevada on these lists. This data reporting created a problem for school funding (showing the inadequacy of the Nevada Plan) but also for stakeholders that noticed the schools in the bottom five percent that came to fame under federal reauthorizations of ESEA. The combination of foreseeing higher taxes and the notoriety of underperforming schools made any unaccountability intolerable to policy makers.

Policy Stream

No participant in this study mentioned weighted student funding being in the discussion around education funding before the release of the adequacy study by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates. One policy expert around education in Nevada referred to that study as the introduction of weighted student funding in the state as well as the “gold standard” for costing out the financial needs of students (personal communication, August 17, 2017). After the study’s release, however, nine years passed before any significant legislation introduced the concept on the agenda.

What happened in between helped to filter the study’s recommendations to practical policy for the state. The legislative commission, according to interviews, brought more stakeholders to the issue and worked through the “technical issues” of the potential formula (M. Denis, personal communication, March 27, 2017). The work of the governor with the superintendent, however, was particularly noted as being important to the details of what portions of weighted student funding would look like in Nevada. In the almost-decade after the Augenblick study, the belief that different students should garner different funding amounts became ubiquitous based on the way that participants mentioned the need for equity (M. Denis, personal communication, March 27, 2017).

For ASD, participants described foundations acting as IOs in targeting the governor to present this particular policy. The Broad Foundation gained an audience with the state superintendent and governor to advocate for recovery districts in Nevada, based on D. Erquiaga. This particular policy, according to interviews, borrows heavily from the Achievement School District in Tennessee. M. Newburn, a State Board of Education member, expressed a lack of knowledge about the state's policy until Governor Sandoval introduced it, but knew that it was based off the "Tennessee model" (personal communication, February 1, 2017).

Policy entrepreneur. For both the funding formula and ASD, respondents noted the centrality of Governor Sandoval and his state of the state address specifically. Both policies had a relatively short political history in the state (almost no visibility whatsoever in the case of ASD) until the governor included them in his education reform package in 2015. An official at the state's Department of Education explained how the two policies were tied together in the governor's plan:

I basically look at this as issues that are two sides of the coin. Same coin. We want to ensure that schools and students have the resources that need to access and provide for a high quality education. But we also want to ensure that when that high quality education that every kid needs is being delivered. That there's some sort of backstop there and that there's a way to provide that kid with a high quality education if the school that they're zoned for, for whatever reason, isn't able to do that with extra resources and with extra support (personal communication, July 13, 2017).

Governor Sandoval utilized his considerable influence to address the problems that the Great Recession defined, and the changes that would be needed to adjust the education system so that a similar economic downturn could not affect the state in a similar way in the future. Immediately

following the contentious legislative session to approve the tax increase, elected officials noted the importance of following the vision of the governor for education (Hagar & Damon, 2015).

Politics Stream

Prior to the governor's state of the state address in 2015, Nevada had undergone a "Red Wave" in the legislature elections resulting in Republicans being in control of the Assembly, Senate, and governorship for the first time since the Great Depression (Myers, 2014). A number of those interviewed mentioned the impact of the shift to Republican control on education policy. Participants spoke about the state GOP as willing to support the governor's reform agenda, and being energized by policies such as ASD. One staff member for state legislative leadership mentioned several factors that led to ASD being introduced in the state, but stated that "ultimately" it was the Republican majority that made the bill a possibility (personal communication, August 9, 2017).

The governor's reform agenda highlights the concepts of ambiguity and time within the multiple streams framework. Stakeholders that opposed ASD mentioned the lack of focus due to the number of issues being proposed from the governor's office. The inability for policy makers to carve out significant amounts of time for each decision is a central tenant of the "organized anarchies" described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972). Inexact decision-making is all that remains.

Another way to view ASD is as a preemptive move to address conservative legislators' concerns about the tax increases that would be necessary to increase school funding. D. Erquiaga explained, "the governor proposed to give millions of dollars or more to the system and Republicans said only if it comes with a line in the sand and more support for alternatives" (personal communication, July 11, 2017). Although Nevada Republicans were in charge of the

state's legislature, the governor, "...broke with his party orthodoxy and built a coalition with Democrats to raise taxes" (J. Vogle, July 13, 2017). This bipartisan group could only be possible due to a state mood of displeasure over the inequity and inadequacy in the Nevada Plan.

Conclusion

The Nevada education system post-Great Recession stands to look markedly different than the one that existed in "the roaring twenties," as M. Newburn (personal communication, February 1, 2017) described the decades leading up to the economic downturn. That financial event appears weaved throughout interviews and takes on a number of connotations: a villain, opportunity, spotlight, warning sign, and/or lesson to be learned—just to name a few. The arrival of the Weighted Student Funding Formula and Achievement School District on Nevada's education policy agenda cannot be explained by the recession alone, but the participants made it clear that both policies' arrivals cannot be explained without understanding the role the recession occupied.

Participants described stakeholders in 2015 as willing to try policies that previously went without major discussion. One Nevada Department of Education official described the setting the following way:

So I would say that in 2015 Nevada had a remarkable legislative session. One where the state tried to come to grips with its current state of student performance... There was a collective agreement that enough was enough--and *we're going to throw the kitchen sink at the problem* (personal communication, July 13, 2017, emphasis mine).

Armed with policies supplied by outside organizations such as the Broad Foundation and Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, and facing problems revealed/exacerbated by the Great Recession, participants in this study around education described that Governor Brian Sandoval

and his office were in a unique position to utilize the new Republican majority to introduced two policies on the legislative agenda and, ultimately, alter the status of education in the state for years to come.

CHAPTER 6

PENNSYLVANIA

In 2015, Pennsylvania state Senator Lloyd Smucker introduced Senate Bill 6 to create the Achievement School District. Under the Achievement School District (or, ASD), schools that showed up at the bottom five percent of the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile would be eligible to be closed, converted into charters, or managed by the state, among other interventions (Senate Bill 6, 2015). Pennsylvania created the School Performance Profile to begin measuring school performance in 2013. The accountability measure grades schools 0-100 based mostly on state mandated assessments (Nathaniel, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, & Ryan, 2016). Under the proposed legislation, the governor and both majority and minority members of the state's legislature would appoint ASD's board (Senate Bill 6, 2015).

Pennsylvania's weighted student funding policy came as a result of recommendations from the Basic Education Funding Commission, a committee created by the state legislature to study the state's previous funding mechanism ("Basic Education Funding Report," 2016). House Bill 1552, the result of the commission's recommendations, was signed into law in June of 2016 (Rogers, 2016). Under this new funding mechanism, individual schools would be allotted additional funding based on individual student characteristics: poverty, enrollment in charter schools, and/or English as a second language (Rogers, 2016). The funding formula within this legislation only applied to money that was added to education funding from that point on. The result was a small amount relative to the total amount allotted to education in the state (McCorry, 2016).

History and Context

Powerful Unions

In 1970 the Pennsylvania legislature passed Act 195, granting all state public employees the right to collectively bargain salaries as well as go on strike (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1993). What followed, according to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA, 1993), was nearly a generation of unprecedented teacher unions' growth in authority. In the nine years immediately after the passage of Act 195, the state experienced 305 teacher strikes that lasted on average over 12 days each (Olson, 1984). Pennsylvania consistently had the highest number of teacher strikes in those years (PSBA, 1993), and continued to hold that distinction for decades after. More recently, from 2010 to 2015 the Keystone State had twenty teacher strikes--four more than the next highest ranked state during the same time period (Brenneman, 2015).

Even after the adoption of strike reform in 1991, Pennsylvania continues to have some of the most powerful teachers' unions in the country. In a 2012 study, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute ranked the state as having the fourth strongest teachers' unions in the nation (Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012). From the report: "Pennsylvania's teacher unions enjoy broad financial resources and membership, are highly involved in politics, and wield considerable influence at the state level. The state's NEA and AFT affiliates are some of the most powerful in the nation" (Winkler, Scull, & Zeehandelaar, 2012, p. 290). The influence of teacher unions has helped shape several of the laws in the state's education policy landscape the past few decades.

1983 – 2002: Funding False Starts and State Accountability

In 1983 Pennsylvania passed the Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education, a funding formula that took several variables into account to allot education dollars (Steinberg & Quinn,

2015). The Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education (ESBE) contained supplements aimed to support districts with less property taxes or larger populations of students living in poverty (PSBA, 2015). The state used ESBE to dictate education funding until the early 1990s.

Act 85 of 1992 irrevocably changed the funding system into a foundation program, where the previous year's funding level was "frozen," and the Pennsylvania legislature no longer used the fixed formula (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). Adding to the fact that there were no additional dollars allocated to the education line item, this abandonment of a funding formula signaled, "...an important turning point in basic education funding from the Commonwealth" (Basic Education Finance Commission, 2015, p. 20). Absent a formula, additional supplements were added in the years that followed without strict parameters and apart from practical consideration of the needs of individual districts (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015).

PARSS v. Ridge (1998). Responding to the failure of the state to maintain a formula, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS) filed suit against the state (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). Any funding inequities that were present in 1992, the argument goes, would only be made worse by the hold harmless funding in the years after (Bissett & Hillman, 2013). The lawsuit, and the others that followed arguing against the inadequacy or inequity of the funding system, failed to produce any change to the system (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has shown time and again that it was willing to defer decisions concerning education funding to the state's legislature (Matthew, 2014).

Education Empowerment Act. In May of 2000, the legislature passed the Education Empowerment Act (or EEA), granting the state broad powers to intervene in school districts with poor student outcomes (Rhim, 2007). Districts were placed in the law's jurisdiction if they, "have a combined average of 50 percent or more students scoring in the bottom measured group

in the [state standardized test] in math and reading for the previous two years” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2000, p. 1). Pennsylvania’s statewide mandated assessments, established a year prior, made state intervention based on academic outcomes (such as the EEA) possible (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015).

Philadelphia schools takeover. When the School District of Philadelphia was taken over by Pennsylvania in December of 2001, it was the largest district in the United States to be put under state control (Bulkley, Mundell, & Riffer, 2004). After being declared “academically and financially distressed” (Bulkley et al., 2004, p. 2), the district went about negotiating contracts with private companies, institutions of higher education, and non-profits to manage low-performing schools (Christman, Gold, & Herold, 2006). This coupling of private management and governance restructuring was introduced to the national education policy landscape via the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Rhim, 2007). As of 2017, the School District of Philadelphia remained under state control.

2003 – 2015: Reestablishing Formulas

Ed Rendell campaigned for governor on the promise to increase equity in school funding (Hawkes, 2008). Once elected in 2003, the state did begin to “make systematic education investments” (Education Law Center, 2013) via increased funding. Additionally, education budgets included an accountability block grant that directed money to lower-wealth districts (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015).

Costing Out Study. Pennsylvania, despite the increased funding under Governor Rendell, continued operating school funding via hold harmless. In 2006 the Pennsylvania state Board of Education sent out a Request for Proposals for a contractor to determine the cost of educating students in the state (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2006). The measure of

whether a student had been educated was based on the state's performance standards and expectations (Ambrose, 2009).

The contracted firm, Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, Inc., "...developed a series of cost factors and combined them in a way that considers efficiency; and identifies a base cost, added cost weights for students with special needs, and additional cost factors associated with differences between school districts" (2007, p. iii). The study found that funding in the state would have to increase \$4.38 billion in order to adequately meet educational demands (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). Starting the 2008/2009 school year, the Pennsylvania General Assembly mandated that the state adopt a formula similar to the one recommended in the study (Ambrose, 2009).

Under the new funding mandate, the state would close the gap between funding levels and the target dollar needed to adequately educate students further each year for six years (Ambrose, 2009). In 2011, however, under the leadership of a new governor, the legislation was changed to remove this requirement (Steinberg & Quinn, 2015). At that point the state reentered a period of hold harmless education funding (Basic Education Finance Commission, 2015). Pennsylvania would continue in that pattern for five more years.

Basic Education Funding Commission. In 2014, the General Assembly created a bipartisan commission, the Basic Education Funding Commission (or BEFC), to examine the state's funding formula (BEFC, 2015). The commission recommended a return to an actual formula, with weights assigned to student characteristics such as poverty and English proficiency (Shrom & Hartman, 2015). The BEFC's recommendation also included provisions to take into account school districts' ability to pay as well as tax effort (Collins, 2016). The commission's work carried it from the end of one governor's tenure into a new gubernatorial term. Based on

these recommendations, Pennsylvania's Governor Tom Wolf enacted a funding formula in 2016, but it was only applied to "newly" appropriated funds (Armagost & Shrom, 2017).

Student Weighted Basic Education Funding

Education funding in Pennsylvania has been a fight that the state has engaged for decades. Though funding arguments are not rare in statehouses across the country, Pennsylvania appears unique in the nation for the gravity of these disputes: few states have gone completely without a funding formula for years, by way of example. In 2015 Pennsylvania was one of only three states without an established funding mechanism (Rogers, 2016). Respondents described the current status of education funding in Pennsylvania as the result of years of work, and far from completion.

Lack of Formula

The fact that the state distributed dollars based on hold harmless funding from 1991/1992 to 2007/2008 came up often in interviews as a de facto explanation for the rare situation that Pennsylvania was in concerning education funding. Instead of state code dictating predictable dollar amounts based on student enrollment, any new funds were handled as a political football to be decided yearly by the legislature and governor. Ron Cowell, president of the Education Policy and Leadership Center in Pennsylvania, explained that even before the hold harmless years, the state had a difficult time maintaining a formula:

The problem, even when it was still invented in law, starting in 1981 or thereabouts, or actually before that, the legislature began to undermine the efficacy and the integrity of the formula that was in the law by not appropriately funding it. So then into the 80s, the effect got so far from the purpose that between 1991 until 2008, Pennsylvania basically

operated without a formula. Things would get made up every year (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

The result, for many school leaders during these years, was a difficult situation where district enrollment may have changed significantly but the amount of money used to educate did not adjust with it.

Inequity. Jonathan Cetel, Executive Director of PennCAN (50-State Campaign for Achievement Now's [50CAN] state office in Pennsylvania), referred to the concept of continuing hold harmless as, "lock[ing] in the existing inequities" (personal communication, June 16, 2017). Bissett and Hillman (2013), in a report on the history of school funding in the state, affirm the sentiment by arguing that any inequity of previous years is subsequently built into the formula. The most obvious display of inequity was the fact that dollar amounts did not change with changing enrollment: if a district decreased in size it continued to receive the same amount as the year before. In school year 2012/2013, by way of example, the per pupil amount allocated to the fastest growing school districts was more than three times less than the per pupil amount for those districts with declining enrollment (Paul, 2014).

The inequities extended beyond just the money that went to educating students. A professor at a Pennsylvania public university explains:

It's not just the budget in the funding formula but it's all the pots of money that Harrisburg contributes to... For example, pension funding in the state. The state matches up to 50% of what the district's contribution is. So if you're in a wealthy district and pay your teachers big time wages, they're getting a percentage of that toward their pension... Whereas if you're in a poor district and your teachers' pay very poor, they're getting far

less money... So it's just a big mess in terms of fairness. And the least among us, our rural schools, are getting killed (personal communication, December 14, 2016).

All of the aforementioned inequities are in place if the number of students changes or there is a large discrepancy between the pay of teachers based on district wealth. The hold harmless distribution proved more inequitable still as the characteristics of students changed across the state.

Shifting demographics. Brett Schaeffer, a policy analyst for the Pennsylvania State Senate Appropriations Committee, laid out the argument for a new funding formula based on the shifting demographics within Pennsylvania:

Ten years ago there probably wasn't a big Latino community in Hazelton, or in Allentown... But now, and in ten years from now, it's going to be huge... You're going to have some folks who are coming in who may be third generation at that point, who speak English great. But then you might have some firsts, who don't speak English. How do you handle that? They are going to come into your public schools (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

B. Schaeffer was not the only person to mention the shifting demographics in the state; in fact, a majority of the respondents in Pennsylvania talked about the issue as a need for a new funding formula to address. Two other interviewees mentioned English Language Learners as a specific growing population in Pennsylvania. Indeed, from 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population in Pennsylvania grew by 82%--the fastest growing ethnic group in the state at the time (Elmendorf, 2014). Without a dynamic funding formula in place, respondents described particular school systems as struggling financially while others were granted money that ought to be spent elsewhere.

Costing Out Study

Those interviewed described the hold harmless distribution as untenable for schools in the state. Shortly after the turn of the millennium, a coalition of traditional education organizations formed to advocate for the state to implement a funding formula. One of the individuals within the lead organization of that coalition remarked that before the partnership arrived at a common goal, individual groups (e.g. the School Board Association, Parent Teacher Association) might lobby for disparate policies to the same legislator, muddying the waters and making change more difficult.

Once the partnership of over 30 organizations (the Pennsylvania Education Funding Reform Campaign) was able to focus their efforts, the campaign members decided to advocate for the costing out study. As a stakeholder within the coalition explains:

We had a two-step process. When I was most involved, the process was advocating for a costing-out study to identify what the needs were in Pennsylvania and we were successful in having the General Assembly agree to that and fund the study... Folks wanted to have the costing out study accomplished first so that we weren't having a discussion about what the target number should be and what the formula should be at the same time (personal communication, June 13, 2017).

Within the executive summary to the study, the firm contracted to perform the research, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (2007), notes that states like Pennsylvania have defined clear outcomes for students through standards and accountability systems without considering the practical financial cost needed to meet them.

A majority of the participants in this study remarked on the importance of the costing out study to funding arriving on the state agenda. The head of an education IO in Pennsylvania at the

time stated that discussion over funding “really started” (personal communication, March 3, 2017) with the release of the study. R. Cowell noted that the costing out study helped to bring more attention not just to education finance, but also to the concept of weighting funding based on the characteristics of students (personal communication, January 30, 2017). B. Schaeffer explained that the student demographics drove some of the research, saying, “They were costing out different student categories, and so they were trying to give a weight, like here’s how much it’s going to cost for an English language learner to basically meet the state standard” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). With the release of the Augenblick study, weighted student funding gained momentum as the policy of choice for how to address inequity in the existing funding legislation.

Respondents described the years immediately following the costing out study as filled with legislators paying lip service to the exposed needs of schools, but without any demonstrable change to policy. The legislature and Governor Rendell did institute a formula in the wake of the study in 2008. However, stakeholders described the formula as a “blip” (B. Schaeffer, personal communication, March 3, 2017), not a “pure formula” (T. Barrett⁴, personal communication, March 3, 2017), passed in “inauspicious political circumstances” (J. Bard, personal communication, June 8, 2017), and ultimately lacking implementation due to budget constraints brought on by the Great Recession.

Actors

If the Great Recession assisted in the dismantling of a funding formula, it also gifted, so-to-speak, advocates another tangible example of schools being underfunded in the state. J. Cetel stated the reduced budgets under the Republican governor (Tim Corbett), “energized and mobilized” groups in and around education (personal communication, June 16, 2017). The

⁴ Pseudonym

Pennsylvania Education Funding Reform Campaign (PEFRC), according to one of PEFRC's leaders, advocated for the state legislature to have "ownership" over the development of a formula that put into practice the findings of the costing out study (personal communication, June 13, 2017). In 2014, House Bill 1738 established the Basic Education Funding Commission to do just that. The legislative commission was described as an important step to the formula that was adopted in the subsequent years. A number of interviews mentioned the difficulty of revising a formula until the landscape was too problematic to ignore a need for change. The commission represented to many respondents a sign that the state was in a painful enough position that funding needed to be addressed.

Campaign for Fair Education Funding. While the Basic Education Funding Commission was reviewing the status of education finance, a coalition formed to advance the issue. The Campaign for Fair Education Funding (or CFEF) had even more groups (over 50 at one point) than the PEFRC that preceded it. A number of respondents mentioned the breadth of the coalition, including those representing interests across the education spectrum (e.g. charter advocates and teachers' unions). A professor at a Pennsylvania public university put it succinctly: "...everyone in the education business was in support" (personal communication, December 14, 2016). A list of the participating groups can be found in the appendix.

A common theme that appeared in interviews was the momentum that seemed to build up between the work of the Basic Education Funding Commission and the CFEF. The commission held both Democrats and Republicans, and the CFEF contained, "basically every group" (J. Cetel, personal communication, June 16, 2017). The result, according to the head of one of the IOs in the coalition, was that passage "...became inevitable...because it was so highly publicized. I think had the legislature and the governor not done something, there would have

been backlash” (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Governor Corbett, respondents remarked, felt the backlash of education advocacy groups’ ire, and was a one-term governor as a consequence.

Governor Tom Wolf. In 2015 Tom Wolf unseated an incumbent governor by appealing to the public dissatisfaction with the way education had been addressed by the state, according to those interviewed. J. Bard mentioned that the organization he helmed at the time, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools, worked with a number of other education groups to make education funding the primary issue of the gubernatorial campaign (personal communication, June 8, 2017). All but two of the interviewees specifically mentioned the election of Governor Wolf as a necessary element to understanding how WSF could arrive on the state agenda.

Aside from Wolf’s campaign promises to restore education dollars, a number of respondents remarked on the overall authority that governors wield in Pennsylvania. J. Bard stated unequivocally, “...there is absolutely no substitute for the leadership of the governor; none” (personal communication, June 8, 2017). One stakeholder integral to the PEFRC explained, “In Pennsylvania we are a very, very strong executive state--much more so than many other states in the country” (personal communication, June 13, 2017). As a point of reference, in 2012 the governor’s office in Pennsylvania had the authority to appoint 32 positions (one measure by which to gauge strength of gubernatorial authority), the highest in the nation that year (Council of State Governments, 2012).

Throughout the interviews, the fact that the state didn’t have a true, adaptable funding formula for years was given as reason in-and-of-itself that the education stakeholders advocated to open discussion (and ultimately: adoption) of weighted student funding. What is ignored,

however, are the years that funding moved to the background of the policy agenda for myriad reasons. The combination of a powerful, broad coalition of intermediaries, a new governor that ran his campaign on the promise of restoring money to schools, the authority of a costing out study and legislature-appointed commission, and a history of inequities in finance, all worked together to place this policy on the education agenda in Pennsylvania.

Achievement School District

Unlike the change towards applying weighted student funding to additional education monies, the recovery district policy, Achievement School District, did not gain much political traction. Interviewees described a policy backed by a single legislator that garnered little momentum due to the state's past with similar policies. ASD arrived on the state agenda at all due to the work of advocacy groups, and increased understanding of the academic outcomes of the state's poorest performing schools.

History of State Intervention

Pennsylvania has an extensive history with state intervention in struggling schools. R. Cowell asserted that the state grappled with standards-based reforms in the 1990s, and that the current debate is a natural follow-up to that discussion due to the need to determine whether, “consequences... get attached to these standards” (personal communication, January 30, 2017). Three respondents mentioned the more recent Education Empowerment Act as a precursor to the ASD legislation as well. One stakeholder that worked for an education not-for-profit during the years preceding ASD laid out the connection:

Back in the late 90s or early 2000s there was legislation that had been enacted called the Empowerment Act. And that focused on a limited number of underperforming school districts with a plan in place for a state takeover of the governance of those districts. And

what you see in the Achievement School District bill very much reflects what already had been in place under the Empowerment Act (personal communication, June 13, 2017).

In testimony before the state Senate Education Committee over ASD, the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) made a similar connection between the two initiatives as well (Eshbach, 2015). Paired with the state's longstanding governance control of the School District of Philadelphia, respondents described state takeover as a common legislative discussion.

Defining a Failing School

In years past, the definition of what constitutes a “struggling” or “failing” school could also take on a financial dimension. According to B. Schaeffer, financially stressed school districts came under state control primarily due to lack of local taxes (personal communication, March 3, 2017). Throughout the discussions of school performance, cost and finances came up as a way to explain the state's relationship with school district governance. J. Cetel described ASD as primarily being driven by concerns over finances:

The watershed moment was... the governor was proposing a big tax increase for education spending. Republicans who cared about education wanted to say that we are not going to throw money to these systems. So here was a chance that we can get a democratic governor to sign reform because we have the leverage because he needs us to tax increase the tax package (personal communication, June 16, 2017).

As consequences for poor performance were being discussed in the Pennsylvania statehouse, there also existed a concurrent discussion on the appropriate way to label schools in line for state intervention. With previous policies like the EEA, the state would act to change the governance of entire school districts, but the ASD focused on individual schools. One possibility for the shift

to individual schools that came up repeatedly was the increased quality and availability of data on school performance.

Before the implementation of No Child Left Behind, each of the state's EEA Districts received state support and had their school performance reported to the state legislators and public (R. Cowell, personal communication, January 30, 2017). R. Cowell connected that state reporting to the data requirements under No Child Left Behind as well as the state's current debate over which data points should populate the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile—a kind of “state report card” (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Unlike when the state was implementing EEA, in recent years the state required, “better data sets now to be able to identify individual schools that may be struggling” (K. Foster⁵, personal communication, June 13, 2017). The bottom five percent of schools, a distinction brought to the fore by No Child Left Behind, became shorthand in the state for which schools were failing and in line for legislation such as ASD.

Lloyd Smucker and PennCan

For those interviewees that had self-described knowledge of ASD arriving on the state agenda, there was no wavering on whom in the legislature was the primary supporter: the Pennsylvania Senate Education Chairman, Lloyd Smucker. No other elected official was mentioned in the interviews as advocating for ASD. However, B. Schaeffer made a point to clarify the difference between introducing the bill in the Pennsylvania state senate and who was responsible for introducing it in Pennsylvania:

Legislatively, it was a bill by Senator Smucker, who is now in Congress. But if you're trying to unlock or answer the question of how did this very particular kind of legislation emerge in multiple states at one time; I think you can know the answer. This came right

⁵ Pseudonym

out of 50CAN and 50CAN sort-of policies shops... That's who, PennCAN, brought that to the senator. Senator Smucker did not come up with the ASD language. That was brought to him directly by PennCAN. They drafted that legislation and handed it to him. (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

J. Cetel, the Executive Director of PennCAN, described his organization's interactions with the senator:

[Senator Smucker] did approach some groups and said, "I took on this committee chairmanship because I wanted to do something big, so what ideas do you have; a big idea to address the problem of failing schools." We threw a lot of ideas at him and he got excited about Achievement School District. We were involved at the beginning of helping formulate the plan (personal communication, June 16, 2017).

In 2014 StudentsFirst, the organization that would later merge with 50CAN and which B. Schaeffer also identified as working with 50CAN, donated \$15,000 to Senator Smucker's campaign (Pennsylvania Department of State, 2017).

Policy Origination

Two themes emerged about the origination of ASD: policy selection from other working laws, and ideology. Several respondents mentioned other states that had policies similar to ASD (Achievement School District in Tennessee and Recovery School District in Louisiana) as the policy's inspiration. J. Cetel also mentioned Massachusetts as a state that offered examples of state intervention and increased flexibility (personal communication, June 16, 2017). One respondent in and around education IOs at the time saw ASD as a policy stitched together from previous Pennsylvania reforms such as the Education Empowerment Act (personal communication, June 13, 2017).

Ideology factored heavily in several interviewees' descriptions of what drove ASD to the state education policy agenda. Respondents that worked closely with Senator Smucker to craft the legislation talked about the need for definitive consequences for schools that produce low outcomes for several years. The head of one of the intermediaries that supported ASD stated:

We have tried multiple ways to turn [schools] around, but absent something with teeth from the state, it became apparent that the turnaround just wasn't going to happen in and of itself, and so the problem really was to incentivize and, in some cases, force some improvement at the local level (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

J. Cetel echoed the sentiment, saying that the state needed the policy equivalent to a "hammer" to influence districts and schools to change (personal communication, June 13, 2017). Other interviewees described ASD as a push for increased charter presence in the state. Interviewee speculation of what drove ASD ranged from a national focus of movement conservatives (R. Cowell, personal communication, January 30, 2017), to a possible attempt to rescue Philadelphia charters from closure (K. Foster, personal communication, June 13, 2017), to a thinly veiled attempt to promote charters absent strong evidence for their effectiveness to affect student achievement positively (B. Schaeffer, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

The Achievement School District suffered, according to interviews, due to both its lack of public visibility and the public's familiarity with, and distaste of, similar policies. On the one hand, respondents mentioned the state's deeply held belief in local control of schools as a reason that ASD never left the Senate. On the other, the state's history of reforms such as the Educational Empowerment Act appeared to leave a stain on further state intervention via ASD. The lack of additional resources to assist schools placed within ASD was viewed as a reason for

suspicion for the policy's ability to turn schools around (B. Schaeffer, personal communication, March 3, 2017), just one of the ways these policies were related.

Case Analysis

Problem Stream

For the Student Weighted Basic Education Funding (SWBEF), no interviewee appeared to suffer under the illusion that the state's funding structure during the hold harmless years was good education policy. If anything, the reference to the state's lack of a true funding formula was conveyed with shame. That explanation would go a long way in explaining the large coalition of groups that formed in order to put a funding formula in place. Even absent a formula, the Great Recession and the subsequent cuts to education budgets exasperated school districts that changed either due to increased enrollment or the increase of student populations that required additional resources to educate (e.g. English Language Learners).

Respondents were less unified on the problems that Achievement School District purported to address. The terms "failing" or "struggling" in describing schools were mentioned numerous times. Pennsylvania education policy has a long history with state intervention of underperforming schools, but those policies appeared to do as much to highlight the inadequacy of state intervention as they did to show the needs of individual schools. J. Cetel conceded that arguments against the bill had a nugget of truth to them:

Why the heck should the state do a better job? They would be taking away local control.

The Department of Education already manages Cyber School, which is terrible.

Technically Philadelphia is under state control and they would argue that it has not gotten better. I would say that certainly it is a lot better than it used to be, but basically they

would say why the heck would the state do a better job. We're just replacing one bureaucracy with another (personal communication, June 16, 2017).

To J. Cetel's point, in the 2015/2016 Pennsylvania School Performance Profile, Pennsylvania Cyber CS was given a grade of 52.5 out of 100 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). Apart from the capacity of the state government or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the distress of individual schools was a common theme.

The public reporting of individual school data assisted in student outcomes becoming a better-defined problem in the state. Pennsylvania had also set up an independent office to provide reports on the financial status of each district. The Independent Fiscal Office's (IFO) mission is to provide funding projections and politically neutral fiscal analysis to the state public and legislators in order to assist, "...their evaluation of policy decisions" ("About IFO," 2017). The combination of statewide reporting via federally mandated accountability systems and the IFO helped focus attention to "chronically failing" schools (K. Foster, personal communication, June 13, 2017).

Policy Stream

For both the SWBEF and ASD, stakeholders drew heavily off of Pennsylvania's policy history while explaining each policy selection. The funding model came out of recommendations from the Basic Education Funding Commission, and the commission's report details the state's past use of weights assigned to student characteristics (BEFC, 2015). Stakeholders discussed the selection of weighted student funding as obvious due to its use in the past. R. Cowell explained that even stretching back to Equalized Subsidy for Basic Education in the early 1980s, the formula recognized that different dollar amounts were needed to educate students with varying needs (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Although a number of participants understood the Achievement School District bill in relation to past state intervention policies, the majority of those interviewed referenced other states' recovery districts as ASD's inspiration. Respondents mentioned Tennessee's Achievement School District most commonly. A review of other state's recovery districts (*Real Accountability, Real Results*, [PennCAN, 2015]) assisted in introducing the idea to Senator Smucker, according to J. Cetel (personal communication, June 16, 2017).

Policy entrepreneur. Both policies had key legislative supporters, but succeeded on being pushed on the agenda due in large part to the work of active IOs. The Campaign for Fair Education Funding was cited time and again as an influencer and a representation of the public mood. Groups such as the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools (an organization that sued the state over funding adequacy) were joined by the Urban League of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Association of Public Charter Schools, the state PTA, and a number of faith-based advocacy groups ("Campaign Members," 2017). This coalition benefited from having a newly elected governor that campaigned strongly on education funding as well.

A coalition also participated in the push for ASD, including (among others) a number of chambers of commerce, StudentsFirst, and PennCAN (J. Cetel, personal communication, June 16, 2017). The individual work of PennCAN stands out as being significant to Senator Smucker's bill. Once introduced, Smucker coupled the ASD policy with the problem of struggling schools and a state mood that seemed disinclined to provide schools with significant increases in money without additional accountability (to be discussed in the next section).

Politics Stream

When asked about why advocates focused on weighted student funding as a policy option, B. Schaeffer explained,

Usually you do sort of a political analysis. You have to look at who has control of the legislature. In this case it was the Republicans, but they couldn't get anything done without the sign-off from a Democratic governor, so they needed to have some kind of bipartisan sign-off on this, some kind of coalition was going to have to work (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

It would appear that Governor Wolf was both an impetus to policy change and an agent dictating the type of that change. Wolf's election, as described in the interviews, energized intermediary groups and signaled a fresh start to the funding discussion.

The power of the massive coalition paired with a change in governor made for a convincing political landscape for funding. Advocates for ASD attempted to capitalize on the financial mood by pairing the concept of additional funding to schools with the promise of accountability that comes with the threat of school takeover. Some Republicans in the legislature viewed Governor Wolf as willing to invest in schools regardless of performance, and groups like PennCAN pitched ASD as fiscal accountability (J. Cetel, personal communication, June 16, 2017).

Stakeholders around education may have been wary of "unaccountable" school funds due to the impact of the Great Recession. In the years following school budget cuts, the concept of the true cost of education gained additional traction. J. Cetel painted a picture of weighted student funding being tied to performance, stating that if a school is failing repeatedly, "...we're wasting money" (personal communication, June 16, 2017). J. Bard asserted that ASD could be viewed as a cost-saving initiative, if the registrar functions were taken from individual schools and given to a central office (personal communication, June 8, 2016). Arguments continued into 2017 over the need to further change school funding and whether to address the liability of

teacher pensions. One of the heads of a group that participated in the Campaign for Fair Education Funding stated that there was an obvious fracture within the coalition over that particular issue (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

Conclusion

No one argument can explain how both education funding and recovery district policies arrived on the state agenda in 2015. Assertions for the influence of the state's teacher unions would be hard up to explain how the takeover of the School District of Philadelphia or the EEA were both passed in the state. Those that overstate the importance of a Republican-controlled (read: fiscally conservative) legislature would have to contend with the fact that Pennsylvania was given an A rating in 2013 for education spending relative to Gross State Product in *Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card* (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2014), the same year that Republicans controlled the state Senate, House of Representatives, and governorship ("Pennsylvania General Assembly," 2017).

Instead, the multiple streams framework reveals the intersection of numerous disparate phenomena and how they intersect to place items on policy agendas. Both policies "benefitted" from the Great Recession in defining the problem. For the Student Weighted Basic Education Funding formula, the cuts to education funding in wake of the recession helped to mobilize the legislature to create the Basic Education Funding Commission. The Achievement School District was pitched as a financial accountability measure and a way to cut costs of the traditional public school. Both SWBEF and ASD also had the backing of advocacy groups with clear goals. While a coalition of intermediaries and Governor Wolf both have strong cases to be the policy entrepreneur for SWBEF, ASD had both PennCAN and state Senator Lloyd Smucker in that role. The case for multiple streams as a framework is not strengthened if one group or person is

chosen over the other for identification as the policy entrepreneur. What is clear, however, is that disputes like these over the proper role for the state in funding schools and holding them accountable, was not dying down in Pennsylvania in 2017.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this state comparative multi-case study is to explore decision makers' perceptions of the many elements that led to weighted student funding and state recovery districts arriving on the education policy agendas in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. The following overarching questions guide this inquiry.

- How did a state recovery district and weighted student funding achieve consideration by policy actors in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania?
 - (a) How do policy actors describe the role of information, intermediary organizations and/or prominent individuals in the decision to recommend weighted student funding and a recovery district?
 - (b) How do policy actors describe the factors within the state that motivated the changes to weighted student funding and a recovery district?
- What similarities and trends exist between the separate agenda setting phases in Georgia, Nevada, and Pennsylvania?
- To what extent is Kingdon's multiple streams framework appropriate for explaining the arrival of these two policies on the states' education policy agendas?

While the previous three chapters addressed the first question and the sub-questions underneath, this chapter will primarily focus on the commonalities and select differences between cases, as

well as the appropriateness of Kingdon’s (1995) multiple streams framework to explain these phenomena.

The chapter will explore each of the cases as they are situated within the three “streams” that policy entrepreneurs join together in order to place a policy on the agenda (Kingdon, 1995). A chapter section is dedicated to identifying the streams as well as the policy entrepreneur. Each subsection includes a summary table for the two policies within the three states. The next section examines how well the multiple streams framework “fits” in adequately explaining recovery districts and weighted student funding arriving on the agendas in Georgia, Nevada and Pennsylvania. The final section before the conclusion contains the implications for further research.

Across-State Analysis

Problems Stream

A cross-comparison of the stated problems that each state’s recovery districts purported to solve shows a common concern for “failing” and/or “chronically failing” schools. For weighted student funding, displeasure with previous funding policies drove each to be a problem in the eyes of stakeholders. Table 7.1 shows the breakdown.

Table 7.1
Problem Stream

	Georgia	Nevada	Pennsylvania
Recovery districts	-Chronically failing schools	-Failing schools -No accountability for additional taxes	-Failing schools
Weighted student funding	-Opacity of current formula -Rigidity of formula	-Unprepared for new economy -Inequity	-Hold harmless formula -Inequity

The term “failing school” was one that consistently appeared across all states. Very rarely did participants refer to any entity outside of the individual school, an interesting point

considering the long history of states intervening to takeover entire LEAs (e.g. School District of Philadelphia). When pressed about the concept of schools failing, policy actors described a narrative of the classification of schools that has roots in federal and state policy for two decades. Although NCLB did not create the concept of separating schools into tiers (e.g. accountability for the lowest performing five percent of schools under NCLB, 2002), several participants singled out the federal reauthorization of ESEA as a watershed moment for school classification. B. Holliday, the Executive Director for the Georgia State Charter Schools Commission in Georgia, laid out the history of data reporting:

Everything sort of before 2003 and after 2003 [after implementation of NCLB]--those are two different worlds in terms of education policy... Suddenly parents and stakeholders were confronted early and often with data on how their school was performing... First the reform came, then there was all this public data available and then it got reported on more often, that's how schools were being measured suddenly, schools that no one had ever questioned whether or not they were serving kids and all kids well enough or well at all, it was really, suddenly they were being graded by the state in new ways and some times it was surprising to parents and it was reported out by the media (personal communication, January 12, 2017).

Georgia's College and Career Readiness Performance Index, Pennsylvania's School Performance Profile, and Nevada's School Performance Framework were accountability systems set up as a result of NCLB. Each system could be viewed as an indicator that, depending on the interview, is either being used "politically" in the way Stone (1988) defines it to condemn schools or in a neutral manner via regular reporting. With each school receiving grades based on

student outcomes, several participants described the concept of noticing that some schools were underperforming based on their peers (or, failing) was natural.

While recovery districts appeared to arrive in the public discourse *ex nihilo*, each of the states had some form of school funding mechanism in place, even if it was primarily providing the previous years' allotments (as was the case under hold harmless in Pennsylvania). Across states, the older funding formulas were the problem that new policies were meant to address. The symptoms of these problems, however, varied among the states. Pennsylvania and Nevada participants painted a remarkably similar picture for how each funding formula became a worsening problem. In both states, the change in population over the last decades highlighted inequities "built into" both the Nevada Plan and the Basic Education Funding Formula--the Great Recession then exacerbated the issue to extremes. Pennsylvania did not see the overall growth of student enrollment that Nevada did, but stakeholders in both states singled out English Language Learners as a growing population that required more funding to provide an adequate education: "It would be more fair, in large measure, because of consideration of different needs of different students," said R. Cowell of Pennsylvania (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Those interviewed in Georgia spoke more about the inflexibility of the existing formula or the inability for even those close to it to understand how to effectively use funds. While other states produced or relied on reports that showed the inadequacy or inequity of their education funding, Georgia's Education Reform Commission appeared to insist that the amount of money a school district was allotted was not a problem worth consideration compared to flexibility. Although Georgia was unique in identifying inflexibility as the main problem for school funding, a number of participants there and Pennsylvania mentioned teacher pensions as a source of

disquiet for state leaders. In Georgia, stakeholders both for and against education funding reform acknowledged the desire by many to adjust how teachers are compensated, with significant dollars being paid into the teacher retirement system. Pennsylvania participants talked about the power of unions in the state, and the outsized role of teacher pensions in existing inequalities between districts under hold harmless.

Policies Stream

Tennessee's Achievement School District and Louisiana's Recovery School District informed each state's recovery district policies. Tennessee's policy specifically appeared across all three states multiple times as a way to explain how policy entrepreneurs came up with specific policies. For weighted student funding, a series of reports informed commissions in all three states, as can be seen in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2
Policy Stream

	Georgia	Nevada	Pennsylvania
Recovery Districts	-Louisiana's Recovery School District -Tennessee's Achievement School District	-Tennessee's Achievement School District	-Tennessee's Achievement School District -Empower Education Act
Weighted Student Funding	-Chamber of Commerce study -Education Reform Commission	-Adequacy study -Task Force on K-12 Public Education Funding	-Past Pennsylvania formulas -Costing Out study/Basic Education Funding Commission

Respondents favored Tennessee's ASD as the inspiration to their local recovery districts due to the recognition that the circumstances that surrounded Louisiana's recovery district were unique to that setting. Unlike Louisiana, Tennessee's legislature was not emboldened to take over schools due to the effects of a hurricane. The policy communities around recovery districts in each state also share a connection via IOs and foundations. Participants in each state

mentioned advocacy groups that participated in the close-knit discussions of what each state-specific policy would look like. StudentsFirst in Georgia, PennCAN in Pennsylvania, and the Broad Foundation in Nevada are each mentioned repeatedly being at least partially responsible for the state actors' selection of recovery districts as a policy.

In the Broad Foundations' 2015-16 *Foundation Report*, the organization lists 50CAN as one of the recipients of a grant for \$100,000 or more. Michelle Rhee, the founder of StudentsFirst, was listed as a member of the Broad Center's Board of Directors in that same report (The Eli And Edythe Broad Foundation, 2016). In 50CAN's annual report, they list StudentsFirst as one of thirteen partner organizations ("Partnerships," 2016). Further, as previously mentioned, 50CAN and StudentsFirst merged in March of 2016 (Resmovits, 2016). It is understandable then, why several respondents mentioned these groups interchangeably. These groups were suggested as being a part of the policy communities around weighted student funding as well, but participants were more likely to point to reports and commissions as the primary ingredients, so-to-speak, in those "policy soups" that Kingdon (1995) references.

While interviews contained references to studies in each state, Pennsylvania's and Nevada's included several more mentions than Georgia's. Since a few participants noted the inclusion of the state's Chamber of Commerce as an influential group around WSF in Georgia, and because a Metro Atlanta Chamber representative (as well as a governor's staff member) mentioned the report produced by the organization, it was included in this analysis. The two reports produced by Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates enjoyed much greater visibility in the perceptions of those around funding in Pennsylvania and Nevada. One reason for the discrepancy might be the type of analyses.

Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates employed a set of well-regarded data inquiry techniques to examine the condition of funding in each state and project the necessary dollar amount that would be needed to achieve adequacy or equity (APA, 2006/2007). The *Smarter Funding* report produced for the Georgia Chamber, on the other hand, relied on a framework from a paper out of the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) to highlight concepts of flexibility and transparency to measure Georgia's funding system (Doyle, Hassel, & Locke, 2012). The Chamber report found that QBE was "relatively equitable" (Doyle, Hassel, & Locke, 2012, p. 8), and avoided the robust quantitative analyses found in the Augenblick studies.

While all three states included commissions that gave wider introductions of WSF, Georgia's appeared unique in this area as well. In Nevada and Pennsylvania the two legislative commissions were notably bipartisan, according to those interviewed. Nevada's Task Force (2015) included appointees by both majority and minority parties in the legislature, as well as by the state's charter schools organization and groups such as the Nevada Association of School Boards. J. Cetel described Pennsylvania's commission:

It was a bipartisan commission, and the truth is it was really successful. It was a bipartisan commission and they worked even during the transition from a Republican governor to a Democratic governor and they came out with a formula that had support (personal communication, June 16, 2017).

Georgia's Education Reform Commission, by way of comparison, was entirely appointed by the governor. Furthermore, weighted student funding was first considered by the commission because the governor requested it, according to the ERC's chair (C. Knapp, personal communication, October 31, 2016).

Politics Stream

Republicans controlled the legislatures of each state when recovery districts and weighted student funding first arrived on the three agendas. Traditional Republican ideology, however, does not help completely explain the funding changes in Pennsylvania and Nevada. In those states pressure groups helped set the agenda, as can be seen in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3
Politics Stream

	Georgia	Nevada	Pennsylvania
Recovery Districts	-Governor Deal -Status quo	-“Red Wave” ^a -Governor Sandoval	-Republican legislature
Weighted Student Funding	-Education as investment -Chamber of Commerce	-“Red Wave” -Civil Rights groups	-Governor Wolf’s election -Campaign for Fair Education Funding

^a The “Red Wave” denotes the substantial change in legislative control from Democrats to Republicans in the 2014 Nevada election (Myers, 2014)

Participants in each state described state education policy in 2015 as setting into a pattern across party lines. One staff member for a state legislator in Nevada listed policies that Republicans supported (education savings accounts, charter schools, recovery districts) and explained that Democrats supported all things public education (personal communication, August 9, 2017). In Pennsylvania, J. Cetel explained that education funding had a “monopoly” on the policy agenda for Democrats, and that Republicans were more focused on accountability (personal communication, June 16, 2017). In Georgia, meanwhile, respondents described Republicans as willing to try novel policy approaches to encourage educational innovation while Democrats were more supportive of the traditional public school, or “status quo” depending on the perspective of the stakeholder.

If viewed through this lens, with Republicans generally favoring additional accountability and/or school choice and Democrats more focused on advancing or restoring traditional public schools, then the presence of Republican majorities, as well as the active participation of Republican governors in Nevada and Georgia, are crucial to the understanding of recovery

districts on state agendas. Underlying the way stakeholders described political support for these policies was the belief that poorer performing schools, if left to their own devices, would (at best) stagnate or (at worst) continue to trap innocent children in failure. G. McGiboney, the Georgia Department of Education Deputy Superintendent for Policy, exhibited the distrust of the failing school to instigate change:

My opinion is the ones that are failing and have been failing for many years; they won't change... We can't continue to have failing schools for years and years and years, there's got to be a line in the sand somewhere... At what point and for how long do you allow a school to continue to fail? It's generational now. We have, we have parents whose children are going to the same school they went to and that school was a failing school when the parents were there. And it's still a failing school. We have some counties where the members of their local board of education attended the same schools when they were failing. And that's, that was the frustration of the governor: what point does it stop (personal communication, November 28, 2017)?

Notably, G. McGiboney relayed uncertainty that recovery districts as a policy were equipped to address the generational failure.

Although party ideology played a significant role in recovery district politics, pressure campaigns better explain weighted student funding in Nevada and Pennsylvania. The Campaign for Fair Education Funding in Pennsylvania, and the civil rights coalition that formed in Nevada both appear repeatedly in stakeholders' description of how funding could gain serious traction in states that both had Republican majorities in the legislature. One possible explanation for the strong coalitional presence in both states is the belief that inequity of the extant funding formulae

was an actionable problem. WSF had less visibility in Georgia, however, and seemed to arrive on the agenda due more to IOs such as StudentsFirst and the Chamber of Commerce.

Party ideology partly explains WSF in each state, if not the primary reason. In Georgia, the perspective of education as a financial investment had been around for years. The introduction of the Education Reform Commission's (2015) report laments the lack of return on increased education expenses, for example. In this vein, WSF is an extension of the state Republican push for viewing education in financial terms. In Nevada, M. Denis explained that the influx of Republican legislators in 2014 brought with it an expectation to make wide-scale changes, and changing the Nevada Plan became a way to follow the governor in his ambitious education reform package (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Democrats and Republicans might have viewed Democratic Governor Wolf's election in Pennsylvania, after a campaign espousing the need to restore education funding, as a signal that the state populace was ready for education finance reform.

Policy Entrepreneurs

In almost every case, the governor of each state was instrumental in tying together policies, problems, and politics in order to place these two issues on the state agendas. Table 7.4 bears this continuity out.

Table 7.4
Policy Entrepreneurs

	Georgia	Nevada	Pennsylvania
Recovery districts	-Governor	-Governor	-State Senate Education Chair
Weighted student funding	-Governor	-Governor	-Governor -Campaign for Fair Education Funding

Similar to findings of Young et al. (2010), this analysis found the role of the governor to be a powerful predictor of whether a policy stood a chance for wide consideration. Participants

described both policies in all three states as belonging to the governor, or as the direct result of his persistence. Unlike the advocacy groups that introduced myriad policies to each state's highest elected official, Governors Deal, Sandoval, and Wolf acted as, "power brokers and manipulators of problematic preferences and unclear technology" (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 74).

Even as Governor Wolf is not the sole policy entrepreneur for WSF in Pennsylvania, his election proved pivotal to the policy's introduction. Respondents that extolled the influence of the Campaign for Fair Education Funding would also credit the governor in being an active participant in advocating for school funding reform. By the nature of the office of the governor, each of the aforementioned actors was situated in a place that gave them direct access to policymakers and the levers of power to couple streams together. Only State Senator Lloyd Smucker's work to advance the Achievement School District in Pennsylvania stands out completely as an outlier.

For a more complete understanding of the place that state governors occupy within policy circles, consider the state politics within Nevada. In discussions about education policy, participants interwove the governor in any narrative about how significant legislation is debated. M. Denis, like many of those interviewed, attributed the sweeping education reform package passed in 2015 to Governor Sandoval. When asked about who introduced ASD to the state agenda, M. Denis described it as the governor's and explained that there was built-in support within his party: "All the Republicans were all on board for the stuff that the Governor was trying to do" (personal communication, March 27, 2017). Furthermore, when describing why individuals supported a change to weighted student funding, M. Denis first explained, "Well, I mean, the Governor understood it" (personal communication, March 27, 2017). This

considerable influence positions governors as ideal policy entrepreneurs within state education policy contexts.

Commonalities Across All Policies

Between recovery districts and weighted student funding in three states, a total of six separate policies are included in this analysis. Although there are strong linkages between all of the studied policies, there is little overlap between all six. Three phenomena do appear to impact an outsized effect however: the influence of state governors, the Great Recession, and the inclusion of IOs and philanthropic foundations in tight policy communities. First, the power of state governors has been covered in depth in the Policy Entrepreneurs section of this chapter previously.

Next, the Great Recession informed much of the conversation around these six policies. Coming out of a nationwide economic downturn, policy makers in all three states saw opportunities to discuss policies that would result in drastic change. The desire to identify the expected return on education investments has been discussed for decades (see Psacharopoulos, 1973/1985/1994). While participants closely linked the recession and funding changes in each case, often they also connected it with recovery districts as a balance against writing districts blank checks for additional funding. As budgets took a larger place in the education conversation, what schools did with that money became for some an element in need of accountability.

Intermediary organizations and foundations. Finally, the interviews continually highlighted the importance of IOs and foundations in policy communities around recovery districts in each state. A number of participants also saw the effects of these (and additional) groups in and around weighted student funding. Unlike the discussions around recovery districts,

however, no true consensus emerged of what groups participated. Table 7.5 breaks down participant mentions of IOs in each case state context.

Table 7.5
Participant Mentions of Intermediary Organizations

	Georgia		Pennsylvania		Nevada	
	Recovery Districts	WSF	Recovery Districts	WSF	Recovery Districts	WSF
50CAN	1		4	1		
Broad Foundation	1	1			5	
Excel in Ed	1	2		1	1	2
StudentsFirst	6	3	3		1	1
Walton Foundation	2					

Perhaps due to the absence of one group's participation in all six policies arriving on the agenda, few respondents argued any of these IOs or foundations-as-IOs coupled the two state policies. Whenever it was brought up that the group StudentsFirst was present in a large number of policy conversations, for example, more often than not the interviewee was unwilling to draw a connection, perhaps due to structural differences between the two reforms.

B. Schaeffer, the policy analyst in Pennsylvania, made the case that the two policies were in competition:

I don't know that the ASD is that connection, because you're creating another state entity, another state structure. So I would see those two almost at odds. Definitely the pro privatization folks, like the voucher folks, really like the idea of a funding formula, a student weighted formula, because that follows their argument of, we're just going to give you a voucher, and if your voucher is a little bit more because you have this extra weight, that's okay, but that's what we're going to do. If we can figure out how much this one student is, then it's easier to write the check. That has been for years (personal communication, March 3, 2017).

From this perspective, recovery districts, even as they convert traditional public schools to charters, are seen as less an expansion of school choice and instead an expansion of state bureaucracy.

Other respondents remarked instead on the difference in scope between the two policies, stating that any argument that pairs recovery districts, oftentimes dealing in dozens of schools, and state funding of all public schools was a false equivalence. If not an explicit pairing of the two policies, the connections between the aforementioned IOs and foundations paints a picture of a wider policy agenda being pursued that includes WSF and recovery districts. Table 7.6 displays the financial contributions that the Walton Foundation and the Broad Foundation made to Excel in Ed, StudentsFirst, and 50CAN in 2015.

Table 7.6
Financial Contributions from Foundations to Intermediary Organizations

Foundation	50CAN	Excel in Ed	StudentsFirst ^a
Broad Foundation	\$100,000 or higher	\$1,000,000 or higher	\$0 ^b
Walton Family Foundation	\$2,923,690	\$1,000,000 or higher	\$3,598,516

Note: Financial disclosures from the Broad Foundation (2016) and Walton Family Foundation (2016)

^a This column includes contributions to StudentsFirst and StudentsFirst Institute.

^b Broad did not report any grants to StudentsFirst in 2015. In the 2013-14, report, however, the Broad Foundation (2014) disclosed a grant of over \$100,000.

If charter schools are viewed as an integral part of a school choice reform movement funded by foundations such as Broad and the Walton Family, then recovery districts' reliance on charters can be considered an outgrowth of this agenda. Nevada's ASD, in fact, was pledged support from three groups including the Broad Foundation so that it would not require tax funds in its first year (Milliard, 2015). It is not difficult to imagine, as Roza and Simburg (2013) assert, that WSF as a policy enables school choice policies to flourish, and therefore has become a part of these IO's priorities. The fact that these policies are being advocated for by the larger family of IOs and foundations does not, however, mean that to push for one is to push for both.

Theoretical Framework Analysis

The appropriateness of multiple streams as a framework for analysis cannot be easily determined for six policies across three states. Select findings of this study do suggest, however, strong arguments for the use of multiple streams in future state contexts. There are a few issues that also require consideration before future researchers continue studying state-level policy through a multiple streams lens.

First, the weak connection between the three streams around recovery districts in each case suggests multiple streams as a helpful heuristic device. There is no lack of policies available to stakeholders with which to address student performance within schools. Selecting the reforms made famous in Tennessee and Louisiana, with no tangible history in any of the case states, runs counter to any claims of rational or incremental policy selection within the policy arena. Instead, these policies seemed to have been chosen from a number of options with the targeted assistance of IOs and foundations. Further, several participants talked about failing schools being present in the states for years or even generations. The fact that this problem might have been a condition for decades gives credence to the concept of clever policy entrepreneurs coupling problems to politics and policies.

Problem definition with recovery districts in each case made use of common indicators. The regular reporting by each state's accountability measure provided stakeholders an opportunity to first declare schools as failing and then to declare failing schools as a problem. These indicators were used politically, possibly bolstered by the fact that Excel in Ed lists "A-F School Grading" as a signature policy in the 2015 *Annual Report*.

Second, the speed that recovery districts arose to prominence in each state is noteworthy. Instead of incremental changes being made until a policy is considered, the recovery districts

each experienced a rapid increase in notoriety due to the actions of individuals. Most striking was the Nevada case, where actors described the Achievement School District as being pushed through the legislature without the vetting that opposition actors usually perform. In each state, stakeholders described limited knowledge of recovery districts until it was formally introduced in their state context.

Third, the influence of such a small number of policy actors placing recovery districts and WSF on the agendas resembles Kingdon's (1995) description of policy entrepreneurs. In Georgia, the governor advocated personally for the Opportunity School District, and set up the Education Reform Commission while also requesting they review weighted student funding. In Nevada, an individual introduced weighted student funding and the Achievement School District within a large education reform package after legislative control shifted towards Republicans. In Pennsylvania, large coalitions had formed to push for funding reform, but it took the election of a sympathetic governor to eventually be placed on the agenda. One Pennsylvania State Senator was similarly given credit for putting the Achievement School District on the legislative agenda. Governors in all three states wielded immense influence with these two policies, consistent with other state applications of multiple streams (Edlefsen, 1993; Elrod, 1994; McLendon, 2003; Lieberman, 2002; Stout & Stevens, 2000).

Additionally, in all three cases IOs and foundations played significant roles in the policy entrepreneur space. The fact that Pennsylvania's Achievement School District was placed within the policy arena without (and perhaps in spite of) the help of the governor gives credence to the concept of IO's "surfing" the policy not only for possible problems, as Boscarino (2009) asserts, but also to possible champions. It is impossible to conceptualize all of these policies gaining notoriety without the help of the groups such as StudentsFirst and the Broad Foundation. Newer

iterations of multiple streams that describe IOs as more active than simply participating in policy communities or a part of pressure campaigns allow for this phenomenon to be explained by the framework (see: Ackrill & Kay, 2011; Rozbicka & Spohr, 2016; Weber, 2014).

Apart from the explanation of the position and function of policy entrepreneurs, the cases around weighted student funding are a worse fit for the multiple streams framework. This argument is most evident in Pennsylvania and Nevada. In both states, a narrative was established where a problem was realized (both inequity and inadequacy in Nevada, primarily inequity in Pennsylvania), and a policy was offered as a solution to said problem (student funding via weighting unique characteristics). The policy was relatively new to Nevada, but having been introduced in a 2006 report, state policy actors had almost a decade to debate its merits before being put on the state agenda. In Pennsylvania, formations of weighted student funding had been present for decades, consistent with Weir's (1992) and Ness' (2008) critique of multiple streams' use of the policy stream when a previously enacted policy exists or arrives in increments.

Unlike in Georgia, the governors in Pennsylvania and Nevada did not appear to be selecting a policy from a number of possibilities, but rather addressing a well-known problem with a well-known policy. Georgia, interestingly, is a good candidate for a multiple streams understanding of its selection of policy solutions due to the fact that (a) inequity was not publically determined to be a problem in the state and (b) the policy did not have high visibility. The "problems" of transparency and rigidity in Georgia's funding mechanism seemingly arrived at the same time that the solution did, a key provision of multiple streams.

Another unique facet of Georgia's political landscape shows a possible weakness in explaining these cases only using multiple streams: the politics stream. By the time this case began, Georgia had not experienced a legislative turnover in a decade. The state was solidly

Republican, with a governor beginning a second term when the two policies were introduced. It would be difficult to argue that there was any noticeable change in the mood of the populace towards school funding or failing schools at that point. A policy entrepreneur need not couple all three streams together, but the Georgia case perhaps highlights that the absence of a stream can be overcome by the influence of a powerful individual.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study highlight several implications for further research. First, this study added to the body of research that shows the connectedness of disparate IOs in state education policy to a limited number of foundation “hubs” (e.g. Scott & Jabbar, 2014). What is less discussed, however, are the actions of these groups that cannot be quantified via a measure such as campaign contributions. For instance, the influence of StudentsFirst on Georgia’s policy arena can be counted by way of generous financial contributions to legislators, the payment for a stakeholder trip to New Orleans, and the funding of a statewide campaign for the Opportunity School District. In Nevada, conversely, participants in and outside the governor’s office described the unique position that a single representative from the Broad Foundation was in, pitching the governor on Achievement School District. This position was available to the Broad Foundation regardless of the fact that there is no evidence that this group has contributed any money or targeted research to Governor Sandoval’s campaigns.

IOs and foundations are active participants in shopping policies to legislators, as evidenced by the claims of current and former employees. DeBray et al. (2014) show how IOs have been dynamic in providing research and information to policy actors in the discussions around charters. One former member of an active IO in Pennsylvania explained their organization’s work in lobbying:

Our primary sphere of influence was the legislature, and that's just because obviously you can't do much of anything in education policy if you can't get a law passed, so that was our number one, and obviously, as an organization, we targeted those legislators who had direct influence over legislative policy, so those were our legislative leaders, in both the House and the Senate, and also the education committee, to a greater extent really (T. Barrett, personal communication, March 3, 2017).

J. Cetel explained that PennCAN was less focused on grassroots campaigns, because, "really the target is lawmakers" (personal communication, June 16, 2017). Additional research on the influence of IOs in state politics will have to expand the way researchers describe this interaction between groups and policymakers beyond financial and/or research contributions.

Second, and related to the first implication, the work of these IOs and foundations in three states with few similarities requires a new conception of centralized education policies. Recovery districts have been touted as the way to decouple individual schools from the central office bureaucracy in order to encourage innovation, by way of example. This decentralization of decision-making is a central tenet of the school choice movement. There is an irony, then, in a limited number of groups with a common agenda being uniquely responsible for placing this single decentralizing policy on state agendas in three states that have few obvious similarities. Building on the work of McGinn and Street (1986), often the concept of centralization is discussed as solely a spectrum of power between the state and the individual, "But centralization-decentralization can be seen not only as a continuum but also as a way to describe the locus of power of groups and organizations vis-à-vis the state" (McGinn & Street, 1986, p. 472). In this understanding, IOs and foundations wield immense power. This *New Centralization* as I call it is not the state or federal government corraling power via mandates, but exerts

influence via markedly similar decentralization policies. New Centralization could help explain the almost uniform encouragement for district flexibility found in the state Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) implementation plans, for example.

Third, this study displayed how state lawmakers bolstered the case for recovery districts via federally-mandated accountability measures, labeling low-performing schools as “failing.” It has been clear since the implementation of NCLB that state accountability systems act as a signal to stakeholders around schools (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004). Similarly, Breakspear (2012) found that ranking education systems via international benchmarks (e.g. PISA) has led to widespread policy change. In the United States, feedback from indicators such as accountability systems has the power to mobilize interest groups and encourage drastic changes to the public school establishment (McDonnell, 2013). This “politics of bad news” as Moffitt and Cohen (2010) dub it, was specifically built into the way NCLB designed the accountability measures, according to the authors.

This study adds to the understanding of the politics of bad news. It has long been held in the policy literature that disparate actors can see the same indicator and draw dramatically different conclusions based on value judgments of how societal structures ought to function (e.g. McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The politics of bad news, however, asserts that that publication of data at all draws the attention to the poorest performing schools. Phi Delta Kappan (2017, p. 26) has reported this phenomenon, stating in the 2017 PDK poll report, “Awareness of a few poor schools can diminish the ratings of all schools together.” Future researchers ought to consider this concept to the way stakeholders utilize new financial transparency regulations under ESSA implementation. As states are required to report on the per pupil expenditures at each system and school, it is possible that this feedback will result in the introduction of drastic financial

accountability measures in the coming years. State education agencies would be wise to apply context in how this powerful data will be displayed for the public.

Finally, weighted student funding's current iteration deserves close attention. This policy arrived on state agendas ostensibly on the merits of equity. Quantitative analyses will be able to bear out if this turns out to be the case upon application. Although no action has been taken on WSF in Georgia by the writing of this study, the case offers a warning to those who expect increased equity in funding. Without a change in governance structure codified in state law, school budgeting in Georgia would continue to be decided at the district level. If districts are simply given different amounts of funding with no state requirements on programs with which to spend it, it is conceivable that equity would decrease as districts could direct more funding to schools "on the brink" of failure or simply to those highest performing schools if they didn't have any underperforming schools. Paired with the fact that equity did not garner as much attention from interviewees in Georgia as other perceived issues, and researchers would be forgiven for expecting less than total equity.

Conclusion

In 2015, Nevada and Pennsylvania stakeholders debated the merits of weighted student funding in order to address the well-documented, quantifiable shortcomings of each state's education funding mechanisms. The Great Recession along with the knowledge of rapidly shifting demographics within the states' schools requiring different levels of funding assisted motivated governors in changing the discussion around funding and placing WSF on the state agendas. In both of those cases, this study demonstrated a strong connection between the problems that were present and the solutions presented.

In Georgia, by way of comparison, participants described a weak connection between the stated problems and the policy offered as the solution. Instead, the work of the Chamber of Commerce and StudentsFirst with a powerful governor placed WSF as the primary topic of consideration for a governor-appointed education commission. This study demonstrated that pattern (IOs and foundations working with a small number of policy makers) as the primary explanation in all three states' introductions of recovery districts as well.

Findings from this study affirm the need to continue studying the influence of intermediary organizations and foundations, state accountability measures as policy instruments, and weighted student funding as a vehicle for equity. This study also deepens the body of knowledge around the application of the multiple streams framework on the state level. The framework illuminated several elements of the agenda setting process, but struggled to explain policy arenas with a well-established history of a single policy, as was the case in Nevada and Pennsylvania with weighted student funding. Based on this cross-case comparison, the multiple streams framework offered immense value specifically in explaining the arrival of policies with previously lower visibility onto state agendas.

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APPENDIX

List of Campaign for Fair Education Funding Participating Organizations

A+ Schools
Action United
AFL-CIO of PA
Allies for Children
American Federation of Teachers-PA (AFT-PA)
Building One PA
Congregations United for Neighborhood Action (CUNA)
Cross-City
Education Law Center
Education Matters in the Cumberland Valley
Education Policy and Leadership Center
Education Voters-PA
Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce
Keystone State Education Coalition
Lutheran Advocacy Ministries
NAACP of PA
PA Ass'n of School Business Officials (PASBO)
PA Ass'n of School Administrators (PASA)
PA Ass'n of Rural and Small Schools (PARSS)
PA Ass'n of Intermediate Units (PAIU)
PA Budget and Policy Center
PA Business Council
PA Chamber of Business and Industry
PA Coalition of Public Charter Schools
PA Council of Churches
PA Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC)
PA Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN)
PA League of Urban Schools (PLUS)
PA Municipal League
PA Partnerships for Children
PA PTA
PA School Boards Ass'n (PSBA)
PA State Education Association (PSEA)
PennCan
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT)
PA School Librarians Association
Philadelphia AFL-CIO
Philadelphia School Partnership
POWER (Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild)

Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)
Public Interest Law Center of Phila. (PILCOP)
Research for Action
Urban League of Philadelphia