

**The Dismantling of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1980-2014**

by

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To my former students.

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## ABSTRACT

In the last thirty years we have seen a flurry of school reforms (e.g., charters, school choice, vouchers, NCLB, Race to the Top, mayoral control, emergency management, statewide recovery school districts, etc.). However, most researchers have studied such reforms in isolation from the other rather than as symptoms of broader change, especially in the way that we govern schools. A historical analysis, this study seeks to understand school governance change by examining the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) since 1980, a single urban school district in which most of the school reforms mentioned above have been implemented. I situate the study within the overall history of public schooling in the United States and use urban regime analysis to highlight how politics—especially informal political arrangements—influences and sustains governance change. Analyses reveal that there are five key school reforms that have culminated in the dismantling of Detroit’s traditional school governance system and the emergence of a possible third wave of school governance change in U.S. history. Case studies of *mayoral takeover* (1999-2004) and the *Education Achievement Authority* (2012-present) tell the story of how policies gradually eroded local control and weakened the *traditional governance regime*, enabling the rise of new educational actors to support governance change. I argue Detroit is a case study of Jeffrey Henig’s idea of “the end of exceptionalism,” the notion that public schooling is losing its special status as a closed system of government and being reabsorbed into general-purpose government. The shifting of *who* controls schools has also resulted in school battles that occur within the racial resonances of postwar Detroit. I conclude the study with a discussion on neoliberalism as a possible framework for further understanding the logic behind

contemporary school reform and the lessons drawn from this study: a stern warning about the structural crisis that has developed under such policies and a call for a better politics around education if we are to have any success in improving urban schools in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

During a visit to Detroit Public Schools (DPS) in 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that the DPS was “ground zero” for education reform. Appointed earlier that year by President Barack Obama, the secretary told reporters that Detroit was New Orleans only without Hurricane Katrina, which had wiped out most of the city’s schools four years ago.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the secretary was describing a school district in one of the most economically depressed cities in the nation, a city portrayed as desolate, abandoned, and in ruins. The DPS was shouldering a crushing \$300 million deficit and suffered from chronic low achievement. Most of its fourth and eighth grade students were unable to score at a basic math level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the lowest performance in the history of this particular standardized test.<sup>2</sup> Even more devastating, only 16 percent of DPS eleventh graders were proficient in math and 37 percent were proficient in reading on the Michigan Merit Exam (MME).<sup>3</sup> A 2003 report declared that DPS was arguably the worst school district in the nation

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<sup>1</sup> See “Detroit Schools ‘Ground Zero.’” *The Washington Times*, May 14, 2009, accessed January 31, 2015, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/may/14/detroit-schools-ground-zero/>; Claudio Sanchez, “New Orleans Enters the Charter School Era,” *NPR*, August 29, 2014, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2014/08/29/344318608/new-orleans-enters-the-charter-school-era>.

<sup>2</sup> The NAEP is the largest nationally representative assessment of what American students know and can do in various subject areas including mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, U.S. history, and Technology and Engineering Literacy (TEL). See Robin Erb and Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “Detroit Students’ Score Record Low on National Test,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 8, 2009, accessed January 31, 2015, <http://archive.freep.com/article/20091208/NEWS01/91208020/Detroit-students-scores-record-low-national-test>.

<sup>3</sup> The MME is Michigan’s minimum-competency test required for all high school students in 2008 and beyond. As required by No Child Left Behind, the MME is used to measure Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

with a 21.7 percent graduation rate.<sup>4</sup> Although graduation rates were reportedly on a steady rise around the time of Duncan’s visit, DPS nevertheless faced dire circumstances: decades of poor academic achievement, more budget cuts, layoffs, school closures, increased classrooms, incidences of violence in the hallways, and volatile disputes around efforts to change the system.<sup>5</sup>

The Education Secretary implored DPS to consider reforms that were working in cities like Chicago. Duncan had first-hand experience reforming Chicago’s schools since he had served as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Chicago Public Schools. He claimed to have increased student performance and graduation rates in Chicago by leading an aggressive reform agenda that included closing underperforming schools and opening more than a hundred new schools supported by public-private partnerships.<sup>6</sup> Michigan’s governor, Jennifer Granholm, agreed with Duncan’s message telling the press that DPS’s turnaround was within reach. She had recently appointed the school district’s first emergency manager, a leader Granholm believed would enact the types of reforms that had “transformed” Chicago.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, such combined federal and state attention and pressure on reforming DPS seems unprecedented. However, by 2009 Duncan and Granholm were merely joining a long line of reformers and national and state efforts designed to overhaul the public school system of Detroit, particularly regarding the ways schools are governed. This dissertation argues that Detroit has been the site of some of the most dramatic school reforms since the Progressive Era nearly a century ago. Indeed, the relentless flurry of policy initiatives experienced by Detroiters reads like a catalogue of 21<sup>st</sup> century reform efforts: accountability, high-stakes testing, schools

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<sup>4</sup> This particular graduation rate is from the Gates report. See Data Driven Detroit, *State of the Detroit Child: 2010* (Report, Detroit, Michigan, August 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Depending on methodology, the DPS graduate rate ranged from 21.7 to 44.5 percent for the class of 2003. The true graduation rate has been a point of contention for years. See Data Driven Detroit, *Detroit Child: 2010*.

<sup>6</sup> Press Room/Senior Staff, “Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education—Biography,” last modified February 5, 2015, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www2.ed.gov/news/staff/bios/duncan.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Detroit Schools ‘Ground Zero.’”

of choice, mayoral control, No Child Left Behind, charter schools, contracting with private education providers, emergency financial management, and most recently, a recovery school district. Seemingly unconnected with one another, I argue that taken together these “innovations” have essentially dismantled Detroit’s century old system of a local administrative board, arguably the most lasting legacy of the Progressive Era. Called the “one best system,” by David Tyack, the days in which the school board and its superintendent made educational decisions and enforced educational policy are a thing of the past.

Most researchers have studied these initiatives in isolation from one another, thus missing the overall transformation of Detroit’s public schooling system. As Jeffrey Henig has observed, “most accounts fail to capture the underlying nature of the change.”<sup>8</sup> This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of what Henig calls a “seismic” shift in school governance, a broader movement of structural change likely to have consequences well beyond Detroit in shaping public schooling for the twenty-first century.<sup>9</sup> Examining this transformation is necessarily a study of *who* has the power to make educational decisions in Detroit, thus this dissertation also seeks to make sense of “some of the most high-stakes political battles,” a byproduct of the social struggles and conflicts that invariably accompany changes in who governs.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, this dissertation is an effort to extend Jeffrey Mirel’s seminal study of schooling in Detroit, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System*.<sup>11</sup> Mirel argued that there was a time, however, when Detroit and its school system thrived. At the turn of the twentieth century,

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education; The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907-1981, Second Edition* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).



in response to the socioeconomic and cultural changes of the new industrial era, a small group of elites transformed the city's schools from a ward-based system to a small nonpartisan school board in 1916. The transformation and the school board's consensus on key policies contributed to DPS's rise as one of the world's finest school systems.

During this period, millions of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were flocking to the great industrial cities like Detroit looking for better economic and social prospects. The public schools, Mirel argued, provided a largely good and effective education for the children of these first generation Americans for two reasons. First, industrialization and the automobile industry led to a burgeoning economy enabling Detroiters to amply fund public schooling. Second, Detroit's business establishment, labor unions and immigrant groups supported the school board's initiatives, thus providing a political consensus regarding school reform not seen in other cities. As a result, DPS's school board was able to implement nearly every important educational reform initiative of the Progressive Era. This broad political consensus greatly contributed to, as Mirel claims, Detroit's national reputation as having one of America's, if not the world's, best public school systems.<sup>12</sup>

However, beginning in the Great Depression, the consensus that supported the schools slowly dissolved, breaking up over funding issues and curricular debates. The honeymoon between business and labor ended when fiscal resources became limited in the 1930s. The school budget and teacher salaries in particular were contentious issues: the business leaders of the Progressive Era battled for cutbacks on salaries and the "fads and frills" of school, while organized labor defended higher spending on education. While typifying national political divisions during and after the Depression that pitted New Dealers against conservatives and labor

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

unions against business leaders, the city's economic woes after the Great Depression contributed to political divisions over how to fund Detroit's schools and how to spend those funds.

Dramatically altering the racial composition of the city and its schools, the migration of Blacks from the Jim Crow South to Detroit after WWII<sup>13</sup> would also lead to tensions and ultimately the breakup of the political consensus that had once supported how DPS school leaders governed and represented its constituents. As early as the 1940s, Black civic leaders joined with White liberals and labor leaders using class-based discourse to form a coalition in support of educational reforms, often in opposition to business. However, African Americans would soon develop concerns specific to the education of their children, putting a strain on the coalition. Schools quickly became segregated due to, in part, housing tactics such as restrictive covenants that kept Blacks concentrated in the poorest and most densely populated sections of the city. Consequently, African American children most often attended the oldest schools, raising concerns about facilities among the African American community.<sup>14</sup> As Whites moved to the outer ring of the city and the metropolitan area expanded,<sup>15</sup> their children attended newer schools and thus further increased both racial segregation and concerns over inequitable facilities. As the Black population continued to grow, increasingly they became an important voting block and a significant member of the coalition that supported DPS. Indeed, by the 1950s, partnerships between the NAACP and organized labor such as the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the

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<sup>13</sup>In 1930, Blacks were 7.7 percent of the population. By 1950, they were 16.2 percent of the population. See Thomas J. Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 23.

<sup>14</sup>Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 187-188; Also see Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Between 1954 and 1960, Detroit lost nearly 90,000 jobs that contributed to White flight. (Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 26.)

Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) forged a powerful liberal-labor-black coalition in support of addressing educational inequalities and the public schooling of *all* children.<sup>16</sup>

However, in the early 1960s, amidst rapid inflation, the need for better school facilities, organized labor's demands for improved teacher salaries, and a soon-to-be Black majority in the city's public schools, would put pressure on this coalition of school supporters. While the liberal-labor-black coalition benefited from the growing support for the civil rights movement—one newspaper admonished residents “Don't Let Detroit Become Another Little Rock<sup>17</sup>—the different and competing goals of its members proved to be its undoing, particularly after the riots in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>18</sup>

For example, by 1963, though the majority of city residents were White, the majority of students in the DPS were Black, which increased the difficulty of getting voters to pass school funding proposals.<sup>19</sup> The year after the Detroit riot (or rebellion) of 1967, school and union leaders campaigned for the largest tax increase for public schools in Detroit history. However, working class Whites rejected it by a large margin, marking a major turning point in both Detroit's finances and its educational coalition. Mirel argues, “Never again would large numbers of white working-class voters support a tax increase for the Detroit public schools.”<sup>20</sup> Race—not class—became the major political dividing force in Detroit, fracturing support, and positioning business, labor, Blacks, and working class Whites in different camps regarding schools issues.

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<sup>16</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 186.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243

<sup>18</sup> One survey of over three hundred young people in Detroit revealed the extent to which the city's job market had narrowed the opportunities of Detroit's Black youth. At the time of the riot, between 25-30 percent of young blacks (aged 18-24) were out of work. Some also refer to the riot as a *rebellion*, which launched “a revolutionary black press, media, and theology” that was a turning point in the political history of the Motor City. (Sugrue, *Origins*, 26 and Thompson, *Whose Detroit?*, 85.)

<sup>19</sup> By 1960, Blacks were more than a quarter of the population and the city remained geographically divided between Blacks and Whites: “two Detroits.” Racial discrimination confined Blacks to Detroit's oldest and worst housing areas and further contributed to Blacks' already deep distrust of Whites and White institutions. (Sugrue, *Origins*, 23, 257.)

<sup>20</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 313, 325.

The fault lines dividing these camps grew wider, exacerbated by industrial transformation, suburbanization, and the national break-up of the New Deal and New Society coalitions in the 1970s and 80s. Mirel points out that the hopes of the early 1960s were shattered by the 1970s, reflecting the overall national mood: “The hopes for a great society, for a newer world, lay among the ruins of that turbulent decade.”<sup>21</sup> In 1974, when the Supreme Court struck down desegregation plans in *Milliken v. Bradley*, ruling that busing could only occur within Detroit and no further, it essentially took the wind out of the NAACP’s decades long focus on schools as providing the main leverage for civil rights and racial justice.

Moreover, by this time, manifesting from a deep discontent with the lack of racial justice and progress, Black Nationalists were able to thwart the DPS school board’s plans for integration and instead demanded for community control, breaking up the district into several wards each with its own school board. Mirel interpreted decentralization as a crisis that in part reflected the political failure of the period. “From the ruins of the coalition emerged a new politics of education,” argued Mirel, which—quoting from Joseph Featherstone—was dominated by “only groups pursuing self-interest to the edge of self-destruction.”<sup>22</sup> The key point for this study is by the 1980s the coalition that once supported the Detroit Public Schools had disintegrated. Detroit’s school board no longer shared wide support, an educational coalition to protect or support the formal governing structure that in the past was responsible for making all educational decisions. As Mirel wrote, “The schools had simply become another arena where embittered interest groups battled for supremacy.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 369.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Mirel quotes Joseph Featherstone who studied decentralization in New York City: “Sooner or later discussions of these matters come round to the need for national political coalitions for which there would seem to be no realistic immediate prospects. The decentralization crisis is in part a reflection of this political failure. Behind the struggle for community control of the ghettos lies the somber truth about America in 1969; here, as St. Paul says, we have no continuing city, only groups pursuing self-interest to the edge of self destruction.” (Ibid, 370.)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

In short, by 1980, DPS no longer had a strong and enduring education coalition. Clarence Stone has argued that in postwar cities such coalitions—what he calls *urban regimes*—with a level of high *civic capacity*, or cooperation across sectors, increase the chances of implementing, organizing, and sustaining institutional changes, changes needed, in theory, to improve urban life, or in our case, the performance of urban schools.<sup>24</sup> Stone’s idea of urban regimes has helped me to rethink the more distant as well as the current history of efforts to improve DPS by reforming its governance. I use it to frame the last thirty years of school politics in Detroit, arguing that the urban regime that sustained the “one best system” of local control in educational decision-making continued to weaken over time, enabling more powerful political agents, particularly those in the governor’s office and the state legislature, to infiltrate decision-making that was once exclusive to the DPS school board and its constituents (i.e., parents, students and voters).

Since 1980, the Detroit Public Schools is a case study of the dismantling of the corporate governance model. During this period, politicians and reformers have sought to shatter the Progressive era school system, a bureaucratic organization in which the school board, superintendent, and district office is at the heart of the institution. I see the case of Detroit as a forecast of what Jeffrey Henig calls the “end of exceptionalism in American education,” in which the “special status” of public schools—autonomous and independent from general-purpose government—is coming to an end.<sup>25</sup>

This rearranging of political order has been central to the tension and conflict within the Detroit community. Of course, there has always been conflict around public education in Detroit—a matter of interest groups vying for a limited resource—but I argue that the nature of

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<sup>24</sup> Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Jeffrey Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013).

the conflict has changed over the last thirty years, reflecting the broader social, economic, and political changes at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the 1950s, the battles and struggles over schools were rooted in issues of classism. Then in the 1960s, and persisting into the early 1980s, the conflicts gradually shifted to matters of race. Today, I argue, public schooling battles are the effects of a fundamental political reordering of the public school system, what Henig calls a “tectonic shift” in the institutional landscape of American education.

Inevitably, in the midst of disruption and change there will be some winners and losers. This dissertation tells a story of an older regime, or the *traditional governance regime*—the school board, unions, teachers, and administrators—losing out in the wake of an emerging coalition of new actors consisting of governors, mayors, legislators, education entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and foundations. Thus, this dissertation is also a political story of the social upheaval that accompanies the task of establishing a new political arrangement for a new era of public education. The battle for an equitable and quality education for all, it appears, is being fought on different terrain from that of fifty years ago.

Obviously, this study is not the first attempt to characterize this contemporary period of public education in the United States. For example, education historian Diane Ravitch has told a story about the death and life of the great American school system in which she argues that testing and choice are undermining education; it is a scathing critique of most efforts to reform schools.<sup>26</sup> Her book and her ideas have helped to launch “Save Our Schools,” a nationwide campaign against the corporate machine that is out to destroy public schools. As such, the battle lines have been drawn between two camps: those in favor of school choice and charters and those who are fighting against it. It appears to me that educational researchers have also been

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<sup>26</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

prone to situate themselves within this dichotomy. In this way, my study is distinctive. Ravitc—and others—fail to see that school governance is at the epicenter of change. My dissertation reveals that the days in which *public* schooling is defined by a publicly elected school board and superintendent who make almost all educational decisions around a local funding stream are far-gone. Thus, I offer critique from a different angle, one that recognizes the structural crisis that has resulted in the transformation of public schooling in Detroit. I also appraise the potential of a historic shift in the way that urban public schools are governed. Indeed, my study seeks to bring to light the institutional shift that is occurring and generally ignored in contemporary debates about education policy.<sup>27</sup>

I present my dissertation in seven chapters. Chapter Two sets the historical context for my study by using existing literature on how school governance transformed over 175 years of public schooling in America. I argue that the literature indicates that new patterns of school governance are emerging and Detroit is a case study of those major shifts at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Chapter Three presents how I studied school governance change in Detroit. While historians usually embed their method in the footnotes and introduction, I actually adapted some tools and concepts from qualitative research that are worth articulating especially because I argue that historical analysis should play a greater role in framing educational policy. I also discuss in this chapter how I use urban regime analysis to support my observations.

Chapter Four provides an overview of five major reforms that I argue have completely altered Detroit's educational landscape and the ways in which decision making occurs. It

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<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Henig, Patrick McGuinn, and Paul Manna are the few scholars who argue that school governance is understudied. See Henig, *End of Exceptionalism*; See Patrick McGuinn and Paul Manna, ed., *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to Schools Reform* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

provides the reader an impression of key policies, events, and figures that over time led to the fragmentation of Detroit's school system, making a case for my argument, and setting a critical backdrop for the next two chapters.

Chapter Five and Six are case studies of two school reforms that I have identified as key to dismantling the traditional public school system: mayoral takeover and the Education Achievement Authority (EAA). Chapter Five argues how mayoral takeover in 1999-2004 was the “beginning of the end,” a period in which the state significantly weakened the traditional governance regime that enabled the rise of a new regime to support and maintain school governance change. Chapter Six argues how the EAA formed in 2011 definitively marked the end of one era and the beginning of another, one in which the new regime—in the aftermath of dismantling the public school system—searches for new order.

Chapter Seven concludes the dissertation by discussing how Detroit is a case for the end of exceptionalism. I also present how neoliberalism might be a possible framework to further examine the structural crisis as a context in which policymakers and reformers respond to and make decisions. I end the chapter by discussing the lessons that can be drawn from this study to various audience members including policymakers, educators, activists, educational historians, and researchers.



## CHAPTER II

### School Governance Change in the United States, 1840 to the Present

There is nothing new about Americans tinkering with school governance. The concept of changing the formal structure of governance—the process or act of ruling or managing—to improve schools has deep roots in American political and intellectual history.<sup>28</sup> Although there has never been a national system of schooling in the United States, there have been two patterns of school governance in the history of American public schooling: what I call *village school governance* and *corporate school governance*. Emerging in the antebellum period, the *village school system* was a loose arrangement of rural schools managed by laypersons or the committeemen of disparate “villages” spread across the United States. Remarkably, the village school system resulted in a relatively literate population by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new generation of educational reformers argued that this system no longer served citizens in the advent of rapid industrialization and urbanization in America. These reformers of the Progressive Era thus set out to transform the nineteenth century village school system into the large, bureaucratic, and centralized systems of the twentieth century, a new managing arrangement that quickly spread across the country. The reformers, an elite group of business and educational experts, sought to control and professionalize schools through the establishment of a school board at the top of an hierarchical system. Impressed with the order and efficiency of new technology and forms of organization that were ushering in a modern era,

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<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich, “Mayor-centrism in Context,” in *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*, ed. Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

reformers believed that they could consolidate the village schools into what David Tyack has called the “one best system” to address an increasingly urbanized population.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the new corporate school system reflected an organizational model found in, for example, the division of labor in factories, the hierarchy and coordination in modern businesses, and even the punctuality of the railroads at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup>

By the early twentieth century, corporate school governance would come to dominate as village schools across the U.S. were centralized into large bureaucratic *school districts* with a board of directors (i.e., the board of education) and a chief executive officer (i.e., the superintendent) at the top of educational decision-making. The school district was also a relatively autonomous government “with dedicated revenue streams and nonpartisan modes of selecting schools boards” seen as a way to buffer schools from the politics of urban machines.<sup>31</sup> Corporate school governance became the unofficial national system as almost all large districts and smaller ones adopted it by mid-century.

By the 1960s and 1970s, however, social and demographic changes in U.S. cities and attacks on the quality of education, especially among the historically disadvantaged and poor led to severe critiques and attacks of the “one best system.” Arguing that the Progressive Era reforms had led to an overly centralized and bureaucratic schooling system, a new wave of reformers sought to once again alter the formal structures of school governance. It is the corporate school system, I argue, that politicians in Michigan and Detroit have gradually dismantled in order to usher in a new governance model at the dawn of the twenty-first century—the central story of

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<sup>29</sup> David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 28.

<sup>30</sup> See Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993) and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

<sup>31</sup> Henig & Rich, “Mayor-Centrism,” 6.

this dissertation. This chapter sets the context for this transformation by using existing literature on how school governance formed and changed over approximately 175 years of public schooling in America. Overall, this chapter provides a synthesis of historical perspectives, concepts, and recurring themes (i.e., consensus and conflict) in which I situate my study and seek to contribute to understanding the nature of new and emerging pattern of school governance and the implications for future policy in cities like Detroit.

### The Village School System, 1780-1890

In the early national period, most Americans lived and taught their children in rural areas.<sup>32</sup> The village school system was informal and local, thus men like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush envisioned and proposed a statewide system of common schools and universities. However, they failed to persuade most Americans about the need for public schooling when most were satisfied with their village schools.<sup>33</sup>

When his common school bill failed in Virginia for the third time in 1817, a frustrated Jefferson attributed the bill's defeat to people's "ignorance, malice, egoism, fanaticism, religious, political, and local perversities."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, early nineteenth century Americans resisted common schooling.<sup>35</sup> Devoted to local control and individual choice, many were not willing to pay new taxes for other people's children and were skeptical of "new institutional regulations by the central government."<sup>36</sup> Still, Carl Kaestle has shown that while it took almost half a century before Americans would agree to legislate a common schooling system, political leaders and

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<sup>32</sup> The early national period spanned from 1780-1830. See Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>35</sup> It was not until a century later did Virginians adopt a statewide free school system for white children. (Ibid.)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

educationists had long imagined a system of tax-subsidized schooling for all children.<sup>37</sup> By the 1830s, White Americans would nevertheless become the most literate people in the world through its “non-system” of village schools (which had grown in number particularly in northern states such as Massachusetts).<sup>38</sup> At the time, the village school system sufficed.

What made Americans change their mind? As the U.S. entered into the industrial era, it became increasingly urban as manufacturing spread, transportation networks forged, and the population significantly grew in large cities.<sup>39</sup> From 1840 to 1850, the number of immigrants entering the country in search of work increased by 240 percent.<sup>40</sup> With such a rapid increase in jobseekers, poverty became an urgent issue, along with the question of how to prepare children. Urbanization presented such vexing social problems that political leaders soon felt that a formal system of schooling was needed in order to restore social stability. Kaestle writes, “The more anxious they became about the security of their world, the more they favored mass education.”<sup>41</sup> Urbanization also transformed the countryside. The burgeoning capitalism of this period “affected the rural areas of the North as profoundly as it affected cities.”<sup>42</sup> Rural families were confronted with ever-expanding markets in which they became both producers and consumers. The countryside experienced a population drain: the local economy strained as people left for jobs in the city. Kaestle observes that by 1860, all of these forces worked to break down the rural community’s insularity from and resistance against state regulation and expenditures for

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<sup>37</sup> The early policymakers and educationists’ vision of schooling “for all,” however, did not include African American children or other non-White children.

<sup>38</sup> William J. Reese, *America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to ‘No Child Left Behind,’* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>39</sup> “Urbanization proceeded as a faster rate between 1820 and 1860 than in any other period of American history. While the total population grew about 33 percent per decade, the number of people in places of 2,500 or more increased three times as fast.” (Tyack, *One Best System*, 30.)

<sup>40</sup> Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 64.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

education.<sup>43</sup> David Tyack argues common schooling was an aggressive plan to address the “rural school problem” in the 1890s, designed to help the countryside catch up with a new world order.<sup>44</sup>

This mix of economic and social anxiety drove many Americans to change their mind and to move forward with establishing a common schooling system. Particularly during the postbellum period, with so many village schools and charity schools, the informal system proved capable of expansion, and the establishment of a single system seemed all but inevitable.<sup>45</sup> The concept of the public schooling system was a cosmopolitan solution to the problems that arose from a new era in which literally people from the old world was converging in the cities of America. Kaestle writes,

The fact that state intervention in education succeeded in this period while earlier it had failed, and the fact that it coincided with accelerating urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, suggests that there were causal connections between educational reform and social change in the years from 1830 to 1860.<sup>46</sup>

Most scholars agree that the common schools in America was borne out of the need to bring social order in the midst of a rapidly changing world and society. Riots and public disorder had become common in cities, reflecting the growing social tensions between rich and poor, native born and immigrant. A new generation of reformers, like Horace Mann, conceived a formal system of schools as “cement[ing] bonds in a world where community ties had dissolved.”<sup>47</sup> Mann summarized his vision in 1848, “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance-wheel of the social

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>44</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> The early policymakers and educationists’ vision of schooling “for all,” however, did not include African American children or other non-White children.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>47</sup> Reese, *American’s Public Schools*, 11.

machinery.”<sup>48</sup> Educational leaders like Mann set out to reform the village school system into one that would better serve the needs of a new urbanized America.

### The Administrative Progressives’ One Best System, 1890-1940

Until the 1890s, most large cities schools were governed by wards, each with its own board that had substantial powers—but “the whole mode of lay management was diffuse, frequently self contradictory, and prone to conflict.”<sup>49</sup> Too many school leaders were laymen, and their decision-making at its best was “inefficient meddling;” at its worst, “the school system was just another source of patronage and graft.”<sup>50</sup> Reformers were convinced that there was a *one best system* of education to not only improve the management of schools but also respond to the issues of urbanization. They sought to discover and implement it.

They were impressed with the order and efficiency of the new technology and forms of organization they saw about them. The division of labor in the factory, the punctuality of the railroad, the chain of command and coordination in modern businesses—these aroused a sense of wonder and excitement in men and women seeking to systematize the schools.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, for the next several decades—between 1890-1940—reformers obsessed with structural changes that would establish a “professional bureaucracy” in which “lay control was carefully filtered through a corporate school board.”<sup>52</sup> They portrayed their struggle for structural reforms as one in which unselfish and enlightened citizens were fighting against the forces of corruption, inefficiency, and ignorance.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Horace Mann, *The Republic and the School*, ed. Lawrence A. Cremin (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957), 87.

<sup>49</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 127.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

These reformers—whom Tyack calls the Administrative Progressives—believed that a corporate school board system consisting of successful businessmen would ensure efficiency and a rational and expert process of decision-making. The urban schoolmen reformers themselves were “successful men”: business and professional elites, including university professors and new school managers.<sup>54</sup> In short, the administrative progressives envisioned the professionalization of the system, including the establishment of training schools for teachers, adopting methods for examining and certifying teachers, properly classifying pupils, designing uniform courses of study, and standardizing examinations.<sup>55</sup>

From classroom to central office they tried to create new controls over pupils, teachers, principals, and other subordinate members of the school hierarchy. Although they often used the nonpolitical language of social engineers, they were actually trying to replace village forms in which laymen participated in decentralized decision-making with the new bureaucratic model of a closed “nonpolitical” system in which directives flowed from the top down, reports emanated from the bottom, and each step of the educational process was carefully prescribed by professional educators.<sup>56</sup>

In the face of “continual pressure to improve and expand public services,” it was a major shift in school governance, one in which a select professional and corporate-minded elite came to govern.<sup>57</sup>

Although the administrative progressives often campaigned their cause as “keeping the schools out of politics,” this rhetoric often obscured the actual patterns of power and privilege.<sup>58</sup> In reality, the common schooling enterprise had always been political because the majority rule dictated what was to be taught: “The whole point of common schools, after all, was to teach the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 39, 45.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 11.

same things to every white child [...].”<sup>59</sup> Reformers who were White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) males saw *their* values as key and superior to nation-building, and often cared little to incorporate the values of other groups until after WWII. As early as the 1830s and 1840s, outsider groups like the Irish Catholic clergy contested WASP values (ultimately establishing their own system of parochial schools).<sup>60</sup> Critically, what we see is, from its onset, public schools have been an arena in which culture wars have been waged, beginning with, for example, debates over religion. Later in the early 1900s, concerned more with social justice and democracy than with social efficiency, there were “reform-minded” citizens (including middle-class women, socialists, and urban activists) who fought against elite control.<sup>61</sup> In short, changing school governance, especially in terms of *who* made educational decisions, was not without conflict or struggle.

Still, by 1940, the administrative progressives had nearly won all of the school wars, successfully transforming the public school system from a loose arrangement of ward boards to a single small board of elites that had “enormous, decisive power in hiring teachers, awarding contracts for building and supplies, and overall policymaking.”<sup>62</sup> The corporate model of schooling—controlled by a homogenous group of elites—would dominate the greater part of the twentieth century.

#### Dissatisfaction with the One Best System, 1960s & 1970s

By any number of criteria, this system was remarkably successful. First, it had developed the capacity to at least manage—if not educate—almost all of America’s children and youth.

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<sup>59</sup> Reese, *America’s Public Schools*, 37.

<sup>60</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> Opposition from such groups did influence the Progressive Era movement in that many educational innovations “originated with the grass roots and only later came under the authority of the experts and professionals who ran the schools.” (See Reese, *America’s Public Schools*, 127, 136.)

<sup>62</sup> Reese, *America’s Public Schools*, 178.



Indeed, in the post-WWII years schools had become the custodial institution for American children and adolescents. For example, by 1960 over 86 percent of 14- to 17-year-olds were enrolled in high school.<sup>63</sup> The U.S. was among a handful of nations to provide free and universal secondary education—virtually the only nation to have done so in the midst of the Great Depression. Second, while certainly contested, many scholars have argued that the one best system was a high return investment.<sup>64</sup> For example, Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz argue that it was no coincidence that the twentieth century was the “American Century” in which a mass educated workforce helped to produce and sustain a flourishing economy.<sup>65</sup>

However, lying below the surface was a growing criticism of the system, particularly the ways in which America’s schools failed to provide a quality and equal education. The turning point was after World War II. Arthur G. Powell and colleagues observe, “If the prewar years were marked by general agreement about what a mass system of high schools should do, subsequent decades saw unremitting criticism of the system that had been built, and unprecedented divisions over schools’ missions and priorities.”<sup>66</sup> Dissatisfaction with the one best system would erupt during the 1960s and 1970s as efforts to improve public schooling rose to the top of the agenda for Americans across a wide range of political, economic, and social interests.

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<sup>63</sup> Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>64</sup> Michael B. Katz, Samuel Bowles, and Herbert Gintis are prominent scholars who have contested the success of the common schooling system. In contrast to scholars who make the connection between human capital and the strength of the U.S. economy, these scholars (with Marxist orientations) critique capitalist forces, arguing how capitalism is incompatible with building a democratic school system. Capitalism is the reason why common schooling was fundamentally and inevitably unequal. See Michael B. Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 279.

The famous ethnographic studies of Elmtown high school and Middletown high school in the 1940s began to shed light on the lack of rigor in America's public schools. Both studies found that the average American high school was little more than a social center.<sup>67</sup> The majority of students at Elmtown and Middletown spent most of their time at school socializing and participating in a variety of extracurricular activities and sports. Some scholars have argued that the very nature of the American high school was a "stroke of genius": as industry and technology changed and society no longer needed a huge labor force, high schools were a holding place for restless adolescents.<sup>68</sup> But the studies offered a darker conclusion regarding the average American student: "one could not expect much in the way of academic effort."<sup>69</sup> Soon, however, Americans would no longer accept the mediocrity of a public schooling system established by an earlier era.

When the Soviets successfully launched Sputnik in 1957, Cold War anxieties reached an ultimate high. Alarmed and threatened by the Soviet Union's military and scientific achievement, political leaders criticized the lackadaisical nature of the America's public schools. Soon the goal of increasing secondary school enrollments in mathematics and science gained bipartisan support in Washington as the Eisenhower administration passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958.<sup>70</sup> This unprecedented federal intervention underscored society's deep dissatisfaction with the quality of the one best system and the growing perception that major reforms were needed in order to keep up with a modern and technological economy.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> August de Belmont Hollingshead, *Elmtown's Youth, The Impact of Social Classes on Adolescents* (New York: J. Wiley, 1949); Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown, a Study in [Contemporary] American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1945).

<sup>68</sup> Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, *Shopping Mall High School*, 275.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>70</sup> Reese, *America's Public Schools*, 225-226.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

The burgeoning Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s would also illuminate the inequalities of public schooling. Preoccupied with social efficiency, the Progressive Era reformers believed that one goal of education was to scientifically determine and sort children into different educational tracks. One administrator at the time pictured the educational system as having the very important function of a selection agency, “a means of selecting the men of best intelligence from the deficient and mediocre.”<sup>72</sup> But tracking would, for instance, place Black students of the Detroit Public Schools into “the academically deficient general high school curriculum at *twice the rate* of white students, thus dooming them to four years of watered-down required courses and life adjustment-style electives.”<sup>73</sup> Millions of Blacks who migrated to central cities from rural areas between 1940-1970 in hopes for better opportunities found themselves in educational wastelands. Racial discrimination and de facto segregation resulted in Black pupils disproportionately attending the worst schools. African Americans and other American minorities had long been dissatisfied with the one best system. Finally, in Detroit, for example, Blacks would gain some political leverage by the late 1940s and began organizing around the educational needs of their children, some of the first steps taken by the civil rights movement.<sup>74</sup>

Then in 1954, the Brown decision of the United States Supreme Court to desegregate schools gave hope to American African Americans across the country that at last their quest for educational equality had the sanction of law. The civil rights movement had also begun to prick the conscience of White Americans. In 1957, when Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus interfered with the integration of Central High in Little Rock “television cameras brought the ugliness of

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<sup>72</sup> Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, *Shopping Mall High School*, 246.

<sup>73</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 201. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

racism home to everyone's living rooms."<sup>75</sup> By the mid 1960s, it was clear that America's education system was far from equal between the races. In 1965, the federal government responded with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act enabling poor school districts to receive additional federal funding. Remarkably, once again, the federal government had intervened, launching an initiative that essentially declared that improving urban public schools was one of the prime weapons in the War on Poverty.<sup>76</sup>

While the one best system was still lauded by some as a shining model of democracy, many more were critiquing the system. Tyack wrote in 1974,

Despite frequent good intentions and abundant rhetoric about "equal education opportunity," schools have rarely taught the children of the poor effectively—and this failure has been systematic, not idiosyncratic.

Talk about "keeping schools out of politics" has often served to obscure actual alignments of power and patterns of privilege.

Americans have often perpetuated social injustice by blaming the victim, particularly in the case of institutionalized racism.<sup>77</sup>

In short, for Tyack, the "search of the one best system" had "ill-served the pluralistic character of American society."<sup>78</sup> By now, a slew of scholars had formulated theories about how the school system actually reproduced social inequality.<sup>79</sup>

Though efforts to desegregate schools through busing spread across a number of cities, the corporate school system remained largely in tact. In the late 1960s, however, Whites were still staunchly resisting integration while Blacks and minorities grew increasingly disenchanted with the slow pace of change. This discontent resulted in minorities demanding for community control as way to improve the quality of schooling for their children, a completely different tactic

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<sup>75</sup> Reese, *America's Public Schools*, 229.

<sup>76</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 270.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> These scholars include Michael B. Katz, Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, Jean Anyon, and sociologists like James S. Coleman.

than busing. In Detroit, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the Black Nationalists (who grew out of the militant faction of the Civil Rights movement) successfully resisted efforts to integrate schools, implementing community control by breaking up the school district into eight wards each with its own board. As Tyack puts it,

many members of outcast groups demanded community control by their own people in place of the traditional corporate model of governance which sought to rise above “interest groups”; they substituted self-determination as a goal instead of assimilation; they rejected “equality” if that meant Anglo-conformity [...] To many blacks the schools were not ‘above politics’ but part of the struggle for black power.<sup>80</sup>

For the first time since the early national period, government agencies entertained the experimentation of “human-scale institutions that were rooted in ethnic neighborhoods,” a major contest to the behemoth and bureaucratic one best system.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, as Americans grew increasingly dissatisfied with the one best system after WWII they called for more academic rigor and equal access to a quality education. Such demands implicated the existing structure for its failure to educate all children well, challenging the basic foundations and assumptions of the one best system, and nowhere more vociferously than in America’s cities.<sup>82</sup> Critically, for the first time since the Progressive Era, reformers were again conceptualizing urban school reform vis-à-vis tinkering with governance. In many cities, this was a brief experiment with community control. In Detroit, community control lasted for ten years before it returned to a single-elected school board. Furthermore, during this period, we witness an unprecedented authority and influence of the federal government in the matters of public education. Thus, we can argue that a new pattern of school governance begins to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>81</sup> Bruce Fuller, “The Public Square, Big or Small? Charter Schools in Political Context,” in *Inside Charter Schools: The Paradox of Radical Decentralization*, ed. Bruce Fuller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>82</sup> Tyack, *One Best System*, 269.

materialize during this period in which the one best system was under attack. This dissertation seeks to understand this new pattern of school governance that is still unfolding.

### Consensus and Conflict: Examples from Chicago, Newark, and New York City

To set the context for the Detroit story, it is useful to briefly review the story of issues around school governance change in other related urban centers, such as Chicago, Newark, and New York City. By reviewing these particular works that detail the educational histories of these cities, we can see shared patterns of consensus and conflict around the transition from village school governance to corporate school governance. Chicago, Newark, and New York City represent the dilemmas most industrial cities faced after the Depression, a postwar context in which educational decisions were made.<sup>83</sup> First, cities began to experience significant financial decline and thus school boards competed for increasingly scarce revenue. Increases in the population and school age population added additional stress to the fiscal challenges cities and schools faced mid-century. Second, while ethnically diverse at the turn of the last century, northern cities grew more *racially* diverse as more Black migrants from the South joined immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, and South America who sought to live in northern cities. This increase in numbers of racial minorities in cities combined with the out-migration of second generation White ethnics further exacerbated and complicated the existing social, political, and economic issues after the Great Depression.

Jean Anyon's description of the Newark Public Schools in the early 1900s is strikingly similar to Mirel's description of DPS.<sup>84</sup> Between 1860-1929, Newark was one of the most wealthy industrial cities in the nation and its school system was also one of the finest. An elite

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<sup>83</sup> Other postindustrial cities include Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Milwaukee, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Diego, Washington, D.C.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

school board dominated by businessmen erected palatial school buildings that came to symbolize the city's power and wealth. Like Detroit, however, the Great Depression had a grave effect on the city, a critical turning point after which Newark's schools would steadily decline. Like so many other post-industrial cities, Newark's ability to raise money for education waned considerably after the 1930s. Newark's fiscal crisis, Anyon points out, is one key factor that would eventually put tremendous strain on the corporate school system.

In her account of Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Dorothy Shipp argues how conflicts among interest groups put pressure on Chicago's corporate school system.<sup>85</sup> Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Commercial Club of Chicago (CCC), a group of elite businessmen, began to wield great influence in shaping the city's school district. In addition to radically transforming school governance into a centralized bureaucracy, the CCC also proposed a system of vocational schools. Their vocational school plan, however, drew protest and conflict from organized labor, who contended that working class children should also receive a liberal arts curriculum. Shipp argues that the Progressive Era was riddled with contests between Chicago's businessmen and labor. And while the CCC failed to create a system of vocational schools, Chicago's business elite won most of the school battles, most importantly the establishment of a corporate model of schooling. This model and the idea that large urban school systems can be substantially improved through better managerialism has remained essentially unchanged in Chicago.

Gradually, however, in the latter half of the twentieth century, conflicts between business and labor would shift to tensions between the corporate school governance decision-makers and racial minorities. By the 1960s, under the leadership of Mayor Richard Daley, business and labor had actually become governing partners in the Democratic machine. Shipp argues that while teachers were winning their rights under the Daley machine, this corporatist governing

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<sup>85</sup> Dorothy Shipp, *School Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880-2000* (University Press of Kansas, 2006), 14.

arrangement largely ignored the intensifying racial cleavages of the city. Like Detroit, after WWII, the Black population in Chicago had doubled.<sup>86</sup> By the 1960s, Chicago's schools were segregated and unequal and even though Blacks were one-third of the teaching force, "most were relegated to second-class status throughout Daley's tenure."<sup>87</sup> But rather than confront race head on, Mayor Daley called upon the Commercial Club leaders who addressed the issue by framing it as a need for holding schools accountable and *not school integration*. Shippis writes, by the early 1980s,

[...] integration was beside the point. Chicago's corporate leaders had already reframed the public school problem and were seeking to convince black members. They believed that the central problem was a lack of consequences for adults when students did not perform well (accountability), rather than the racial bias of a system that routinely gave black and Latino students an inferior education.<sup>88</sup>

Shippis' history of the conflict between various interest groups demonstrates how issues of race ultimately put pressure on the one best system. But because of the paths not chosen—integration, community control, etc.—racial resonances continue to affect the politics of education reform in Chicago today.

Similarly, in the end, Newark Public Schools also failed to address the racial issues that came along with population change. This began as early as the 1920s when two thirds of Newark's children were either foreign or children of immigrants.<sup>89</sup> Anyon contends that the single largest factors to Newark's failure was the inability of the corporate school governance elites to properly respond to immigration:

[...] the failure of the schools to respond successfully to poverty and cultural difference even in a period of relative affluence and strength reveals a phenomenon that continues to grow in Newark and other American cities: the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>89</sup> Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling*, 54.



power of social class—poverty—and racial difference to overwhelm educational efforts to reform schools.<sup>90</sup>

In Anyon's interpretation of schooling history, the pattern was set early on. Thus, when southern Blacks migrated to northern cities they were a "racially" different population infiltrating the city. And, this time, with the combined effects of redlining, suburbanization, and White flight that resulted in concentrated Black poverty, this rendition of population change further exacerbated the system's plight to educate non-Whites well. Overall, Anyon argues, the decline of Newark's schools can be traced back to national, state, and local policies—the general disinvestment of the city and absence of corporate accountability—that disenfranchised the nation's urban ethnic residents from political power. As with Shipp's account, Newark's racial history continues to cast a long shadow on efforts to reform its schools today, with poverty and racial isolation making it especially difficult.

In her history of New York City Public Schools, Diane Ravitch conceptualizes such pressure and conflict on the one best system as *school wars*.<sup>91</sup> As early as the 1840s, there was such a clash between the Public School Society, a group of elites who began the first common schools in New York City, and the Irish Catholic clergy. Even though the Public School Society espoused a non-sectarian philosophy, in truth, nonsectarianism was really sectless Protestantism. Thus, the Irish Catholics, one of the largest immigrant groups in the early nineteenth century were angered by the overtly Protestant nature of public schools and launched "one of the bitterest debates in the history of American education."<sup>92</sup> Ravitch argues that the Protestant elites failed to see how they privileged their own native status over that of new immigrants. The Catholics went on to establish their own system of parochial schools.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>91</sup> Ravitch, *School Wars*.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 20.

Over a century later, when Black and Puerto Rican children became the majority of the New York City school register, the stage was set for yet another school war. Echoing the separatism of the Catholics in the 1840s, Black militants demanded for community control.

Ravitch writes,

Once they agreed that the system consciously conspired not to educate their children, it became imperative to wrest away control of the schools. The corollary to this view was the inference that black children *would* learn in a black-controlled school, where there was no clash between the culture of the teachers and the pupils.<sup>93</sup>

With racial riots exploding in Newark in 1964 and Detroit in 1967, New York Mayor John Lindsay, not wanting to be responsible for any incident that would escalate into a riot, urged the school board to decentralize. Like so many other large urban school districts at the time (including Detroit), the racial conflict resulted in brief experimentations with decentralization. Ravitch, however, emphasizes how the conflict between Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and the White corporate school system were manifestations of reoccurring tensions between the culture and ideology of the native versus the non-native, underscoring Tyack's idea that the one best system has always ill-served a pluralistic America.

Again, these case studies serve as examples of how by the 1960s and 1970s the corporate school system came under fire. Chicago, Newark, and New York City are stories about how there was enough agreement to forge and develop the corporate school governance model in the early twentieth century. However, achieving consensus became significantly more difficult in the postwar economy—especially as conflicts were increasingly racial in matter—challenging the basic assumptions of this system. Although Shipp's makes the case that Chicago largely ignored the issues concerning the educational equality of African American children, professionals, and

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 310.

citizens, in total the uprising and protests of Blacks and minorities in urban centers across the nation put these issues at the forefront of policy and research. These accounts indicate that the history of racial conflicts—or the ideological and cultural school wars—not only put pressure on the system that ultimately led to change but it also continues to cast a long shadow on the racial politics of urban school reform today. Thus, these case studies help to situate my analysis of school governance change in Detroit, particularly as repercussions of postwar policies (e.g., disinvestment of the city and the concentrated poverty of Blacks and minorities) and today’s “school wars.”

### Changing Conceptions of Public Schooling in the Twentieth Century

Connected to the understanding of how Americans came to lose faith in the one best system are the changing conceptions of the purpose of public schooling. Just as economic, technological, demographic, and social changes put pressure on the system, so did it change people’s views on the purpose of public schooling as more came to believe that the Progressive Era system no longer addressed the needs of the society. “Americans have traditionally considered their schools mechanisms for social improvement,” observes Patricia Albjerg Graham.<sup>94</sup> While this has remained true, ideas and beliefs about what social improvements are needed have changed over the century. While there are volumes written about the varying purposes of public schooling over time, relatively less is known about how this has ultimately impacted school governance change. Thus, it is useful to briefly synthesize some of the relevant literature on this subject in order to situate Detroit’s story as an analysis of a new emerging pattern of school governance as a response to changing educational goals.

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<sup>94</sup> Patricia A. Graham, “Assimilation, Adjustment, and Access: An Antiquarian View of American Education,” in *Learning From the Past: What History Teaches Us About School Reform*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Maris A. Vinovskis (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

Graham has conceptualized public schooling's purpose shifting from assimilation to adjustment to access in the twentieth century. In the first quarter of the century, "schools performed the astonishingly successful transformation of taking many children whose family culture and often whose family language was foreign and converting them in to adults who were Americans."<sup>95</sup> Graham argues that schools were able to do this because parents were keen on acclimating their children in a new land while political leaders were concerned with producing loyal Americans. Thus, in response to the social need for figuring out what do with immigrants, reformers primary saw the purpose of public schooling as a process of assimilation.

Then in the middle of the century, when public schooling became a holding place for youths, Graham argues that public schooling's purpose was largely characterized by the idea of adjustment, "adjusting" children to what they will do *later* in their adult life, which was often tacitly limiting. For instance, women were largely expected to become homemakers and thus would go through a corresponding curriculum. During this era, the perceived need for society was a socially well adjusted next generation, but to many scholars, including Graham, it was actually a poor interpretation of what Dewey meant as "teaching the whole child."<sup>96</sup> The anti-intellectual sentiment of this era would soon come under attack in the 1960s. If poor and minority children were to have any chance for social mobility, they needed formal instruction in reading and mathematics not "life adjustment" curriculum. When the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, it essentially ushered in a new era focused on *access* in which reformers became concerned with raising student achievement in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. By the end of the twentieth century, the demand for universal academic achievement had become a norm. Consequently, Graham argues, reforming

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 14.

the schooling system around universal access has largely been a struggle to *undo* the ideology and practices of progressive education.

Along the same lines, David Labaree, argues that at least three different educational goals developed over the century—democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility—are often in competition with each another, complicating today’s efforts to reform schools.<sup>97</sup>

Achieving democratic equality, the goal of preparing students for citizenship, was the most compelling justification for the founding and early diffusion of common schools in the mid-nineteenth century. The Progressive Era then produced a second goal, social efficiency, which aimed to prepare students for work. In the late 1990s, as people gravitated towards new ideas about markets and schools, they established a new goal of social mobility—preparing *individuals* to compete for social positions. This third educational goal, Labaree contends, has appeared to trump the other goals, changing the nature of education from a public good to an almost private good—a drastic shift from the acquisition of knowledge for the welfare of society to the acquisition of knowledge as a credential. Like Graham, Labaree also argues that there is a struggle to reform the system around this new educational goal, but partly because the other two goals—at least ideologically and politically—are in conflict with the social mobility goal.

While Graham and Labaree’s concepts allude to how changing educational goals might affect the nature of the system, Michael W. Kirst explains how different goals during different periods influence which *institutions* are chosen to govern schools.<sup>98</sup> Kirst argues that the “major alterations in the socioeconomic environment” affect which institutions govern schools and the “accumulation of policies over many years embodies a set of preferences about which

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<sup>97</sup> David F. Labaree, “Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals,” *American Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (1997): 39-81.

<sup>98</sup> Michael W. Kirst, “Who’s in Charge? Federal, State, and Local Control,” in *Learning From the Past: What History Teaches Us About School Reform*, ed. by Diane Ravitch and Maris A Vinovskis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 26.

institutions should govern what components of a policy area.”<sup>99</sup> Yet, “institutional choice” is “complex, uncertain, and subject to continual political change.”<sup>100</sup> Kirst argues that at times certain institutions are chosen to temporarily settle a debate among the numerous and conflicting goals that the public has for education. Not surprisingly, Kirst identifies 1900-1920 and 1965-85 as two periods that experienced the most significant changes in institutional choice. And like the other scholars, Kirst sensing new changes on the horizon, argues that contemporary reformers are actually advocating that the institution of a democratic government has become inappropriate for schools and rather the market is a better new institutional choice.

Scholars like Kirst indicate that new educational goals change the institutions that we select to govern our schools. On the other hand, David L. Kirp has shown that in other instances institutions like the Supreme Court have *intervened* and changed the course of educational goals first.<sup>101</sup> For instance, Southern states were notably the last to establish public schools and especially did little to finance the education of Black children. Therefore, “correct[ing] those gross inequities” and “to bring about ‘simple justice’ nationwide” became a theme of educational policy and constitutional law after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the 1954.<sup>102</sup> Kirp makes the case that a critical set of legal battles in the twentieth century have transformed the purpose of public schooling. Kirp’s argument highlights the growing influence of institutions like the Supreme Court and other higher levels of government (e.g., municipal, state, and federal) in public education.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>101</sup> David L. Kirp, “Changing Conceptions of Education Equity,” in *Learning From the Past: What History Teaches Us About School Reform*, ed. by Diane Ravitch and Maris A Vinovskis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.,97.

In summary, in the wake of dissatisfaction with the one best system, new educational goals have arisen but not without struggle and conflict, particularly in large urban school districts that must operate within the reality of postwar economies and the racial resonances of failed Great Society programs. As the literature indicates, the gradual breakup of consensus in the twentieth century have resulted in competing goals but nevertheless are shaping contemporary efforts to change school governance. The next section explores what patterns of school governance emerged after the great contests against the corporate school system in the 1960s and 1970s.

### Emerging Patterns of School Governance, 1980-2013

In spite of serious challenges to the one best system, by the early 1980s the Progressive Era system was still largely intact. Graham likened America's public schooling system to a battleship.

“Large, powerful, cumbersome, with enormous crews, these giants of the ocean go where they are told to go by some distant authority, which presumably understands better than anyone on the ship, including the captain where and why they should go. Maneuverability is not their strength.”<sup>103</sup>

To many, the large bureaucratic structure of school was just not responding quickly enough to the many calls for change. However, in the next decade, there would be innovations like vouchers, parental choice, and charters that were efforts to better respond. By the mid 1990s, there were all sorts of “new, specialized ships” that were addressing the calls for change better than the single battleship model.<sup>104</sup> Increasingly, the one best system was regarded as an antiquated model and reform efforts, particularly in urban school districts, were largely about dismantling the corporate school system left over from an earlier era. This final section of the

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<sup>103</sup> Graham, *Assimilation, Adjustment, and Access*, 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

chapter explores some of the literature attempting to explain the “breakup” of the battleship and new and emerging patterns of school governance at the turn of the century.

The flurry of reform initiatives beginning in the 1980s can be categorized into at least three strategies of educational reform: standards-based reform, differentiation of schools, and market-based reform.<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, however, they are all interrelated or connected in some way, together having influenced the extraordinary restructuring of the public schooling system.

According to Diane Ravitch, standards-based reform originated with the 1983 report *A Nation At Risk*.<sup>106</sup> The report claimed, “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.”<sup>107</sup> Thereafter, “much of the energy in large-scale change in public education has focused on raising standards.”<sup>108</sup> The standards movement was also born out of the economic anxiety of that time and spun into the report was the idea that the nation’s global competitiveness depended on a better-educated workforce, a prevailing belief that continues to impact school reform today.<sup>109</sup> With the ascendancy of President Ronald Reagan, standards-based reform was also a conservative backlash against the radical and freewheeling reforms of the late 1960s and 1970s—the call for a *back-to-basics* education.<sup>110</sup> Then, the core elements of standards-based reform was incorporated into federal policy beginning with President Bill Clinton’s Improving America’s School Act in 1994 to President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Over time, however, Bulkley explains that the goals of the standards-based reform evolved

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<sup>105</sup> See Katrina E. Bulkley, “Portfolio Management Models in Urban School Reform” in *Between Public and Private: Politics, Governance, and the New Portfolio Models for Urban School Reform*, ed. Katrina E. Bulkley, Jeffrey R. Henig, and Henry M. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2010).

<sup>106</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>107</sup> National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 5-6.

<sup>108</sup> Ravitch, *Death and Life*, 16.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Fuller, “Charter Schools in Political Context.”



from establishing a rigorous curriculum and instruction to creating a high-stakes accountability system based on the outcomes of assessments tied to standards.

Ravitch thus distinguishes these as two movements: standards and accountability. In a scathing critique, she argues that the standards movement was “hijacked” by the accountability movement, arguing that President Clinton’s Goals 2000 legislation—codifying the testing of student performance as a way of keeping schools and districts accountable—shifted efforts away from raising standards since the late 1950s to the extreme testing culture of the 2000s. Both conservatives and liberals had come to believe that accountability via testing would lead to better outcomes. NCLB brought the accountability concept home by requiring all schools to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) or else be sanctioned. Ravitch argues that the rewards and punishment system of NCLB resulted in a culture in which teachers were punished, vilified, and fired, schools were closed, and unions were hard-pressed to do anything. NCLB was also the largest expansion of federal authority of schools in American history.

Ravitch also explains how the accountability movement actually originated from aggressive efforts to reform city schools. As early as 1987, the hard-lined, uncompromising, and unrelenting top-down managerial approach of NCLB was already being tested and tried in New York City. Anthony Alvarado, the superintendent of District 2 in New York City, drew national attention when he dramatically turned around his district, replacing two-thirds of his principals and half his teacher workforce when they failed to use his methods.<sup>111</sup> In 1998, Alvarado would replicate his method in San Diego.<sup>112</sup> Significantly, Ravitch points out, there was already considerable replication of what would become the NLCB approach and a network of individuals and policy actors that would be increasingly called upon in the 2000s.

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<sup>111</sup> Anthony Alvarado utilized a reform program called Balanced Literacy. (Ravitch, *Death and Life*, 36.)

<sup>112</sup> Alvarado’s motto in San Diego was “1) Do it fast, 2) Do it deep, 3) Take no prisoners.” (Ravitch, *Death and Life*, 53.)

At the same time, large urban school districts were also experimenting with a second reform strategy: differentiation of schools. This was an obvious shift away from the common school model and towards schools that were distinct in some way.<sup>113</sup> Magnet schools, smaller themed schools, and charter schools claimed to serve several different educational purposes, including “offering a range of schools within a system of choice, providing schools that incorporate an array of instructional practices and thus service the varied needs and interests of students, and giving opportunities for educational innovation.”<sup>114</sup> Notably, the Gates Foundation pushed towards differentiation of schools through their five-year initiative to fund the creation of new, small, and autonomous high schools.<sup>115</sup> Other philanthropies sought to fund charter school, which would gradually evolve into broader strategy of utilizing the market to improve schools.

Market-based reform, the third reform strategy, actually originates during the empowerment era in the 1960s and 1970s. The original purpose of charter schools was to enable a group of parents, educators, or community activists to establish an independent school in order to be more innovative, effective, and responsive to special needs.<sup>116</sup> According to Fuller, for the first time, reformers began to “experiment with human-scale institutions that were rooted in ethnic neighborhoods.”<sup>117</sup> The rise of Reagan and conservatism, however, would soon redirect the movement, steering “empowerment” in quite a different direction and laying the foundations for the market-based movement. In the 1980s, *true* empowerment was redefined as to mean when all parents could choose the school of their own choice. Fuller writes,

The new policy discourse dropped the earlier progressive elements of community empowerment and democratic participation, aimed at transforming society, in

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<sup>113</sup> Bulkley, “Portfolio Management Models.”

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Bruce Fuller, “Introduction: Growing Charter Schools, Decentering the State,” in *Inside Charter Schools: The Paradox of Radical Decentralization*, ed. Bruce Fuller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6-7.

<sup>117</sup> Fuller, “Charter Schools in Political Context,” 18.

favor of a story about “devolving” the state’s authority and delivering Adam Smith’s dream of ever-widening market choices. Conservatives argues that a lack of accountability and competition were the culprits, not family poverty, unequal school financing, or uneven teacher quality.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, Reagan conservatives increasingly viewed charters, vouchers, and other open enrollment schemes as a means of pressuring “bureaucratic school managers to compete and be held *directly accountable* to parents.”<sup>119</sup> Influenced by Milton Friedman’s 1955 *The Role of Government in Education*, which opposes government regulation and champions the private marketplace as a solution for increasing both access to and the quality of schooling, reformers actually began to envision the marketplace as a new institution to govern public schooling.<sup>120</sup>

In 1989, at the first “Education Summit” in Charlottesville, President George H.W. Bush and fifty governors agreed that school choice would be a major component to their national agenda to reform public education. The education summit and subsequent events like it would lead to a widespread (and bi-partisan) belief that creating a market of public schools for parents to choose from would lead to improved educational opportunities and outcomes. Two years later, in 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter law, marking the beginning of a market-based movement that would quickly spread across the country, particularly in large urban centers.

In the 1990s, increasingly, advocates began to argue that market-based reform was the only way to “deconstruct the cumbersome institution of public education.”<sup>121</sup> John Chubb and Terry Moe’s 1990 book *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* was hugely influential in pinning the problem squarely on bureaucracy. They write,

[...] the specific kinds of democratic institutions by which American public education has been governed for the last half century appear to be incompatible

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>120</sup> Milton Friedman, “The Role of Government,” *Economics and the Public Interest* (1955).

<sup>121</sup> Fuller, “Introduction,” 6.

with effective schooling. Although everyone wants good schools, and although these institutions are highly sensitive and responsive to what people want, they naturally and routinely function to generate just the opposite—providing a context in which the organizational foundations of effective academic performance cannot flourish or take root. The problem of poor performance is just as much a normal, enduring part of the political landscape as school boards and superintendents are. It is one of the prices Americans pay for schooling to exercise direct democratic control over schools.<sup>122</sup>

In other words, Chubb and Moe were arguing that democratic control, the organizational foundations of school (i.e., the school board and superintendent), was actually the major barrier to improving academic performance. The market would not only singlehandedly disrupt this governance structure but also provide a new and *compatible* institution for effective schooling.

Among all three reform strategies, market-based reform has had the most obvious impact on changing school governance, but all three strands have resulted in the gradual dismantling of the corporate school system and the shaping of a new and emerging pattern of school governance.

### *Mayoral Control and Integrated Governance*

One key indicator of a new and emerging pattern of school governance is mayoral control of school boards. In the beginning of the 1990s, Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago and Mayor Thomas Menino of Boston were at the forefront of this “groundbreaking movement.”<sup>123</sup> According to Kenneth Wong and his colleagues, school boards were overwhelmed and “outmatched” by the challenges of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and as a result mayors “found themselves in a new role in relation to city schools, namely, as crisis managers.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, a driving factor behind the shift to change school governance is the mayor’s newfound role of

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<sup>122</sup> John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990), 2.

<sup>123</sup> Kenneth K. Wong, Francis X. Shen, Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, Stacey Rutledge, *The Education Mayor: Improving America’s Schools* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

reinvigorating cities where the improvement of schools is seen as a major way of improving the quality of life of city residents.<sup>125</sup> In the new era of urban school reform, city schools are not viewed as autonomous units of government but rather increasingly a part of the mayor's system-wide focus.

While Jeffrey Henig and Wilbur C. Rich describe mayoral control as the outcome of Americans losing faith in the corporate school system, reformers have also found that mayoral control can be a mechanism by which to circumvent a deeply entrenched school board often dominated by teacher union interests, which can be vehemently resistant to change.<sup>126</sup> But Some scholars have found that market-based reforms are actually predicated on mayoral control or state takeover, which greatly reduce the bureaucratic and local political processes that would otherwise hinder or compromise market-based reforms.<sup>127</sup> A growing number of states have legislated mayoral control, essentially making it possible to facilitate the aforementioned reform strategies. As a result, in many instances, corporate school governance, which once kept mayors and other political leaders from interfering with public schools, has been replaced with a new and emerging governing paradigm, which Wong and his colleagues call "integrated governance."<sup>128</sup> They write, "Within an integrated governance framework, school district governance is no longer isolated from but is incorporated into the governance of the local municipality."<sup>129</sup>

In the same vein, other scholars have observed that educational decision-making has not only shifted upwards to the local municipal level but also to the state and federal level. For example, Jeffrey Henig describes, in addition to the mayor's office, we are witnessing the rise of

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>126</sup> Henig and Rich, "Mayor-centrism," 21.

<sup>127</sup> Sarah Reckhow, "Disseminating and Legitimizing a New Approach: The Role of Foundations," in *Between Public and Private: Politics, Governance, and the New Portfolio Models for Urban School Reform*, ed. Katrina E. Bulkley, Jeffrey R. Henig, and Henry M. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2010), 277-306.

<sup>128</sup> Wong et al. *Education Mayor*.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 2.

“education executives” in the State House and the White House.<sup>130</sup> Kathryn A. McDermott suggests “the evolution of state sanctions against underperforming schools and districts in the late 1980s and 1990s” represents a substantial shift in the state role in education.<sup>131</sup> David Gamson argues that it is a combination of federal and state mandates that have essentially rendered the corporate school system ineffective.<sup>132</sup> In Douglas S. Reed’s historical study of Alexandria schools in Virginia, he contends that the United States actually aspires to build a “federal” schoolhouse, a new era in which the concept of the neighborhood school (i.e., educating all children within its attendance zone) is increasingly seen as outdated.<sup>133</sup> Scholars like Paul Manna have also explored how this unprecedented and new role of the federal government in education has actually clashed with state and local realities, seeking to explain a sort of disconnect between policies at the federal level and how the policies are actually operationalized in local and state settings.<sup>134</sup>

Critically, integrated governance has introduced—in addition to education mayors and presidents—other new educational actors into the public schooling arena, especially the role of foundations and philanthropists. For example, in the late 1990s, when Alvarado implemented his unrelenting top-down approach in San Diego, the city’s superintendent, Alan Bersin, raised more than \$50 million from the Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Broad

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<sup>130</sup> Jeffrey Henig, “The Rise of Education Executives in the White House, State House, and Mayor’s Office,” in *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the Structural Barriers to School Reform*, ed. Paul Manna and Patrick McGuinn (Washington D.C., Brooks Institution Press, 2013), 178-208.

<sup>131</sup> Kathryn A. McDermott, “Growing State Intervention in Low-Performing Schools: Law and Regulation in Three Waves of Reform,” in *Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy*, ed. Kenneth K. Wong and Robert Rothman (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 91.

<sup>132</sup> David Gamson, “Democracy Undone: Reforming and Reinventing the American School District, 1945-2005” in *Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy*, ed. Kenneth K. Wong and Robert Rothman (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 79-90.

<sup>133</sup> Douglas S. Reed, *Building the Federal Schoolhouse: Localism and the American Education State* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>134</sup> Paul Manna specially examines the ways in which NCLB has collides with local and state realities. See Paul Manna, *Collision Course: Federal Education Policy Meets State and Local Realities* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2011).

Foundation, and others.<sup>135</sup> In 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg attained mayoral control of New York City public schools, and with chancellor Joel Klein’s assistance, aggressively moved forward with making the school system a major testing ground for market-based reforms—five years later, the Broad Foundation, one of the biggest donors for market-based reforms, awarded the city with most improved urban school district in the nation.<sup>136</sup> Ravitch writes, “Never in American history had private foundations assigned themselves the task of reconstructing the nation’s education system.”<sup>137</sup>

Sarah Reckhow’s work focuses on the new role of foundations and the interrelationship between its activities and the degree of mayoral control of urban school districts.<sup>138</sup> Reckhow argues that the largest grant makers actually tout a strategy of funding *only* school districts in which mayoral control or state takeover has occurred. For instance, the Broad Foundation reported “the conditions to dramatically improve K-12 education are often ripe under mayoral or state control.”<sup>139</sup> Reckhow has found that foundations hoping to catalyze dramatic reform seek to do so in cities where “a change in governance” (i.e., mayoral control) offers an “an opportunity to shape new policies and introduce new actors into district-level decision making.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, the characteristics of new patterns of governance include mayoral and/or state takeovers and new policy actors such as foundations.

### *“The End of Exceptionalism”*

In spite of the variety of work conducted on grasping these recent changes in school governance, Jeffrey Henig has observed that the elements of change are still too often studied in

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<sup>135</sup> Ravitch, *Death and Life*, 51.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>138</sup> Reckhow, “The Role of Foundations.”

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

isolation from the other.<sup>141</sup> It is the problem of researchers narrowly analyzing components of change within their own specialized areas. In his most recent work in 2013, Henig seeks to explain the broader transformation and the underlying nature of school governance change. Seemingly chaotic, the flurry of change is symptomatic of a major structural shift. That is, Henig argues, public schooling has been gradually losing its “special status,” the ability to self-govern and remain exempt from the goals and politics of other levels of government. For the greater part of the twentieth century, public schools have been governed as a *single-purpose government*: an autonomous governing system, a closed and local arrangement of a few special interest groups, and with the single purpose of managing schools. Today, Henig explains, the whirl of school reforms are actually manifestations of a larger effort to “reabsorb” public schooling into *general-purpose government*: an open system subject to multiple levels of government in which the issue of educating children has been combined with a wider range of policy problems and issues.<sup>142</sup>

Henig writes, “The broad changes under way constitute the *end of education exceptionalism* in the United States.”<sup>143</sup> Not to be confused with “American exceptionalism” (how America’s institutions, norms, and political practices differ from other nations), Henig directs our attention to how the handling of education in the past was vastly different from the treatment of other major domestic policies. That is, historically, “Education policy in the U.S. has traditionally been seen—and treated—as different and distinct, a thing apart.”<sup>144</sup> Thus, Henig argues that the end of exceptionalism in American education means that the management of public schooling is becoming more like other domestic policy areas.

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<sup>141</sup> Henig, “End of Exceptionalism.” (Italics mine.)

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 3, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.



Indeed, the sharpest manifestation of the end of exceptionalism is mayoral control, vigorous efforts towards eliminating or weakening the publicly elected school board, which is at the crux of the corporate school system. Additionally, so-called “education executives” (i.e., mayors, governors, and presidents) are increasingly involved in educational decision-making. The new influence of the judicial branch, Congress, state legislatures, city council, and new educational actors such as foundations all suggest the emergence of a new pattern of school governance, which Henig describes as the immersion of education into general-purpose government. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1. Patterns of School Governance in the United States**

Timeline	1780-1890	1890-1950	1960s to present
School Governance	Village school governance	Corporate school governance	Emergent pattern of governance
Interchangeable terms or phraseology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>village school system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>corporate school system</li> <li>“one best system”</li> <li>Progressive era governance</li> <li>traditional school governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“end of exceptionalism”</li> <li>integrated governance</li> <li>new style governance</li> </ul>
Features	Rural; loosely organized; decentralized; “one-room schoolhouse” <sup>145</sup>	Urban; multiple schools; centralized; bureaucratic; single-purpose government; closed system	Urban; multi-systems; integration with other policy domains; integrated or general-purpose government; open system
Central actors	Laymen (i.e., local school committeemen); village community	School board consisting of professional elite (i.e., businessmen and educational experts); superintendent; teacher unions; parents	“Education executives” (i.e., mayors, governors, presidents); legislative entrepreneurs; educational entrepreneurs; multi-issue groups (e.g., foundations, business, etc.); philanthropy
Values	Local and “tribal”	Professionalism; order; local control; modernizing (domestic),	Efficiency; responsiveness; accountability; modernizing (global)

<sup>145</sup> See Tyack, *One Best System*, 15-21.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set up the context for Detroit's story in the last thirty years. Jeffrey Mirel claims that the history of the Detroit Public Schools largely exemplified the patterns of school governance in the United States: from village school governance to corporate school governance, followed by attacks on the system in the 1960s and 1970s. Does Detroit's public schooling system continue to reflect broader changes in school governance particularly in large cities at the turn of the twenty-first century?

In the last thirty years, the Motor City has experienced a flurry of reforms including mayoral control, appointing powerful emergency managers with the capacity to close schools and revise contracts with school employees, the spread of charters, and a statewide recovery school district called the Education Achievement Authority. After President Obama's election in 2008, DPS also became the poster child for potentially receiving millions of federal dollars from the newly launched Race to the Top initiative. With many parents and children opting to enroll in a myriad of alternative schooling systems (e.g., self-governing schools, charters, and open enrollment schools), the school district has shrunk by half in terms of number of schools.<sup>146</sup> Since 1999, DPS's enrollment has dropped by an astounding 72 percent.<sup>147</sup> In 2012, Detroit reportedly ranked second to New Orleans in the percentage of students attending charter schools.<sup>148</sup> With the authority of the school board suspended, many Detroiters contend that they have lost complete

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<sup>146</sup> Data Driven Detroit, "Detroit System of Schools, Then and Now," (presentation, Detroit Schools-Higher Education Consortium meeting, Detroit, MI, October 15, 2012).

<sup>147</sup> Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research).

<sup>148</sup> The seventh annual report by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools looked at the percentage of students enrolled in charter schools in large to medium sized cities using enrollment data from the 2011-2012 school year. Detroit enrolled 41% and New Orleans enrolled 76%. See Jennifer Chambers, "Detroit No. 2 in Percentage of Charter School Students, National Report Finds," *Detroit News*, Nov. 15, 2012.

control of their schools. Yet, others see Detroit as an opportunity to rebuild a school system with new actors. Are the educational conditions in Detroit symptomatic of “the end of exceptionalism in American education”? After a century in which public schools have had a “special” place in America’s government—autonomous, insulated, and sheltered from politics, at least rhetorically—are they being absorbed into general-purpose government? Importantly, can current displays of conflict and struggle, attempts at politically resisting change, be interpreted in light of seismic shifts in *how* public schooling is managed?

Although educators (and educational researchers) sense the dramatic changes to public schooling especially in light of the twenty-first century, school governance is remarkably given little attention.<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, Patrick McGuinn and Paul Manna blame the media whom they consider is more interested in sensationalizing or politicizing the debates around *particular* reforms: “Questions about governance tend not to lend themselves to stark narratives that pit ‘us’ against ‘them’ [...]”<sup>150</sup> Again, Henig argues that in the research world too often educational reforms and policies are studied in isolation from each other. Thus, my dissertation seeks to piece together a variety of reforms and episodes into the history of a single urban school district in the last thirty years, to examine the *details* of change, to characterize an emerging new era of public schooling within the context of U.S. education history, and to tell a story of transformation. Given how Detroit reflects earlier historical patterns, the Motor City makes a suitable case study to further understand school governance change at the beginning of a new century. What exactly were the factors (e.g., events, policies, social and political forces, etc.) that led to school governance change beginning in the 1980s? Who led and supported such reform

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<sup>149</sup> See Patrick McGuinn and Paul Manna, “Education Governance in America: Who Leads When Everyone Is in Charge?” in *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century; Overcoming the Structural Barriers to Schools Reform*, Paul Manna and Patrick McGuinn, ed. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 1-20.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

efforts, and who opposed? What was the nature of conflict during this period? How did events ultimately impact Detroit's school system? These questions guide the construction of a contemporary history of Detroit's public school system, a narrative from which to confirm or challenge existing ideas around school governance presented in this chapter, add to the historiography of post-Brown schooling, and most importantly to suggest what Detroit's story means for future policy. McGuinn and Manna assert, "the understudied issue of education governance should be atop the list of anyone interested in the present and future of American education."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

### Studying School Governance Change in Detroit, 1980 to 2014

This dissertation seeks to understand within the context of America's public schooling history what happened to the Detroit Public Schools in the last thirty years. I use historical methods: the periodizing and framing of events and actors, contextualizing, observing patterns of detail to make meaning of change over time and to tell a plausible story of causation. As such, Detroit provides a historical case study for a closer examination of the phenomenon of a new and emerging pattern of school governance at the turn of the twenty-first century.

In this chapter, I discuss historical methods and describe the sources that informed my study and the ways I went about using my "data." Such a methodological description is unusual in most historical studies as most historians embed their method in their footnotes and introduction. However, I have deemed this chapter necessary for two reasons. First, I have incorporated various tools and concepts from qualitative research (e.g., coding and memo writing) during the very early stages of my study that could provide a *model* for how elements of qualitative research can be useful in future historical research. Second, and most importantly, not only do we lack in general an explanation of historical methods but also how historical methods might be applied in the field of education policy. In my case, my historical case study substantiates and provides the fine grain detail of emerging concepts or theories. As I argue in the concluding chapter that history should play a greater role in the framing of educational policy

analysis and recommendations, a discussion of the virtue of the historian’s craft becomes essential for future research.<sup>152</sup>

I begin by briefly describing how qualitative methods influenced the early stages of my research and suggest how it could be taken up further in future research. Then I explain how preliminary concepts that emerged from the early phases of research in addition to the ongoing process of constructing a historical narrative enabled me to perceive how the story of DPS in the last three decades is about *school governance change*. In light of this, I explain how the later stages of my research utilized *urban regime analysis* as a concept for revealing key points about school governance change: “Good concepts illuminate significant details, and telling details point to illuminating concepts.”<sup>153</sup> For example, urban regime analysis enabled me to see more clearly the social and political conflicts around efforts to tinker with governance. In turn, these details have pointed to concepts that may be helpful for both future research and policy. I conclude with a few words regarding *plausibility* in case study research, especially in terms of how my particular case study of DPS’s recent history elaborates on a concept or theory, poses new questions, and seek alternative solutions.<sup>154</sup>

#### Early Stages of Research: Grounded Theory and Newspapers as Data

To understand my approach to the early stages of my study, I will briefly describe how I applied concepts from grounded theory design. Sharan B. Merriam writes, “Qualitative researchers are interested in the understanding of how people interpret their experiences, how

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<sup>152</sup> Kenneth K. Wong and Robert Rotham, ed., *Clio at the Table: Using History to Inform and Improve Education Policy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>153</sup> Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 255.

<sup>154</sup> Carol Lynne Fulton, “Plausibility,” in *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, ed. Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc, 2010), 683-685.

they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, as a researcher who feels that it is important to richly feature the “voices” of the actors in my study, in this sense it appeared to me that aspects of qualitative research could be a helpful entry point into discovering who and what voices were in my data. Moreover, I wanted to come to my data with a blank slate—without predetermining the problem—so that the data would tell me where to go next analytically. In other words, I would not begin with theory but rather collect and analyze data from which to generate a hypothesis (i.e., an idea of what might be happening).<sup>156</sup> While some historians may very well approach the early stages of their project in this way, concepts from *grounded theory* influenced the *specific* steps I took with collecting and analyzing my first set of data which were news articles related to DPS or school reform in Detroit between 1999-2012.

Because I was interested in discovering the perspectives of as many kinds of people as possible, I selected articles from three major newspapers in the Metro Detroit area that cover the gamut of political orientations: the *Detroit News* is more conservative than the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Michigan Chronicle* has been one of the most politically influential weeklies in the Black community since 1936. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2. Selected Newspapers**

Michigan Chronicle	Detroit News	Detroit Free Press
Established in 1936, the <i>Michigan Chronicle</i> , based in Detroit became popular news weekly serving the African American community. It was one of the first Black weeklies “to develop an editorial policy in favor of the labor movement and the Democratic Party.	Established in 1873, <i>The Detroit News</i> , circulated daily, is considered to be a more conservative paper. It has never endorsed a Democrat for president, though it refused to endorse George W. Bush for reelection in 2004.	Established in 1831, the <i>Detroit Free Press</i> is the largest daily newspaper in the Metro Detroit area. The newspaper is owned by Gannet, which also owns USA Today. It is considered slightly more liberal than the <i>Detroit News</i> .

<sup>155</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 5.

<sup>156</sup> Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory and Procedures and Techniques* (Newberry Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

After collecting a set of newspaper articles I began a process of open coding, meaning that my first glance of the data involved coding for “anything and everything.”<sup>157</sup> This was simply a process of scanning through every article and identifying key events, policies, programs, schools, figures, statistics, and themes and creating a very simple codebook to keep track of whether certain “themes” were reoccurring year to year. For example, I noticed that between 1999-2005 the code “race” appeared more frequently than other codes, bringing my attention to a heated debate among Detroiters over whether mayoral takeover was a “racist tactic” or not. This led me to establish a sense of various actors’ racial perspectives around school reform. Influenced by the practice of memoing, my first drafts were in essence memos—I wrote to make sense of what I thought I was seeing in the data. Soon I found myself discussing how the racial perspectives of different individuals, groups, organizations, agencies, etc. were essentially proxies for positions for and against mayoral takeover. In short, this brief episode of *systematically* examining the data from a specific time period led me to focus on the regime politics surrounding efforts to change school governance. In true grounded theory fashion, the data told me where to go. Landing on regime politics and school governance as the subject of my story, I stopped coding as I moved on to a different stage of my research.<sup>158</sup>

While historians rarely describe their methods in the manner that social scientists do, what are the advantages of making explicit the historian’s way of arriving at a plausible story? What are the merits of applying social science methods, like grounded theory, to historical

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<sup>157</sup> Using the University of Michigan Library database, I searched for articles under these specific newspapers by using several key search words (e.g., “PUBLIC SCHOOLS,” “DETROIT,” “REFORM”). I did this for every year from 1999 to 2012. This generated a large collection of articles (an average between 100-250 for each year). I also used a tool in the “library search query” that enables you to compare the number of “search results” for each month or year. The months and years with the most number of “search results” often suggested that a major event had occurred, drawing significantly more press attention, and thus generating more articles in that month. This search tool enabled me to zero-in on key events and dates, which began to form a preliminary narrative.

<sup>158</sup> The findings from this phase of research were captured in a paper I wrote for my preliminary examination. See Leanne Kang, “Education Reform in Detroit at the Turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Race and Policymaking,” (Preliminary Examination Paper, University of Michigan, 2013).



research? Grounded theory, for example, assumes an inductive stance. What place does an inductive, exploratory position have in historical research? For me, an inductive stance enabled me to approach my data without an agenda, to avoid bias, and to let the data “speak for itself.” Thus, incorporating some qualitative methods could avoid bias in historical research. Additionally, grounded theory—often applied to cases in which there is a lack of theory to explain a particular phenomenon<sup>159</sup>—is methodologically theory-driven. How might historical research, particularly in the field of education, be oriented around theory building? Thus, I briefly sketch this early stage of my research to point to the possible merits of incorporating qualitative methods in historical research.

#### Methods and Sources for a Historical Study

Why a historical approach to answering the research question? What makes historical methods distinct from social science methods? Clarence Stone asserts:

As one moves from the realm of physical phenomena to that of social phenomena, limitations in the scientific method multiply. The nature of the research enterprise itself is open to debate. For example, unlike many social scientists, historians are disinclined to search for universal conclusions or identify “iron laws” of human behavior. Instead, they offer the detailed texture of a phenomenon – whether it be a movement, an institution, a person, an era, or some combination of these.<sup>160</sup>

Thus one goal of historical methods is to offer a comprehensive description of the social phenomenon. The historian’s answer to the question of *what happened in Detroit in the last thirty years and why*, for example, is likely to be complex and layered. Stone explains, “Historical analysis makes assumptions about causation, the main one being that social

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<sup>159</sup> Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, Third Edition* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008).

<sup>160</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 255.

phenomena are to be understood as having multiple causes. Research proceeds by analyzing the *conjunction* of factors, not by isolating single variables.”<sup>161</sup>

As opposed to choosing a bit for study, striving to tell the story of the social phenomenon in its entirety does what science cannot: produce characterizations that not only embrace but also explain the paradoxes of social phenomenon. Stone writes,

Many historical phenomena display opposing tendencies; hence, characterization often takes the form, not of elaborating the implication of pure types, but of explaining how divergent needs or clashing propensities are reconciled. Appreciation of paradox pushes us toward complexity, not simplification: toward bridging differences, not defining them out of existence.<sup>162</sup>

Paradox and complexity point to the notion of change over time. While certain aspects of life remain the same across time, social phenomenon is rarely static in that, for example, we see new technologies shape the way we organize society and impact our economic, social, and cultural pursuits. A historical approach seeks to illuminate such aspects of social change wherein the values and assumptions of one era may drastically differ in another.<sup>163</sup>

History is “unable to replicate endless observations under laboratory conditions.”<sup>164</sup> Rather, the “method” proceeds from “the notion of sequence.”<sup>165</sup> Stone explains, “Events have manifold causes, many of which we may never identify or even be conscious of. But by following events sequentially, we gain some understanding of what

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>163</sup> See Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?” *Perspective on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, January 2007, accessed May 21, 2015, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/what-does-it-mean-to-think-historically>.

<sup>164</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 257.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

remains constant, what changes, and what is associated with each.”<sup>166</sup> In my study, the sequencing of events after 1980—where Jeffrey Mirel left off—revealed what is constant and what is changing. Since its inception, public school reformers in the United States have tinkered with school governance as a way of improving education. What appears to change over time are the regimes that determine what governance looks like. Regime change also seems to be the source of social, political, and cultural conflict among groups in an ever increasingly diverse America.

Stone also explains how historical research is the *interaction* between patterns of detail and concept. Isolated details, on the other hand, can “point in quite different directions.”<sup>167</sup> Thus, the historian’s work is that of both contextualization and conceptualization. Stone argues,

Evidence consists, not of interesting facts standing alone, but of *patterns of detail*. The soundness of a political characterization (of a person, movement, institution, etc.) depends on the explanatory power of the conceptualization and on the consistency of detail. [...] If a concept does not illuminate concrete historical events, it is not useful.<sup>168</sup>

In 1989, political scientist Clarence Stone produced a historical study on Atlanta’s transition from a city governed by Whites to a period in which Blacks became an electoral majority and gained control of city hall (1946-1988).<sup>169</sup> Stone observed that Atlanta’s transition to a Black-led city was relatively free from the kind of racial polarization that came to dominate other cities. Instead a biracial coalition of both formal and informal decision makers had formed and became an essential part of the city’s governing regime, cooperating around several major redevelopment projects that strengthened and bolstered Atlanta’s city center. Seeking to explain this phenomenon, Stone developed the concept of *urban regime analysis*.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 255.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

This political concept is based on the assumption that the government in the United States by itself is greatly limited in carrying out its decisions and almost always relies on extra informal arrangements to enhance governance. Therefore, a *regime* is the *informal arrangements* that “surround and complement the formal workings of the governmental authority.”<sup>170</sup> A regime is not just any informal group that comes together to make a decision; it is an informal group that is relatively stable and has access to institutional resources that allow it to have a sustained role in making governing decisions.<sup>171</sup> Importantly, a regime is *empowering*—“a means for achieving coordinated efforts that might not otherwise be realized.”<sup>172</sup>

In cities, the regime is characteristically *urban*. In our postwar economy, the lack of financial resources in many cities across the nation has significantly constrained what municipal governments can or cannot do. Thus, *urban* regimes are distinct in that they are informal arrangements needing business as a key actor in sustaining agendas and policies. Stone argues that urban regimes thus find themselves needing “to bridge the principle of popular control of governmental office on the one side and the community’s need for an appreciable level of business activity on the other.”<sup>173</sup> In short, an urban regime requires *the active support and cooperation of private interests*. Therefore, an urban regime is defined as “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and *private interests* function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions.”<sup>174</sup> Critically, Stone notes, private interests are not confined to just business interests; indeed, in practice, private interest may include “labor-union officials, party functionaries, officers in nonprofit organizations or foundations, and church

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 6. (Emphasis mine)

leaders.”<sup>175</sup>

At the heart of urban regime analysis is the concept of *civic capacity*, the idea that a level of cooperation, the kind that actually brings together “people based in different sectors of a community’s institutional life,” is necessary for enabling a “coalition of actors to make and support a set of governing decisions.”<sup>176</sup> A high level of civic capacity also determines the difference between policies that fade or last. Stone writes,

The study of urban regime is thus *a study of who cooperates* and how their cooperation is achieved across institutional sectors of community life. Further, it is an examination of how that cooperation is maintained when confronted with an ongoing process of social change, a continuing influx of new actors, and potential break-downs through conflict or indifference.<sup>177</sup>

In Atlanta, a high level of civic capacity was achieved through a biracial coalition that ensured policies were mutually beneficial for each group, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the governing regime. In short, Atlanta’s biracial coalition helped to negotiate around racial polarization, a path taken by so many other Black-led cities.

In this way, urban regime analysis offers two concepts relevant to my study. First, the notion that an urban regime is required to facilitate and sustain change. Thus, what regime supported school governance change in Detroit? Second, the notion of civic capacity enables me to turn to the policy implications at the end of my story. Stone suggests, “This theory can alert us to difficulties in politics that we might otherwise underrate. If indeed politics can enhance the urban condition, then we must learn how to act in concert on those matters that people might choose by reasoning together.”<sup>178</sup> That is, civic capacity not only illuminates the story of politics in my study but also reveals why changing governance towards both effectiveness and equality is

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 9. (Emphasis mine.)

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., xii

a struggle. Stone and other scholars have found that an urban regime perspective reveals why efforts to reform public schooling is so difficult.<sup>179</sup> Stone writes,

[...] I have argued that governance in Atlanta can usefully be understood by the concept of an urban regime. By implication, I also suggest that this same concept would be a fruitful starting point in the study of governance in other communities. In short, I contend that ‘urban regime’ is an illuminating concept, casting light on Atlanta’s political experience and, potentially, on the experience of other communities as well.<sup>180</sup>

Applying urban regime analysis to my study has lead to questions of policy: *whose* cooperation is needed in order to improve the quality of education in urban school systems?

### *Urban Regime Analysis and School Reform*

While Atlanta’s municipal government had achieved remarkable cooperation across racial lines, the same was not true for its school district. Rather, its school district followed the pattern of other postindustrial cities: efforts to improve schools were difficult and conflict-ridden. Thus, Stone and other scholars began to consider how urban regime analysis could be applied to questions around urban school reform.<sup>181</sup> Stone and collaborators also noticed increased pressure on how schools had been traditionally governed. Collaborators, Michael Danielson and Jennifer Hoschild, observed:

[...] during the 1990s the demands for accountability have gained ascendancy over the structural and normative drive towards autonomy. Schools are not, after all, hermetically sealed. [...] The fact that public education has so singularly failed to accomplish its task for so many children, most strikingly in cities like New York, Chicago, and Baltimore, has further increased the clamor from a widening range of outsiders. Citizens and leaders alike are increasingly realizing

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<sup>179</sup> Clarence N. Stone, Jeffrey R. Henig, Bryan D. Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi, *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

<sup>180</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 256.

<sup>181</sup> See Clarence N. Stone, ed., *Changing Urban Education* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Clarence N. Stone, Jeffrey R. Henig, Bryan D. Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi, *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

that education is both too important and too problematic to leave to insiders and hope for the best.”<sup>182</sup>

Perceiving that demands to improve student performance was forcing educational decision-making beyond the usual confines of the local school district (i.e., “insiders”), scholars set out to better understand the phenomenon, resulting in the publication of *Changing Urban Education*, a compilation of cross-city case studies measuring for levels of civic capacity around school governance change. The contributors found that in every city executing some kind of school reform that changes governance, civic capacity was low. In other words, the education politics of the city was not readily organized around improving the academic performance of the least disadvantaged students.

Instead what Stone and others have found is that education politics involves a coalition of individuals and groups organized around the protection of jobs and career ladders. Stone calls this coalition the *employment regime*.<sup>183</sup> Wilbur Rich, in less than flattering terms, has called this regime the “education cartel,” who ultimately inhibit the work of school reformers and maintain the educational status quo.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, urban regime analysis suggests that shifting to a *performance regime*, a coalition centered on improving the performance of lower SES students, will be difficult. Stone writes,

Even though the legitimacy of the old system has weakened, a new regime has yet to form in more than a rudimentary way. It is not enough to destabilize the old order. The political challenge is to build a new set of arrangements in which *academic performance is a focal concern*.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Michael N. Danielson and Jennifer Hochschild, “Changing Urban Education: Lessons, Cautions, Prospects,” in *Changing Urban Education*, ed. Clarence N. Stone (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 279.

<sup>183</sup> Clarence N. Stone, “Introduction,” in *Changing Urban Education*, ed. Clarence N. Stone (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 9.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

In addition to urban regime analysis, these concepts (that have been applied to the urban schooling context) have illuminated what I was seeing in my data: the gradual ending of one regime and the emergence of another. Even though I do not try to measure civic capacity, this concept has given me a powerful way of thinking about Detroit's future in the aftermath of school governance change; what will it take to establish a performance regime, a political arrangement that actually includes those who can truly assist with improving the performance of our least advantaged students?

### *Civic Capacity and Race as a Barrier*

Furthermore, studies that have applied urban regime analysis have found that race is a factor or force that distracts from or weakens civic capacity. In their study of school reform in Black-led cities, Jeffrey Henig and colleagues extend the concept of civic capacity to include how race is a central (though not a primary) variable:

The concept of civic capacity, in and of itself, has little to say about the role of race. We believe (and present evidence to support the fact) that race is an extremely potent factor in determining how localities respond to the challenges they face. Yet, we also believe that it is possible and desirable to incorporate race as a central variable in a broader theoretical framework than to give it primacy. Understanding race *helps* to explain the nature of local school-reform politics; it does not *serve* as an explanation on its own terms.<sup>186</sup>

Henig and colleagues measured civic capacity across the cities and found “race as a resilient cleavage,” a factor that continued to “define conflicts inside the city and even more sharply to define the orientation of the city versus the suburbs and the state.”<sup>187</sup> With respect “outsiders” pushing for school reform, they argue,

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<sup>186</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, Richard C. Hula, Marion Orr, and Desiree S. Pedescleaux, *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



[...] race may become a defining aspect of the relationship between Black-led cities and important external actors. Large central cities are limited in their capacity to undertake meaningful school reform without the support or, at the least, acquiescence of suburban neighbors, state legislatures, governor, courts, and the national government [...] While blacks control the local levers of formal governmental authority in each of our cities, in each case the key external actors are white. Conflicting priorities and interests, whether rooted in race or something else entirely, may easily come to be *interpreted* in racial terms and to engender a more emotionally intense and combustible politics as a result.<sup>188</sup>

Thus, while authoritative intervention by higher levels of government can play a productive role in jumpstarting or activating the process of reform, Henig and colleagues argue that “external efforts ultimately require a broad local constituency if they are to be sustained.”<sup>189</sup> The politics of reforming urban schools in Black-led cities is as such: “When predominantly white external institutions partner with predominantly white internal constituencies to impose reform on local black decision makers, the prospects for long-term success are undermined.”<sup>190</sup>

### *Applying Urban Regime Analysis to Historical Case Study*

Urban regime analysis when applied to my case studies illuminates a way to further make sense of my observations around Detroit’s school governance change. Given urban regime analysis, the central question that guides the later stages of my analysis is *who supported and who opposed school governance change?* In other words, who was coalescing around efforts to change the way schools were governed? What regime ushered in change? In short, the concept of urban regime analysis offers a way in which to explain *how* Detroit’s educational landscape could change so quickly and dramatically in thirty years.

The concept of civic capacity—evidence of cross-sector cooperation—also sharpens my ability to consider the strength of coalitional relationships and whether they will determine the

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

life of a policy. Most compelling, examining Detroit’s civic capacity allows me to return to earlier questions about how racial politics affect the implementation of school policy. *Is race a barrier to forming strong cross-sector cooperation that, according to Stone, is necessary for institutionalizing governance change?* Thus, civic capacity offers me a way to further interpret—in the light of “theory”—my observations about the racial issues surrounding efforts to change who governs schools. In the “final” stages of research, these concepts sharpened my ability to tell a political story in which I could better understand the nature of conflict; in this case, racial discourse and rhetoric are symptomatic of a great upheaval in educational decision-making.

In sum, given the concept of urban regime analysis, the following questions were applied to my study—featured in case studies of specific reforms in Chapter Five and Chapter Six—of how Detroit’s corporate school system was dismantled in the last three decades), which are:

1. Who made up the coalitions—the informal arrangements—that supported, sustained, or hindered the enactment of policy?
2. Was the regime strong enough to enact reform *and* make it effective? Was there a high level of civic capacity, evidence of strong cross-sector cooperation?
3. Why was reform “difficult” or conflict-ridden? To what degree did race play a role in building or hindering coalitions for school governance change?

These analytical questions enabled me to take my observations further in one direction—an analysis of why and how school governance changed. For example, in the case study of mayoral takeover in Chapter 5, the concept of urban regimes enabled me to produce a reinterpretation of why efforts to implement mayoral takeover failed despite a rare moment in which, I argue, Detroit had a high level of civic capacity. In Chapter 6, I present a case study on attempts to establish a statewide recovery school district, a case in which I clearly see the weakening of an

older regime and the formulation of a new coalition of education actors that have the potential to institutionalize change.

### Plausibility, Case Study, and Contemporary History

Although historians do not normally include a methods chapter, I have written one in hopes of influencing future research. After all, my dissertation is not “purely” historical in the sense that actors have long passed or that I had spent most of my research process in the archives. My dissertation is a contemporary history, consisting of two case studies of specific school reforms, and one in which I have adapted some methods from qualitative research to approach my data and sources. In this chapter, I have attempted to articulate my method for how I construct the history of school governance change in Detroit since 1980. Can my story be trusted?

Hence, I conclude this chapter with a few words regarding the *plausibility* of my study. In the sciences, reliability and validity are terms used to describe whether the findings from a study can be trusted. Historical research, however, cannot be replicated like an experimental study. In this way, we test for “validity” by asking whether the story is plausible. Stone argues that the crux of historical research is: “Good concepts illuminate significant details, and telling details point to illuminating concepts.”<sup>191</sup> Therefore, we can test the plausibility of a historical study by assessing the strength of the interaction between illuminating details and concept. In other words, sound observations should lead to cogent theory.

It is also helpful to turn to case study research to discuss plausibility. Carol Lynne Fulton explains, “Case studies that are deemed plausible typically elaborate on a situation, pose

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<sup>191</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, 255.

questions, compare the cases to other cases, reframe the case, and seek alternative solutions.”<sup>192</sup>

Fulton goes on to explain how plausibility should also be crosschecked by triangulation. Indeed, a key aspect to later stages of my research was triangulating between new sources of evidence. Newspaper articles as a single source of data has its obvious limitations; at the end of the day, news outlets are concerned about maintaining readership, thus having implications for which events are *actually* covered and which are not. It was imperative to provide other sources of evidence such as government documents (e.g., legislation), political speeches, reports, artifacts (e.g., original handouts, pamphlets, and websites), and a body of secondary sources (e.g., other historical studies of Detroit and DPS, and accounts or studies of specific policies).<sup>193</sup> The corroboration of data strengthens the narrative from which claims are made.

In *interpretive* case studies<sup>194</sup> findings are considered valid if the case “rings true” and the “theory derived from the case makes sense.”<sup>195</sup> Fulton states, “The plausibility of the case could be the ground on which to build the validity of the theory related to it.”<sup>196</sup> Perhaps one of the greatest indicators of the plausibility of my study is that it validates, in fine grain detail, Jeffrey Henig’s concept of “the end of exceptionalism.” Indeed, the history of DPS in the last thirty years is a tale of two governing regimes, in which a new emerging regime undermines the older traditional regime, marking the end of an era. In the world of historical, qualitative, and case study research, the ability to land on a concept, to speak to theory, can prove the validity of the study. Moreover, my study’s ability to offer policy insights that are historicized—which is the

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<sup>192</sup> Fulton, “Plausibility,” 683.

<sup>193</sup> Secondary sources proved to be extremely helpful in sequencing and forming the chronology of my narrative.

<sup>194</sup> *Positivist* or *critical perspectives* are other philosophical orientations for case study research. (Fulton, “Plausibility.”)

<sup>195</sup> Fulton, “Plausibility,” 683.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 685.

aim of contemporary history<sup>197</sup>—displays the strength and plausibility of the study and its applicability.

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<sup>197</sup> Michael D. Kandiah, “Contemporary History,” *Making History: The Changing Face of the Profession in Britain*, [http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/contemporary\\_history.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/contemporary_history.html).

## CHAPTER IV

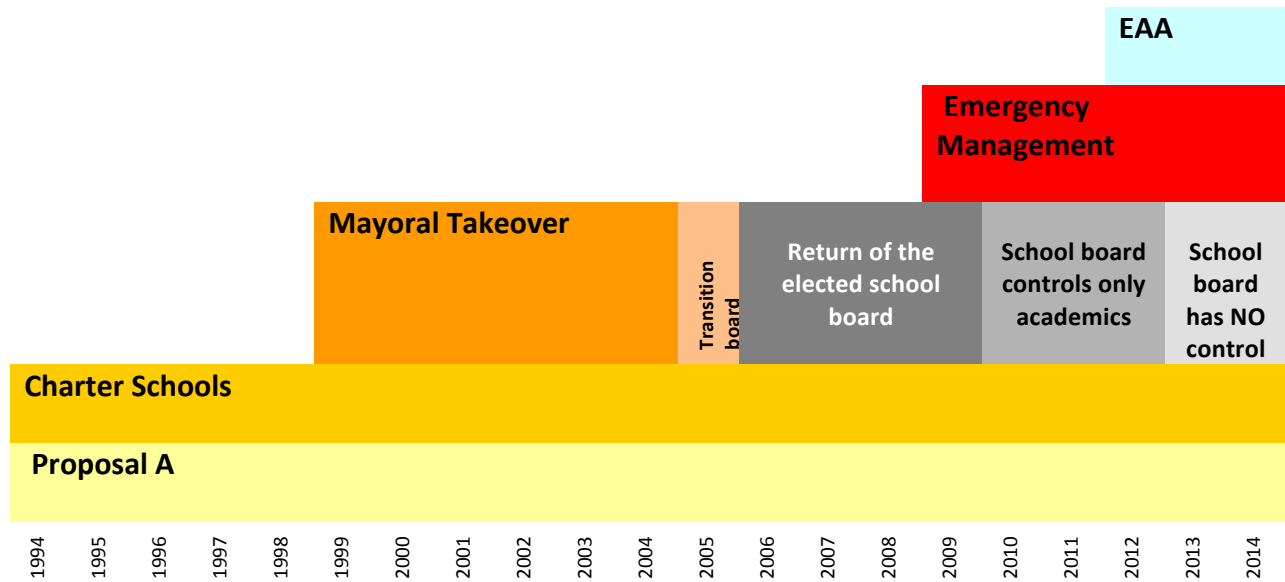
### Five School Reforms: Changing School Governance, 1994-present

In this dissertation I argue that *five major school reforms* over a twenty-year period have dismantled the traditional governing system of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), essentially rendering the publicly elected school board and its constituents powerless. By 2014, the Progressive Era system devoted to the schooling of all of Detroit’s children was *functionally* nonexistent, though the school board continued to hold public meetings. This chapter tells the story of an era of significant change: how each school reform—Proposal A, Michigan’s charter law, mayoral takeover, emergency management, and the Education Achievement Authority—cumulatively ended the “special governance arrangements” of public schooling.<sup>198</sup> (See Figure 1.) While I do not try to do the work of determining the “ultimate” purpose of any reform measure, I do discuss how each initiative responded to Detroit’s persistent educational and financial crises, often beginning where the previous attempt at reform failed. I analyze how each reform eroded local control and impacted the way schools were governed, revealing a history of how DPS was dismantled. The public schools thus became subject to a wide range of decision-makers, with few them devoted solely to educating children. In short, this chapter builds a case for how Detroit went from the “one best system” to a fractured non-system in search of a new order in 2014.

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<sup>198</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2013), 3.

**Figure 1. Five Mayor School Reforms, 1994-2014**



### Proposal A: The State Takes Over Finance

The dismantling of the Detroit Public Schools began with Proposal A, a radical funding approach approved by voters on March 15, 1994. According to Julie Berry Cullen and Susanna Loeb, the reform “stemmed from concerns about inequities in property tax burdens and expenditures,” a part of a broader movement to equalize school funding at the time.<sup>199</sup> The passage of Proposal A replaced *property tax* with the *state sales tax* as the primary source of school funding, shifting spending decisions from the local school board to the state government. The state now had the ability to equalize funding by restricting higher spending school districts from levying additional taxes while increasing funding in previously low spending districts through a minimum per pupil foundation allowance.<sup>200</sup> While this effort briefly equalized funding in Michigan, Proposal A would eventually exacerbate DPS’s already weak fiscal base. In addition to reducing local control over spending across the state, the new funding formula also

<sup>199</sup> Julie Berry Cullen and Susanna Loeb, “School Finance Reform in Michigan: Evaluating Proposal A,” in *Helping Children Left Behind: State Aid and the Pursuit of Educational Equity* ed. John Yinger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 215.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

mandated a “dollars-follow-students” formula, enabling parents to enroll their children in “school of choice” while receiving school districts collect the foundation allowance associated with each student. This aspect of the funding formula would in particular play a crucial role in the dismantling of DPS.

After nearly two decades of failed attempts to reform Michigan’s funding formula, Republican Governor John Engler, elected in 1991, was intent on making it happen under his watch. Engler had campaigned for governor partly on the promise to cut property taxes by 20 percent.<sup>201</sup> While Engler had pitched his plan as a way to lower taxes, he also had his sights on fundamentally changing the way public education functioned beginning with how schools were funded. Once elected, however, voters would reject the governor’s proposals to alter the school funding formula.<sup>202</sup>

The opportunity to reform the funding formula came from an unlikely source. When Engler and his Republican allies in the Senate introduced for the fourth time a relatively modest property tax relief plan, Senator Debbie Stabenow proposed an amendment to completely eradicate property tax as a source of school funding. Having declared her intentions as the next Democratic gubernatorial candidate, many accounts have interpreted Stabenow’s proposal as a challenge to the governor, a “rhetorical statement” on how unrealistic it was to reduce taxes without specifying what would replace it. In any case, according to James D. Goenner, the governor called on the Republican majority to call her bluff; as she handed them a golden opportunity to not only cut taxes but also radically change the paradigm of Michigan’s education

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan* (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2012), 15-16.



system.<sup>203</sup> By the next day, the bill had passed both chambers and the governor eagerly signed Public Act 145 of 1993.<sup>204</sup>

Mirel has described these events as an “astonishingly audacious political act,” in which the legislature had essentially manufactured a crisis.<sup>205</sup> With virtually no alternate plan in place for funding schools, the legislature had to draft a funding package that would restore the \$6.3 billion lost by eliminating property taxes. Meanwhile, the governor outlined a bold school reform plan in a 54-paged proposal entitled “New Schools for a New Century” that was distributed to students, parents, teachers, and taxpayers in October.<sup>206</sup>

Critiquing the school funding system for having relied too heavily on property tax, which was susceptible to the uneven distribution of wealth and subject to frequent millage elections, the governor articulated the need for school finance reform.<sup>207</sup> The governor’s specific recommendations reflected how the “manufactured” crisis was an opportunity for making some radical and unprecedented changes. First, the governor proposed a “new state role in education” in financing school districts, which would ensure an “adequate and equitable allocation of resources to all schools.”<sup>208</sup> Referring to Michigan’s chronically low scores on national and state exams, Engler argued, “[o]ur generally disappointing results in public elementary and secondary

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<sup>203</sup> James N. Goenner, “The Origination of Michigan’s Charter School Policy: An Historical Analysis” (Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2011), 62.

<sup>204</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*.

<sup>205</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, “Detroit: ‘There Is Still a Long Road to Travel, and Success Is Far from Assured,’” in *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*, ed. Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 124.

<sup>206</sup> John Engler, “Our Kids Deserve Better! New Schools for a New Century” (Governor John Engler’s Plan to Reform Michigan Schools, Michigan, October 5, 1993), 1-54.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 29.

education have been due, in part, to the historical absence of strong state leadership.”<sup>209</sup> Second, Engler recommended “school choice” for parents and students.<sup>210</sup> His proposal stated,

Parents and students should not be limited to the school district where they live, but be able to choose from among Michigan’s public K-12 schools and charter public schools. The Berlin Wall which now encircles each school district must come down.<sup>211</sup>

In order to tear down the wall, the governor advocated a system by which state funding follows individual students, not districts. Lastly, Engler articulated mechanisms to reduce the power of the teachers union, which he believed played a role in undermining the quality of education.

When collective bargaining “interferes with the educational process,” the governor explained, “it is appropriate to seek the development of alternatives.”<sup>212</sup> Charter schools, for example, should be exempt from collective bargaining. In effect, Engler’s proposal was a blueprint for a completely new school system.

Meanwhile, the legislature finally came up with two school funding plans before Christmas: Proposal A, which would increase the state’s sales tax by 2 percent, or a statutory plan that would increase the state’s income tax.<sup>213</sup> Unlike past proposals, the voters were not presented an opportunity to maintain the status quo—as Andrew Lockwood put it, there was no going back to the “old system.”<sup>214</sup> Voters overwhelmingly chose Proposal A by a 69-31 percent margin.<sup>215</sup> The *New York Times* called Prop A “the nation’s most dramatic shift in a century in

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>213</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 17.

<sup>214</sup> Andrew Lockwood, “School Finance Reform in Michigan Proposal A: A Retrospective” (Office of Revenue and Tax Analysis, Michigan, December 2002), 1-53.

<sup>215</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*.

the way public schools are financed.”<sup>216</sup> Seeing opportunity in crisis, the governor had seized a rare episode in the legislature to reenvision and reshape education policy.

Indeed, Proposal A would not only mark the beginning of a new era for Michigan’s schools but also the start of the unraveling of Detroit’s school system.<sup>217</sup> If the adage “money in politics flows to where the power is” holds true for schools, then Proposal A marked a substantial shift of power from the DPS school board to the state of Michigan. In fact, Proposal A was a direct blow to the teachers union whose ability to negotiate with the school board on spending decisions was now greatly reduced. Governor Engler made it abundantly clear at the law’s signing ceremony, “[t]he power and control of the teachers union have had over education policies in Michigan ended this morning.”<sup>218</sup> Thus, with the passage of Proposal A, we begin to see the first signs of decision-making arrangements between the school board and union leaders under threat, paving the way for the further weakening of traditional school governance. In Detroit, the effect was particularly pronounced given that the majority Republican legislature was not beholden to the interests of a largely Democratic city that held the largest number of teacher union members.

Most critically, the additional aim of creating an alternative schooling system of “choice” through Proposal A would have the greatest impact on Detroit.<sup>219</sup> Although changing per-pupil funding to follow the student successfully launched Michigan’s charter movement, it would

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<sup>216</sup> William Celis, “Michigan Votes for Revolution in Financing Its Public Schools,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1994, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/03/17/us/michigan-votes-for-revolution-in-financing-its-public-schools.html>.

<sup>217</sup> Indeed, twenty years later, *Michigan Radio* asserted that the state had killed public schools on the day Engler signed Proposal. See Justin Dwyer, “The Day Michigan Killed Public Schools (and Then Created the System We Have Today),” *Michigan Radio*, June 19, 2014, accessed November 19, 2014, <http://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/day-michigan-killed-public-schools-and-then-created-system-we-have-today>.

<sup>218</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel,” 126.

<sup>219</sup> Peter J. Hammer argues that Proposal A has had the most negative impact on the Detroit Public Schools district. See Peter J. Hammer, “The Fate of Detroit Public Schools: Governance, Finance, and Competition,” *The Journal of Law and Society* 110, no. 13 (2011).

ultimately create a structural crisis for DPS; in the next twenty years, thousands of students—an and thereby millions of dollars—were drawn out of DPS, creating a severe strain on the district’s operating budget. DPS’s seemingly persistent fiscal crisis would leave it vulnerable to further efforts to reform school governance. Proposal A in 1994 set the conditions – the increased role of the state, the softening of district borders, and the weakening of the school board and unions – in which subsequent school reforms in Detroit were implemented.

#### Mayoral Takeover: Attempt to Govern Schools with a Mayoral-Appointed Board, 1999-2005

Several years after Proposal A took effect, Governor Engler began to set his eye on not only controlling fiscal but also educational decisions, particularly for chronically failing districts. He turned to the mayoral control model that several cities (e.g., New York, Boston, Chicago, and Washington D.C.) had begun to experiment with in the early 1990s.<sup>220</sup> In these cities, mayors had been given authority to control schools either by directly working with a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of schools or by appointing reform boards that worked with the CEO to make educational decisions. The implication was that the school boards in these cities had been failing students and parents for too long. At first, Governor Engler envisioned mayoral control for struggling school districts across Michigan but the final legislation targeted Detroit, erupting into a political debate that is further explored in the case study. In this chapter, I focus on how the implementation of a mayoral-appointed reform board was the first tactic in DPS history to suspend the school board’s capacity to make educational decisions, shifting decision-making power into higher levels of government (i.e., municipal and state) and the first in a series of school reforms that culminated in the dismantling of DPS’s traditional governing structure.

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<sup>220</sup> Kenneth K. Wong, Francis X. Shen, Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, and Stacey Rutledge, *The Education Mayor: Improving America’s Schools* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007).

Having amassed 11 consecutive annual budget deficits between 1978-1989, the state had begun to threaten the DPS school board with takeover in the late 1980s.<sup>221</sup> Even Detroit's first Black mayor, Coleman Young, who was typically at odds with the state, proposed mayoral control as a means of stabilizing finances.<sup>222</sup> However, according to Michael Addonizio and Phillip C. Kearney, the school board managed to avoid such measures when they ended the 1990 fiscal year with a small fund balance.<sup>223</sup> Ironically, after the passage of Proposal A in 1994, DPS began to fall back into deficit. In short, when the economy dipped so did the state's ability to raise revenue, resulting in a period in which school funding remained flat, a real problem given the cost of inflation. Still, in the three years preceding mayoral takeover, DPS actually succeeded in recovering its district fund balance. In spite of this, Engler forged ahead with mayoral takeover. Much of the press helped to produce the sense that the governor's plan was about removing a school board that was for far too long more interested in preserving the status quo than the real work of improving schools.

The governor believed that, like Proposal A, mayoral takeover would breakup the deadlock long maintained by the school board and its associates (i.e. the teachers union) and ultimately usher in a new era of school improvement, educational innovation, and fiscal management. Engler had been influenced by the likes of Ted Kolderie, John E. Chubb, and Terry M. Moe, leading school reform intellectuals who squarely placed the blame for urban school failure on local bureaucracy.<sup>224</sup> Kolderie, who was a key player in helping Minnesota adopt the first charter law in the nation, argued that states needed to withdraw the "exclusive" nature of

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<sup>221</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 207.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Goenner, "Origination."

local school districts, institutional practices that did not welcome radical change.<sup>225</sup> Reelected to his third term in 1998 and with Republicans sweeping both the Senate and the House, Governor Engler also had the political clout to virtually forge a state intervention in a predominantly Democratic city.

The school board remained adamantly opposed to mayoral takeover, campaigning against Engler's plan with the message that it was a racially motivated tactic to further weaken a Black-led city and to deny Detroiters of their right to vote. However, as the city debated the measure, it appeared that many individuals and groups within the city had become so disillusioned with the school board's ineptitude, that—according to the press—more than half of the population wanted change and supported the governor's plan. Remarkably, even the teachers union—the Detroit Federation of Teachers—who was initially opposed would come to support mayoral takeover. So did many other individuals and groups like the Council of Baptist Pastors and the Detroit Urban League come to support the governor's radical plan. The NAACP, however, would remain obstinately opposed. Though reluctant at first, the governor also won the support of Detroit's Democratic Black mayor, Dennis Archer.<sup>226</sup>

Although the legislature ultimately opted to not give Detroiters an opportunity to vote on the plan, many were hopeful the plan could salvage the beleaguered school district. Engler signed the “mayoral takeover” law, Public Act 10 in 1999, suspending the school board and its superintendent and authorizing the mayor to appoint a reform board. The reform board, consisting of seven members, would determine school policy including the selection of Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The seventh member, however, was the governor's appointee who had special powers to veto the selection of the new CEO if he/she deemed necessary, revealing the

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>226</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel.”

degree of control the governor had in the implementation of the policy. The new governance structure would remain in effect for five years at which point Detroiters could vote to continue the reform board or return to the elected board.

Ultimately, mayoral takeover did little to improve education or finance. In fact, the fiscal situation grew significantly worse under mayoral control: the CEO, Kenneth Burnley, had begun his tenure with a \$93 million surplus and by the end of his tenure in 2004 reported a \$200 million deficit. In fact, no one would have predicted how mayoral takeover was headed on a collision course with Proposal A. During the period of mayoral takeover, thousands of students left the system along with their per-pupil funding, a loss of nearly \$225 million in state funding. In spite of some reported educational improvements, Proposal A had created a context in which Burnley could not attract new students fast enough to offset the ones who were opting to leave the system. The fiasco would result in Detroiters voting for the return of the publicly elected school board in November 2004.

Even though mayoral takeover did not last, what is central to the argument of my study is that the five year period was like a dress rehearsal for future reforms in which policymakers continued to move decision-making to other levels of government and forging new arrangements with new policy actors, ridding the local district of its special status as a “single-purpose government.” Mayoral takeover foreshadowed how educational leaders from the outside (i.e., figures like CEO Kenneth Burnley) could be given the authority to circumvent traditional and local democratic processes in order to address educational and fiscal crises. This period in which Engler found ways to remain in the driver’s seat also reinforced the increased role of the governor and state in local educational affairs, which would increasingly become a norm in Michigan. Although voters returned decision-making power to the school board, I argue that

DPS's brief stint with mayoral takeover weakened the legitimacy of traditional school governance. To this day, the school board has not regained a foothold in decision-making as reformers are bent on shaping a new era of schooling.

#### Emergency Management: State Intervention, 2009-present

After the failed experiment of mayoral takeover, the publicly elected school board was restored in 2005. The school board struggled to make any significant improvements and, by 2008, the deficit had ballooned to \$400 million, causing the state to declare a state of emergency and to appoint an emergency manager to address the fiscal crisis.<sup>227</sup> I argue that the effort to reform DPS through emergency management has only served to further dismantle DPS's traditional governing system. Again, such moves were made at the behest of the governor. Succeeding Engler in 2003, Governor Jennifer Granholm inherited Engler's failure to improve—if not worsen—Detroit's finances. Even as a Democrat, she continued on the same path, movements towards shifting decision-making out of the local school district. By now, Republican or Democrat, such tactics were increasingly a norm among self-proclaimed “education governors.” Emergency management also attracted new educational actors, particularly foundations, who believed that emergency management was a harbinger of institutional change and thus possibilities for revival.

In 2007, when the school board selected Connie Calloway, an educator for more than 35 years and a Harvard graduate to replace the interim superintendent, William Coleman III, many reformers found the decision promising.<sup>228</sup> The state had just passed a law to allow 15 new charter high schools in Detroit and the *Detroit News* predicted that Calloway would finally bring

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<sup>227</sup> “Detroit School Charade Stalls Financial Reformer,” *Detroit News*, Dec. 12, 2008.

<sup>228</sup> Connie Calloway was previously a superintendent of 5,700-student school district in Normandy, Missouri. See Jennifer Mrozowski, “DPS Board Chooses Calloway as Leader,” *Detroit News*, March 9, 2007, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20070309/SCHOOLS/703090424>.



the charter movement to Detroit.<sup>229</sup> Instead, Calloway—perhaps opting to take a more careful political route given the anti-charter sentiment in Detroit—set out to reform DPS by restructuring existing schools.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, she infuriated the school board by designating five schools for restructuring without their approval. One board member accused Calloway of implementing a “defacto takeover.”<sup>231</sup> “What I see is that private organizations came up with a decision that board members are not aware of [...],” the board member said referring to foundations like Skillman and United Way who were funding Calloway’s efforts.<sup>232</sup> Within a year, the board fired Calloway for her perceived overreach. The *Michigan Chronicle* speculated, however, that the board had removed Calloway because she was exposing too much of the district’s financial woes.<sup>233</sup> Calloway had created a 228-page report on DPS that concluded that there was *no improvement* in student achievement since 2002 and there was also a lack of connection between money spent and what takes place in classrooms.<sup>234</sup>

The debacle with Calloway, however, contributed to Detroiters’ growing dissatisfaction with the school board, which was increasingly expressed during vitriolic school board meetings. Detroiters regarded the ballooning deficit with extreme suspicion, interrogating board members about where the money had gone.<sup>235</sup> Such public displays likely conveyed to policymakers that Detroit’s school board, hopelessly muddled in territorial politics, had run its course and simply could not be relied upon to bring the district to financial order. With State Superintendent Flanagan’s strong recommendation, Granholm determined in 2009 that a financial emergency

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<sup>229</sup> “Fix Detroit Schools, But Give Parents Choice,” *Detroit News*, December 19, 2007.

<sup>230</sup> Foundations like New Detroit Inc., Gates Foundation, United Way, and the Skillman Foundation funded Calloway’s efforts to pursue Governor Granholm’s “small schools initiative.” See Diane Bukowski, “Calloway Launches Restructuring Plan,” *Michigan Citizen*, April 6, 2008.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> Sam Logan, “DPS: A Tale of Urban Decay,” *Michigan Chronicle*, December 17, 2008.

<sup>234</sup> The Council of Great City Schools conducted the report. See Sam Logan, “DPS Courting Disaster,” *Michigan Chronicle*, October 8, 2008, A1, A4.

<sup>235</sup> *Dan Rather Reports 617: A National Disgrace*, DVD, 2011, HDNet.

existed in Detroit and signed Public Act 72, appointing Robert Bobb as the first emergency financial manager (EFM) of DPS.<sup>236</sup> The EFM law effectively suspended DPS's school board and superintendent from managing any fiscal related issues and handed over the "authority and responsibilities affecting the financial condition of the school district" to Bobb.<sup>237</sup> For the first time in DPS history, the state had declared that DPS's fiscal problems were at emergency levels that required immediate state intervention.

For those who supported emergency management, Granholm's appointment, Robert Bobb, was met with great approval. From Oakland, California to Washington D.C., Bobb had been active in a national movement towards establishing charters and privatizing school management.<sup>238</sup> The emergency manager was also a graduate of the Broad Academy, a program sponsored by the philanthropist Eli Broad to develop leaders that will "pioneer sustainable breakthrough initiatives" for public schooling.<sup>239</sup> In fact, the Broad Foundation was funding a portion of Bobb's salary.<sup>240</sup>

Beginning his tenure with an audit of DPS, Bobb initially considered two responses: filing for bankruptcy or lobbying for debt forgiveness.<sup>241</sup> Instead, Bob ruled out both options,

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<sup>236</sup> On January 13, 2015, the state appointed a fourth emergency manager. See Dominic Adams, "Snyder to Make Detroit Schools Announcement as Darnell Early Reportedly Next EM," *MLive*, January 13, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2015/01/snyder\\_to\\_discuss\\_future\\_of\\_de.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2015/01/snyder_to_discuss_future_of_de.html).

<sup>237</sup> Public Act 72 also enabled the emergency financial manager to recommend school district consolidation and authorize the school district to proceed in Chapter 9 federal bankruptcy. See Kristi L. Bowman, "State Takeovers of School Districts and Related Litigation: Michigan as a Case Study," *The Urban Lawyer* 45, no. 1 (2013): 6.

<sup>238</sup> From 2006-2008, Robert Bobb was president of the State Board of Education in the District of Columbia, a period in which Mayor Adrian Fenty took control of the school district and appointed Michelle Rhee as Chancellor. Rhee gained national recognition for her get-tough management style: if schools did not measure up, she did not hesitate to fire teachers, shut down buildings, or turn schools over to charter networks. See Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System; How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 171-172.

<sup>239</sup> See "Academy at a Glance," The Broad Academy, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.broadcenter.org/academy/about/academy-at-a-glance>.

<sup>240</sup> Broad Foundation contributed \$28,000 in 2009, \$56,000 in 2010, and \$183,350 for financial audits of DPS. See Sherri Welch, "Absent No More," *Crain's Detroit Business*, March 15, 2010.

<sup>241</sup> "New DPS Financial Manager on Right Track," *Michigan Chronicle*, March 11, 2009; "The B Word: Bobb Mentions Bankruptcy, and That May Be the Best Option for Reviving Detroit Public Schools," *Detroit News*, July 1, 2009.

deciding that the best strategy was to hand over schools to private educational management organizations (EMOs). In July 2009, with \$20 million in federal stimulus funds, Bobb hired four educational management companies (Edison Learning, Institute of Student Achievement, EdWorks, and Model Secondary Schools Project) with multi-year contracts to turn around 17 of the worst-performing high schools in the district.<sup>242</sup> Bobb then launched an aggressive campaign to not only retain but also attract students back into the district. His “I’m In” campaign literally covered the city in thousands of posters with the now iconic image of a blue door symbolizing the entryway to a new and improved DPS. Bobb’s campaign included a back-to-school parade down Woodward Ave, from Hart Plaza to Campus Martius Park, complete with floats and the DPS marching band.<sup>243</sup> Bobb’s position as an emergency financial manager enabled him to pursue the most radical plan to date: the bidding and contracting of education services and management. The idea was that the EMOs would turnaround schools and bring students—and lost per-pupil funding—back into the system. By the end of Bobb’s first year, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Detroit had taken a step closer to financial stability.<sup>244</sup>

Bobb’s turnaround strategy via EMOs, however, was an affront to the school board, who technically still held authority over educational decision-making. School board president, Carla Scott, was stunned that Bobb had not consulted with them during the entire process and charged the EFM with having grossly overstepped his role. She told reporters that Bobb was trying to

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<sup>242</sup> The 17 schools slated for turnaround were: Central, Crockett, Henry Ford, King, Western, Cooley, Denby, Finney, Kettering, Mumford, Southeastern, Pershing, Detroit Tech, Southwestern, Cody, Northwestern, and Osborn. See Marisa Schultz, “DPS Gives Control of Lagging Schools to Private Sector,” *Detroit News*, July 11, 2009.

<sup>243</sup> “Detroit Public Schools Launches ‘I’m In’ Student Retention Campaign,” *Michigan Chronicle*, Sep. 2, 2009.

<sup>244</sup> In his first year, Robert Bobb worked with the Detroit Federation of Teachers to ratify a contract that would save the district \$63 million over the next three years. Teachers, counselors, and staff each agreed to defer \$10,000 in salary over the next two years. Depending on the district’s financial health, salaries would then be raised incrementally from the third year and on. See Alex P. Kellogg, “Detroit Schools Push for Change,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 2009, A4.

create an all-charter district.<sup>245</sup> The school board maintained that they had control over academic management and they voted unanimously to seek a court order to halt Bobb's turnaround plan.<sup>246</sup>

Controversy notwithstanding, Bobb had crossed into educational issues: his educational theme was transforming DPS for the twenty-first century. This included, among others, longer school days, computer-based learning, flexible options for high school students such as offering career certification classes, and more advanced placement course enrollment.<sup>247</sup> His strategy and philosophy attracted philanthropists and foundations that began to express keen interest in offering financial backing for Bobb's turnaround plans.<sup>248</sup> In 2009, when voters approved a \$500 million bond borrowed under the federal stimulus program at zero and low-interest rates for school construction and renovation, Bobb argued that capital investments must be tied with overall plans for student achievement.<sup>249</sup> With that, the Excellent Schools Detroit, a collaborative group of foundations, advocated that the emergency manager's powers be expanded to include education. With broader powers as a possibility and the belief that Bobb was the right kind of leader to transform one of the most dysfunctional school systems in the country, two of the biggest national educational funders, the Gates Foundation and the Broad Foundation, seriously considered investing in DPS.<sup>250</sup>

However, by 2011, it was clear that Bobb's plan was failing. Conceding that he was unable to bring in enough revenue and projecting the loss of another 73,000 students by 2014, Bobb submitted a plan, a last-ditch effort, to eliminate the \$327 million deficit in the next four

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Marisa Schultz, "DPS Unveils \$148M Strategy," *Detroit News*, July 17, 2009.

<sup>247</sup> Ryan Beene, "Education Overhaul: DPS Leaders Push for Smaller, Fiscally Stable School District," *Crain's Detroit Business*, Aug. 24, 2009.

<sup>248</sup> "Detroit Public Schools Foundations to be Launched," *Michigan Chronicle*, Sep. 2, 2009.

<sup>249</sup> Bankole Thompson, "2000-2009 End of the Decade," *Michigan Chronicle*, Dec. 30, 2009; Nancy Kaffer and Ryan Beene, "2009 Newsmakers of the Year: Robert Bobb and Dave Bing: Agents of Change," *Crain's Detroit Business*, Jan. 11, 2010.

<sup>250</sup> Sherri Welch, "Absent No More," *Crain's Detroit Business*, Mar. 15, 2010.

years. Shockingly, the plan called for the closing of nearly half of DPS's schools and increasing the average size of the high school classroom to 60 students.<sup>251</sup> Claiming that salaries, pensions, and healthcare obligations had weighed down his ability to address the crisis, the emergency manager argued that without his cuts and cost-saving measures the district would have faced up to more than a \$500 million dollars in deficit.<sup>252</sup> But the announcement of more school closings angered the community. A spokesperson for Detroiters for Detroit Public Schools cried,

We're appalled by a man imposed on our community from the outside to solve our problems. We believe in Detroit solutions for Detroit problems. No stranger should come in to a situation so complex and act so ludicrously, especially a situation like this.<sup>253</sup>

An attorney for the school board put it this way: White suburbs could elect who they want in charge, while Black Detroiters are forced to accept whoever the state installs. Emergency management, for all intents and purposes, was a return to separate and unequal education.<sup>254</sup> Facing much criticism, Bobb resigned in June 2011 with much of the deficit still remaining.

During Bobb's tenure, the school board had waged a legal battle against the emergency manager's overreach, but Governor Rick Snyder, a Republican elected into office in 2010, would end the battle by signing Public Act 4 in 2011 that gave the emergency manager full academic authority. Supporters of emergency management argued that the law provided "a series of progressive steps that would constitute a meaningful way to help both local governments and

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<sup>251</sup> Matthew Dolan, "Detroit Schools' Cuts Plan Approved," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2011, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703610604576158783513445212>.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Zenobia Jeffries, "Detroiters Say No to Bobb," *Michigan Citizen*, April 4, 2010, A1, A4.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

school districts maintain their solvency.”<sup>255</sup> However, with Proposal A still at work, DPS would remain in debt even three emergency managers later.<sup>256</sup>

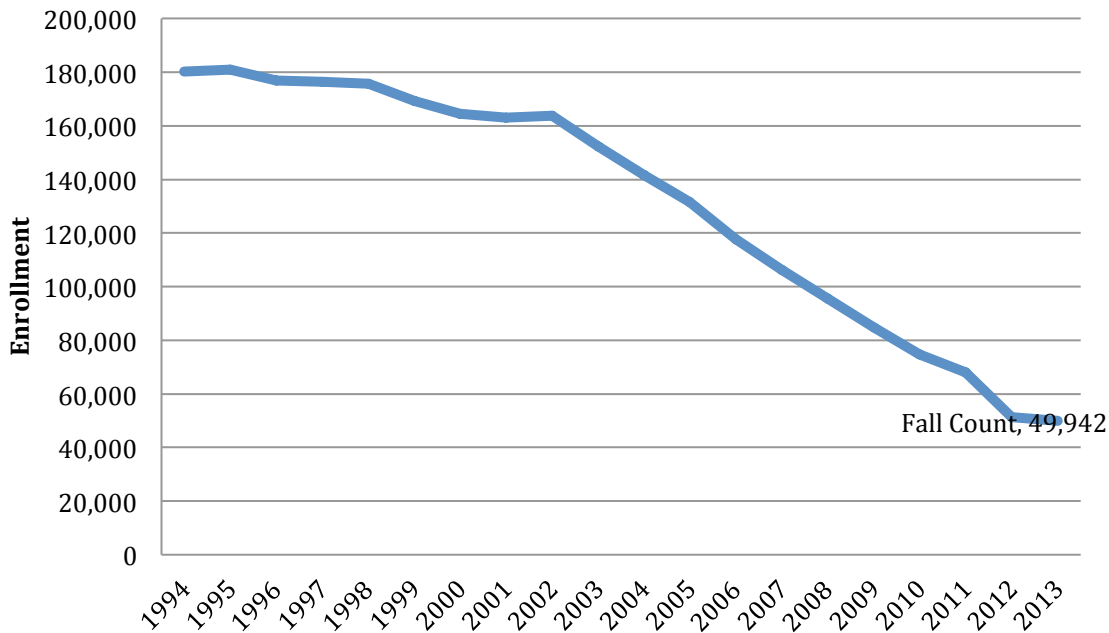
With fewer students enrolling in DPS each year since 1994, the district was losing millions of dollars. (See Figure 2.) Like mayoral takeover, emergency management failed to ameliorate the school district’s rapidly deteriorating finances, let alone improve education. Nevertheless, policymakers continued to address DPS’s educational crisis with changing school governance by suspending, circumventing, or all together eliminating the power of the school board, which is exactly what Governor Snyder did with the passage of Public Act 4 in 2011. A line of governors, Democrat and Republican, both obliged and emboldened by the state’s responsibility to raise and distribute school funds, intervened on issues that were once exclusively local affairs in Detroit. Granholm’s enactment of emergency management was unprecedented in that Robert Bobb directly reported to the state and did not have to consult with the local school governing body. During this period of school reform, transformation appeared inevitable as emergency management attracted new education partners (i.e., foundations) to support and sustain school governance change. A new regime of actors was emerging, a kind that was necessary to finally bring school choice and charter schools to the Motor City.

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<sup>255</sup> Kristi L. Bowman, “State Takeovers of School Districts and Related Litigation: Michigan as a Case Study,” *The Urban Lawyer* 45, no. 1 (2013): 6.

<sup>256</sup> Roy Roberts, Jack Martin, and Darnell Earley have (in that order) succeeded Robert Bobb as emergency managers. See “Editorial: Charting a Better Future for Detroit Public Schools,” *Detroit News*, March 23, 2014.

Figure 2. DPS Enrollments 1994 through 2013<sup>257</sup>



### Michigan’s Charter Movement: Creating an Alternate System, 1994-2014

In January 1994, Governor Engler signed Public Act 362 of 1993 unleashing one of the most expansive charter laws in the nation.<sup>258</sup> Undoubtedly, the law had come on the heels of a historic overhaul of the way schools had been financed for nearly a century. Engler now had the opportunity to introduce an alternate system beyond the traditional public schooling system. Leading charter advocates visited the governor’s office to help with conceptualizing a system free from the power and control of school boards and unions—whom they believed were the

<sup>257</sup> This is the “fall count,” the number of students enrolled in DPS, at the beginning of each school year starting in 1994. See Michigan Department of Education Bulletin 1011, various years, accessed April 13, 2015, [https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530\\_6605-21539--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_6605-21539--,00.html).

<sup>258</sup> According to statistics in 2006-2007, only Washington D.C., Arizona, Colorado, and Delaware enrolled a higher percentage of public school students in charter schools. See Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 134.

institutional barriers to school effectiveness.<sup>259</sup> Charters would enjoy the “operational autonomy of a private school,” which would result in more freedom to innovate and improve the quality of education.<sup>260</sup> Parents would also be able to select any charter of their choice. Therefore, assuming the basic principles of competition, the quality of education would increase as schools competed for enrollment in a market of schools.<sup>261</sup> One implication of this concept is that the worst performing schools would eventually be forced to shut down, preventing wasteful spending on schools that do not work. Not required to unionize, the charter system would also avoid demands for pay raises and benefits, so often a financial strain and burden in school districts. For the governor, the charter law was going to fix the financial and educational issues that had long plagued Michigan’s public school system.

Twenty years later, while people are still speculating whether the charter law has improved education or school finance, it has definitively transformed the state’s educational landscape, most profoundly in Detroit. Ironically, DPS did not have an opportunity to charter many schools before the state reached its charter limit (or charter cap) in 1999. As a consequence, the charter law actually had a paradoxical effect on DPS as a steady stream of parents and students exited the system for charters, a gradual erosion of virtually the shape and size and geographical boundaries of the school district. The development of a Detroit charter system would not take off until the charter cap was lifted and there was a new regime of educational actors to support school governance change.

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<sup>259</sup> In fact, according to Addonizio and Kearney, John Chubb, Terry Moe, Al Shankar, and Ted Kolderie had visited the governor’s office in his first term, helping to shape and outline conceptions for creating a new systems of schools in Michigan. See Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 131-136. For more information about Al Shanker, see Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 121-127.

<sup>260</sup> The Michigan Department of Education reported that 62 percent of tenth graders failed reading, 77 percent of tenth graders failed math, and 54 percent of eleventh graders failed science. See Engler, “New Schools for a New Century,” 4-5.

<sup>261</sup> John E. Chubb & Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1990).



Although passing the charter law was an easy victory for Governor Engler and the Republican-controlled legislature, the law would have a rocky start. The Michigan Education Association, a 150,000-member teachers union, filed a suit against the state in August 1994, challenging the constitutionality of the new charter school law.<sup>262</sup> While the lawsuit was pending, there was enough chartering of schools where, in 1996, the MEA managed to negotiate a legal cap on the number of university-authorized charter schools to 150.<sup>263</sup> However, a year later, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled in favor of the state and sanctioned one of the most expansive charter laws in the nation.<sup>264</sup> Michigan's charter law enabled a broad array of institutions to establish a charter—including local school board, boards of intermediate school districts, and the boards of community college and state universities. Yet, most did not jump at the opportunity to establish charters. Because the law did not offer any means for capital funding, most of the institutions did not have the resources to lease, acquire, or renovate buildings for new schools. State universities, on the other hand, contracted with educational management organizations (EMOs) that had the kind of private equity to cover building costs.<sup>265</sup> Thus, state universities were by far issuing the most charters. Between 1995-1999, about 35 new charters opened in Michigan each year, many of them granted by universities.<sup>266</sup>

By 1999, the state had reached the charter cap on university-authorized charter schools. While charter growth across the state slowed after 1999, growth in Detroit was at a near-

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<sup>262</sup> To be more specific, the MEA was one of the most active members of a coalition called the Council of Organizations for Education About Parochialism (often referred to as CAP) who opposed the charter bills. For full details on the legal battle between MEA (via CAP) and Governor Engler's charter law, see Goenner, *Origination*, 90-113.

<sup>263</sup> See Natalie Lacireno-Paquet and Thomas T. Holyoke, "Moving Forward or Sliding Backward: The Evolution of Charter School Policies in Michigan and the District of Columbia," *Educational Policy* 21 (2007), 194.

<sup>264</sup> In the interim, the legislature enacted Public Act 416, which addressed several issues brought up by a court ruling. After the state supreme court upheld the original charter law in 1997, PA 416 was repealed. For details, see Goenner, *Origination*.

<sup>265</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 136.

<sup>266</sup> Gary Miron and Christopher Nelson, *What's Public About Charter Schools? Lessons Learned About Choice and Accountability* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press).

standstill. Universities, the most active authorizers in the state, were no longer able to start any more charter schools in Detroit. Ironically, the charter cap had been reached the same year Detroit went under mayoral takeover; it was a widely shared assumption among reformers that the mayoral school governance model would lead to more chartering of schools. In other cities, the switch to mayoral control resulted in charter school expansion because major foundations—like the Broad Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—were more inclined to invest in school districts with political arrangements that buffered them from local resistance.<sup>267</sup> For example, when New York City, Oakland, Boston, and Chicago school districts went under mayoral control, they received significant funding from foundations that enabled them to open charters.<sup>268</sup> In Detroit, however, the opposite happened—Detroit *lost* most of its major foundation grants between 2000-2005.<sup>269</sup> According to the press, foundations withdrew their support because they were uncertain about whether mayoral takeover would last, waiting to see if voters would terminate or extend mayoral takeover in 2004 before they made their investments. Moreover the charter cap prevented universities, the most active authorizers, from chartering in the Motor City.

In 2003, when Bob Thompson, a philanthropist from Plymouth, Michigan offered \$200 million dollars to build additional charters in Detroit, the state legislature discussed lifting the cap or making an exception for Detroit.<sup>270</sup> But Thompson’s proposal was met with widespread protest, especially from the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT). Three thousand DPS teachers

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<sup>267</sup> More specifically, major foundations target their grants toward *diverse providers*, organizations and individuals who operate charter schools and other services such as human capital development, curriculum, and school turnaround strategies usually within urban school districts. They can be non-profit or for-profit, usually under a contracting or charter arrangement with a public agency. See Sarah Reckhow, “Disseminating and Legitimizing a New Approach: The Role of Foundations,” in *Between Public and Private: Politics, Governance, and the New Portfolio Models for Urban School Reform*, eds. Katrina Bulkley, Jeffrey Henig, and Henry M. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2010), 277-304.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> “Philanthropist Withdraws \$200 Million for Detroit Charter Schools,” *Philanthropy News Digest*, October 8, 2003, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/philanthropist-withdraws-200-million-for-detroit-charter-schools>.

and their supporters descended on the capitol to protest any further expansion of charters. Negotiations among key players, which included Governor Granholm and Republican leaders, quickly degenerated into partisan bickering while failing to pass any legislation.<sup>271</sup> Meanwhile, Detroit's newly elected mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick, advocated for more authority to manage Detroit's schools and proposed his own charter plan.<sup>272</sup> Detroiters were quick to accuse him of hardening the political battle line around charters. One reporter wrote, "The mayor is more likely to find support among the business community and Republican lawmakers than he is among grass-root Detroiters and most fellow Democrats in Lansing."<sup>273</sup> The Detroit chapter of the NAACP conducted a survey showing that the majority of Detroiters rejected the mayor's proposal and regarded charter schools with suspicion.<sup>274</sup>

The legislature, however, managed to pass Public Act 179 in October, allowing fifteen new charter high schools in Detroit. Still, reluctant to be embroiled in the politics of Detroit, Thompson rescinded his offer.<sup>275</sup> Exasperated by the lost opportunity, a Republican legislator told one reporter that Detroit's resistance to charters bewildered him. As he saw it, other American cities would have thrown a parade for Thompson.<sup>276</sup>

In the meantime, a Democratic state senator filed a lawsuit against Public Act 179 but dropped it in early 2004 when no groups made moves to open new charter high schools.<sup>277</sup> However, as the November elections neared—at which point Detroiters would vote on whether or not to keep mayoral takeover—Thompson reappeared, expressing possible interest in

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<sup>271</sup> Daniel Howes, "Thompson Gives Detroit a Final Shot at Charters," *Detroit News*, February 25, 2004, 1A.

<sup>272</sup> Mayor Kilpatrick did not welcome philanthropist Thompson's \$200 million offer, arguing that it would drain millions of dollars from the DPS system. His plan, on the other hand, was locally based and partnered with DPS schools. See Luther Keith, "Battle Lines Harden in Bid to Run Schools," *Detroit News*, November 20, 2003, 2A.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> The NAACP surveyed members of select churches in Detroit. See Keith, "Battle Lines Harden."

<sup>275</sup> Howes, "Thompson Gives Detroit."

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Sherri Begin, "Charter-School Efforts on Hold Until After Detroit Vote," *Crain's Detroit Business*, Aug. 30, 2004.

Detroit.<sup>278</sup> So did Detroit businessman Dave Bing (who would become Detroit's next mayor) and Central Michigan University, the most active authorizer among the universities.<sup>279</sup> However, Detroiters voted to end mayoral takeover and reinstated the publicly elected school board. In the interim, Governor Granholm created a massive 140-member transition team with the president of the NAACP, Reverend Wendell Anthony, as chairman.

The transition team began its work with making recommendations, one of which called for a charter ban. To her chagrin, Granholm wrote a letter to Reverend Anthony, urging the team to reject the idea:

This recommendation suggests that the only way to bring students back to the DPS is to eliminate educational options that parents and children have today... The Transition Team should remain focused on finding ways to improve the Detroit Public Schools to give parents more, not fewer, opportunities to choose good schools for their children.<sup>280</sup>

Although there was no ban, charter advocates did not sense any hope for expansion until the reinstated school board selected a new superintendent Connie Calloway in 2007, predicting she would be more accommodating to charters.<sup>281</sup> In early 2008, the *Detroit News* citing the success of University Prep Academy, which opened its first school in Detroit in 2000, gleefully reported that more "high quality" educational choices were coming the city's way.<sup>282</sup> After several excellent national charter operators courted Detroit, but were deterred by the state's limits on

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Christine MacDonald, "Granholm Warns School Panel – Detroit Public Schools Transition Team Urged to Spurn Charter Ban, Avoid Suing State for Funds," *Detroit News*, October 11, 2005, 1B; "Banning Competition Won't Save Detroit Schools – Some on District's Transition Team Seek to Outlaw Charters," *Detroit News*, October, 17, 2005, 10A.

<sup>281</sup> See "Fix Detroit Schools, But Give Parents Choice," *Detroit News*, December 19, 2007; members of the elected school board were Jimmy Womack (president), Annie Carter, Marvis Cofield, Joyce Hayes-Giles, Paula Johnson, Jonathan Kinloch, Reverend David Murray, Carla Scott, Ida Short, Marie Thornton, and Tyrone Winfrey, see Jennifer Mrozowski, "DPS Board Votes Down Closure Plan," *Detroit News*, March 24, 2007, A3.

<sup>282</sup> "New Detroit School Brings Hope to the City," *Detroit News*, Jan. 20, 2008.

university-authorized charters, one *Detroit News* editorial pleaded the legislature to lift the cap.<sup>283</sup> Finally, more than a decade later, newly elected Governor Rick Snyder signed Public Act 277, lifting the charter cap in December 2011.<sup>284</sup>

Once the cap was lifted, DPS's emergency financial manager, Robert Bobb, announced his Renaissance Plan 2012, which aimed to turn 41 of DPS schools into charters, affecting nearly 16,000 students. He argued that the plan would save \$75-\$99 million in operating costs per year, avoiding the need for drastic cuts and more school closures.<sup>285</sup> Moreover, charters, having to pay rent for DPS buildings, would actually bring in an estimated \$21.85 million in revenue. Turning DPS schools into charters would also cut costs that would otherwise go to paying teacher tenures and pensions. Bobb explained to the press, "We want to create a marketplace of schools. It enables us to design a new DPS at a level that is sustainable given our current financial legacy deficit situation along with an opportunity to improve our cash flow."<sup>286</sup> The school board—who still held educational decision-making power—would have to approve the Renaissance plan, but it was unlikely that they would. Charter advocates, however, remained hopeful as Governor Snyder sought to expand the powers of the emergency financial manager.<sup>287</sup>

The same year Snyder lifted the cap, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools announced that Detroit ranked number two in cities with the most enrolled students (41 percent) in charters. New Orleans was number one (with 76 percent enrolled in charters).<sup>288</sup> The

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<sup>283</sup> Anonymous, "Seize Change to Bring School Choice to Detroit," *Detroit News*, June 10, 2008, A14.

<sup>284</sup> James Dickson, "Gov. Snyder Lifts Caps on Charter Schools," *The News Herald*, December 27, 2011, accessed January 23, 2015, <http://www.thenewsherald.com/articles/2011/12/27/news/doc4efa454363ea8066656728.txt>.

<sup>285</sup> According to Bobb's estimates, shutting down schools would actually cost the district \$22 million. See "41 Detroit Public Schools to Become Charter Schools," *Huffpost Education*, March 14, 2011, accessed January 21, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/detroit-charter-schools\\_n\\_835719.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/detroit-charter-schools_n_835719.html).

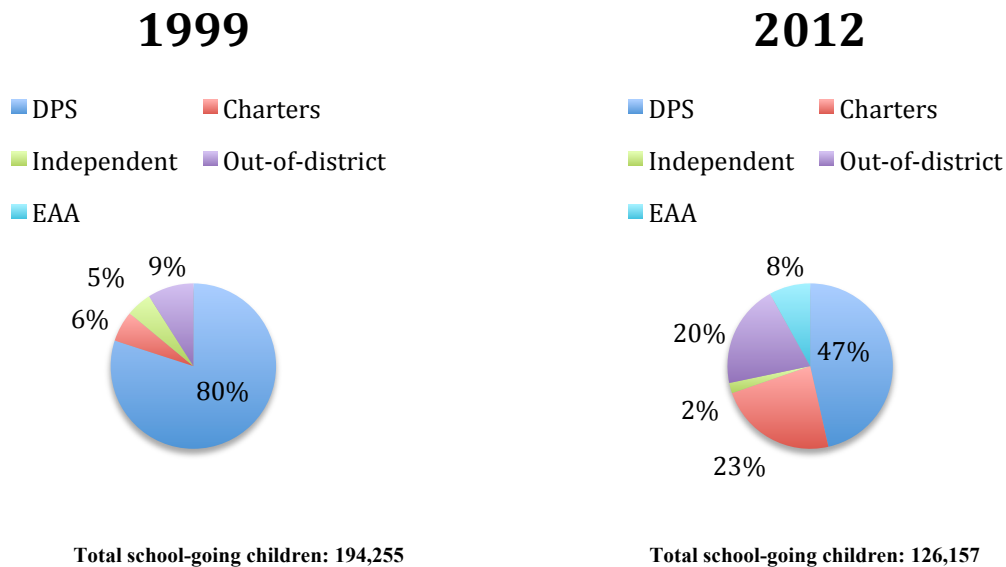
<sup>286</sup> Matthew Dolan and Stephanie Banchemo, "Detroit Plan Makes Big Charter Bet," *The Miami Times*, March 16, 2011, 10A.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> In 2013, Detroit was still ranked number two with more than half (51 percent) of Detroit students attending charters (51,083 versus 49,172 in regular school districts). See "Detroit Now Ranks #2 in Charter Enrollment," The

*Huffington Post* argued that Bobb’s Renaissance plan would be the next step in turning Detroit into post-Katrina New Orleans, in which virtually all its traditional public schools had been replaced by charters after the storm.<sup>289</sup> The *New York Times* stated that although results were mixed there were as many as 71,000 Detroit children attending charters.<sup>290</sup> According to Data Driven Detroit, in 2012, roughly half of that figure attended charters outside of Detroit. In 1999, 80% of Detroit’s children attended DPS; in 2011, less than half attended DPS. (See Figure 3.) These figures show that parents were overwhelmingly exiting the traditional schooling system and enrolling their children in an alternative system of charters and schools of choice.

**Figure 3. Percent of school-going children in Detroit enrolled in schools available to the district.**



Source: Data Driven Detroit, “Detroit System of Schools, Then and Now,” (presentation, Detroit Schools-Higher Education Consortium Meeting, Detroit, MI, October 15, 2012).

Governor John Engler Center for Charter Schools Central Michigan University, accessed January 23, 2015, [http://thecenterforcharters.org/modules.php?name=Issues&sp\\_id=111](http://thecenterforcharters.org/modules.php?name=Issues&sp_id=111) and Katie Ashe, “New Report: Majority of New Orleans, Detroit Students in Charters,” *Education Week*, December 10, 2013, accessed January 14, 2015, [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2013/12/new\\_report\\_majority\\_of\\_new\\_orleans\\_detroit\\_students\\_in\\_charters.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2013/12/new_report_majority_of_new_orleans_detroit_students_in_charters.html).

<sup>289</sup> “41 Detroit Public Schools to Become Charter Schools,” *Huffpost Education*, March 14, 2011, accessed January 21, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/detroit-charter-schools\\_n\\_835719.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/detroit-charter-schools_n_835719.html).

<sup>290</sup> Michael Winerip, “For Detroit Schools, Hope for the Hopeless,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2011, A13.

Thus, the charter system had effectively shrunk the total number of DPS schools (i.e., traditional schools) by more than half. In 1999, there were 260 traditional schools; in 2011, there were 109. The number of charter authorizers, on the other hand, *had increased more than 100 percent*. Furthermore, DPS had lost another 15 schools that were slated for transfer to a newly established statewide recovery school district, accounting for 6% of *all* the types of schools in Detroit. Interestingly, to note, the development of an alternate system of charters also decreased the number of independent schools (i.e., private and religious schools) by almost half in 2011. (See Table 3.)

**Table 3. Number and Percent of Detroit Schools by Types, 1999 and 2011**

School Types	1999	2011
	# (%)	# (%)
<b>Detroit Public School District</b>		
Traditional	260 (67%)	109 (45%)
DPS Authorized Charters	7 (2%)	13 (5%)
Self-Governing		9 (4%)
<b>Charter Authorizers</b>	36 (9%)	74 (30%)
<b>Independent</b> (private and religious schools)	83 (22%)	24 (10%)
<b>Education Achievement Authority</b>		15 (6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>244</b>

*Source:* Data Driven Detroit, “Detroit System of Schools, Then and Now,” (presentation, Detroit Schools-Higher Education Consortium meeting, Detroit, MI, October 15, 2012).

In sum, Michigan’s charter law impacted school governance change in Detroit in three ways. First, having reached the charter limit in 1999, charter growth stalled in Detroit while parents opted to leave DPS, inadvertently shrinking the size of DPS in terms of number of students, teachers, and schools. Second, the establishment of a charter school system in the state weakened the geographical borders of DPS that once bounded a school district to a set of schools. Thirdly, the eventual creation of a charter system *within* Detroit added to the city’s

educational options beyond traditional schools (i.e., what was left of DPS). All together, the creation of a charter school system in the last twenty years has altered the educational landscape in Detroit and how schools are governed. For each charter authorizer, for example, a different governing body makes decisions for those set of schools. The need for a local school board increasingly became more irrelevant as the schooling system became more fractured. Moreover, during this period, new educational actors such as powerful governors, emergency managers, and foundations helped to usher in and support change in a city that had been, at least politically, resistant to charter schools. Parents, on the other hand, indirectly supported this change by opting to enroll their children outside of DPS. When 15 schools were slated for transfer into another new schooling system in 2011, the implementation would to reveal just how much the school board, and by extension its constituents, were rendered powerless within the traditional school governing structure.

#### The Education Achievement Authority: Another Schooling System, 2012-present

The creation of the Educational Achievement Authority (EAA) in 2011 marked the most recent assault on traditional school governance in Detroit. Modeled after Louisiana’s Recovery School District, Detroit’s emergency manager transferred fifteen DPS schools into the new recovery school district designed to turnaround the lowest performing schools in the state. Spearheaded by Governor Snyder—who faced little legislative resistance under a Republican trifecta<sup>291</sup>—the EAA virtually removed school buildings, land, and pupils from Detroit. This effort to reform schools in Detroit, I argue, signaled the end of an era: Detroit’s “one best system” had been effectively dismantled. As a state authority, the EAA was not subject to local decision-makers, completely pushing the publicly elected school board to the sideline and

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<sup>291</sup> Since 2011, Republicans hold the governorship, the state senate, and the state house. See “Michigan State Legislature,” Ballotpedia, accessed May 14, 2015, [http://ballotpedia.org/Michigan\\_State\\_Legislature](http://ballotpedia.org/Michigan_State_Legislature).

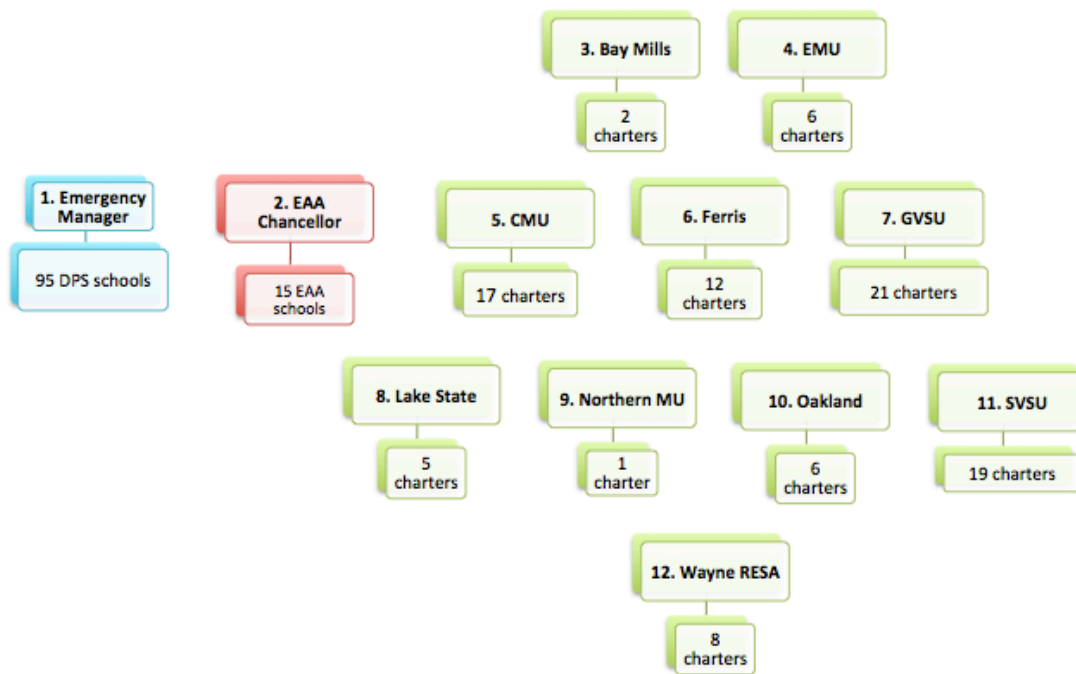


rendering it entirely superfluous to the lives of Detroit students, parents, and teachers.

Additionally, the EAA was adding to at least eleven other schooling systems each with its own governance. In 2014, the DPS was but a small fraction of a fragmented educational landscape.

(See Figure 4.)

**Figure 4. Twelve School Systems: Detroit's Fragmented Educational Landscape**



Source: Excellent Schools Detroit, “Proposal” (Presentation for ESD Board, Michigan, August 15, 2014), accessed November 21, 2014, [http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd\\_board\\_presentation\\_082014.pdf](http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd_board_presentation_082014.pdf).

The origins of the EAA can be traced back to the end of Governor Jennifer Granholm’s tenure. In 2009, Michigan was so cash strapped that extra federal dollars offered through the Race to the Top (RTT) initiative was appealing. By the end of the year, the legislature put together a package of reform bills designed to win RTT dollars. Michigan failed to win the first

round, but the state was nonetheless left with a set of reform initiatives, one of which required the state department of education to create a turnaround district for the lowest performing schools in the state. In effect, legislative efforts to win RTT money became early blueprints for the EAA. After his election in 2011, Governor Snyder immediately began to seek a way in which he could establish a statewide turnaround district.

In an unprecedented move, the governor quickly implemented the EAA without going through the usual legislative processes. Snyder used an Interlocal Agreement (ILA), a contract between public agencies to share functions and resources, to establish a freestanding K-12 system. DPS and Eastern Michigan University (EMU) were the two public agencies that signed the ILA contract. However, for all intents and purposes, the contract was an agreement *between DPS's emergency manager and the regents of EMU*. Since neither DPS nor EMU faculty were consulted, the governor's plan immediately drew controversy.

Reminiscent of Governor Engler, Snyder promised to transform public education in Michigan. Having campaigned on economic comeback, the governor argued that education was an integral part of his plan to paving a stronger economic future for Michigan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the EAA was not only going to turnaround the state's lowest-performing 5% of schools but also provide a new model for innovation and instruction *outside of the traditional public school system*. Mary L. Mason and David Arsen argue that Snyder was interested in using the EAA as a new governing authority to pull together Detroit's fragmented system into a *portfolio management model*.<sup>292</sup>

EAA advocates claimed that removing DPS schools from the bureaucracy of the traditional school district would enable schools to innovate programs especially tailored to

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<sup>292</sup> Mary L. Mason and David Arsen, "Michigan's Education Achievement Authority and the Future of Public Education in Detroit: The Challenge of Aligning Policy Design and Policy Goals," (Working Paper, College of Education Michigan State University, December 2014), ii.

students' needs, which would in turn increase student performance.<sup>293</sup> Snyder also said that the EAA would strive to spend up to 95 percent of its student funding on classroom expenses versus the 55 percent allocated to DPS classrooms.<sup>294</sup> As a result, the EAA model would improve student performance by spending more on students and less on administration. Indeed, the governor perceived how transferring the DPS schools into a new system could unload some of DPS's financial burdens, which had little to spare for spending on dramatic turnaround. The EAA would rely on private donations for start-up costs.

A new regime of actors consisting of the governor, mostly Republican leaders, the new DPS emergency manager, Roy Roberts, the EMU Regents, and a network of foundations supported the EAA, firmly believing it was the long-awaited transformation of Detroit's schools. The opponents of the EAA, however, perceived the reform initiative as the most extreme form of state intervention since mayoral takeover. Unclear as to how an effort to turnaround the state's lowest performing schools was directed only at DPS, the unions, school board, and its supporters in Detroit were convinced that the EAA was just a part of another series of efforts to eviscerate DPS, deny Detroiters of their voice, corporatize public schooling, and profit from a new market of schools. Remarkably, the opposition to the EAA would soon spread beyond Detroit. Neighboring school districts that feared the transfer of their own schools into an untested system began to appeal to Democratic state legislators to halt any further expansion of the EAA.

With a slew of performance data and investigate reports revealing the appalling state of the EAA, it appeared that opponents were on the brink of winning the war they had launched against the new state-authorized school district. However, Governor Snyder—in many ways, the

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<sup>293</sup> Christina A. Samuels, "State Creating New Districts to Steer 'Turnarounds,'" *Education Week*, December 12, 2011, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/12/14/14authority.h31.html>.

<sup>294</sup> Matthew Dolan, "U.S. News: State to Take Charge of Worst Detroit Schools," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2011, A4.

architect of the system—was reelected to office in 2014, which essentially ensured that the EAA would remain in effect. As soon as the governor was reelected, a cacophony of new voices (with the school board and teachers union notably absent) urged the governor to address the extremely fractured school district in which there were “twelve drivers” each driving to their own rules.<sup>295</sup> With the “one best system” dismantled, there was a need to search for new order.

### Conclusion

On the eve of Proposal A in 1993, Detroit’s school board essentially made *all* the major fiscal, operational, and educational decisions for all of Detroit’s public school students and teachers. Yet, twenty years later this publicly elected board had virtually no power over any schools, students, or teachers. Where once a simple organizational chart could explain the Detroit’s school governance, today one would need a few different charts to show the variety of school systems, governing boards, and levels of government that play a role in decision-making.

When Proposal A eliminated the ability for school districts to raise revenue for operational costs, this was the first major blow to the school board. Not only did the new funding law freeze the school board’s role in financing schools but it also weakened the negotiating power of the teachers union, the informal actors that actually support and maintain traditional school governance. Between 1999-2004, mayoral takeover was the first instance in which the Detroit school board’s authority was literally suspended. Although the shift to a mayoral-appointed school board had been brief, the traditional governance regime was significantly weakened; thus, mayoral takeover actually paved the way for subsequent reforms. In 2009, the

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<sup>295</sup> Excellent Schools Detroit, “Proposal” (Presentation for ESD Board, Michigan, August 15, 2014), accessed November 21, 2014, [http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd\\_board\\_presentation\\_082014.pdf](http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd_board_presentation_082014.pdf).

emergency financial management law effectively suspended the school board’s fiscal authority. By 2012, the law was amended and Detroit’s school board once again had lost all authority. In part, this enabled the final assault on traditional school governance: the establishment of the Education Achievement Authority, a system that took root in Detroit but had no local input whatsoever. At the same time, Proposal A and Michigan’s charter movement had created a structural crisis in DPS—with thousands of students enrolling outside of the district since 1995—leaving the district fiscally vulnerable, which also contributed to the erosion of the school district’s power and authority.

For most of the twentieth century, reformers envisioned public schooling as a “single-purpose government,” a closed system of “schoolmen” in which the central actors were the school boards, superintendents, teacher unions, and parents.<sup>296</sup> By 2014, this governing system had been all but dismantled in Detroit. The shift to mayoral control signaled the movement towards what some scholars have called “integrated governance,”<sup>297</sup> opening up the job of educating Detroit’s children to a slew of new educational actors whom may not even be specialized in education.<sup>298</sup> In short, this chapter builds a case for Henig’s concept of “the end of exceptionalism.”

This chapter also illustrates the paradoxical nature of school reform in Detroit. Much of the policies in the last twenty years were meant to increase capital accumulation and improve the financial situation of DPS. Yet, under these school reforms DPS has amassed even greater debt. As discussed, Proposal A and the establishment of a charter system created a structural crisis in which Detroit-specific reforms were headed on a collision course with; no appointed leader could change things fast enough to prevent the steady drain of students leaving the system.

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<sup>296</sup> See Henig, *End of Exceptionalism*, 3, 27.

<sup>297</sup> Wong et al., *The Education Mayor*, 12.

<sup>298</sup> Henig, *End of Exceptionalism*.

Ironically, policymakers continued to blame the school board for the district's financial problems. Conveniently, it provided a rationale for changing school governance. Nearly everyone—from every level of government and across party lines in D.C. and Lansing—advocated for resolving DPS's fiscal crisis by pushing the school board and teacher unions aside and creating new partnerships, whether governmental or private, but especially agencies that could provide additional resources to supplement the funding of schools. Importantly, the rationale of policymakers was contextualized by the need to solve a fiscal crisis, unaware that previous policies had created and exacerbated the crisis. The established pattern is this: the deeper the fiscal crisis, the more policymakers turn to non-traditional and external actors. The result, so far, is the situation in Detroit seems far worse while citizens, almost all African American, have lost their voting right, forced to watch the state and other agencies make educational decisions for them. Such political and racial issues are further taken up in the next chapters.

This chapter presented a bird's eye view of school reform in Michigan and Detroit. It sought to assemble school reform efforts—so often studied in isolation from the others—into a coherent picture of how one urban school system was dismantled at the turn of the twenty-first century. The next two chapters go further, presenting case studies on specific reforms—mayoral takeover and the EAA—that detail and explain the fall of one regime and the rise of another. These chapters are a close examination of the regime activity that is required for school governance change, and the social and political conflicts that come with it.

## CHAPTER V

### Mayoral Takeover: The Beginning of the End, 1994-2005

Detroit became the fourth major city in the nation to implement mayoral control in 1999, joining the first wave of urban school districts to embrace an emerging movement towards a radical “new style governance”<sup>299</sup> that dismantled the nearly century-old system of school governance. By the late 2000s, mayoral control of schools had occurred in at least 104 school districts across forty states.<sup>300</sup> In Detroit, however, mayoral takeover did not last. Kenneth Wong and his colleagues have interpreted Detroit as a unique case in which new style governance is not for every city, concluding that by 2005 Detroit had ultimately returned to a “more traditional” governing system.<sup>301</sup> However, as I argued in Chapter 4, DPS did *not* return to a traditional system but continued on a historical trajectory that ended the special status of public schooling. Like most scholars, Wong examines mayoral control in Detroit in such a way that it fails to locate this event in the continuum of America’s quest to reshape the urban public schooling system.<sup>302</sup> In several other accounts, mayoral control is a single event, a “blip” on the radar. Mirel, on the other hand, recognized the historical significance of mayoral takeover arguing,

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<sup>299</sup> According to Kenneth K. Wong, Boston was first to implement mayoral control in 1992, followed by Chicago in 1995) and Cleveland in 1998—the first wave of *new style governance*. See Kenneth K. Wong, Francis X. Shen, Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, and Stacey Rutledge, *The Education Mayor: Improving America’s Schools* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>301</sup> In addition to Detroit, Washington D.C. was also another exception. It “experimented” with mayoral control between 2000-2004 before returning to a traditional system of governance. See Wong et al., *Education Mayor*.

<sup>302</sup> To be fair, Wong and his colleagues situate their study in the historical and political context of integrated governance. However, the purpose of their study is to find whether mayoral control leads to improved outcomes. Unlike a historical analysis that might seek to articulate the meaning of governance change, Wong’s aim is to measure the effectiveness of mayoral control as an increasingly widespread phenomenon in cities across the nation. Their conclusion, by the way, is that, mayoral leadership is associated with positive outcomes. See Wong et al., *Education Mayor*.

“one must go back to the Progressive Era to find reforms of equal magnitude in Detroit.”<sup>303</sup>

Mayoral takeover in Detroit, following as it did on heels of the centralization of school funding, contributed to the erosion of local control. In my dissertation, it is part of a longer, continued assault on the progressive model of school governance.

This chapter examines the rise, fall, and impact of a mayoral-appointed board, asking: what led to this major shift in governance, what happened during this period, and what were the effects of this policy? I begin by discussing the reasons, problems, and issues that policymakers, particularly in Lansing, perceived in DPS, why they argued restructuring was necessary, and how Michigan politicians turned to Chicago’s mayoral takeover as a model for Detroit. Digging deeper into this reform than I did (or could) in Chapter 4 allows us to examine the debates, interest groups and coalitions that formed around either the opposition or support of mayoral takeover. Most critically, a closer examination will enable us to see Black support for mayoral takeover and the ways in which the implementation of the policy collided with the structural issues of Proposal A, eventually leading to what Wong saw as the restoration of the old system. I, however, conclude by discussing the longer-term impact mayoral control had on weakening the older regime and opening up the path for a new coalition of actors.

### An Urban School System in Crisis

Mayoral takeover of DPS was, at least rhetorically, an attempt to fix a system under crisis. For decades, DPS increasingly struggled to improve education and manage its finances, while political efforts to break the status quo were at a deadlock. By the late 1990s, policymakers

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<sup>303</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, “Detroit: ‘There Is Still a Long Road to Travel, and Success is Far from Assured,’” in *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race, and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*, ed. Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 142.



in Lansing overwhelmingly believed that something decisive had to be done to save a chronically underperforming and fiscally damaged system from its continual slide downward.

One cannot overstate the extent to which Detroit's fiscal crisis affected the financial management of DPS, the largest school district in the state. Once the bastion of the U.S. auto industry, Detroit was the nation's leading boomtown in the 1940s and boasted the highest-paid blue-collar workers in the nation.<sup>304</sup> After World War II, however, the Motor City began to suffer as deindustrialization brought about the end of Fordism and its assembly line-based work.<sup>305</sup> Between 1954 and 1960, Detroit lost nearly 90,000 jobs.<sup>306</sup> Manufacturers also began to move to areas outside of the city to cut costs. All of this, in addition to increasing racial hostility, resulted in a mass White-migration into developing suburbs. Black out-migration was nearly impossible due to discriminatory housing practices that lasted well into the late 1960s.<sup>307</sup> By the mid 1960s, the majority of DPS students were Black, though Whites were still the *voting* majority. In 1968, the White voting block abruptly shifted away from supporting schools through tax increases, a major turning point in DPS's financial history as "[n]ever again would large numbers of white working-class voters support a tax increase for the Detroit Public Schools."<sup>308</sup> As a consequence the school deficit jumped to \$10 million in 1969-1970.<sup>309</sup>

Dramatic economic changes, as well as changes in the racial and social demography of the city, significantly reduced Detroit's tax base and the political will to fund schools. The fiscal

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<sup>304</sup> Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>305</sup> Wilbur C. Rich, "Who's Afraid of a Mayoral Takeover of Detroit Public Schools?" in *When Mayors Take Charge: School Governance in the City*, ed. Joseph P. Viteritti (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

<sup>306</sup> Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 26.

<sup>307</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968.

<sup>308</sup> Jeffrey Mirel, *The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System; Detroit, 1907-1981, Second Edition* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 325.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

situation continued its steady decline as DPS amassed 11 consecutive annual budget deficits between 1978 and 1989, reaching a new low of \$159 million in 1989.<sup>310</sup> By 2000, the population had plummeted to 951,270, losing more than half of its population since 1950. Indeed, some have observed that anyone who had the resources to leave had left by now. Among all residents, 82 percent were Black, 26 percent of whom lived below the poverty line.<sup>311</sup> Thus, importantly, DPS's finances play out within this postwar urban context: a shrinking city without a stronger tax base. With Michigan experiencing major changes in its economic health, state officials began to threaten the DPS board with takeover if they did not resolve their financial problems. But, in 1989, when Detroit's first Black mayor, Coleman Young, actually suggested mayoral control as a means of stabilizing finances the state legislature was unwilling to give him that power.<sup>312</sup>

Still, remarkably, Michael Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, maintain that DPS could have avoided its financial crisis. For property-poor school districts, like DPS that depended on state aid for its operating revenue, the guaranteed tax base (GTB) formula adopted in 1973 actually served Detroit well. Under the GTB formula, state aid steadily increased. Though it fell sharply in 1980, with what would become then the deepest recession since the Great Depression, state aid would rebound as the economy began to recover in 1983.<sup>313</sup> In the mean time, between 1977-1985, Detroiters had voted to increase the district's operating millage rate, which under the GTB formula brought in additional matching state aid. Because of these "sizable increases in operating millage rates and matching state aid of the mid-1980s," Addonizio and Kearney

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<sup>310</sup> Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan* (Kalamazoo: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2012), 207.

<sup>311</sup> Rich, "Who's Afraid?"

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 207.

believe that DPS could have easily eliminated the district's deficit. They argue that the teachers union's demand for pay raises each year was what triggered a budget deficit explosion in 1989.<sup>314</sup>

In Addonizio and Kearney's view, the DPS school board and the teachers union had failed to place the public's interest before their own interest. Costs could have been contained had these groups worked toward an affordable and reasonable collective bargaining agreement. Indeed, Republican Governor John Engler shared this view and he actively sought ways to diminish the power and influence of the unions in educational matters. Meanwhile, the notion that a corrupt and inept school board was responsible for DPS's fiscal crisis continued to grow among the public.<sup>315</sup>

Yet, the reality was that the school board was managing the finances of one of the largest urban school districts in the U.S under relatively unstable conditions including rapid population decline and the unpredictability of state aid given the rise and fall of the economy.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, as the auto industry declined, DPS suddenly found itself one of the largest employers in the city and became a critical source for maintaining Black middle class income.<sup>317</sup> Addonizio and Kearney fail to take into account how demands for pay raises were made within this context. They also fail to consider how the period between 1971-1981 was a particularly tumultuous period beginning with *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), the failure to integrate schools, and then dramatic battles over decentralization, which resulted in the school district splitting into eight

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<sup>314</sup> To ameliorate the deficit, the district began to sell deficit bonds in 1990. As a result, Detroit taxpayers were stuck with 13 additional mills over 10 years to service its school debt. See Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 207-208.

<sup>315</sup> In a pilot-study conducted in 2013, Kelly Slay and I found that "corruption" is a reoccurring theme in Detroit's educational politics. For most interviewees, corruption is one reason why they think DPS is experiencing a financial crisis, though no one cited any specific cases or examples. While it is entirely possible that DPS's fiscal crisis is due in part to fraudulent uses of funds, we have yet to encounter any literature that discusses corruption nor have we begin to investigate specific cases and events.

<sup>316</sup> According to Wilbur C. Rich, Detroit was still one of the largest urban school districts in the U.S. in 2009. See Rich, "Who's Afraid?"

<sup>317</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, Richard C. Hula, Marion Orr, and Desiree S. Pedescleaux, *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

regions.<sup>318</sup> The basic lack of improvement in the quality of public schooling undoubtedly contributed to the exodus of families who could afford to leave, which in turn contributed to further decline in population and revenue. Consequently, the school board was constructing its budget under these complex circumstances while negotiating salaries with one of the strongest teachers unions in the nation.

Since the 1950s, Detroit Public Schools' once highly regarded academic record was also in steady decline both in reputation as well as student performance. For example, according to an alumnus of Northern High, by 1966, the once outstanding high school had become "primarily a custodial institution complete with police as an apparent part of the administration, and was only on the surface an institution where systematic learning took place."<sup>319</sup> In 1965, three-quarters of all of Northern's tenth and twelfth graders scored below the average on national standardized tests. Only 20 percent of the graduating class of 1966 scored at or above the twelfth grade level on similar exams.<sup>320</sup>

Northern in the late 1960s was an early indicator of DPS's academic decline over the next thirty years. By 1999, one report showed that of the 30 percent that managed to graduate, more than half tested below an eighth grade level in reading and math.<sup>321</sup> An astonishingly small percent (6%) met or exceeded state standards on the high school proficiency tests.<sup>322</sup> The reported also noted that among the 180,000 students attending DPS, two-thirds lived in poverty.

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<sup>318</sup> See Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 359-368.

<sup>319</sup> Northern High alumnus Karl D. Gregory was also a professor at Wayne State University in 1966. See *Rise and Fall*, 300.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>321</sup> 57 percent of those who graduated scored below an eighth grade level in reading and math. "Report Card Says Detroit Schools Don't Measure Up," *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17, 1999, A10.

<sup>322</sup> Barry M. Franklin, "Race, Restructuring, and Educational Reform: The Mayoral Takeover of the Detroit Public Schools," in *Reinterpreting Urban School Reform: Have Urban Schools Failed, or Has the Reform Movement Failed Urban Schools?*, ed. Louis F. Miron and Edward P. St. John (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 95-121.

Given DPS's devastating financial and academic decline, it is no surprise that by the mid 1980s, people began to call for change.<sup>323</sup> A diverse coalition of Blacks, Whites, labor unions, business groups, grassroots activists, and major political leaders sought to seek control of the school board in 1988. What was called the HOPE campaign envisioned DPS's transformation would come by first disrupting the old school board regime, which the coalition claimed was the chief reason for DPS's decline. The HOPE candidates ran on denouncing "the profligate spending of the incumbents," repeated allegations of the school board's sheer lack of fiscal responsibility.<sup>324</sup> Promising an "education revolution" that would also stabilize finances, the HOPE campaign was stunningly successful resulting in the defeat of all four incumbents, creating the "biggest shakeup" in school leadership in nearly two decades.<sup>325</sup>

Over the next two years, the HOPE team got control of the budget, reduced the deficit, and developed a seemingly strong working relationship with the teachers union, the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT). However, this relationship would quickly sour when the HOPE team began to push for its chief educational initiatives that aimed to reorganize schools.<sup>326</sup> Perceiving it as a threat to union contracts, the DFT launched an attack on the HOPE team by depicting them as union busters. This would contribute to the defeat of the HOPE team's bid for reelection in 1992, which for all intents and purposes restored the old order.

Mirel argues, however, that the election of the HOPE team in 1988 signaled a sharp break with previous education politics. After all, the election was a flat out rejection of Mayor Coleman Young's support of the incumbent board members and his claims that the HOPE team

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<sup>323</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>325</sup> Mirel, "Long Road to Travel," 123. (The last "shakeup" nearly twenty years ago was the decentralization of schools in 1971.)

<sup>326</sup> The HOPE team sought to establish specialized magnet schools (otherwise know as "schools of choice") and empowered schools (that provided principals and teachers more control over school finances, curriculum, and testing). See Mirel, "Long Road to Travel," 123.

was tied to White interests. Having been roused by the mayor in the past over racial issues, this time Black Detroiters opted for change, demonstrating that they were “neither content with the status quo in the schools nor with politics as usual in the city.”<sup>327</sup> In spite of the short-lived HOPE campaign, these sentiments and attitudes would continue to resonate.

Moreover, after the collapse of HOPE, the reinstated school board proved to be utterly unreliable. In 1994, when Detroiters voted for a \$1.5 billion bond issue to address the school district’s crumbling buildings, the school board struggled to start any construction projects. By 1997, “not a lick of paint or trowel of mortar ha[d] been applied with the money.”<sup>328</sup> Perhaps worse, the value of the bond depreciated by over \$30 million per year. Five years later, due to a variety of reasons, the school board still had not launched a single construction or renovation project, while asking the state for another \$200 million. The state refused.<sup>329</sup> The total mismanagement of the bond money contributed to the public’s waning perception of the school board, setting the stage for the state government to act.<sup>330</sup>

Mirel argues that the path to mayoral takeover really began with the collapse of the HOPE team, when reformers realized they had underestimated the power of the DFT in maintaining the status quo.<sup>331</sup> Despite a bit of a fiscal recovery leading to a fund balance between 1996 and 1999, indeed, decades of educational failure and a history of fiscal mismanagement presented Governor Engler a politically opportune time for his plan for mayoral control of DPS.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 422.

<sup>328</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel,” 127.

<sup>329</sup> Some of the reasons behind the school board’s failure to begin construction include objecting to the superintendent’s choice for overseeing the program, and instead seeking to contract with local businesses (that apparently made campaign contributions to several school board members.) See Mirel, “Long Road to Travel,” 128-129.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>332</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 215; Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 430.

## How Mayoral Takeover Took Shape in Detroit

Governor John Engler proposed mayoral control in 1996, but Dennis Archer, Detroit's mayor turned him down. Archer, an African American and Democratic mayor who succeeded Coleman Young, felt that the plan was too extreme and that the state should not try to dictate the terms of school reform to Detroit.<sup>333</sup> The governor, however, was persistent. In his 1997 State of the State address, he proposed takeover of Detroit and Benton Harbor, another Michigan district with high dropout rates and low scores on proficiency tests but Engler was unable to enact his plan during the next legislative session.<sup>334</sup> He repeated his call in the 1999 State of the State address of 1999, holding Chicago's takeover as *the* model for educational reform:

Chicago Mayor Richard Daley was given the power to appoint the school board and shake up the system. Courageous reformers—crossing racial, ethnic, and partisan lines—came together, crafting a bold plan and are fixing the city's schools. The results are impressive [...].<sup>335</sup>

The governor went on to declare that mayoral control in Detroit would be a part of his broader plan to make Michigan a “Smart State” for the twenty-first century.<sup>336</sup> This plan included breaking up school bureaucracy and expanding school choice.<sup>337</sup>

Engler had long wanted “to fundamentally alter the paradigm by which Michigan's public education system functioned.”<sup>338</sup> When he campaigned for governor in 1990, a key feature to his plan was increasing parental choice in K-12 education. By parental choice, the candidate meant opening a new market of schooling choices, the rationale being that through competition schools will be forced to improve. With the country in its tenth executive year of a Republican

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<sup>333</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel,” 131.

<sup>334</sup> Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover.”

<sup>335</sup> John Engler, “The ‘Smart State’ First in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” (State of the State Address, Michigan, January 28, 1999.), 11. (Retrieved document from the Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>338</sup> James N. Goenner, “The Origination of Michigan's Charter School Policy: A Historical Analysis” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2011), 5.

presidency, the influence of Reaganomics—an economic approach that favors entrepreneurship, deregulation, and free markets—was strong, notably the idea that the private sector was a more efficient and cost-effective way to provide goods and services than the government. After narrowly winning the election against incumbent Democratic Governor James Blanchard, Engler was visited by scholars, educators, and representatives from government, business, and school leaders, to outline conceptions for a new system of charter schools.<sup>339</sup> Among them were political scientists John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, authors of the seminal work *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. These reformers suggested that school bureaucracy (i.e., the school board and its relationship with the teachers union) was the main issue, the root of all contemporary educational problems.<sup>340</sup> Hence, mayoral control was a part of this broader vision for fundamental change, one in which decision-making would be removed from the local bureaucracy.

Engler had already broken through local bureaucracy with the passage of Proposal A in 1994. In addition to replacing property tax with the sales tax as the main source for school funding, the law restricted school districts from raising extra revenue to supplement their state allocation. This significantly diminished the negotiating powers between unions and the school board. Moreover, changing the funding formula to follow the student enabled the state to establish charter schools. In other words, the governor had already begun moving the state towards his educational vision for a “Smart State” and mayoral control was a part of his broader plan.

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<sup>339</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*



*The Fight Over School Governance*

Archer changed his position on taking control of the public schools in Detroit after the 1998 election. With Engler's re-election and the Republican sweeping control of the State House, Senate, and the State Supreme Court, Archer recognized that there was little to prevent the plan from happening given a Republican-controlled state government was likely to support the Republican governor. Nevertheless, he gave a stern warning to the legislature in his State of the City speech in 1999:

I wish to caution that the plan's provision for removing a duly elected school board and replacing them with an appointed board should not be embraced without a lot of careful and sensitive thought, legal consideration and respect for voters.<sup>341</sup>

He also conceded that while some in the community opposed any change, it was true that many Detroit parents, community and civic groups, religious leaders and business organizations, and even several union leaders supported some form of legislative educational reform.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, one *Detroit News* poll in February indicated that almost 80 percent of Detroiters were dissatisfied with the DPS administration and that over 70 percent were dissatisfied with their schools. The same poll also showed that 49 percent supported mayoral takeover, while 44 percent opposed it.

Race played a key role in shaping support for mayoral takeover of the schools. While three-quarters of Whites were in support of the governor's plan, slightly more than half of Blacks looked upon it with suspicion. In essence, the poll showed that even though most Blacks believed that schools were in need of reform, they did not necessarily think that takeover was the

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<sup>341</sup> Mirel, *Lessons from Michigan*, 131.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

way to do it.<sup>343</sup> Indeed, those who opposed mayoral takeover to its very end constructed racial arguments. Even before the governor had made any steps towards legislation, one anonymous contributor to Michigan's leading Black newspaper observed, "Critics of Engler's initiative have already begun crying racism."<sup>344</sup>

Many people will see the governor's tough stand and the legislators who write the school governance bills as trying to wrest control of Black political power. Critics will also accuse Mayor Dennis Archer of conspiring with Engler.<sup>345</sup>

Reverend Malik Shabazz, the leader of the New Black Panther Party, for example, told a reporter:

We are fighting in the name of Coleman Young. He did not stand up for us to see the Negroes become the lap dogs... to the governor. The governor may wear a suit by day, but at night he puts on a white sheet.<sup>346</sup>

While publicly known for his incendiary and provocative rhetoric, Shabazz's usage of Klan imagery to indicate the "racist" motives of the governor was not completely out of line with the sentiments of other Black opponents of mayoral takeover.

At its original conception, the takeover bill applied to *any* district that was failing to meet certain academic and fiscal conditions. In fact, DPS was outperforming other failing districts including Inkster, Benton Harbor, Highland Park, Grand Rapids, Pontiac, Flint, and Muskegon.<sup>347</sup> Nevertheless, Republican Senate Majority Leader, Dan DeGrow, along with three other colleagues introduced a bi-partisan revision to the school code, specifying that cities with school districts enrolling at least 100,000 students may empower their mayors to appoint a reform

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<sup>343</sup> Figures come from a telephone poll conducted by *The Detroit News* of 400 randomly selected Detroit residents, reflecting the city's racial composition. Cameron McWhirter, "Most Blacks Oppose Engler Plan, Poll Finds: They Back School Reform, But Don't Think Takeover is the Way to Do It," *Detroit News*, February 21, 1999.

<sup>344</sup> Anonymous, "City Schools Must Reform: Leadership Needed," *Michigan Chronicle*, January 27, 1999.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Brian Harmon, "Protestors Rally Against Takeover: Detroit Men March Into Board Meeting," *Detroit News*, Feb. 17, 1999.

<sup>347</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 217-218.

school board. This applied to just *one* city in the state: Detroit with a population of roughly 180,000 students.<sup>348</sup> When Detroiters descended on Lansing to pack a two-and-a-half hour session of the House and Senate Education Committees in mid-February, they wanted to know why the legislation was targeting Detroit. Senator DeGrow explained, “Because there are so many students in Detroit, in some ways it’s most important.”<sup>349</sup> Unsatisfied, Representative Ed Vaughn of Detroit, insinuated that the plan was racially motivated: “The only school district targeted is the biggest and blackest.”<sup>350</sup> When the Senate committee, expressed their intentions of passing the bill in two weeks, Representative Keith Stallworth of Detroit warned his Republican colleagues of a “civil insurrection,” imploring that, “If you want the racial climate in this state to change, you won’t move this legislation in a two-week period.”<sup>351</sup> When the senate blocked an amendment enabling a vote on mayoral control, Representative Stallworth evoked the memory of one of the worst race riots in American history: “There has not been an issue that has been this controversial and this disruptive to the social fabric of Detroit since 1967.”<sup>352</sup> By now, the Detroit chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had announced its opposition to mayoral control.<sup>353</sup>

From the New Black Panther Party to the NAACP, a vast array of Black leaders representing different political ideologies expressed—some more explicitly than others—that the policy was inherently “racist.” These leaders contextualized their arguments to a common past: the historical legacy of how a city once permeated by the Klan, through their triumph of the Civil Rights Movement and the trials of 1967, eventually brought about the election of Coleman

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>349</sup> Mark Hornbeck, “Takeover Foes Turns to Threats: Detroiters Say They’ll Use Every Means to Keep Their Schools,” *Detroit News*, February 11, 1999.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Keith Bradsher, “Detroit Mayor Is Step Closer to Control of Schools,” *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1999.

<sup>353</sup> Brian Harmon, “Local NAACP Rejects School Takeover Plan,” *Detroit News*, Feb 17, 1999.

Young as the first Black mayor in a city.<sup>354</sup> In short, they rejected mayoral control on the moral basis that their very mission is to protect the hard-fought democratic rights and the self-determination of Black people. For these leaders, denying Detroiters' right to vote for their own school board was a complete negation of the Black struggle for power.

Yet, there was also a growing view among the Black population that supported mayoral takeover and rejected racial arguments, *though their worldview was not deracialized*. For example, Bill Johnson, an African American columnist for the *Detroit News*, downplayed the claims that mayoral control is racially motivated and an insidious plot to seize control of the district's assets.<sup>355</sup> As Johnson saw it, there was "nothing magical about black political power, particularly as it relates to education improvement."<sup>356</sup> He emphasized that by every measure Detroit's schools were worse than they were in 1967, and therefore "Detroit's historical record makes it clear that *radical* rather than racial solutions are demanded."<sup>357</sup> Likewise, one editorial in the *Michigan Chronicle*, Detroit's most important Black weekly, read, "*This is not racism*. The education of a generation of you people affects the quality of all our lives, the viability of the state's economic system and the state of the race of Black people."<sup>358</sup> The correspondent, while conceding that mayoral control was an emotionally charged issue, attempted to appeal to the readers' logic as opposed to their emotions.

Yes, it sounds like the White man is "coming to the rescue" of those black folk again. Is it a little condescending? Perhaps. But what is the alternative? Let the education system remain as it is? If we're satisfied, then that is the way to go. If we are not happy, then the status quo is not an option. It is certainly not an option

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<sup>354</sup> A KKK chapter rose to power in Detroit in the 1920s. A Klan-supported mayor was elected in 1929. See Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 44-45.

<sup>355</sup> Bill Johnson, "Detroit Schools Require Radical Rather than Racial Solution," *Detroit News*, Jan. 29, 1999.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>357</sup> See Anonymous, "City Schools Must Reform: Leadership Needed," *Michigan Chronicle*, January 27, 1999. (Italicize mine.)

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*.

for Detroit parents who hope to see their children progress beyond dead-end jobs and dead-end lives.<sup>359</sup>

By March 1999, the periodical made an official endorsement in support of the policy:

The plain fact is that conditions in Michigan's schools and communities necessitating the use of reform school board have been festering for years [...] It is plain and simple: put control of the board in the mayor's hands and take it out of the hands of a politically oriented, public elected school board [...]

[...] true reform happens only when Detroit community rises up and takes responsibility for educating our children the way Black folks did years ago. Real healing can only happen when we admit the problem.<sup>360</sup>

For these advocates, the philosophical debate about the relationship between education, Black history, and voting rights was less imminent than the realistic need to address the economic collapse of their community. They stressed being honest about the problem, personal responsibility for educating children, and even the need to participate in elections. Scholars have found that race (in Black-led cities) is often a barrier to creating the necessary partnerships to support and sustain new education reforms.<sup>361</sup> Remarkably, Detroit, who was known as being a particularly racially divisive city, was gradually coming to a consensus to support mayoral governance. (See Table 4.) Even the DFT and the Council of Baptist Pastors had come around to support mayoral takeover, an extraordinary development since for decades the unions and religious leaders formed a tight alliance around the school board in an effort to maintain and protect jobs.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> "The Michigan Chronicle Endorses School Reform," *Michigan Chronicle*, March 10, 1999.

<sup>361</sup> Henig et al., *Color of School Reform*.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

**Table 4. Who Supported and Opposed Mayoral Takeover**

Supported Mayoral Takeover	Opposed Mayoral Takeover
100 Black Men <sup>363</sup> Council of Baptist Pastors <sup>364</sup> Detroit Association of Black Organizations <sup>365</sup> Detroit Federation of Teachers <sup>366</sup> Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce <sup>367</sup> Detroit Urban League <sup>368</sup> Ecumenical Ministers Alliance <sup>369</sup> The Michigan Chronicle <sup>370</sup> New Detroit Inc. <sup>371</sup> New Detroit Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors <sup>372</sup>	Alumni of the Million Man March <sup>373</sup> Detroit City Council Grassroots community activists NAACP The New Black Panther Party Parents, students, and teachers State Representative LaMar Lemmons <sup>374</sup> State Representative Kwame Kilpatrick <sup>375</sup> Wayne County Commissioner <sup>376</sup>

Although the school board launched their own reform plan and insinuated that the governor was actually targeting DPS to acquire the city’s \$1.5 billion bond, it did little to fend off the political

<sup>363</sup> “100 Black Men, an organization of Detroit business and community leaders, is the latest to embrace Gov. John Engler’s plan to give Mayor Dennis Archer control of Detroit Schools.” See Steve Pardo, “100 Black Men Favors Archer-led Reform,” *Detroit News*, March 9, 1999.

<sup>364</sup> “The proposed takeover of Detroit’s schools has the support of Mayor Archer, who is black, and one of the most powerful political forces in the city, the largely black Council of Baptist Pastors.” (The Council of Baptist Pastor’s support of mayoral takeover was surprising because the school board president was a Baptist pastor and a member of the council, and who abstained from the council’s vote.) See Keith Bradsher, “Detroit Mayor Is Step Closer to Control of Schools,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1999.

<sup>365</sup> See Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover.”

<sup>366</sup> See Kerry A. White, “Power Shift for Detroit Moves Ahead,” *Education Week*, March 3, 1999, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1999/03/03/25det.h18.html>.

<sup>367</sup> See Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover.”

<sup>368</sup> “In recent weeks, business groups, churches, and prominent city groups, including the Detroit Urban League, have endorsed the plan.” See White, “Power Shift; Anonymous, “Urban League Board Votes to Support Appointed School Board,” *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17, 1999, A10.

<sup>369</sup> See Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover.”

<sup>370</sup> Anonymous, “The Michigan Chronicle Endorses School Reform,” *Michigan Chronicle*, March 10, 1999.

<sup>371</sup> See White, “Power Shift for Detroit.”

<sup>372</sup> See Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover.”

<sup>373</sup> See Brian Harmon, “Protesters Rally Against Takeover,” *Detroit News*, February 17, 1999.

<sup>374</sup> See LeMar Lemmons, “Don’t Believe the Hype!” *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17-23, 1999, A-11.

<sup>375</sup> See “Opponents of State School Plan Vow Fight,” *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17-23, 1999, A-11.

<sup>376</sup> “Wayne County Commissioner Bernard Parker introduced a resolution encouraging the Michigan Legislature to refrain from taking any action that would remove the Detroit School Board or curtail their authority. The resolution, which passed overwhelmingly, challenges the Legislature to pass laws that would help strengthen the reform plans and efforts of the board.” See Bernard Parker, “Wayne’s Commission opposes state takeover in Detroit School,” *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17-23, 1999, A-11.

forces in Lansing.<sup>377</sup> While the legislature debated the details of the final law, Black support was growing, with the hope that mayoral takeover was the kind of organizational change that would salvage their school system.<sup>378</sup>

Nevertheless, the final Senate bill was a compromise. The governor's proposal had stirred enough political controversy and debate to force the legislature to find a middle ground, especially because they needed a two-thirds majority to move forward with the plan immediately.<sup>379</sup> Several Democrats, including future Senatorial candidate Gary Peters from Bloomfield Township, argued that the elimination of the elected board indeed had implications for the "voting rights" of Detroiters. Peters recommended two alternative amendments: require a referendum by Detroit voters to approve the takeover *or* require an election at the end of five years to determine if Detroiters wanted the takeover to continue. The other significant debate was over a House version of the bill, one in which the governor would appoint a monitor to run the schools while the Board of Education remained in an advisory capacity.<sup>380</sup> Ironically, six Detroit Democrats, holding a deep antipathy towards Archer—whom they saw as overly accommodating towards White politicians and business unlike the outspoken Coleman Young—broke rank and helped pass the bill.<sup>381</sup> Representative LaMar Lemmons explained to one *Free Press* reporter, "If you want a plantation analogy, it's African American's experience that

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<sup>377</sup> The school board's reform plan called for the involvement of parents, the union, and the clergy. See Franklin, "Mayoral Takeover"; Brian Harmon, "Detroit Schools Resist Takeover: Board Chief, Residents Say Engler Wants to Get Bond Money," *Detroit News*, January 27, 1999.

<sup>378</sup> While Black support was growing, long time community activists like Helen Moore attempted to derail the bill. Moore collected 10,000 signatures from Detroiters who opposed the bill and presented the boxes of petitions to the legislature, see Mark Hornbeck, "School Reform Passes Committee," *Detroit News*, March 10, 1999, 1C; Also on February 25, 1999, about a hundred protestors crowded the halls of the capital threatening a recall, see Franklin, "Mayoral Takeover of DPS."

<sup>379</sup> Franklin, "Mayoral Takeover," 105.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> One of the six Detroit Democrats was Representative Kwame Kilpatrick who would become mayor of Detroit in 2002 date, *Ibid.*; Mirel, "Long Road to Travel," 133.

overseers are often worse than dealing with the master.”<sup>382</sup> The political ruckus finally came to an end when Engler signed Michigan Public Act 10 on March 26, 1999, suspending the school board and authorizing the mayor to appoint a reform board. The reform board, consisting of seven members, would select a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of schools to replace the DPS superintendent. The law also designated the governor to appoint the seventh member, who could veto the selection of the new CEO if he/she deemed necessary. The new governance system would remain in effect for five years at which point Detroiters could vote to continue the reform board or return to the elected board.<sup>383</sup> For Governor Engler, the takeover was a major victory.

### *Implementing the Takeover of Detroit’s Schools’ Governance System*

Mirel suggests the early transition to the mayoral-appointed board was relatively smooth.<sup>384</sup> However, it would soon erupt into controversy. After an extensive search for the CEO involving 320 candidates and 11 finalists, the reform board settled on John Thompson, a superintendent of schools from Tulsa, Oklahoma. But, when the governor’s appointee, Michigan Treasurer Mark Murray, exercised his “super-veto” against the board’s nomination, he reignited the political conflicts surrounding mayoral takeover. What had apparently eluded many was that the final version of the takeover law enabled the governor to maintain a degree of control through his appointee. For those who had opposed the governance change, the super-veto confirmed their worst suspicions—state intervention meant a blatant disregard for people’s voting rights.<sup>385</sup> One of the reform board members lamented to the *Michigan Chronicle*,

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<sup>382</sup> Dawson Bell, “2 Competing Proposals Display Divided Loyalties and Capital Confusion,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 18, 1999, A:1,12.

<sup>383</sup> Michigan Public Act 10 (1999), accessed April 15, 2015, [http://www.legislature.mi.gov/\(S\(1xbvdlth4ozpaalep0dpsz3v\)\)/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=1999-SB-0297](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/(S(1xbvdlth4ozpaalep0dpsz3v))/mileg.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=1999-SB-0297).

<sup>384</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel.”

<sup>385</sup> Anonymous, “Kids Should Be the Number One Priority,” *Michigan Chronicle*, January 26, 2000, A6.



We teach our children about the benefits of democracy, and that the best form of government gives people the right to determine their own future. Yet, last week, our children witnessed the spectacle of one vote outweighing the consensus of the majority. They saw a fundamental tenet of our democracy turned on its head.<sup>386</sup>

Nicholas Hood III<sup>387</sup>, a city council member, also wrote in the *Chronicle* that the implications should send a “chilling message” to every city and municipality in Michigan and elsewhere:

It seems that the vote of Mark Murray, gubernatorial appointee to the board and non-resident of this city, carries more weight than the considered opinion of local businesspersons and educators hand-picked by Mayor Dennis Archer [...] How can those who champion the cause of local control deprive certain people from exercising that right?”<sup>388</sup>

Hood felt shocked and disappointed that “the governor’s legislatively bolstered authority was used to humiliate the mayor of Detroit and disrespect the city’s residents.”<sup>389</sup> Suspecting that Murray voted against Thompson because the latter was known to be anti-voucher, Hood would appeal to the public that “Lansing has its own agenda with regard to Detroit” and if people had not figured that out yet, now they will.<sup>390</sup> Another community member wrote that she felt duped and that reform was nothing more than Lansing’s Trojan Horse.<sup>391</sup> The city council would adopt a resolution calling for the removal of the super-veto, but Engler maintained that there would not be any changes.<sup>392</sup>

In early May 2000, the reform board would finally agree on a CEO, voting for Kenneth Burnley, the superintendent of the Colorado Springs School District. During his tenure at

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<sup>386</sup> Freman Hendrix, “The Vote for School CEO: What Kind of Lesson for Our Children?” *Michigan Chronicle*, Jan. 26, 2000.

<sup>387</sup> Nicholas Hood III after graduating from Yale returned to Detroit to work with his father, the Rev. Nicholas Hood, Sr. at Plymouth United Church of Christ. Hood III was also a committee member of NAACP and unsuccessfully ran for mayor in 2001. See “Rev. Nicholas Hood III,” *puccdetroit.org*, accessed January 15 2013, <http://www.puccdetroit.org/pastor.htm>.

<sup>388</sup> Nicholas Hood, “Be Careful What You Ask For,” *Michigan Chronicle*, Jan. 26, 2000, A6.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>391</sup> Sha-Ron C. Hampton, “Beware of the Trojan Horse,” *Michigan Chronicle*, Feb. 9, 2000.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

Colorado Springs, the American Association of School Administrators voted Burnley as Superintendent of the Year. Having grown up in Detroit and attended DPS schools, Burnley was a logical choice: Detroiters would consider him “one of their own.”<sup>393</sup>

When Burnley took over in July 2000, he faced many challenges. Having inherited a 1.5 billion construction bond, Burnley was expected to jumpstart projects unlike the previous administration. Second, he had to restructure school bureaucracy to provide more efficient and effective services to administration, teachers, and students. Furthermore, he would have to negotiate contracts with the DFT without provoking strikes in this volatile time. Finally, to improve and sustain teaching and learning in every classroom, he would have to find additional funds amidst a statewide economic downturn in order to pay for salary increases, teacher hires, and new programs.<sup>394</sup>

When Mayor Archer announced he would not seek reelection, CEO Burnley would virtually become “the face of the school system.”<sup>395</sup> Despite Governor Engler’s attempt to emulate the Chicago model in which Mayor Daley was in charge, Archer would keep his distance. After selecting a “blue-ribbon” reform board, the mayor largely stepped aside, allowing the reform board and the CEO to manage all decisions.<sup>396</sup> Archer’s deputy press secretary explained, “He has enough on his plate trying to run the 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in the country.”<sup>397</sup> In sum, the implementation of Detroit’s mayoral takeover—one in which the governor maintained control and the mayor was largely absent—was distinct from other cities like Chicago.

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<sup>393</sup> Mirel, “Long Road to Travel.”

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 156.

<sup>396</sup> Mayor Dennis Archer appointed Freman Hendrix, his deputy mayor, as the chair of the mayoral takeover board. Other members include Bill Beckman, president of New Detroit; Glenda Price, president of Marygrove College; Marvis Coffield, community activist; Pam Aguirre, CEO of Mexican Industries; and Frank Fountain, vice president of DaimlerChrysler. See Rich, “Who’s Afraid?”

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, 155.

## The Effects of Mayoral Takeover: Collapsing Enrollment, 2000-2005

The first two years of Burnley's term as CEO was met with considerable public approval. Detroiters' perception of the CEO was that he was a "sensitive and compassionate" man with a "tough-love approach," who worked around the clock by visiting students at home and even consoling families at hospitals and memorial services.<sup>398</sup> Corporate leaders also liked him because he had explicit goals for improvement and reported progress. Jeffrey Mirel credits Burnley for the following accomplishments: initiating an audit that uncovered \$1.5 million in misappropriated funds; reorganizing payroll; outsourcing operations such as food service, grounds maintenance, and information technology; saving \$7 million annually by purchasing buses for special education; and using the \$1.5 billion bond for a substantial infrastructure project.<sup>399</sup> Reportedly, building projects had pumped \$25 million dollars a month into the local economy. (The fact that he contracted Detroit-based and Black-owned business was not lost to the public.)<sup>400</sup> At the start of his tenure, Burnley also negotiated a three-year contract with the DFT well before start of the school year—an unprecedented achievement.<sup>401</sup> Wilbur Rich contends that Burnley's biggest impact was organizational as well as curricular; his leadership resulted in the spending of the construction bond on twenty-one new schools, renovations, and updating technology, while the district saw fourth-grade reading scores reach the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the MEAP, a new high in DPS history.<sup>402</sup>

Yet, in the end, mayoral takeover failed to fundamentally fix DPS's deep fiscal problems or significantly improve the quality of education for more students, thereby failing to win over

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<sup>398</sup> Valerie D. Lockhart, "On Task; DPS CEO Stays Focused on Goals and Mission to Improve District," *Michigan Chronicle*, Feb. 3, 2004.

<sup>399</sup> Mirel, "Long Road to Travel."

<sup>400</sup> "DPS Makes Gains with New and Improved Buildings Say School Officials," *Michigan Chronicle*, Feb. 10, 2004.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>402</sup> Rich, "Mayoral Takeover."

the voters to the legitimacy of a new governance structure. In spite of prioritizing district finances and capital programs, the district's finance began to quickly deteriorate in Burnley's third year. The sudden turn in fiscal stability was in large part due to a steady stream of students that continued to leave the school district. For decades, the district had been shrinking with population decline but because students were now leaving for charters, with every student leaving DPS so did the funding tied to them, as mandated by Prop A. In Burnley's first year, the DPS lost some 4,700 pupils, a loss of \$31.5 million in state funding. By January 2002, school leaders predicted a \$70 million deficit for that school year, growing to \$135 million for the following school year. To make matters worse, the DFT contract stipulated increases in salaries for 2002-03, adding a \$27 million burden to the budget.<sup>403</sup> Indeed, 11,503 students left the district at the beginning of fall 2003 and another 10,577 students in the following year.<sup>404</sup>

In November 2004, Burnley announced a \$48.7 million budget deficit and anticipated that \$150 million needed to be trimmed from the budget. The news came as a shock to the public because just five months ago Burnley had reported that the school year had ended in the black. Burnley explained that he and the board had miscalculated student attrition and that the budget was based on assumptions that failed to materialize.<sup>405</sup> Other school districts through charter and choice laws were recruiting away DPS students at an ever-growing pace, while state aid had not gone up in 3 years.<sup>406</sup> The CEO worked furiously to amend the situation. He suggested using the bond money to fill the deficit to avert further cuts. He implored the legislature to keep up with a \$15 million annual grant. Burnley attempted to compete with out-of-district charters by making

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<sup>403</sup> Mirel, "Long Road to Travel," 141.

<sup>404</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 221.

<sup>405</sup> Christine MacDonald, "School Chief Wants to Stay," *Detroit News*, Jan. 21, 2005.

<sup>406</sup> John Gehring, "Detroit Schools Facing Massive Cuts, Layoffs," *Education Week*, Dec. 1, 2004.

kindergarten full day and extending preschools—items that were in high demand by parents—but but to no avail.<sup>407</sup>

By the end of 2004, 9,308 more students transferred from the DPS to charter schools outside of the district, resulting in a crushing \$198 million budget deficit. Burnley announced he would have to cut 4,000 jobs and close 25-40 schools by the end of the school year.<sup>408</sup> “School closings are painful. For an older city like Detroit, they represent the embodiment of several generations of memories, but we are left with no choice,” wrote Burnley to the *Chronicle*.<sup>409</sup> Burnley’s words did little to console a disappointed and disenchanting public.

In all, by 2005, due to six consecutive years of significant student losses totaling 33,000, the DPS lost \$226 million in state funding.<sup>410</sup> The collapse in enrollment in addition to cuts in state aid forced Burnley to lay off almost half of the teaching force (from 8,000 teachers in 1999 to just over 4,600 teachers in the fall of 2005).<sup>411</sup> In essence, greatly underestimating the drawing power of charters in the last two years of his tenure, Burnley had ended up spending more than the district was taking in. The defeated CEO left the district in June 2005 with nearly a \$200 million deficit and 13,000 kids projected to lose their schools (an estimated 34 schools) in the fall—what would likely be the country’s largest school closure in a single district. Experts projected that in the next three years 60-75 more schools would close, completely changing the face of the district.<sup>412</sup>

No matter what Burnley did, he could not attract new students fast enough to offset the ones who were leaving, forcing him to close schools and pink-slip hundreds of employees. In

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<sup>407</sup> MacDonald, “False Hope Costs Detroit Schools”.

<sup>408</sup> Valerie Lockhart, “DPS Loses Students and Millions in Funding,” *Michigan Chronicle*, Nov. 17, 2004.

<sup>409</sup> Kenneth Burnley, “New Student Enrollment Figures at DPS Suggest Rough Times Ahead,” *Michigan Chronicle*, Jan. 17, 2004.

<sup>410</sup> Christine MacDonald, “False Hope Costs Detroit Schools,” *Detroit News*, Jan. 23, 2005.

<sup>411</sup> Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 222.

<sup>412</sup> Chastity Pratt Dawsey, Peggy Walsh-Sarnecki, and Lori Higgins, “In June, Detroit to Shut Down 34 Schools,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 11, 2005, A1,10; MacDonald, “False Hopes.”

other words, even though Burnley was improving the schooling system, the pace of improvement was not fast enough where more parents desired to keep their students in the system. The system was also far from measuring up to the rest of the state. For example, while the number of students passing the MEAP rose by 14 percent between 2000-2005, the gap remained large between DPS and the state, often scoring about half of the state average *even when the student population is broken down by family, income level, race, or gender*.<sup>413</sup> Even the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a conservative think tank, reported that improving the quality of schooling through mayoral takeover had failed to materialize after six years. They noted that while it was true that MEAP scores had risen in reading, scores for math had actually dropped dramatically. Students in high school were also performing poorly in math: in 1999, 48.5 percent of high school students scored below basic on math and, by 2005, the number of low performers increased to 59.1 percent. During the same period, while the number of high students who could read proficiently rose from 36.3 to 57.4 percent, again, relative to the state average the improvements were not enough to keep parents from opting to exit the system for other schools available through choice policy.<sup>414</sup>

Thus, the collapse of enrollment greatly overshadowed Burnley's achievements. From Detroiters' perspective, the CEO had began his tenure with a \$93 million surplus and left with a crushing \$200 million deficit, it was infuriating. Many would accuse the state of robbing the district of their bond money and leaving them worse off. According to Wilbur Rich, the attacks would become "personal," not only attacking the law but anyone associated with it.<sup>415</sup> With

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<sup>413</sup> See Michigan Higher Education Land Policy Consortium, "MEAP; Percentage of Composite Passing Scores, School Years 2000 and 2005," accessed February 4, 2014, [http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu/modules.php?name=Documents&op=viewlive&sp\\_id=2236](http://www.landpolicy.msu.edu/modules.php?name=Documents&op=viewlive&sp_id=2236); Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "Takeover of Detroit Schools Shows Few Intended Results," last modified January 19, 2006, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.mackinac.org/7556>.

<sup>414</sup> Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "Takeover of Detroit Schools Shows Few Intended Results."

<sup>415</sup> Rich, "Who's Afraid?"

Detroiters scheduled to vote on mayoral takeover in November 2004, earlier debates were reignited and traditional school board advocates launched a campaign to restore the old order. Ironically, mayoral takeover, in many ways, a tactic to remove decision-making from local politics, was now embroiled in politics. The failure to legitimize the value of a new governing structure would only help to harden the political lines over school reform for the next several years.

### Campaign for the Return of the Elected School Board

In 2002, state representative Kwame Kilpatrick succeeded Dennis Archer who declined to run for reelection. A product of DPS who had also taught in the system, Kilpatrick was an advocate of a modified mayoral control plan independent of Lansing. Under the Kilpatrick plan, a modified school board would report to the mayor who would select the CEO with the board's approval. Eager to put his plan to action, the new mayor even tried to move up the referendum on the Engler plan to 2003. When this did not happen, State Senator Buzz Thomas of Detroit crafted a ballot initiative in which voters could vote for a publicly elected school board with *modified* powers.<sup>416</sup> Kilpatrick and Thomas appealed to the public that "No" to Prop E meant a return to the traditional board with the same old problems and politics that had afflicted the district in the past.<sup>417</sup>

Once again, the *Michigan Chronicle*, the state's oldest Black-owned newspaper and key political voice in Detroit, officially endorsed governance change.<sup>418</sup> A *Detroit News* editorial, however, countered that the Chronicle is taking a questionable stance, citing several polls indicating that "a considerable number of Detroiters" were opposed to the plan. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>416</sup> Wong et al., *Education Mayor*.

<sup>417</sup> "Proposal E: Form of Governance for the Detroit Public Schools," *CRC Memorandum*, September 2004, no. 1077; See Wong et al., *Education Mayor*.

<sup>418</sup> Luther Keith, "Chronicle Chief Likes School Board Progress," *Detroit News*, August 2, 2004, A2.

Detroit Urban League and the NAACP were at odds with one another over the issue. Like it did in 1999, the Urban League endorsed governance change. Urban League president N. Charles Anderson told the *Detroit News*, “What we need is a 21<sup>st</sup> century governance arrangement for a 21<sup>st</sup> century school district.”<sup>419</sup> The president of the NAACP, largest chapter in the nation with about 50,000 members, argued that “This has never been about education,” reflecting the view that Prop E is fundamentally about usurping millions of dollars in contract spending.<sup>420</sup> In response, the *Chronicle* criticized the NAACP for “recklessly play[ing] upon the emotions of voters and use of children as pawns in this heated debate.”<sup>421</sup>

The NAACP was joined by a long list of organizations calling for a return to the elected school board: the Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration, and Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN); the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); and Voices for Working Families, etc. (See Table 5.) According to Kenneth Wong and his colleagues, Voices for Working Families put together a get-out-the-vote campaign specifically to counter the opposition. Voter turnout was expected to be high.<sup>422</sup>

Helen Moore who had gathered thousands of petition signatures against mayoral takeover in 1999 was now the legal chair for the Keep the Vote--No Takeover Coalition. She summed up in the *Free Press*, “We want our right to vote back, period.”<sup>423</sup> A flyer to voters, distributed by BAMN, in bold large font at the top read: “On November 2<sup>nd</sup> -**Vote NO on E.**”<sup>424</sup> The flyer

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<sup>419</sup> Luther Keith, “Rights Groups Divided on Detroit School Plan,” *Detroit News*, August 9, 2004, A2.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Keith, “Chronicle Chief.”

<sup>422</sup> Wong et al., *Education Mayor*, 47.

<sup>423</sup> Anonymous, “Proposal E – Control at Stake,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 8, 2004; “Detroit’s ‘Proposal E’ a Matter of Contention Among Voters,” *Michigan Education Digest*, October 12, 2004, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.mackinac.org/6858>.

<sup>424</sup> BAMN, “On November 2<sup>nd</sup> – **Vote NO on E.**” (Flyer distributed in September 2004), accessed February 4, 2015, <http://216.25.88.127/doc/2004/040826-voteno-flyer.pdf>.



encouraged voters to “take back control of our public schools,” defend Detroit’s Public Schools, and to “fight for equal, quality education for students of Detroit.”

**Table 5. Constituencies that Supported and Opposed Proposal E in 2004**<sup>425</sup>

Supported Prop E	Opposed Prop E (i.e., campaigned for the return of the publicly elected school board)
Black Slate <sup>426</sup> The Detroit Chamber of Commerce <sup>427</sup> Detroit Urban League <sup>428</sup> The Michigan Chronicle The New Marcus Garvey Movement <sup>429</sup> Vote for Kids, Vote Yes on Proposal E <sup>430</sup>	AFSCME Council 25 (public workers) BAMN City Council member Sharon McPhail <sup>431</sup> Detroit Federation of Teachers <sup>432</sup> Keep the Vote Coalition NAACP Voice for Working Families

BAMN’s flyer was indicative of how opponents of Proposal E were equating their campaign to the ushering in of a new civil rights movement:

We are building a mass civil rights campaign for a ‘NO’ vote. [...] The new civil rights movement demands an end to the disgrace of unequal funding for our schools. No more second class education for Detroit’s students! No more back of the bus!<sup>433</sup>

By voting NO, they said, voters will be taking a historic stand for “inner-city school districts around the country that are facing crowded classes, privatization, layoffs, and the closing of

<sup>425</sup> Tara J. Young, “Detroit Leaders Split on Proposal E,” *Michigan Chronicle*, October 27-November 2, 2004, A5.

<sup>426</sup> The Black Slate is the “political arm” of the Shrine of the Black Madonna. See Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 158.

<sup>427</sup> See Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 158.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> See Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 158.

<sup>430</sup> Vote for Kids, Vote for Yes on Proposal E was newly formed coalition that consisted of a cross-section of community activists, civic organizations, and grassroots and business leadership. Co-chair Shirley Stancato explained that the coalition supported Proposal E because they believed in having a CEO of schools, a professional educator responsible for the daily operations of the district. See Elizabeth Belts, “Detroit Schools’ Leadership,” *The Michigan Daily*, October 21, 2004, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.michigandaily.com/node/6365>.

<sup>431</sup> Sharon McPhail, a once mayoral-candidate, was a high profile city council members. See Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 158.

<sup>432</sup> The Free Library, “Detroit Federation of Teachers Votes to Endorse a ‘No vote on Proposal E,” Published October 21, 2004, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Detroit+Federation+of+Teachers+votes+to+endorse+a+%27No+vote+on...-a0123467327>.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

schools.”<sup>434</sup> BAMN argued that only a democratically elected school board would fight for all the funds squandered by the state takeover efforts. They warned voters that the Chamber of Commerce, contractors, and corporations profited off of Detroit from privatization and that the same sources are pouring million of dollars into campaigns to deceive the people.

On November 2004, Detroiters went to the ballot and 65 percent voted to eliminate mayoral takeover, thus reinstating the traditional school board.<sup>435</sup> Unlike most other cities that had since shifted to mayoral governance, mayoral takeover did not last in Detroit.<sup>436</sup> Although the coalition campaigning for the elimination of mayoral control believed they had restored traditional school governance, as I argued in the previous chapter, it was only a brief period before the implementation of another policy—emergency management—that would suspend the school board again.

#### Analysis: Why Mayoral Takeover Was Eliminated

Other accounts of Detroit’s mayoral takeover tend to emphasize how reformers were unable to build enough political support or legitimacy to sustain the initiative. For example, Kenneth Wong and his colleagues argue that, in contrast to Chicago and Cleveland, Mayor Kilpatrick was met with stiff resistance from the DFT because he had failed to form strong working relationships with teacher union officials, community leaders, and state politicians.<sup>437</sup> In truth, 41 percent of the union actually voted to remain neutral on the issue of Proposal E. Although 54 percent voted ‘NO’ on Proposal E and 7 percent voted ‘YES,’ the president of the DFT told reporters that “Ultimately the DFT will work with whatever governance structure the

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Rich, “Who’s Afraid?”

<sup>436</sup> Washington D.C. also briefly underwent mayoral takeover.

<sup>437</sup> Wong et al., *Education Mayor*, 47.

citizens choose.”<sup>438</sup> Thus, a poor relationship between the mayor and unions was unlikely the reason for why the policy was eliminated.

In his account, Wilbur Rich also points to the mayor’s failings as *one* explanation for why the policy was eliminated. Rich contends that some voted “No” to Proposal E as an indictment on the mayor’s character. In 2002, the mayor was involved in a mini-scandal and “did not engender trust from his constituency.”<sup>439</sup> Rich argues, “mayoral credibility can be a legitimating mechanism.”<sup>440</sup> However, Rich cites other reasons for why Detroiters voted “No” to mayoral takeover: to some it was a restoration election, for others it was a message to Lansing about local control. Most of all, Rich argues that the “public school cartel” (i.e., what I generally refer to as the traditional governance regime) was able to characterize Proposal E as a power grab, portraying the motives of state politicians as racist, partisan, and undemocratic. “The narrative shifted away from student performance and the district’s fiscal problems toward Detroit as a victim of state encroachment.”<sup>441</sup> The BAMN fliers vividly demonstrate how opponents of Proposal E characterized the vote as a chance to stand up for *all* inner-city school districts across the nation and even the launching of a new civil rights movement. Therefore, Rich concludes, “A rational voter could decide that his or her vote was directed at the civil rights issue alone and was not an endorsement of the performance of the schools system.”<sup>442</sup>

While Rich’s analysis offers powerful insights into the campaign against Proposal E’s framework and the logic of the Detroit voter, it minimizes the discussion around the policy itself, mayoral takeover as a mechanism for addressing DPS’s chronic issues. How did the

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<sup>438</sup> The mini-scandal revolved around the mayor’s questionable “hip-hop” lifestyle, from leasing an expensive sports utility vehicle to parties thrown at the Manoogian Mansion.

<sup>439</sup> Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 163.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

effectiveness of the policy affect voters' decisions? How would events have played out if mayoral takeover had been more effective? Thus, my analysis highlights the structural issues that led to the elimination of mayoral takeover. Governor Engler's broader vision for creating a new market of schools for Michigan was actually harmful to DPS. The concepts of school choice and competition created an invisible structural crisis not well understood by the public. In particular, the change in the funding formula in 1994 (i.e., Proposal A), allowing per-pupil spending to follow the student, created a system in which operating revenues are determined by enrollment. In spite of CEO Burnley's efforts, they could not stem the tide of parents and students leaving the district for charters or schools of choice during the entire period of mayoral takeover, a course towards financial collapse. By year four, greatly underestimating the number of students that were leaving the district, the only option was "radical triage—desperate efforts to cut fixed costs even faster than revenues drop."<sup>443</sup> Peter Hammer, a law professor at Wayne State University, describes the school finance formula as creating a winner-take-all system, one in which school districts that lose students are penalized.<sup>444</sup> He argues,

The real sources of DPS's financial problems are defects in Proposal A itself, exacerbated by changes in demographics and the adoption of state policies encouraging schools of choice and increased competition from charter schools. To begin with, Proposal A never leveled the economic playing field.<sup>445</sup>

Such were the invisible forces at play. Once clinging to the hope that mayoral takeover would fix DPS's finances, the dismal outcome of \$200 million deficit rekindled feelings of suspicion and distrust, and even accusations that Burnley (and the state) had squandered or stolen the bond money. Few at the time understood that Engler's broader

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<sup>443</sup> Peter J. Hammer, "The Fate of the Detroit Public Schools: Governance, Finance, and Competition," *The Journal of Law and Society* 13, no. 1 (2011), 138.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

vision for school reform in the state had created a structural crisis that no CEO, mayor, or school board—whatever leader—could successfully address.

Quoting from political scientist James Gibson, “Legitimacy is an endorphin of the democratic body politic,” Rich argues that the failure to create legitimacy is what eliminated mayoral takeover and that the “case study of Detroit demonstrates the folly of retrospective citizen participation,” that citizens should have facilitated the legitimacy of the takeover from the start.<sup>446</sup> But this argument greatly overlooks the growing political support for mayoral takeover in 1999. My analysis demonstrates a moment in which enough Detroiters were open to a new form of governance because they were so frustrated by the traditional governance regime. Mayoral takeover, I argue, was a lost opportunity to solidify new political and institutional arrangements that could have better supported governance change. In a study conducted by Jeffrey Henig and colleagues on urban school reform between 1988-1997, Detroit was a high conflict, low-level cooperation city in which race was a splitting factor.<sup>447</sup> Thus, remarkably, in a short period leading up to mayoral takeover, a growing number of Detroiters were considering how the issues were *not* racial. Newspaper accounts also indicate that Burnley, considered an “insider,” was well liked and respected until he shocked the community with the announcement of the deficit in 2004. Unfortunately, the need to close schools and layoff teachers, which had real consequences on student lives and adult employment, appeared to be an assault on the Black community. Feeling betrayed and infuriated, people fell back on preexisting racial charges to make sense of the crisis, which

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<sup>446</sup> Rich, “Who’s Afraid?” 160.

<sup>447</sup> Henig et al., *Color of School Reform*.

ultimately gave opponents of Proposal E the upper hand in generating a large voter turnout for eliminating the policy.

### Conclusion

From the vantage point of time, it seems to me that the Detroit mayor's short-lived authority over the public schools was a dress rehearsal for another form of control that further reduces the "exceptional" system of school governance in Detroit. Digging deep into this "reform" also highlights several critical features of this story, features that contributes to our understanding of the demise of the system of local control of schools.

To begin with, while Wong and Rich tell a story of how mayoral takeover failed, ending with the restoration of the old governing system, my account argues that this was the beginning of the end: mayoral takeover was the first instance in which the state suspended the authority and power of the DPS's elected school board. This was a historic moment in which both politicians and the public perceived the traditional governance regime itself as the *problem*, an institutional barrier to change. The board's exclusive and exceptional power over the schools—what had been one of the progressives' most compelling reasons for creating this structure in the first place—appeared to be the cause (not the answer) for all of DPS's problems.

Mayoral takeover also reflected the rise of the "education governor," a new policy actor who wielded unprecedented powers over what was in the past highly localized decisions. Indeed, Engler "wanted to break up and spread around the 'lock' that the MEA (teachers union) had on policy, plans, finance—everything about education," explained Art Ellis, Engler's State Superintendent of Instruction.<sup>448</sup> Engler argued that the traditional governance regime was too bureaucratically fixed and tied to union demands, a drag on the finances of school districts like

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<sup>448</sup> James N. Goenner, "The Origination of Michigan's Charter School Policy: An Historical Analysis" (Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2011), 72-73. ("teachers union" added by me)

DPS.<sup>449</sup> Although Governor Engler’s stance typified the long-standing Republican position towards unions, Engler’s plan to break up the logjam in Detroit was not a partisan one. My analysis not only shows that there was Democratic support, including Mayor Archer (albeit reluctantly) and Black Detroiters (who are mostly Democratic), but also foreshadows the significant role governors would play in Detroit’s educational affairs in the next decade.

Transcending partisan politics, all of Engler’s successors, both Democrat and Republican, would claim the mantle of “education governor,” introducing policies that would continue to erode local control and render the traditional governance regime irrelevant for most of the Detroit school population.

While other accounts of Detroit’s mayoral takeover emphasize the success of the counteroffensive campaign, my analysis highlights the opposite: the traditional governance regime’s failure to maintain its power and legitimacy. One major indicator of the older regime’s breakdown was the robust support for mayoral takeover from a variety of Black Detroiters. In hopes of finally ushering in revolutionary changes for DPS, as early as the late 1980s, Black Detroiters opted to break away from “politics as usual,” electing the new HOPE members. Unlike what the literature suggests, during this period, race—while it was up for debate—was *not* a barrier to change. Rather, remarkably, in a city where race has been an obvious dividing factor, the wide spread agreement that DPS needed radical change superseded the racial discourse, with many rejecting the notion that mayoral takeover was inherently a “racist” tactic. Perhaps, for the first time since the break-up of the liberal-labor-black coalition in 1973, there was a growing consensus of diverse players around the need for “shaking up the status quo,” who hoped that a mix of state intervention and mayoral leadership would finally improve school and student outcomes.

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

This part of my story not only stresses the weakening of the regime but also points to another critical feature of this analysis. If urban regime analysis posits that a high level of civic capacity is necessary for sustaining governance change, why then was mayoral takeover short-lived? If there was considerable support, why did reformers fail to institutionalize mayoral control? I argue that the reason is simply because the policy failed to address DPS's fiscal and educational problems, if not worsened the school district's conditions. Thus, we can interpret the vote to abandon mayoral takeover in 2004 not as a vote of confidence in the old system but rather an indictment of the fiasco of the "new" system.

Therefore, the implementation of mayoral takeover demonstrates the depth of the structural crisis both created and intensified by changes to the school funding formula. Tinkering with or even overhauling the governance system could not alter the economic, demographic and fiscal situation Detroit schools faced. "The real source of DPS's financial problems," Peter J. Hammer claims, "are defects in Proposal A itself, exacerbated by changes in demographics and the adoption of state policies encouraging schools of choice and increased competition from charter schools."<sup>450</sup> In other words, some of Engler's reforms undermined the ability of the takeover board to address DPS's educational and fiscal issues. With Proposal A, the decline in enrollment each year was a major loss of revenue, decreasing the funds with which the district had to work with."<sup>451</sup> Hidden from the public was a terribly difficult scenario in which Burnley had to keep up with relatively higher fixed costs, plus rising pensions and healthcare costs, with an increasingly smaller budget.

This aspect of my account problematizes Engler's vision of a new market of schools and the principles of competition. The case of mayoral takeover in Detroit leads me to question the

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<sup>450</sup> Hammer, "The Fate of the DPS," 140.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 142.



ideological foundations of market-based reform, competition, choice, etc., which I further comment on in the concluding chapter of this study.

Finally, this hidden crisis had severe social repercussions around future school reform efforts. Because the policy had failed them, Detroiters missed the opportunity to unite a variety of new and emerging alliances around school governance change. When Burnley was forced to close schools and fire DPS employees, it reignited the deep distrust and suspicion that Black Detroiters had of the state. This is unfortunate because today the “events of 1999” has been seared into people’s memories as the first state takeover and the beginning of DPS’s downward slide. The Black-city-versus-White-suburb trope had been rekindled, making it difficult to establish a sense of trust that is required to forge a cross-sector coalition (i.e., a high level of civic capacity) that includes teachers, community activists, and parents that can help to raise student performance.

Further complicating matters, advocates of what I call new style governance often downplay or even ignore these racial tropes, rationalizing their extreme actions as crisis management, and continue to aggressively and radically dismantle the traditional school system without consulting any local authorities. Henig and Rich write,

“While this ‘mayor-centric’ approach is sometimes promoted and adopted by local interests, more often it has involved intervention by governors and state legislators who claim that they must take extraordinary steps in order to rescue a faltering system unable to heal itself. While the theories and rationales for this reform are famed in universal terms that should apply to any community struggling with disjointed educational initiatives and ineffective schools, *actually cases to date nearly always involve central city school districts with predominantly Black students and school leadership.*”<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich, “Mayor-centrism in Context,” in *Mayors in the Middle: Politics, Race and Mayoral Control of Urban Schools*, ed. Jeffrey R. Henig and Wilbur C. Rich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4. (Emphasis mine.)

Thus, my account highlights the racial aspects of school reform in Detroit, but it does not indicate that mayoral takeover was a racist tactic. Instead, it shows the conflict and tension that arises from shifting decision-making out of the local institution, the dismantling of the traditional governance structure, while not yet making enough significant improvements for the vast majority of Detroit children who are African American. Although White suburban districts during this period evaded the affects of shifting control to higher levels of government, the next chapter indicates how subsequent renditions of takeover would begin to loom over White neighborhoods as well.

In sum, even though Detroit's mayoral takeover was short-lived, it weakened the traditional governance regime, set the precedent for further efforts to erode local control, opened the pathway for distinctly new educational actors, and ultimately results in "the end of exceptionalism" of America's public schooling system.

## CHAPTER VI

### **The Education Achievement Authority: The End of Exceptionalism**

On April 2, 2012, a crowd of more than two hundred students, teachers, and concerned parents gathered outside of Detroit's Mumford High School carrying signs and chanting, "No way to EAA!" They had come to protest the state's unprecedented *removal* of Mumford High and 14 other schools from DPS, transferring the schools to a new state-run reform district called the Education Achievement Authority (EAA).<sup>453</sup> Established in 2011, the EAA was a part of Republican Governor Rick Snyder's broader vision to reinvent education in Michigan for the twenty-first century. Modeling after Louisiana's recovery school district that virtually took over all of New Orleans' schools after Hurricane Katrina, the EAA promised to turnaround the lowest 5% performing schools in Michigan.<sup>454</sup> The governor declared his plan "will jettison the status quo" that had for so long failed the state's children.<sup>455</sup> However, when the state announced that only Detroit Public Schools (DPS) were slated for transfer, several protests were staged across the city.<sup>456</sup>

Mumford High was Detroit's cultural and historical gem and a "neighborhood school" in every sense of the word. The original building, built in the late 1940s on the northwest side of

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<sup>453</sup> Joe Rossiter and Chastity Dawsey Pratt, "Hundreds Protest 'Theft' of Mumford High from DPS," *Detroit Free Press*, A6; "Mumford Protests 'Theft' of New School," *The Detroit Teacher* 50, no. 8 (2012), 1.

<sup>454</sup> Allie Gross, "The EAA: How a Policy Package Created Michigan's Statewide District," *Education Dive*, April 2, 2014, accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.educationdive.com/news/the-eea-how-a-policy-package-created-michigans-statewide-district/246066/>.

<sup>455</sup> See Rick Snyder, "A Special Message from Governor Rick Snyder: Education Reform," (Special Message, Michigan, April 27, 2011), accessed January 4, 2015, [http://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/SpecialMessageonEducationReform\\_351586\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/snyder/SpecialMessageonEducationReform_351586_7.pdf).

<sup>456</sup> See Chastity Pratt Dawsey, "Parents, Students Protest Denby High Over School's Transfer to the EAA," *Detroit Free Press*, March 16, 2012.

Detroit, was a stunning—everyone remembered its iconic baby-blue limestone entrance and art deco style.<sup>457</sup> The school had also produced generations of famous alum such as jazz musician Earl Klugh, Grammy-winning songwriter Allee Willis, and even appeared in a Hollywood film in the 1980s.<sup>458</sup> In the 1970s, Mumford was known for its Black student activism.<sup>459</sup> By the 2000s, however, the iconic building was deteriorating. The community unable to salvage the building, agreed to fund the rebuilding of the school by approving a \$50 million bond in 2009. In 2012, Mumford students eagerly awaited for the opening of the “new” Mumford, a state-of-the-art facility for 1,500 students. Thus, when the state announced the transfer of Mumford to the EAA, the community erupted into outrage and protest, claiming the transfer was “an act of theft.”<sup>460</sup> A junior at Mumford said, “I hope the EAA is stopped. While it’s true we need some improvement on our test scores, there are some signs of progress and that’s something we can build on.”<sup>461</sup> One Mumford teacher said, “This school belongs to Mumford students and they’re trying to turn it into a charter school.”<sup>462</sup> Helen Moore, a longtime community activist in Detroit, put it in these words “They went against the promise.” She and other protestors felt betrayed. Without Detroiters’ consent, the state had decided to take from the Detroit Public Schools a brand new facility constructed with a bond approved by the citizens of Detroit.<sup>463</sup> The *Detroit News* reported that the move signaled a new era for DPS.<sup>464</sup> However, as I am arguing, the EAA did not signal a new era but rather was another event in an era that began with Lansing removing

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<sup>457</sup> “Mumford in the News,” Mumford High School Class of 1957, accessed October 23, 2014, [http://www.mumford57.com/class\\_custom8.cfm](http://www.mumford57.com/class_custom8.cfm).

<sup>458</sup> Eddie Murphy is seen wearing a Mumford High t-shirt in the film, *Beverly Hill’s Cop*. TV producer Jerry Bruckheimer, a Mumford alum, was also involved with the production of the film. See “Mumford in the News.

<sup>459</sup> In 1971, Mumford students staged a sit-in against district budget cuts and demanded “real community control” (i.e. no majority White boards controlling districts with majority Black students). See Mirel, *Rise and Fall*, 347-348.

<sup>460</sup> Rossiter & Pratt, “Hundreds Protest ‘Theft.’”

<sup>461</sup> Jennifer Chambers, “Saying Goodbye to Detroit’s Mumford High,” *Detroit News*, April 19, 2012.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> Rossiter & Pratt, “Hundreds Protest ‘Theft.’”

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

the power of local Boards to raise revenue. The EAA was another step toward eliminating the traditional system that gave local communities control of their schools.

However, the step the governor took in establishing the EAA was unprecedented as it nominally created a statewide school system, separate from local bureaucracy and decision making, not limited a district's borders. Further, the EAA's startup costs did not come from public funds alone, as a network of foundations came forward to invest in a new and innovative schooling system, a model for the rest of the state. The governor also managed to form the EAA quickly, without having to deliberate his idea in the legislature. The EAA also added yet another system of schools to an already fragmented educational landscape in Detroit. Further disgruntling the community, the governor arranged for the emergency manager of DPS to have authority over the EAA. In short, the establishing of the EAA was fast and controversial, yet just one more dramatic measure in a succession of policies in the last thirty years to dismantle the traditional public schooling system.

It is tempting to see another educational governor creating the EAA and the controversy around it as replicating the mayoral takeover in Chapter 5. There is, however, a significant difference in that by the time EAA comes into being, there is a history of "outsiders" controlling the Detroit School Board or ignoring the Board to make educational decisions for the schools. While resistance and contention over the policy would become widespread, nevertheless, the governor and Republic legislators met with little substantive opposition to reduce the jurisdictional authority of DPS Board and administrators.

In this chapter, I argue that the EAA represents the latest piece in the new order of school governance and a new twist on the idea of the decentralized American system of schooling. In the past, when scholars discussed the centralization of school governance, they referred to the

amalgamation of locally centralized school districts. However, with the advent of EAA and the aftermath of 30 years of moving educational decision making beyond the school board and superintendents, Detroit has a fragmented educational landscape, consisting of multiple “systems,” and actors, each with limited and situated authority with no coordination or common oversight. With EAA’s special authority over Detroit students and schools, the exceptional status of the elected Detroit School Board had over the city’s education has essentially come to an end. The traditional governance regime (i.e., school board and teachers union) had little political power to resist this and other changes.<sup>465</sup> For EAA schools, educational decisions formally moved up to the state-level and out of the hands of Detroiters.

This chapter presents the case of the EAA by setting the policy and reform in context of the enduring crisis of the academic record of Detroit students and DPS’ crushing fiscal problems. Second, I describe the EAA, its purpose, design, and educational goals and how the advocates of the new system claimed it would address DPS’s chronic problems. Then, I tell the story of how the EAA was established, driven by a so-called education governor who wanted to put together the EAA very quickly, and focusing on the conflicts and struggles that emerged around the effort to change school governance. Next, I situate the EAA in its time, using regime analysis to argue that the EAA is evidence of a new coalition of actors—what I call a *new style governance regime*—to implement, sustain, and “normalize” this change in school governance. I conclude by discussing how the story of the EAA contributes to our overall understand of a new era of schooling and extends Henig’s ideas about the “end of exceptionalism” in American education.

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<sup>465</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform*,” (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

## The Ongoing and Persistent Crises of Detroit's Public Schools

When Democratic Jennifer Granholm succeeded Governor Engler in 2003, Michigan's finances were in tatters. Its shrinking tax base forced Granholm to cut \$127 million in public spending within weeks of taking office.<sup>466</sup> Michigan's economy would remain poor resulting in the Governor having to eventually cut higher education funding, and was ultimately unable to raise any new money for the public school system.<sup>467</sup> Therefore, DPS was not receiving any significant increases in state aid in the 2000s. Furthermore, the school district was left with a \$200 million deficit in 2005. As explained in the previous chapter, thousands of students were leaving the district for charters and schools of choice and, following the reinstatement of the elected school board, the decline in enrollment actually accelerated, and continued well into the decade. In 2006, DPS enrollment dropped to 117,567, a loss of more than 14,000 students and millions in funding.<sup>468</sup>

In 2007, the school board hired a new superintendent, Connie Calloway, but she was unable to overcome the district's deteriorating finances as Detroit school children continued to flee the system, costing the system millions in revenue.<sup>469</sup> The fall 2007 count showed a loss of about 11,400 students from the prior year, with the district closing the 2007-2008 fiscal year with a \$140 million deficit. When Calloway projected a \$409 million deficit for 2009, the state superintendent recommended that Governor Granholm appoint a review team to examine the

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<sup>466</sup> Associated Press, "Cuts to Education Hurt Governor Granholm's Education Legacy," *MLive*, December 8, 2010, accessed October 24, 2014, [http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/12/cuts\\_to\\_education\\_hurt\\_gov\\_jen.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2010/12/cuts_to_education_hurt_gov_jen.html).

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> Valieri D. Lockhart, "DPS Loses Students and Millions in Funding," *Michigan Chronicle*, November 17, 2004; Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan* (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2012).

<sup>469</sup> After Superintendent Connie Calloway publicly aired the district's "financial laundry," there was a lot of tension between her and the school board. The board fired her at the end of 2008. See Addonizio & Kearney, *Lessons from Michigan*, 223.

school district's finances. DPS's financial situation had become so bad that Granholm declared a state of emergency, appointing the district's first emergency manager in 2009.<sup>470</sup>

As the fiscal crisis continued so did the educational crisis. According to Michael Addonozio and C. Philip Kearney, after the restoration of the elected school board, the district's academic performance worsened significantly.<sup>471</sup> Their study found that "by any valid measure of district performance," DPS was "in a more perilous position" in 2012 than it was in 1999.<sup>472</sup> In 2009, the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, told reporters that DPS's drop-out rate was "devastating" and arguably the worst in the nation.<sup>473</sup> A white paper on the state of the Detroit child published in 2010 declared that the majority of Detroit public schools had "shockingly low standardized test scores."<sup>474</sup> With a little more than half (62%) of DPS students graduating in 4 years,<sup>475</sup> only 37% had passed reading and 16% had passed math in the Michigan Merit Examination (MME). Data on the ACT showed that only 1.2 percent of Detroit public school graduates were considered college ready.<sup>476</sup>

In spite of the emergency manager launching an educational campaign, data analyses in 2012 revealed that test scores—including those from lower grade levels—hardly budged in the last five years.<sup>477</sup> More than a decade since mayoral takeover, DPS was not only under emergency management but the majority of its schools were in academic crisis. Before the end of

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 223-224..

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Data Driven Detroit, "State of the Detroit Child: 2010," (White Paper, Detroit, Michigan, 2010), 19.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>475</sup> Different cohort methodologies show different graduation rates. The "old methodology" (versus the federally-mandated methodology) shows inflated graduation rates. Nevertheless, strictly in terms of graduation rates as a measure of district performance, Michigan State University's Education Policy Center found evidence that runs contrary to Addonozio & Kearney's claim: DPS *has* been making steady progress since 2007. In 2010, 62 percent of ninth graders graduated with their class, up from 32 percent in 2006. Additionally, in 2009, Detroit third graders were 86 percent proficient in reading and 79 percent proficient in math. The problem is as students progress through the system, the percentage of proficient students drops significantly. See Data Driven Detroit, "State of the Detroit Child: 2010," 19-21.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>477</sup> Data Driven Detroit, "State of the Detroit Child: 2012," (White Paper, Detroit Michigan, 2012).



her tenure in January 2011, Governor Granholm’s last attempt to address these issues included seeking additional federal dollars through a new federal initiative called Race to the Top and the establishment of a redesign district for the lowest performing schools in the state. Rick Snyder, the newly elected Republican governor, would not only inherit the problem of DPS but also the policies and structures that his predecessor had put in place.

The EAA Dream: “A Different System, for a Better Outcome”<sup>478</sup>

Months after his election, Governor Snyder delivered a special message on education to the Michigan legislature in April 2011. Referring to the state’s dismal student performance on a number of assessments, the governor argued that the key problem was that the education system was an “outdated model of the past.”<sup>479</sup> Thus, the governor outlined a plan to transform and modernize the delivery of education, which included more charter schools, performance-based teaching, and a new public schooling model called an “Any Time, Any Place, Any Way, Any Pace.” The crux of the model depended on that funding follow the student, as a variety of schooling options, including 24-hour online learning, were made available. Snyder envisioned minimizing “all state and local barriers that hinder innovation at the local level” in order to offer a new unfettered educational system adaptable to all types of students and learning situations.<sup>480</sup> Although the governor did not mention his intentions for establishing the EAA, which he would two months later, his message was clear: the old system of education had to be overhauled.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> The phrasing, “A Different System, for a Better Outcome” comes directly from EAA outreach materials that were given to me in 2013. See Education Achievement Authority, “A Different System, for a Better Outcome; An Overview” (Pamphlet materials, Michigan, 2013).

<sup>479</sup> Snyder, “Special Message.”

<sup>480</sup> Ibid..

<sup>481</sup> Mary L. Mason and David Arsen surmise that Snyder did not mention the EAA in his special message because it either “did not fit neatly into the overall statewide agenda” or strategists saw, later, an opportunity to incorporate the EAA into the overall plan. See Mary L. Mason and David Arsen, “Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority and the Future of Public Education in Detroit: The Challenge of Aligning Policy Design and Policy Goals,” (Working Paper, College of Education Michigan State University, December 2014), 11.

Though Governor Snyder is often given credit—or blame—for creating the EAA, the blueprints for a recovery school district predates his election. As mentioned, Governor Granholm’s education legacy included an attempt to receive Race to the Top (RTT) funds, a new federal initiative central to President Barack Obama’s and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s efforts to reform education. A part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, RTT incentivized school reform by awarding stimulus funds to states with the strongest, most innovative and workable submissions, meeting certain requirements such as adopting standards for work- and college-readiness, building data systems that inform educators on areas of improvement, lifting caps on charter schools, *and turning around the lowest achieving schools.*<sup>482</sup>

The promise of an additional \$400 million in stimulus dollars encouraged both the governor and the cash-strapped Michigan legislature to propose sweeping reforms. Within a month of RTT’s announcement in March 2009, the Michigan legislature had hastily introduced a set of “Race to the Top” bills.<sup>483</sup> By January 2010, Granholm signed a package of RTT bills, extolling them as “revolutionary.”<sup>484</sup> The Michigan School Board Association also praised the bills for putting Michigan in serious competition for RTT dollars, stating that it was “one of the more major reforms in education policy in recent memory and will result in changes in almost

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<sup>482</sup> See U.S. Department of Education, “Race to the Top Program Executive Summary,” November 2009, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>.

<sup>483</sup> Michigan Race to the Top legislation included five bills: HB 4787, HB 4788, HB 5596, SB 926 and SB 981. See Michigan Association of School Boards, “Race to the Top Legislation Summary,” December 2009, accessed January 5, 2015, <file://localhost/http://house.michigan.gov/sessiondocs:2011-2012:testimony:Committee5-6-6-2012-1.pdf>.

<sup>484</sup> Amy Lane, “Gov. Jennifer Granholm signs ‘Race to the Top’ bills to reform Michigan Schools,” *Crain’s Detroit Business*, January 4, 2010, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.craindetroit.com/article/20100104/free/100109990/gov-jennifer-granholm-signs-race-to-the-top-bills-to-reform>; Peter Luke, “Gov. Jennifer Granholm calls legislature’s sweeping education reform ‘revolutionary,’” *MLive*, December 21, 2009, accessed October 24, 2014, [http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2009/12/gov\\_jennifer\\_granholm\\_calls\\_le.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2009/12/gov_jennifer_granholm_calls_le.html).

every district in the state.”<sup>485</sup> In the end, Michigan failed to win the stimulus dollars, but the bills had nevertheless become law.<sup>486</sup>

One of the laws, Public Act 204, required the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to establish a State School Reform/Redesign District (SRRD) to turn around the lowest achieving schools.<sup>487</sup> State Superintendent Mike Flanagan had envisioned modeling the SRRD after the Louisiana Recovery School District, which virtually took over all of New Orleans schools after Hurricane Katrina.<sup>488</sup> When Snyder entered office a year later, no schools had been transferred to the SRRD. Thus, past reform efforts under Granholm had already established both the concept and a governing structure for a statewide recovery school district. In fact, the SRRD would eventually provide a legal basis from which to launch the EAA.

Still, as early as his gubernatorial campaign, having supposedly approached a range of educational leaders, Snyder dreamed of creating an entirely new educational system for the state of Michigan. Once in office, one of the first things the governor did was not only broaden the powers of the emergency manager but also appoint Roy Roberts who agreed to assist the governor with his vision.<sup>489</sup> Snyder dreamed big. In one draft of EAA plans, the document states that the EAA schools will “ascribe to the non-negotiable for the radical transformation of the traditional paradigm of public education.”<sup>490</sup> These non-negotiables included a student-centered learning platform, common assessments, global partnerships, individualized learning plans for all students, and the use of technology as a learning tool. In short, Snyder’s vision for the EAA was

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<sup>485</sup> Michigan Association of School board, “Race to the Top.”

<sup>486</sup> Dave Murray, “Michigan’s Loss of Race to the Top Funding Doesn’t Negate Need for School Reforms,” *MLive*, March 5, 2010, accessed October 24, 2014, [http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2010/03/michigan\\_loss\\_of\\_race\\_to\\_the\\_t.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2010/03/michigan_loss_of_race_to_the_t.html).

<sup>487</sup> See Michigan Public Act 204 (2010), accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2009-2010/publicact/pdf/2009-PA-0204.pdf>.

<sup>488</sup> Rochelle Riley, “Fixing Schools is Personal for Flanagan,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 2011.

<sup>489</sup> Jesse David, “How Snyder’s Spark of an Idea Grew Into This Plan,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2011, A9.

<sup>490</sup> Education Achievement Authority, “A Strategic Plan (Vision) for the Radical Transformation and Disruption of Public Schooling” (Draft of EAA plans, Michigan, 2011).

not just establishing a recovery district, but also the *actual* inventing of a new educational model for the twenty-first century.

Earlier drafts of EAA plans also indicate that “disrupting” the traditional public schooling system was an appropriate action for getting started.<sup>491</sup> For too long, the system was entrenched in the customs and the demands of interest groups. A new educational authority could break free from such constraints. For example, the EAA could replace all teachers, staff, and principals of the lowest-performing schools and bring in new blood, like hiring from Teach for America (TFA), and partnering with the Harvard Graduate School of Education to recruit new principals from across the nation.<sup>492</sup> According to Mary L. Mason and David Arsen, Snyder’s vision was “shaped by a loss of faith in the system of traditional public schools and a belief that shifting a greater portion of education service provision outside that system would advance opportunities and outcomes.”<sup>493</sup>

In the EAA’s first year of implementation (2012-2013), the EAA promised to replace the “one size fits all” education with an “innovative learning environment.”<sup>494</sup> This environment included such features as extending both the day and year, abolishing grade levels, letting students master concepts at their own pace, requiring individualized learning plans, and delivering instruction through a technology platform called “Buzz,” an array of curricular

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<sup>491</sup> See Education Achievement Authority, “A Strategic Plan for the Radical Transformation and Disruption of the Traditional Public Schooling” (Draft of EAA plans, Michigan, 2011).

<sup>492</sup> Joy Resmovits, “Detroit’s Teach for America Recruits Stuck in the Middle of Broader Battle,” *Huffpost Detroit*, November 7, 2011, accessed November 11, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/16/teach-for-america-detroit\\_n\\_1095367.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/16/teach-for-america-detroit_n_1095367.html); Education Achievement Authority, “Harvard University Graduate School of Education Collaboration for the Principal Selection Process,” (Principal Appointment Roster, Michigan, 2012).

<sup>493</sup> Mason & Arsen, “Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority,” 11.

<sup>494</sup> See Education Achievement Authority, “Education Achievement Authority: Definition” (Pamphlet materials, Michigan, 2013).

materials and adaptive assessments.<sup>495</sup> Additionally, new hires accounted for 80 percent of the teaching staff, of which 27 percent were from TFA. Only a handful of principals were kept, Harvard recruited the rest. The EAA did not require unionization.<sup>496</sup> Most importantly, in light of Snyder's dream, the EAA's governing structure was radically divergent from the traditional public schooling system. The chancellor of the EAA, John Covington, and a small administrative team managed the EAA, directly reporting to the EAA's *founding board*. The founding board consisted of (among the original eleven members) the likes of the emergency manager, the president of the Skillman Foundation, and the head of the Detroit Medical Center, Mike Duggan (who would become Detroit's first White mayor since the early 1970s).<sup>497</sup> It was the complete eradication of any publicly elected body in charge of the recovery school district, and the establishing of an educational authority with a slew of new actors and players. It was a different system, for a better outcome.

### Establishing the Education Achievement Authority

According to the *Free Press*, a dinner at an Ann Arbor steakhouse on May 16, 2011 “marked an explosion of activity” that led to the materialization of the EAA. Present at the meeting were Snyder and officials from his administration, State Superintendent Mike Flanagan, and representatives from the Eli Broad Foundation and Eastern Michigan University (EMU). Purportedly, Richard Baird, a representative from Broad, pitched the idea to the EMU administrators, explaining how the university “was the right fit for this project.”<sup>498</sup> EMU's

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<sup>495</sup> Education Achievement Authority, “Frequently Asked Questions, Revised 3/2013” (Pamphlet materials, Michigan, 2013); Nelson Smith, “Redefining the School District in Michigan” (Part two of a three part series published by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October 2014), 18.

<sup>496</sup> See Smith, “Redefining the School District,” 19-20.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>498</sup> According Hoi Polloi, Richard McClellan, attorney and “charter school/school voucher snake oil salesman” was also present. You can listen to a recording of EMU Regent Jim Stapleton tell a group of EMU faculty how the EAA got started. See Hoi Polloi, “Listen To EMU Regent Jim Stapleton Reveal the Origin of the Education Achievement

history of teacher education efforts, personal ties with the governor and Lansing, and familiarity with the governor's idea would be a suitable partner for launching the immediate creation of a new school system.<sup>499</sup> Moreover, the governor also needed another public entity, in addition to DPS, to use the Urban Cooperating Act of 1967 to establish a new governing entity or authority necessary for the launch.

The Urban Cooperation Act, a provision in the state's constitution, enabled two or more public entities to enter into an "Interlocal Agreement (ILA)" to share functions and resources to assist with a public undertaking. According to Nelson Smith, ILAs were frequently used, but no two public agencies had ever "merged powers to create a freestanding new K-12 system."<sup>500</sup> Sometime between May and the announcement of the EAA in June—with the signatures of EMU President Susan Martin, DPS's emergency manager Roy Roberts, and Governor Snyder—the university and the school district agreed to a fifteen-year contract, to form the EAA.<sup>501</sup> In a way, it was a bold and innovative move towards establishing a new mechanism for providing improved public educational services.

Snyder's move would also avoid deliberating his concepts for the new school system through the usual legislative process. Seemingly, the governor was eager to implement the EAA quickly. With neither the EMU regents nor the emergency manager having consulted with EMU faculty, DPS school board officials, or the teachers union, the plans were shrouded in secrecy up until its public announcement in June. EMU Regent Jim Stapleton told reporters later on, "It's an aggressive plan, and it needs to be."<sup>502</sup> Attorneys were hammering out the final details of the plan

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Authority," November 3, 2014, *Daily Kos*, <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/11/03/1341223/-Listen-To-EMU-Regent-Jim-Stapleton-Reveal-TheOrigin-of-the-Education-Achievement-Authority>.

<sup>499</sup> Jesse David, "How Snyder's Spark of an Idea Grew Into This Plan," *Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2011, A9.

<sup>500</sup> Smith, "Redefining the School District," 8.

<sup>501</sup> See Interlocal Agreement Between The Board of Regents of Eastern Michigan University and the School District of the City of Detroit Creating the Education Achievement Authority, (Interlocal Agreement, Michigan, 2011).

<sup>502</sup> David, "Snyder's Spark of an Idea."

on Friday; by Sunday, Roy Roberts briefed the teachers union of the plan. On Monday morning, June 20th, Roberts informed the DPS school board—just hours before the public announcement of the EAA.<sup>503</sup>

Although the public announcement alluded to the likelihood of starting with the transfer of DPS schools on the list of the lowest 5% performing schools in the state, it immediately caused a great stir in Detroit’s educational community. The apparent disregard of the local system drew considerable concern from DPS teachers and the union. The president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) stated, “We are troubled at the lack of teacher and school employee voice in the current plan, especially in the light of the hard work Detroit education unions and school district have already done in collaborating to develop and implement workable solutions for the city’s schools.”<sup>504</sup> Many speculated whether this was a repeat of mayoral takeover in 1999, in which DPS was unfairly targeted. Some denounced the plan, at its core, as racially motivated. In response, Mike Flanagan assured one reporter that the new recovery district focused on the education of *all* children: “This isn’t a Detroit problem or Grand Rapids problem or a black problem or a white problem.”<sup>505</sup> Soon after being appointed by Snyder as chancellor of the EAA in August, John Covington set out immediately to dispel these concerns. In hopes of conveying to Detroiters that the EAA was serious about being a system for the *entire* state, Covington campaigned throughout Michigan to include schools from other districts.<sup>506</sup>

For Snyder, DPS’s chronically failing schools and ongoing fiscal problems were enough to justify that the new recovery school district begin with Detroit. Snyder argued that removing

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> David Jesse & Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “EMU Staff: We Won’t Work in Detroit,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 22, 2011, A1.

<sup>505</sup> Riley, “Fixing Schools.”

<sup>506</sup> Lori Higgins, “State District May Take Non-DPS Schools Sooner,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 5, 2011, A5.

schools from DPS would lessen the school district’s financial burden, as operational costs for turnaround measures would be funded by private donations.<sup>507</sup> Additionally, students removed from DPS would benefit—with the EAA model promising 95% of school funds for instruction.<sup>508</sup> In contrast, in DPS, nearly half of school dollars went to bureaucracy, management, and debt reduction.<sup>509</sup> The EAA would also receive additional funding through Michigan Public Education Finance Project, a non-profit accepting donations from private sources. These private donations topped off by 5.9 million dollars in federal grants would foot the EAA’s one-time startup costs.<sup>510</sup>

Thus, private donors were essentially investing in an opportunity for DPS schools to start over. Through its transfer to a new governing authority, unfettered by local governmental, political, and financial constraints, new and innovative educators, leaders, and agencies could experiment with ways to educate the students most in need. Not surprisingly, then, when the state announced the first schools to be transferred to the EAA on March 13, 2012, all 15 were from DPS.<sup>511</sup> (See Table 6.)

**Table 6. Detroit Public Schools Transferred to the Education Achievement Authority in 2012**

Elementary and Middle Schools	High Schools	Charter Schools
Brenda Scott Elementary/Middle Burns Elementary/Middle Law Academy Mary M. Bethune Elementary/Middle Nolan Elementary/Middle Phoenix Elementary/Middle	Central Collegiate Academy Denby High School Henry Ford High School Mumford High School Pershing High School Southeaster High School	Murphy Elementary/Middle Stewart Elementary/Middle Trix Elementary/Middle

<sup>507</sup> Matthew Dolan, “U.S. News: State to Take Charge of Worst Detroit Schools,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 21, 2011, A4.

<sup>508</sup> Breeana Kiter, “The Birth, Growth and Outcomes of the Education Achievement Authority,” *Michigan Policy Network K-12 Education*, May 8, 2013, accessed November 10, 2014, [http://www.michiganpolicy.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1256:the-birth-growth-and-outcomes-of-the-education-achievement-authority&catid=36:k-12-education-current-issues&Itemid=122](http://www.michiganpolicy.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1256:the-birth-growth-and-outcomes-of-the-education-achievement-authority&catid=36:k-12-education-current-issues&Itemid=122).

<sup>509</sup> Dolan, “State to Take Charge of Worst Detroit Schools.”

<sup>510</sup> Kiter, “Birth, Growth, and Outcomes.”

<sup>511</sup> See Aaron Foley, “EAA Set to Take Over Six Detroit High Schools, and Nine Elementary-Middle Schools” MLive, March 13, 2012, accessed January 6, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2012/03/ea\\_a\\_set\\_to\\_take\\_over\\_six\\_detro.html](http://www.mlive.com/news/detroit/index.ssf/2012/03/ea_a_set_to_take_over_six_detro.html); Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “State Names Detroit Schools for Takeover,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 14, 2012, A3.



Through such strategies and partnerships, Governor Snyder was able to quickly launch the EAA in Detroit without having to first codify the new school system into law. Still, the governor sought to expand the EAA's authority to include the lowest performing schools across the state. By fall, the governor figured he could meld the powers of the SSRD (Granholtz's "redesign district") with the EAA. On November 1, 2011, the SSRD signed a contract with the EAA agreeing to the "transfer of functions and responsibilities," essentially passing on the SSRD's power to turnaround the state's lowest achieving schools to the EAA. Now the EAA was the state's preeminent reform district with the EAA chancellor at its helm and the political and financial support of the Broad Foundation and other philanthropies.

That the EAA could transfer any of the 98 schools that the Michigan Department of Education had identified as the bottom 5% in August,<sup>512</sup> would soon garner concern beyond Detroit. Several news outlets, including *Education Week*, speculated that if these schools could not improve in the next two years, they could very well be transferred to the EAA.<sup>513</sup> Fears of loosing schools, privatization schemes, and the dismantling of the traditional public schools would result in a growing movement to stop the EAA and thwart the governor's plan to eventually make the EAA law.

### *Resistance to the EAA: Conflict and Struggle*

The struggle against the EAA began in Detroit but would gradually include other school districts that began to feel the threat of the state's increased power and authority in educational matters. The EAA's announcement of the transfer of the 15 DPS schools triggered weeks of protests in the spring of 2012. DFT president Keith Johnson accused the EAA of "union

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<sup>512</sup> See Michigan Department of Education, "Persistently Lowest-Achieving Schools By District," (August, 2011).

<sup>513</sup> Lori Higgins, "98 Struggling Schools May End Up in Michigan Reform District," *Education Week*, August 29, 2011, accessed October 31, 2014, [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/29/03mct\\_mireform.h31.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/08/29/03mct_mireform.h31.html).

busting,” no more than a plan to privatize services and underpay employees.<sup>514</sup> Custodians that were in schools slated for the EAA, for example, had to go through a process of rehire, expecting to earn anywhere between \$1.50-2.50 less per hour.<sup>515</sup> The president of the school custodians union told the *Free Press*, “What (the EAA) is going to save on custodians is minimal at best. EAA is nothing but smoke and mirrors, a social experiment.”<sup>516</sup> Johnson declared war on the emergency manager, who had the power to transfer DPS schools and create contracts without collective bargaining.<sup>517</sup> In May, the DFT filed the biggest lawsuit against DPS (i.e., the emergency manager) in living memory.<sup>518</sup>

With the public largely in the dark about why Detroit was yet again singled out, they could only speculate on the state’s intentions. Elena Herrada, a school board member, told the *Huffington Post*, “It’s very, very insidious.”<sup>519</sup> In her view, the highest-risk students would still receive the least amount of resources while EAA experimenters had nothing to lose because the students – nearly all African American children—had been failing anyway. Herrada argued the new school district was separate and unequal—“basically a Jim Crow District.”<sup>520</sup> School board member Herrada’s view underscored the persistent notion among Detroiters that they were being

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<sup>514</sup> Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “DPS Union Leadership Criticizes New EAA,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 30, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.freep.com/article/20120630/NEWS01/206300403/DPS%20union%20leaders%20criticize%20new%20EAA>.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Anonymous, “Detroit Teachers Union Calls New Contract, ‘An Act of Tyranny,’” *Huffpost Detroit*, July 2, 2012, accessed October 29, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/02/detroit-teachers-union-ca\\_n\\_1643182.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/02/detroit-teachers-union-ca_n_1643182.html); Anonymous, “Detroit Teachers See Cuts.”

<sup>518</sup> See Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “DPS to Face Suit Alleging it Broke Teacher Contract,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 25, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.freep.com/article/20120525/NEWS01/205250457/Detroit-Public-Schools-to-face-lawsuit-alleging-it-broke-teacher-contract>; David Sands, “Detroit Teachers Union Threatens Lawsuit Against District Over Teacher Tenure, Contract Violations,” *Huffpost Detroit*, May 25, 2012, accessed October 31, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/detroit-teachers-union-lawsuit-public-schools-tenure\\_n\\_1546583.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/detroit-teachers-union-lawsuit-public-schools-tenure_n_1546583.html).

<sup>519</sup> David Sands, “Elena Herrada, Detroit School Board Member, Defends Vote to Withdraw From the EAA District,” *Huffington Post*, November 5, 2012, accessed August 20, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/15/elena-herrada-detroit-school-board-eea\\_n\\_2137281.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/15/elena-herrada-detroit-school-board-eea_n_2137281.html).

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

unfairly targeted because of their race, and the governor's tactics were terribly reminiscent of mayoral takeover in 1999. However, fears about such tactics and/or objections with the emergency manager's broad powers and connection with the EAA as a gross violation and threat to democracy began to spread across the state.<sup>521</sup> Especially in the Metro Detroit, people began to vocalize their disapproval of the EAA, indicating that efforts to "corporatize and dismantle public education" had implications that reached beyond Detroit.<sup>522</sup>

The broader struggle against the EAA began as early as 2011 and the strategy was to eliminate the emergency manager. A coalition called Stand Up for Democracy initiated a grassroots campaign against the "emergency manager law" (i.e., Public Act 4) by collecting petition signatures to force a ballot referendum during the November 2012 elections.<sup>523</sup> According to one of its leaders, the campaign was truly a working-class movement.<sup>524</sup> Stand Up for Democracy drew from unions, church groups, the NAACP, progressive organizations, and some state congressional representatives.<sup>525</sup> Earlier, in February 2012, 500 people from Lansing, Flint, and Detroit rallied at a church in Lansing before sending off delegates to the legislature with 15 boxes filled with petition signatures.<sup>526</sup>

When the Board of State Canvassers approved the ballot referendum, it effectively suspended the full activity of the emergency manager and reinstated the school board until the

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<sup>521</sup> See Rod Rock, "Education Achievement Authority Bad for State—and Its Kids," *Detroit Free Press*, April 25, 2013

<sup>522</sup> Rob Glass, "A Dagger Aimed at the Heart of Public Education," *Detroit Free Press*, December 2, 2012.

<sup>523</sup> AFSCME Council 25 and other union groups funded Stand Up for Democracy. See Jonathan Oosting, "Michigan Proposal 1: Voters Reject Measure, Repeal Controversial Emergency Manager Law," *MLive*, November 7, 2012, accessed October 31, 2014,

[http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/election\\_results\\_michigan\\_vote.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/election_results_michigan_vote.html); David Sands "Michigan Emergency Manager Repeal Delivers 226,637," *Huffpost Detroit*, February 29, 2012, accessed October 14, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/michigan-emergency-manager-repeal\\_n\\_1311582.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/michigan-emergency-manager-repeal_n_1311582.html).

<sup>524</sup> David Sands "Michigan Emergency Manager Repeal Delivers 226,637," *Huffpost Detroit*, February 29, 2012, accessed October 14, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/michigan-emergency-manager-repeal\\_n\\_1311582.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/michigan-emergency-manager-repeal_n_1311582.html).

<sup>525</sup> Representative John Conyers (D-Detroit) released a report that showed that PA 4 was unconstitutional and called on U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to investigate. See Sands, "Repeal Deliver 226,637."

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

November vote.<sup>527</sup> For the first time in three years, the school board had some power restored, and, it immediately set out to sue the state.<sup>528</sup> Parents of students slated for the EAA transfer worried how this would affect their children, with only a month before school re-opened. Chancellor Covington, however, assured them that they would nevertheless move forward with the transfer. In September, all fifteen of the EAA schools opened.

Victory appeared to be near. As Michiganders went to the polls on November 4, 2012, they repealed the emergency manager law by a 52-48 percent margin.<sup>529</sup> Believing that they had rid the district of the emergency manager, the Detroit school board quickly took the opportunity to close down the EAA by voting to break its interlocal agreement with EMU.<sup>530</sup> However, within days, Snyder and Roberts declared that repealing the law (PA 4) simply meant rolling back to the first emergency financial manager law established in 1990, PA 72.<sup>531</sup> Thus, Roberts would remain as emergency manager, while rendering the school board's actions to discontinue the ILA illegitimate. Remarkably, rather than weaken under such great opposition, the EAA was

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<sup>527</sup> A conservative group called Citizens for Fiscal Responsibility challenged the petitions by claiming that the font size of one of the sections on the petition was too small. Initially, two Republicans on the Board of State Canvassers supported the challenge. See Simone Landon, "Michigan Emergency Manager Law Referendum Petitions Not Certified," *Huffpost Detroit*, April 26, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/26/michigan-emergency-manager-law-petitions-not-certified\\_n\\_1455184.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/26/michigan-emergency-manager-law-petitions-not-certified_n_1455184.html).

<sup>528</sup> The school board filed a lawsuit seeking to replace more than \$200 million in deficits accrued during the first takeover: mayoral control from 1999-2005. In turn, the State Attorney filed a suit seeking to completely remove the school board, arguing that its 2011 elections were invalid based on the district's enrollment levels. The school board had been filing lawsuits against the emergency financial manager since 2009. See Benoit, "Student Achievement," and Chastity Pratt Dawsey, "DPS School Board Plans to Sue the State, Reinstate Teachers," *Detroit Free Press*, August 17, 2012, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.freep.com/article/20120817/NEWS01/308170152/DPS-school-board-plans-to-sue-the-state-reinstate-teacher>.

<sup>529</sup> Jonathan Oosting, "Michigan Proposal 1: Voters Reject Measure, Repeal Controversial Emergency Manager Law," *MLive*, November 7, 2012, accessed April 18, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/election\\_results\\_michigan\\_vote.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/election_results_michigan_vote.html).

<sup>530</sup> Sands, "Elena Herrada."

<sup>531</sup> Jonathan Oosting, "Michigan Emergency Manager Law: What's Next After Public 4 Repeal," November 11, 2012, accessed April 18, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/michigan\\_emergency\\_manager\\_law.html](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/11/michigan_emergency_manager_law.html).

poised to expand as Snyder and the legislature were intent on codifying the reform district into law by the end of the year.<sup>532</sup>

Thus, the struggle against the EAA took a different turn; this time, the coalition—which by now clearly consisted of both Detroiters and non-Detroiters—would directly attack the EAA and persuade the legislature from codifying the school district into law. When the federal government announced at the end of the year that the EAA was at last a Race to the Top finalist, a group of parents, university professors, and advocates of the traditional public schooling system wrote a letter to Arne Duncan and President Barak Obama outlining their grievances regarding the EAA.<sup>533</sup> Garnering national attention, Democratic lawmakers also began to take note, siding with constituents who wanted to stop Snyder’s experimental model.<sup>534</sup>

The anti-EAA movement’s biggest weapon was the overwhelming data that indicated that the EAA was not working. Within its first year of implementation, a short list of problem areas included financial mismanagement, lack of operational support, lack of transparency, poor student outcomes, and disciplinary problems. In January 2013, the EAA requested \$2 million to fix glitches in the software and to add computers.<sup>535</sup> After filing a Freedom of Information Act request, Thomas Pedroni, Wayne State Professor and education activist, found hundreds of emails attesting to a botched online platform: significant disruption during the baseline

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<sup>532</sup> HB 5923 included language indicating that the EAA would provide new forms of public school governance, expand the number and types of public entities permitted to operate public schools, and repurpose educational buildings, effectively seizing unused public school buildings from local districts and redistributing them. See Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, “Education Achievement Authority (EAA) Analysis of SB 1358 and HB 6004,” November 18, 2012, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://mymassp.com/files/EAA%20analysis-11.18.12.pdf>.

<sup>533</sup> Jaclyn Zubrzycki, “Michigan Education Achievement Authority Special School District a Lightning Rod for Controversy,” *Huffpost Education*, December 12, 2012, accessed November 13, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/mich-achievement-authori\\_n\\_2287214.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/mich-achievement-authori_n_2287214.html).

<sup>534</sup> The legislature tried to expand the EAA during the lame-duck session at the end of the year (2012), but it stalled in committee. In addition, with a slimmer GOP majority in the House, Kathleen Gray predicted that it might be more difficult for Snyder to achieve his educational goals. See Kathleen Gray, “Bitter Feelings Mays Linger As Lawmakers Get Back to Work,” January 17, 2013, *Detroit Free Press*.

<sup>535</sup> Chastity Pratt Dawsey, “EAA Schools Ask for \$2M to Fix Tech Glitches, Add Computers,” January 12, 2013, *Detroit Free Press*.

assessment in the fall, headsets needed for audio were not available, weak wireless signals resulting in failure to load the online tests, and many students unable to login to the system at all.<sup>536</sup> Pedroni also found that discipline incidents in the EAA increased by 500 percent in the second quarter: in an 8,000-student district, some 5,200 incidents were reported in less than three months.<sup>537</sup> When the EAA claimed a 22% increase in math and a 27% increase in reading, state Senator Bert Johnson of Highland Park accused the EAA for withholding from the public the data on those students who experienced no such results.<sup>538</sup> There were also concerns regarding the educators: the EAA had lost 12.6 % of its teachers since September. As Johnson told the *Free Press*, there were about a dozen cases of Teacher for America teachers walking out of their jobs, and leaving their pupils unattended. At the end of its first year, EAA enrollment dropped by nearly a quarter.<sup>539</sup> Armed with preliminary reports on the performance and implementation of the new district, state Democrats Bert Johnson, Hoon-Yung Hopgood, and Ellen Cogen Lipton launched a full throttle campaign against the EAA, urging Snyder and the legislature to “scrap the EAA’s failed experiment.”<sup>540</sup>

In the meantime, teachers unions across the Detroit Metro Area and EMU faculty had been pressuring EMU regents to pull out of its contract with the EAA, deeming the university’s affiliation with the EAA “pedagogically unsupportable.” The EAA, they lamented, had “tarnished” the reputation of its teacher preparation program across the state so much that some school districts were refusing to hire EMU student teachers.<sup>541</sup> By November 30, 2013, the Dean

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<sup>536</sup> Thomas C. Pedroni, “Trust and Transparency Among EAA Issues,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 2, 2013, A12.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Bert Johnson, “EAA’s Biggest Backer Ignore Biggest Shortcomings,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 2013, A15.

<sup>539</sup> EAA enrollment dropped by 24.9% (from 8,682 to 6,517). See Mason & Arsen, “Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority,” 47-48.

<sup>540</sup> Johnson, “EAA’s Biggest Backers.”

<sup>541</sup> David Jesse, “Educators Urge EMU: Cut Ties With State Districts,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 16, 2013.

of the EMU College of Education became the third EAA board member to resign in the system's short history.<sup>542</sup>

Perhaps the single most damning evidence of the failures of the EAA was the firsthand accounts of the severity of the poor teaching and learning conditions and the overall chaos of the system. During the middle of EAA's second year, a number of EAA teachers (many remaining anonymous for fear of losing their jobs) disclosed these alarming stories on a blog led by a prominent Democrat.<sup>543</sup> Undoubtedly these stories drew much public attention and scrutiny. By February, the mounting negative publicity was enough to pressure the state superintendent to terminate the EAA's contract with the SRRD, which had given them the exclusive function of turning around the state's lowest performing schools.<sup>544</sup>

Still, in March, the House's Republican majority managed to pass the "EAA expansion bill" (adding 50 more schools) by just two votes—ironically both from Detroit legislators.<sup>545</sup> The *Michigan Citizen*, a local, pro-community, and progressive weekly newspaper, lambasted their legislators:

Harvey Santana and John Olumba are on the wrong side of history, the wrong side of the school question and on the worst side for children. They are preparing to join Gov. Rick Snyder, the Republican corporate 'school reform' movement

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<sup>542</sup> Sharlonda Buckman and Mike Duggan also resigned their board positions on the EAA. See Chastity Pratt Dawsey, "State Reform District Could Add Schools Early as January," *Detroit Free Press*, December 10, 2013, A4; Emergency Manager Roy Roberts also resigned in May. See Chastity Pratt Dawsey, "As DPS Steps Up, Roberts to Step Down," *Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 2013, A1.

<sup>543</sup> Eclectablog, "Education Achievement Authority Teacher Speaks Out On Abuse of Student and the Failure of the EAA," January 22, 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.eclectablog.com/2014/01/education-achievement-authority-teachers-speak-out-on-abuse-of-students-and-the-failure-of-the-eaa.html>.

<sup>544</sup> To be more exact, Flanagan terminated the renewal of the SRRD's exclusive contract with the EAA, which expired in February. See Jake Neher, "Michigan Ending Its Exclusive Contract with the EAA," *Michigan Public Radio*, 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://michiganradio.org/post/michigan-ending-its-exclusive-contract-eaa>;

<sup>545</sup> HB 4369 or the "EAA expansion bill" passed by a 56-54 vote. See Chad Livengood, "Michigan House Narrowly Passes EAA Expansion Bill," *Detroit News*, March 20, 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140320/POLITICS02/303200131>.

and vote yes to expand the Education Achievement Authority [...] We say it is a Jim Crow district – separate and unequal.<sup>546</sup>

But, the stream of incriminatory evidence was relentless. By the end of the EAA’s second year, the Michigan Department of Education’s report on MEAP scores revealed that Detroit students had suffered tremendously under “state-managed DPS and EAA schools”—since takeover in 2009, the proficiency gap in reading had widened in every tested grade relative to state peers.<sup>547</sup>

Soon after this release, State Board of Education members John Austin and Dan Varner—both of whom had previously supported the EAA—joined the ranks of four other state board colleagues who had already come out against the EAA.<sup>548</sup>

In June, the EAA Board released the 2014-2015 budget showing steep declines in projected revenues, from \$112.6 million in 2014 to \$86.2 million for 2015. The drop reflected, in part, the end of private funding for start-up costs.<sup>549</sup> John Covington resigned the same day.<sup>550</sup> Bad news would continue: in August, the *Free Press* reported that an authorizer for the EAA was among ten other charter school authorizers at risk of suspension for deficiencies.<sup>551</sup> Lastly, soon after her appointment, the interim chancellor, Veronica Conforme, found herself embroiled in a mini-scandal. Cash-strapped, the EAA attempted to enroll more students by recruiting from neighboring suburbs. The effort resulted in an embarrassing public apology from Conforme

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<sup>546</sup> Anonymous, “Set Your State Reps Straights,” *Michigan Citizen*,” March 19, 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://michigancitizen.com/set-your-state-reps-straight/>.

<sup>547</sup> Thomas C. Pedroni, “Another Lost Year: Children in State-Managed Detroit Schools Lose Even More Ground to State Peers,” *March 3, 2014*, accessed May 1, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/site/detroitdataanddemocracyproject/ANOTHER-LOST-YEAR>.

<sup>548</sup> Jennifer Chambers, “2 State School Board Members Come Out Against the EAA,” *Detroit News*, March 12, 2014, accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140312/SCHOOLS/303120089>.

<sup>549</sup> Smith, “Redefining the School District.”

<sup>550</sup> According to Nelson Smith, John Covington’s public statement explained he needed to take care of his ailing mother. See Smith, “Redefining the School District,” 22.

<sup>551</sup> This announcement came from the State Superintendent Mike Flanagan after an 8-day investigative series of charters in the *Detroit Free Press*. See Lori Higgins, Jennifer Dixon, and David Jesse, “11 Charter School Authorizers Risk State Suspension For Deficiencies,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 11, 2014, accessed January 9, 2014, <http://archive.freep.com/article/20140811/NEWS06/308110130/charter-schools-Michigan-suspension>.



when it came to light that the recruitment letters, which were titled “Confirmation of 2014-2015 School Assignment,” seemed to mislead and deceive parents to think that they had already been assigned to an EAA school.<sup>552</sup> Given its poor outcomes, negative press, and with key state-level figures renegeing on their support, it appeared that the hopes of codifying the EAA into law was all but dashed.

Still, extraordinarily, (at the time of writing) the EAA lives on. During the tail end of Snyder’s reelection campaign, an opinion editorial featured in the *Detroit News* argued that if the governor was reelected, it should finally “push the legislature to give the EAA authority, and the funding, to be successful.”<sup>553</sup> Citing the success of the recovery school districts in New Orleans and Tennessee as “one of the most promising educational innovations in America today,” the authors—the president and vice president of research at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, an advocate of providing quality choices for every family—claimed it was “not too late for policymakers to resuscitate this promising reform.”<sup>554</sup> In November 2014, Governor Snyder was re-elected by a 52-46 percent margin.<sup>555</sup>

## Discussion

In recent studies of the EAA, scholars have wondered how the policy would have fared had Snyder established the recovery school district through the typical legislative process. Mary L. Mason and David Arsen argue that Governor Snyder’s tactics did nothing but postpone the

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<sup>552</sup> In addition to Detroit, parents in Pleasant Ridge, Ferndale, Grosse Pointe, and Southfield reported receiving the “confirmation” letters. See Ann Zaniewski, “Reform District Apologizes for Letter ‘Assigning’ Students to Schools,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 2, 2014, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://archive.freep.com/article/20140901/NEWS/309010195/Reform-district-apologizes-letter-assigning-students-schools>.

<sup>553</sup> Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli, “EAA District Can Be Reformed” *Detroit News*, October 31, 2014, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2014/10/31/ea-redefining-michigan-school-district/18197963/>.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Jonathan Oosting, “Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder Defeats Democrat Mark Schauer, Wins Second-Term in Hard Fought Election,” November 4, 2014, accessed April 18, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2014/11/rick\\_snyder\\_wins\\_michigan\\_elec.html](http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2014/11/rick_snyder_wins_michigan_elec.html).

political contention and controversy that is described in the latter half of this case study. They contend, “Indeed the route chosen likely generated political obstacles to crafting coherent policies for low-performing schools and for Detroit [...]”<sup>556</sup> Nelson Smith, on the other hand, argues that from the perspective of EAA advocates, Snyder’s tactic made sense especially given how difficult it has been to expand the bill. In either case, the political struggle around the EAA, another effort to radically transform school governance, can be examined through the lens of urban regime analysis.

Indeed, one explanation for why Snyder and EAA reformers have struggled to codify the EAA and bring about governance change was their failure to establish a sufficient level of civic capacity. Circumventing local decision-making has only served to further alienate the traditional schooling community from the prospect of building a new turnaround model for persistently low-achieving schools. Instead, the school board and teachers union went on the offensive with weeks of protests like the one at Mumford and launching legal battles claiming that the EAA was a “Jim Crow” district. Their challenge put a slight pressure on the state’s ability to establish the new school system.

In reality, beginning in the 1980s, through a series of policies, the power and influence of the school board and teachers union had been significantly weakened. As this dissertation shows, policies of the last twenty years have in one form or another geared towards the eradication of school board and unions’ centrality in decision-making. As a consequence, I argue, what I call the traditional governance regime was not a serious threat to Snyder’s efforts to expand and codify the EAA. Rather, remarkably, the EAA would draw controversy and critique from individuals and groups beyond the borders of Detroit, essentially galvanizing a resistance movement. This battle, one that would involve key Democratic legislators who could place the

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<sup>556</sup> Mason & Arsen, “Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority, 53.

issue of the EAA on the stage of state politics before the governor’s reelection year, pitting Democrats against Republicans, was a threat to the governor’s plans. Despite all the negative press and the Democrats’ campaign against Snyder, claiming the he was responsible for a dangerous and failed experiment gone wrong, the governor was reelected by a 51-47 margin in 2014. Along with his reelection came renewed voices to not only expand the EAA but also calls to bring order back into a system that had been fractured to the point where, ironically, too many were in control.

These new voices reflect a powerful regime of new actors whom I argue support change and sustain initiatives like the EAA. The fact that the EAA is still standing, then, must mean that there is some level of civic capacity sustaining the new recovery school district. Thus, the EAA is a case study of the rise of a new style governance regime—an informal arrangement that support, advocate, and provide resources for state initiatives like the EAA. The regime includes foundations, the business community, pro-school choice organizations, charter advocates, and universities (i.e., the regents of Eastern Michigan University) who assist and support formal the increased role of the governor and the state. Importantly, the new educational actors reveal a web of relations that have been nurtured beginning as early as the 1980s, when people increasingly lost faith in local school governance. (See Table 7.)

**Table 7. Traditional Governance Regime versus New Style Governance Regime**

Traditional governance regime	New style governance regime
School board Teachers union Teachers and administrators Some parents	Broad Foundation Eastern Michigan University regents Emergency Manager Excellent Schools Detroit Governor Snyder Harvard Graduate School of Education Republican legislators Skillman Foundation Teach for America Other foundations (Kresge, W.K. Kellogg, McGregor Fund)

Still, whether this new coalition of actors, what I call the new style governance regime, will sustain the EAA, remains to be seen. At the end of the day, the policy needs to work. As seen in the case of mayoral takeover in Chapter 5, it was the policy's basic failure to address DPS's chronic issues that resulted in the breakdown of political support, resealing divisions, and hardening political lines. Even though Republicans currently dominate the legislature, if the EAA fails to address DPS's academic and fiscal issues, Democrats could very well continue their campaign against a Republican-driven effort to expand the EAA. The Democrats could play on people's fears of an era of corporatizing schools, experimentation on children, unregulated charters and the end of local control and the infringement of democratic rights everywhere, including White neighborhoods.

#### Conclusion: The Final Assault?

What are we to make of the EAA? Is it a turning point in the quest to dismantle the public schooling system? Was it the next logical step in a 30-year search for a way to manage a system long mired in fiscal and educational problems? Indeed, by establishing a new schooling authority, a powerful education governor was able to pull 15 schools out from a chronically failing system. In 2013, Bill Rustem, the governor's director of strategy, told *Michigan Radio* that the EAA is more than an education initiative but is a part of the governor's larger, state-led effort to "transform traditional public education" and "to build another model for the delivery of education services."<sup>557</sup> It was the governor's dream for "a different system, for a better outcome." The creation of the EAA was also about creating a more cost-effective system while attempting to shrink DPS's budget deficit. In sum, the governor had achieved radical governance change

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<sup>557</sup> Sarah Cwiek, "The Educational Achievement Authority, Part 3: True Reform, or a Questionable Experiment?" *Michigan Radio*, April 16, 2013, accessed November 10, 2014, <http://michiganradio.org/post/education-achievement-authority-part-3-true-reform-or-questionable-experiment>.

made possible by the systematic weakening of the traditional governance regime while rallying the support of new educational actors.

## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusion: Characterizing a New Era of Urban Public Schooling

Who will take responsibility when the last public school in the city is closed?

– Peter J. Hammer<sup>558</sup>

As Detroit emerged from Chapter 9 bankruptcy in mid August of 2014, the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in U.S. history, many media outlets speculated about the Motor City's future. Notably, many argued that the city's revival was dependent upon improving the public schooling system. For instance, the *Detroit News* and the *Free Press* reported that an increasingly influential education coalition called the Excellent Schools Detroit (ESD) had released a proposal for *mayoral control*, claiming that it would significantly improve schools and finally usher in a new era of public schooling for Detroit.<sup>559</sup> With no less than twelve separate schooling systems in place, the ESD argued it was nearly impossible to bring about any meaningful and comprehensive reform without centralizing schools, suggesting that the newly elected Mayor, Mike Duggan (Detroit's first White mayor since 1973), to oversee a *portfolio of*

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<sup>558</sup> Peter J. Hammer, "The Fate of Detroit Public Schools: Governance, Finance, and Competition," *The Journal of Law and Society* 110, no. 13 (2011), 154.

<sup>559</sup> Joel Kurth, "More Power Over Schools Sought for Detroit Mayor," *Detroit News*, August 15, 2014, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140815/SCHOOLS/308150073>; Ann Zaniewski, "Education Coalition: Centralize Detroit's Public School System," *Free Press*, August 16, 2014. Earlier in 2014, it appeared that Mayor Mike Duggan had no interest in taking over Detroit's schools, which garnered loud applause and praise at a school board meeting. See Anne Zaniewski, "Duggan: I Want to Team-Up with Detroit Schools, Not Take Them Over," May 8, 2014, *Free Press*, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://archive.freep.com/article/20140508/NEWS01/305080222/Duggan-want-team-up-Detroit-schools-not-take-them-over>.

*schools*.<sup>560</sup> The ESD's proposal immediately sparked debate. Advocates of the traditional public schooling system were quick to remind the public of how mayoral "control" in 1999 had failed. The dissenters were weary as mayoral takeover in 1999 did little to address DPS's fiscal and educational problems. There was nothing by way of past successes that could convince dissenters that anymore state interventions would turnaround Detroit's schools. On the other hand, from the perspective of the reformers, mayoral takeover had been one step among many to *effectively* dismantle the traditional public schooling system in order to usher in a new era of innovation and school choice (i.e. charters and the EAA). Besides two very brief moments since 1999, the elected school board has yet to be fully reinstated. The ESD's influence, in fact, reflects how unlikely either the school board or the traditional governance regime will be restored. Instead, this dissertation tells the story of the emergence of a new regime of educational actors, the informal arrangements that "surround and complement the formal workings of the governmental authority."<sup>561</sup> The new style governance regime supports mayoral takeover, one of the sharpest indicators of a new era of public schooling in which educational decision-making is gradually being absorbed into multi-level, general-purpose government.<sup>562</sup>

This dissertation tells the story of how one major city's school system unraveled in the last thirty years. In Chapter Four, I show how five key school reforms—Proposal A, mayoral takeover, emergency management, Michigan's charter law, and the EAA—contributed to the gradual erosion of local control and the final breakup of the one best system. Using urban regime analysis to highlight the governmental dimensions of Detroit's story, Chapters Five and Six tell a

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<sup>560</sup> Excellent Schools Detroit, "Proposal," (Presentation for ESD board, August 15, 2014), accessed November 21, 2014, [http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd\\_board\\_presentation\\_082014.pdf](http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/files/esd_board_presentation_082014.pdf).

<sup>561</sup> Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 3.

<sup>562</sup> Jeffrey R. Henig, *The End of Exceptionalism in American Education: The Changing Politics of School Reform*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2013).

political story of how governance change is made possible by the end one regime and the beginning of another. Indeed, in the aftermath of these school reforms, a clamor of new voices—especially philanthropic organizations and education entrepreneurs—are urging Governor Snyder to implement a *portfolio management model*, the next logical step in urban schooling advances. With the elected school board’s authority suspended and dissenters marginalized, I argue that Detroit is a case study of the “end of exceptionalism in American education.”<sup>563</sup>

### “The End of Exceptionalism” in American Education

Just twenty years ago, Detroit’s elected school board and superintendent had full authority over DPS. School governance in Detroit was still functioning as a highly localized, single-purpose government, dominated by a small array of interest groups. Before 1994, the traditional governance regime was still intact. Today, however, general-purpose elected officials, from federal government on down, have considerable power and control over city schools—and this shift in school control is supported by a regime of new actors.<sup>564</sup> For example, Arne Duncan’s first official act as secretary of education was to go to Detroit and tell the mayor and governor that the federal government would provide millions of dollars if DPS would follow the Chicago model, in which mayoral takeover is a key mechanism that leads to the closing of failing schools and the expansion of charters.<sup>565</sup> Thus, Robert Bobb, Detroit’s emergency manager, followed up with a proposal to close schools and expand a market of schools. A year later, in 2010, the coalition of foundations—the ESD—also released a plan for establishing at least 70 high performing schools in Detroit by 2020, garnering the attention of national funders. “For

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>565</sup> Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 155-156. (Insert mine.)



the first time they [philanthropic foundations] believe that Detroit is serious about true reform, that it really is focused on children,” the president of the Skillman Foundation, Carol Goss, told reporters.<sup>566</sup> Thus, Detroit saw an “interweaving of philanthropic organizations and city government.”<sup>567</sup>

From the beginning, Governor Snyder worked closely with the ESD envisioning a portfolio management model for Detroit, with the establishment of the EAA as a way to ultimately form a new authority in which to establish the new model.<sup>568</sup> When the EAA was on the brink of elimination, the ESD proposed that the governor put Detroit’s fragmented school system under the control of the mayor. The role of the ESD and other such organizations in Detroit constituted a “new type of local education regime”—characterized by new actors that advocated for mayoral control, adopting a portfolio management model, and contracting services.<sup>569</sup>

This new style governance or what Henig has called the *emerging reform regime* redefines the power of the local actors in education, such as teachers and parents, as it draws power, legitimacy, and authority from others.<sup>570</sup>

Parents, teachers, and school boards may at times play a role even in the newly emerging reform regimes, but that role tends to be less central and episodic. *In their place*, general-purpose elected officials are constructing supporting regimes that incorporate a new set of actors, notably foundations and other philanthropists, private charter school operators, organizations (like Teach for America and New

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<sup>566</sup> Sherri Welch, “Absent No More: School Reform Attracting Once Reluctant Foundations,” *Crain’s Detroit Business*, March 14, 2010, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://www.craindetroit.com/article/20100314/SUB01/303149954/absent-no-more-school-reform-attracting-once-reluctant>.

<sup>567</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 101.

<sup>568</sup> Mary L. Mason and David Arsen, “Michigan’s Education Achievement Authority and the Future of Public Education in Detroit: The Challenge of Aligning Policy Design and Policy Goals,” (Working Paper, College of Education Michigan State University, December 2014).

<sup>569</sup> Henig, *End of Exceptionalism*, 148.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Leaders) that represent an alternative source of teachers and principals, and for-profit providers in the publishing and testing business.<sup>571</sup>

The emerging reform regime, Henig observes, often replaces a “national constituency for what historically was a very localized one.”<sup>572</sup> The core values of the new regime are different as well, shifting from a focus on pedagogical and instructional skills to an emphasis on management and technology. (See Table 8.) Some of the most prominent stakeholders include consulting organization such as McKinsey, Parthenon, or the Boston Consulting Group; national foundations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, and Broad Foundation; and advocacy groups like StudentsFirst and Stand for Children. Added to this mix are national charter management organizations and publishers and testing firms.<sup>573</sup>

Detroit exemplifies these new political arrangements. The Broad Foundation, for instance, has played a pivotal role in supporting new style governance. Broad has not only financed the emergency manager’s salary but also helped to craft the idea of the EAA and finance the chancellor’s salary. In fact, Robert Bobb was a graduate of the Broad Academy, a program to develop educational leaders. Bobb would hire four educational management companies (Edison Learning, Institute of Student Achievement, EdWorks, and Model Secondary Schools Project) with multi-year contracts to turnaround the lowest performing schools in DPS.<sup>574</sup> The Michigan Educational Excellence Fund (MEEF), a multi-donor fund (whose honorary chair is the governor himself), contributed \$9.5 million to the EAA during its second

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> The 17 schools slated for turnaround were: Central, Crockett, Henry Ford, King, Western, Cooley, Denby, Finney, Kettering, Mumford, Southeastern, Pershing, Detroit Tech, Southwestern, Cody, Northwestern, and Osborn. See Marisa Schultz, “DPS Gives Control of Lagging Schools to Private Sector,” *Detroit News*, July 11, 2009.

year.<sup>575</sup> The EAA would also pay Agilix, a partner in the School Improvement Network, for providing a largely experimental technology platform called “Buzz” as the main feature of the new school district’s instructional and curricular innovation.<sup>576</sup>

**Table 8. Traditional Governance Regimes Versus Emerging Reform Regimes<sup>577</sup>**

	Traditional governance regimes	Emerging reform regimes
Core stakeholder groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher unions</li> <li>• Parent organizations</li> <li>• School boards</li> <li>• Superintendents and bureaucracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayors</li> <li>• National foundations, venture philanthropists</li> <li>• Service providers (for profit and nonprofit, local and nonlocal)</li> <li>• State and national advocates</li> <li>• Private education industry (publishing, testing, professional development, management consultants, etc.)</li> </ul>
Core values and premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local control</li> <li>• Teacher as professional</li> <li>• Parents (as junior partners)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Markets</li> <li>• Management expertise</li> <li>• Choice</li> <li>• Technology</li> </ul>
Policy and instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Higher salaries</li> <li>• Class size reduction</li> <li>• Curriculum reform</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charter schools</li> <li>• School closures and turnarounds</li> <li>• Portfolio management</li> <li>• Test-based accountability</li> <li>• Educational technology</li> </ul>

Detroit’s new style governance regime, with little to no involvement of school boards, superintendents, teacher union, and parents, places the authority and power to make decisions

<sup>575</sup> By fiscal year 2014, private donors had contributed up to \$18 million to the EAA. See Nelson Smith, “Redefining the School District in Michigan,” (Report for a three-part series commissioned by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, October 2014), 14.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>577</sup> Adapted from Jeffrey Henig’s table on p. 150 of *End of Exceptionalism*.

about the education of Detroit’s school children into “general-purpose” arenas.<sup>578</sup> No longer are actors working in school specific agencies. Indeed,

As more and more key decisions about schools are migrating into general-purpose areas, the mix of influential actors and ideas has begun to look more similar to that involved in policy decisions about economic development, taxes, environmental protection, zoning, housing, crimes, and social services.<sup>579</sup>

The recent example of Governor Snyder transferring the state’s school reform office (i.e. the SSRD) to the Department of Technology, Management and Budget is simply the logical extension of a change that is no decades-old.<sup>580</sup>

What is less clear in Henig’s work and this study is *why* at this juncture in time we are turning from a single-purpose government to a more general-purpose government. Why is it more acceptable or more reasonable to address education of our children in ways similar to other policy arenas?

Some argue that this question does not matter so much because “exceptionalism” was merely the result of happenstance and habit, decisions made in an earlier era when “both attention and stakes were low.”<sup>581</sup> Social scientists who examine political institutions and public policy refer to this as *path dependency* and they argue: “Path dependency played a role in the creation of school-specific governance in the U.S., and it is a part of the story of the end of exceptionalism unfolding today.”<sup>582</sup> Henig, however, believes that the story of school governance in the U.S. can be best understood from a perspective that rests on politics and power.<sup>583</sup> Still, his study falls short of examining the historical contexts in which choices and decisions are made.

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> Kyle Feldscher, “Gov. Snyder Signs Executive Order Bringing State School Reform Office Under His Control,” *MLive*, March 12, 2015, accessed April 21, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/03/gov\\_snyder\\_signs\\_executive\\_ord.html](http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/03/gov_snyder_signs_executive_ord.html).

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 24.

While my dissertation obviously confirms how power and politics are central to governance change, it also seeks to distill the historical changes that *do* impact decision-making.

Ever since the ascendancy of Reagan and the empowerment campaign in the 1980s, school reformers have embraced the idea of markets and choice that have broken up the traditional school system. Why have policymakers chosen these concepts and ideologies over others? This study argues that *structural crisis* has shaped the responses, rationales, and decisions of policymakers. How do we go about characterizing this structural crisis that shaped this new educational age? For instance, how have the economy and the politics of postwar cities like Detroit driven reformers to call on substitute actors like venture philanthropists and educational entrepreneurs?

### *Structural Crisis*

At first glance, the desire to radically alter the shape and form of Detroit's schools, the search for new order and efficiency, and the need to adapt to great social, economic, and technological changes is not unlike that of the Administrative Progressives, a century ago. However, there is at least one dramatic difference between yesterday and today that have shaped decisions that ultimately become pathways. During the time of the administrative progressives, America's cities were burgeoning sites of industry, employment, and population growth—the *centers* of wealth and growth. In cities like Detroit and Newark, palatial high schools were popping up like mushrooms after a rain.<sup>584</sup> The school reformers at the dawn of last century were making educational decisions during a prosperous time. Today's school reformers are dealing with the complete opposite. After decades of disinvestment and population decline beginning in the late 1950s, many postwar cities—Detroit in particular—are now the *centers* of concentrated

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<sup>584</sup> See Jean Anyon, *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban Educational Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

poverty. Considering our most recent economic depression beginning in 2008, with state and city budgets slashed, the strategies and tactics to reform urban schools are shaped and crafted within this context of fiscal crisis.

Ironically, as we have seen, Proposal A—Governor Engler’s conservative idea to cut taxes, equalize school funding, and encourage competition—exacerbated Detroit’s problem. Prior to the dramatic change in the way schools are funded in Michigan, Detroit actually received more state aid.<sup>585</sup> The combination of lower state aid, relatively higher fixed costs, and sharp declines in its enrollment due to competition with charters “guaranteed the continued existence of chronic structural deficits.”<sup>586</sup> Without additional external resources, the only option is “radical triage,” frantic efforts to cut fixed costs even faster than revenues drop.<sup>587</sup> Peter J. Hammer argues that Proposal A is essentially a zero-sum game in which the winners from the start (i.e. wealthy districts) will continue to win while the losers (i.e. poor districts, especially Detroit) will eventually lose everything. From Hammer’s perspective, this fiscal path will lead to, in the near future, the closure of the last standing traditional public school.

Proposal A created a steady stream of students leaving DPS, resulting in a snowball effect; no state-appointed educational/financial leader has yet to address the fiscal crisis because the budget deficit continues to worsen with each year. In Chapter Five, I argue that the vote to return to the elected school board was not a vote against mayoral takeover (or CEO Kenneth Burnley) per se, but rather an indictment on the massive budget deficit that had accrued during that five-year period. In fact, Jeffrey Mirel, Michael Addonizio, and C. Philip Kearney, have praised Burnley’s efforts and, whether test scores had been raised or not, there are reasons to believe that he had improved curriculum and instruction, what actually happens in the

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<sup>585</sup> Hammer, “The Fate of the Detroit Public Schools,” 138.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

classroom.<sup>588</sup> Still, none of this could be done to transform the system fast enough to prevent students from leaving the system, driving up the budget deficit. By the time Governor Snyder contemplated establishing a recovery school district for the lowest performing schools in the state, the fiscal crisis had become so severe that DPS had been put under emergency financial management. I think that the governor's vision for the EAA was as much about creating a new model of schooling as it was to create a more cost-effective system while attempting to shrink DPS's budget deficit. To do this, the governor sought out informal partners that could assist him, such as private donors who could fund start-up costs and the salaries of school leaders. Therefore, the context of structural crisis and austerity do affect the paths taken (or not taken): the privatization of public schooling, for example, is a response to the need for lifting a crippled municipal system out and into better and broader management.

We need something beyond the concepts of urban regimes and “the end of exceptionalism” to understand the emergence of a new era. It occurs to me that that applying a *neoliberal framework* to my finding could help us understand the nature of the structural crisis, both as historical outcome and as a set of assumptions that shaped policymakers' choices and responses to the changing political economy of urban spaces. Neoliberalism can also help to articulate the social conflicts of today's efforts to reform urban schools.

So, is the structural crisis in Detroit a case of neoliberal reform?

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<sup>588</sup> In the early stages of this project, Jeffrey Mirel suggested finding empirical evidence for Burnley's success with improving classroom instruction in various DPS schools. Also see Michael F. Addonizio and C. Philip Kearney, *Education Reform and the Limits of Policy: Lessons from Michigan* (Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2012).

## Search for New Order: Neoliberal Reform?

Scholars studying other cities *have* made the case that neoliberalism is both a cause and effect of changes in urban life. For example, David Menefee-Libey argued that Chicago Public School's 2010 adoption of the portfolio management model was a clear case of neoliberal school reform. The blending of diverse public and private provision for students and the "differentiation of entrepreneurial schools into a diverse portfolio to be managed by district leaders," this combination of strategies, he argues, follows patterns of what is called a *neoliberal policy approach* "common in businesses and governments across the developed world."<sup>589</sup> Other indicators of a neoliberal policy approach include what were historically public components "increasingly staffed by conditional employees rather than career civil servants or union workers" that are subjected to "bottom-line accountability" heavily focused on outcomes and numerical data and "sharp fiscal management discipline from above."<sup>590</sup> Indeed, reformers in Detroit continue to turn to Chicago as a model, and there is evidence that Governor Snyder has been pursuing a portfolio management model since he was elected into office.

Menefee-Libey, however, delimits the discussion of neoliberal school reform as but a strategy and the portfolio management model as an indicator of its application. Other scholars, on the other hand, have described neoliberal policy approaches as a new rationality or a defining social paradigm, in which they outline its origins, and are much more critical of neoliberalism and its outcomes. Pauline Lipman writes,

Neoliberalism has been the defining social paradigm of the past 30 years. Neoliberalism is a particular, historically-generated state strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism and provide new opportunities for capital accumulation. Put simply, neoliberalism is an ensemble of economic and social

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<sup>589</sup> David Menefee-Libey, "Neoliberal School Reform in Chicago," in *Between Public and Private: Politics, Governance, and the New Portfolio Models for Urban School Reform*, eds. Katrina Bulkley, Jeffrey Henig, and Henry M. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*



policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere. Neoliberals champion privatization of social goods and withdrawal of government from provision for social welfare on the premise that competitive markets are more effective and efficient. Neoliberalism is not just “out there” as a set of policies and explicit ideologies. It has developed as a new social imaginary, a common sense about how we think about society and our place in it.<sup>591</sup>

To Lipman, neoliberalism explains why certain policy actions have been taken in the last 30 years; there is actually an ideological paradigm, a way of managing the structural crisis of capitalism in such a way that it has become commonsense.

Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval argue that neoliberalism is a new *rationality* that “tends to structure and organize not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled.”<sup>592</sup> They reason, we will not understand the “obstinacy” or “fanaticism” with which the experts of government pursue a policy of austerity, if we do not appreciate that they are trapped in a normative framework.<sup>593</sup> That is, in light of fiscal crisis, their very commitment to the economic future is something that they themselves have actively constructed over decades. Dardot and Laval write, “Unable and unwilling to break with this framework, they are embroiled in the headlong rush to adapt increasingly to the effects of their own previous policy.”<sup>594</sup> Given this, it could be argued that Proposal A created the structural crisis that twenty years later the EAA, using the same strategies and tactics, is attempting to ameliorate. Yet, such “obstinacy” is not readily recognizable by all. In the name of crisis management, austerity and solvency, the EAA is a “commonsense of the times” that legitimizes the “rulers”—even in a democracy—to act

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<sup>591</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 6.

<sup>592</sup> Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neo-Liberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2009), 4.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*

severely, such as stripping Detroiters of their voting rights and removing Mumford High School without the permission of the school district.

Thus, while a *neoliberal* regime may take on the moral ethical tone of government austerity and solutions for solvency, Dardot and Laval argue that the new rationality radically subverts the meaning of citizenship.<sup>595</sup> Since the eighteenth century, western democracies have been built on the premise that the elected officials answer to the governed. Today, the new rationality justifies the subversion of this relationship: from government to governance. Lipman writes, “The shift from *government* by elected state bodies and a degree of democratic accountability to *governance* by experts and managers and decision making by judicial authority and executive order is central to neoliberal policymaking.”<sup>596</sup> Dardot and Laval warn that the very existence of the “public community”—that which promotes the “citizen’s direct participation in public affairs”—is at stake.<sup>597</sup> Lipman, however, argues the centrality of race—that the neoliberal project is actually targeted against people of color.<sup>598</sup>

### *School Battles: Beyond Race?*

Was mayoral takeover and the EAA racially motivated? As this dissertation has shown, some—especially those associated with what is left of the traditional governance regime—believe so and resort to racialized arguments in their activism. A notable example occurred in the beginning of this year, when the EMU Regents went to vote for whether or not to stay contracted with the EAA, young protestors in the audience staged a “die-in,” lying on the floor chanting

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>596</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 13.

<sup>597</sup> Dardot & Laval, *New Way*, 303.

<sup>598</sup> See Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 12-13.

“Black Lives Matter! The EAA is killing me!”<sup>599</sup> They linked their protest of the EAA with a broader national movement that had begun with the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin. Appropriating the “Black Lives Matter” slogan, the protesters were making a connection between the school system and the police and judicial system: all were biased and harmful to the lives of Black children. (The EMU Regents nevertheless voted 6-2 in favor of supporting the EAA.)<sup>600</sup>

Critics of neoliberal school reform, like Pauline Lipman, argue that race is a central “variable” in the relationship between neoliberalism and education. Lipman writes, “In the United States, a 400-year legacy of White supremacy has been pivotal to the country’s development, the triumph of capitalism, and more recently, to advance the neoliberal project.”<sup>601</sup> *Racism*, she asserts, is the “ideological soil” for constructing the idea that people of color are underserving (i.e. lazy, uncontrolled, and welfare dependent) and thus providing policymakers “with a rationale to restructure or eliminate government-funded social programs and to diminish state responsibility for social welfare.”<sup>602</sup> A “cultural politics of race” and a “racialized logic” in essence, are central to constructing justification and consent for dismantling public institutions and privatizing public goods, such as schooling.<sup>603</sup>

Another aspect of the neoliberal project is “disaster capitalism,” the notion that a crisis is an opportunity to further privatize the public sphere. Again, this disproportionately affects

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<sup>599</sup> Lori Higgins, “Raucous Response as EMU Board Continues Role in EAA,” *Detroit Free Press*, December 5, 2014, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2014/12/05/eastern-michigan-university-eaa-controversy-continue-contract/19960197/>.

<sup>600</sup> Curt Guyette, “EMU’s Regents Stand By Snyder, EAA in 6-2 Vote,” *MetroTimes*, December 10, 2014, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/emus-regents-stand-by-snyder-eaa-in-6-2-vote/Content?oid=2272850>.

<sup>601</sup> Lipman, *New Political Economy*, 12.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

communities of color,<sup>604</sup> one of the most vivid examples being how Hurricane Katrina provided an opportunity to privatize nearly all of New Orleans's (mainly Black) schools. Lipman argues that the Obama administration has continued to seize on the "fiscal crisis of cities and states to further restructure public education along neoliberal lines."<sup>605</sup> She illustrates this by pointing out that one of Arne Duncan's first tasks as secretary of education was to convince Detroit to follow the Chicago model. The federal government created an impetus for Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm to sign a package of radical reform measures, which indeed resulted in the restructuring of DPS. As I have shown, the EAA actually originated from Race to the Top blueprints. Given this perspective, one could also perceive Republican governor Rick Snyder seizing on DPS's fiscal crisis to create the EAA. In spite of being one of the most segregated regions in the U.S., Snyder selected Detroit to implement an untested model. Seeing that White neighborhoods have been left unaffected, some have argued that the implementation of the EAA was racially motivated, calling the new school district a Jim Crow system.

Yet, claims about the centrality of race weaken in the face of several realities. First, this study has shown that there was considerable Black support for mayoral takeover, which helped to weaken the traditional governance regime. These Black Detroiters rejected racial tropes, and instead they argued a position that reflected a tremendous loss of faith in the school board. They welcomed the opportunity to shift educational decision-making elsewhere.<sup>606</sup> Second, many Black leaders (from mayors to the President of the United States) have supported and promoted new style governance in the last 30 years. Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, beloved by Detroiters until his mini-scandal, argued for mayoral control as a way for him to help fix DPS. CEO Kenneth

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Is it possible that these Black Detroiters in 2013 voted for the first White mayor in 40 years? Those who voted for Mayor Mike Duggan contend that the ability to get the job done is more important than the candidate's race.

Burnley and emergency manager Roy Roberts, for example, were native Detroiters who saw themselves as returning home and their work as a way to give back to the community. The president of the Skillman Foundation, Tonya Allen, was a native Detroit; so was the chief executive officer of Excellent Schools Detroit, Dan Varner.<sup>607</sup> Third, as enrollment data shows, many parents have tacitly supported new style governance by enrolling their children in charters. Although a powerful metaphor for the disturbing reality that so many decades later Black children in Detroit are still receiving a lesser education than most White children, the Jim Crow imagery falters when many Black leaders have been supporting—even leading—such school reform initiatives like the EAA.

The centrality of race also weakens when governors reveal their wish to spread their educational project across Michigan, triggering Whites to retaliate also. Barry Franklin points out that during the debates over mayoral takeover, there was opposition coming not just from African American Detroiters but also a number of largely all White school districts including West Bloomfield, Royal Oak, Hazel Park, and rural communities like Boyne and L’Anse. “The issue for these opponents was not of course race but *local control*,” observed Franklin.<sup>608</sup> For White opponents, if the takeover proposal passed, it might threaten the future independence of their own districts.<sup>609</sup> This phenomenon, in effect, was repeated during debates over the expansion of the EAA. Remarkably, an anti-EAA movement formed beyond Detroit and claims about the infringement of democratic rights and the unsavory notion of the further corporatizing

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<sup>607</sup> “Our President & CEO,” The Skillman Foundation, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.skillman.org/Who-We-Are/Our-President-CEO>; Megan Krueger, “Detroit Dad Dan Varner Leads Drive For Better Schools,” *MetroParent for Southeast Michigan*, August 26, 2013, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.metroparent.com/daily/parenting/profiles/detroit-dad-dan-varner-leads-drive-for-better-schools/>.

<sup>608</sup> Barry M. Franklin, “Race, Restructuring, and Educational Reform: The Mayoral Takeover of the Detroit Public Schools,” in *Reinterpreting Urban School Reform: Have Urban Schools Failed, or Has the Reform Movement Failed Urban Schools?*, ed. Louis F. Miron and Edward P. St. John (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 108.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*

of neighborhood schools proved to be a significant obstacle to the expansion of the EAA. Detroit is the canary in the coalmine—a warning sign for *all* other districts. If this is so, Dardot and Laval better capture the perils of the neoliberal project: citizenship is under threat everywhere.

Thus, the racial undercurrent of school reform in Detroit is likely more attributable to the extent of how the racial resonances of America’s postwar history continues to affect policymaking. In his study of postwar Detroit, Thomas Sugrue argues that the consequences of past racial struggles, especially White flight, continue to endure.<sup>610</sup> For instance, Detroit’s political influence in the state legislature has significantly decreased as its population continues to decline. In 1950, Detroit held 30 seats compared to 13 in 1999. In the 1958 gubernatorial election, about 25 percent of the votes came from Detroit, compared to only 7.5 percent in 1998. Soon term limits would force out the most influential senior members of the Detroit legislative delegate.<sup>611</sup> With literally less seats in a Republican-swept legislature and low voter turnout, the stakes are low if politicians choose to implement newfangled and untested schooling models in Detroit. With elected officials in Lansing and Washington “beholden to a vocal, well-organized, and defensive white suburban constituency” and the “growing marginalization of the city in local, state, and national politics,” Detroit makes for easy pickings.<sup>612</sup>

In sum, applying a neoliberal framework might be helpful for understanding and characterizing a new era of public schooling in Detroit and other cities. In this brief discussion, the concept illuminates the relationship between a new rationality that shapes the decisionmaking of policymakers and school reformers and a structural crisis that shapes the political economy of urban spaces. We see the quest for a policy of austerity trapped in a normative framework: the

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<sup>610</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 268.

<sup>611</sup> Franklin, “Mayoral Takeover,” 110-111.

<sup>612</sup> Sugrue, *Origins*, 268.

fiscal crisis itself a result of the same ideological approach for decades. Crises and disasters enable governmental experts to justify shifting school governance and subverting citizenship. A neoliberal framework also enables us to highlight the complexity of the role of race—or to disentangle its role—in contemporary school battles. When examining the racial undercurrent of Detroit’s story, there seems to be a key distinction between motives and effects. We could stop with the notion of the end of exceptionalism, but by *understanding* the path taken—that which brings us to this historic moment—is a necessary foundation in the discourse about improving policy. In the search for new order, are we in danger of losing forever the democratic aspects of public schooling? Will shifting governance to enable new educational actors *actually* improve instruction? To conclude, I discuss “lessons” that can be gleaned from my study.

#### Lessons for Educational Research and Policy

The story of the dismantling of the Detroit Public Schools in the last thirty years offers lessons for all. To conclude, I discuss the policy implications of my dissertation by offering lessons to various audience members, including policymakers and school reformers, educators, community activists, and civic leaders, and educational researchers and historians.

#### *Policymakers and School Reformers*

In his study of Proposal A’s effect on Detroit Public Schools, Peter Hammer asks, “Who will take responsibility when the last public school in the city is closed?”<sup>613</sup> In the aftermath of dismantling the traditional school system, are policymakers and reformers ready for the new world that they have helped to create? In other words, before it is too late, policymakers and reformers must take pause and assess their approaches to urban school reform in the last several decades.

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<sup>613</sup> Hammer, “The Fate of the Detroit Public Schools,” 154.

Increasingly, in Detroit and Michigan (and other cities and states), reforming urban school districts and *urban renewal* come hand-in-hand, a task that politicians seem both obliged and eager to commit to. The absorption of public schooling into general-purpose government is an indicator of this trend. Thus, it seems that increasingly one objective of public education at the turn of the century is to create a new, efficient, and cost-effective system that will prepare a workforce that will produce future returns on capital. This is one major reason, as this dissertation has shown, that educational decision-making has been lifted out the hands of the traditional governance regime (e.g. teachers and parents) and into the hands of those who can create a new system. But the central question is will this shifting actually improve urban schools?

In the late 1990s, when reformers began to gravitate towards market-based school reform, David Labaree worried that this new approach was fundamentally altering the goals of public education. Early twentieth century reformers had envisioned public schooling as a way of preparing a democratic citizenry. By the end of the century, however, reformers were advocating for public schooling as way of attaining *individual credentials*, which at its very core challenged the democratic aspects of public schooling.<sup>614</sup> As this dissertation has shown, in Detroit, the goal of “democratic equality” is on the verge of extinction. Policymakers and reformers *must* ask whether the pursuit of creating a new system at the expense of democracy is good for society.

In their quest to solve the urban schooling problem once and for all, new experts and managers have a special aversion to the democratic aspects of public schooling, blaming these structures for its inefficiency and inability to deliver better education. Open deliberations between the school board and the public are considered not only a nuisance but irrelevant in the age of the age of “emergencies” and “crises.” Moreover, teaching to prepare a citizenry is also

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<sup>614</sup> David F. Labaree, “Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals,” *American Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (1997): 39-81.



extraneous. If John Dewey was to be taken seriously, it would require intense and complex teacher training, far too costly and time-consuming in the age in which Teach for America recruits—who only have a matter of months for training—are preferred. Nor would teaching to prepare a citizenry guarantee better test scores, the gold standard of the “new style governance regime.” While building more federal and state accountability to ensure that no child is left behind is a tremendous achievement in the history of public schooling in the U.S., how has NCLB’s testing culture actually improved the quality of instruction?

For policymakers and school reformers, the lesson drawn from Detroit is that we are at a historic juncture in which today’s choices and decisions will matter a lot. The traditional public schooling system has been virtually dismantled, now what? In the search for new order, we must move beyond the paradigm of tinkering with school governance as a response to structural crisis—but actually move forward with establishing what Stone and other scholars have called a “performance regime,” informal political arrangements that will actually improve student outcomes. I suggest “instructional regime” as a better term that begs the question of who needs to be seated at the table to assist with advancing instruction? The answer is teachers, parents, and the community, those who understand the student population intimately. How do we reimagine the role of the school board, as they remain a crucial part of the community? While they may no longer have the capacity to make technical decisions as higher-level government seeks to include schools in the urban renewal plans, how can they maintain the democratic aspects of public schooling that strengthen society by making it more equal? Stone writes,

It is not easy to have a regime that is both effective and equitable, but no regime is truly effective unless it is equitable. Tension between equity and effectiveness is largely a matter of how regimes are put together. The problem is that the path of least resistance lies in the direction of slighting equity.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Stone, *Regime Politics*, xii.

How will policymakers and school reformer move forward with a regime that is both effective and equitable?

*Educators, Community Activists, and Civic Leaders*

My findings show that Detroit’s school battles at the turn of the twenty-first century—while they occur in the context of America’s postwar racial history—are *not* like the struggles of the past in the face of de jure segregation. The 1960s and 1970s was a revolutionary period in which the federal government acknowledged schooling was indeed unequal and ever since then, closing this achievement gap is a top priority regardless of party. The No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 was a culmination of that bipartisan vision and, by many accounts, a cornerstone in terms of federal law and education. Given this trajectory, one could argue that there is a great deal of consensus around improving the quality of education for the least advantaged.

On the other hand, as we have seen in this study, these innovations—which have required tectonic shifts in governance (i.e. the virtual dismantling of DPS)—have also negatively affected Detroit’s schools and communities. Today, with the school board suspended and little representation in Lansing, Detroiters have no say in how their schools are run. The debt has worsened and little improvement of the quality of education has been seen. Ironically, those who have the most influence on students have been pushed out of educational decision-making, as “urban renewalists” are eager to solve Detroit’s fiscal crisis and to build a new and cost-effective system.

One lesson that can be drawn from this study for educators, community activists, and civic leaders is that the framing of political discourse matters because today’s struggle for educational equality is complex and rife with contradiction, it is language that will either lead to the exclusion or the inclusion of teachers, parents, and community members. The problem with

some of the strategies employed by educators and activists thus far is the use of a confrontational language that lends itself to the further marginalization of their cause. A paradigm shift is required in seeing the need to leverage resources, which means that venture philanthropists, for example, offer extra dollars for educators and students during a time when Detroit's tax base is insufficient. In this way, the movement against the privatization of public schooling should really be targeted at those who are merely profiteering or leeching off this institutional shift. By recognizing the structural crisis that shapes the actions and choices of policymakers, as opposed to racial biases or motives, what is left of the traditional governance regime can reassert themselves by building consensus. Campaigns against policies like the EAA will be more effective if activists join forces with neighboring suburbs where their voting is more impactful in Lansing. (Protests in the form of marching in of themselves in Detroit will not do much.) The goal is to maintain—even reimagine—the democratic aspects of public schooling and to ensure that those who are experts in instructing students are seated at the decision-making table.

#### *Educational Historians and Researchers*

I hope this dissertation has not only contributed to the historiography of post-Brown schooling but also provided an example of how historical analysis can be useful in educational policy. By bringing attention to historical patterns of school governance, I hope various readers can gain further insight into the political levers and impediments, the limitations and potentials of their current sites, aims, and objectives—a bird's eye view. In Detroit's context, a historical analysis offers a story from which educational actors can build the kind of consensus that is required to establish not just a new style governance regime but an *instructional* regime, a political arrangement of actors that can actually assist in offering a rich and exciting education for Detroit's children. As educational historians, how can we offer a historical context—beyond

just anecdotal tools—in which policy is carefully considered. While historical research cannot predict the future, it can delineate the paths taken and not taken, show that choices and decisions are not made in a vacuum, and illumine a path forward. Given the strengths of historical analysis, how can we present our methods so that educational researchers might incorporate some of these methods into their own research design?

The application of urban regime analysis in this historical study also provides insight into how we can further understand school governance and politics in cities like Detroit, particularly with regards to building civic capacity. It was no accident that among the sea of theories and perspectives that I embraced Stone’s concept of regimes. From the beginning, I was weary of adopting a perspective that might limit me to just naming problems or taking a side in our current education debates. At the end of the day, it was important for my historical analysis to arrive at the shore of solutions. By nature, the concept of urban regime analysis is solution-oriented, a search for better politics. Stone draws a distinction between “power over” and “power to”:

“Conventionally we think about policies and practices in ‘power over’ terms. We assume that what is in place was put there is maintained by some powerful group or collection of groups.”<sup>616</sup>

Rather, he continues, “if we think in terms of ‘power to’ and acknowledge that intentions are not always fixed, then we are led to think about politics in a different way.”<sup>617</sup> Thus urban regime analysis lends itself to a narrative that moves away from the assumption that preferences are fixed, and rather people can develop better political strategies. How can the concept of civic capacity, for example, help us to reimagine the democratic elements of public schooling in the aftermath of dismantling DPS? How can it enable us to see racial barriers and resonances in a way where we can actually remove them? In education policy, the combination of historical

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<sup>616</sup> Clarence N. Stone, “Power, Reform, and Urban Regime Analysis,” *City & Community* 5, no. 1 (2006): 35.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

analysis and urban regime analysis offers the potential to develop a better politics to support urban school reform in cities like Detroit.

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“Who governs American schools, and with what results?”<sup>618</sup> Patrick McGuinn and Paul Manna argue that that simple question has surprisingly received scant attention and is a “stunning oversight given that several decades of intense American school reform efforts [...] have produced at best marginal gains in student achievement.”<sup>619</sup> They say it will be hard to imagine much dramatic improvement without a more focused attention on how schools are governed.<sup>620</sup>

This study has sought to examine the question of school governance, bringing to light an institutional shift that is occurring but generally ignored in contemporary debates about education policy.<sup>621</sup> Detroit is case study that stunningly reveals that the days in which *public* schooling is defined by a publicly elected school board and superintendent who make almost all educational decisions are far-gone. Moreover, if Detroit is like other cities, there is an emerging pattern of governance, one in which governance is pushed into higher levels of government and new educational actors are in charge. This would be the third time that the United States fundamentally shift who controls schools in its roughly 250 year history. This study also explores the school battles around such dramatic changes. If Detroit is like other cities, this historic moment calls for the urgent need for building political consensus to finally ensure that urban school children receive a high quality education in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>618</sup> Patrick McGuinn and Paul Manna, ed., *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century; Overcoming the Structural Barriers to Schools Reform* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>621</sup> Jeffrey Henig, Patrick McGuinn, and Paul Manna are the few scholars who argue that school governance is understudied. See Henig, *End of Exceptionalism*; See McGuinn & Manna, *Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century*.

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