



(Un)doing Spatially Fixed Inequality: Critical Reflections on Urban School District-Community Partnerships

Melinda Lemke¹

Published online: 26 July 2020
© Springer Nature B.V. 2020

Abstract

Utilizing critical geography, critical history, and critical educational studies as guideposts, this article examines community organizing and school district partnerships as relevant to improving urban public education reform efforts and schooling practices within the United States. Proceeding in four parts, part one discusses the kinds of external multi-sector entities working with school districts in a continued era of accountability-driven educational reform. Understanding community activism as a lever to address urban geospatial obstacles to equity-oriented educational practices, this is followed by a historical overview of community-based organizations (CBOs) as tied to sociopolitical, economic, and schooling transformation throughout the U.S. Part three helps to illustrate this position through discussion of the Buffalo-Niagara Region and the case of one urban school district context—Buffalo Public Schools (BPS). Specifically, it considers how regional history, demographic shifts, urban development, racial spatialization, and CBOs affect district practices. It concludes with a discussion of the significance of CBO partnerships with urban schools toward the end of improving educational opportunities for traditionally underserved, low income, and minoritized student populations.

Keywords Critical geography · Critical history · Critical educational studies · Educational reform · Urban education · Neoliberalism · Racial spatialization · School district partnerships · Community organizing · Community-based organizations (CBOs)

✉ Melinda Lemke
malemke@buffalo.edu

¹ Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, University at Buffalo, SUNY, 470 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260-1000, USA

Introduction

To be sustainable, educational reform must be rooted in a foundation that permits uninterrupted interaction and development of reciprocity among a grassroots base and community elites (Stone 2001). Moreover, to be successful, educational reform must have civic capacity, or “the extent to which different sectors of the community—business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others—act in concert around a matter of community-wide import” (p. 596). Over the past 15 years, organizational partnerships with public school systems increasingly have worked in ways that intervene, mediate, and assist educational policy development, reform, and other schooling processes. Although a focus on these entities is newer to educational policy and leadership research, there is a history of their steady involvement in educational settings. Research literature points to a host of labels for cross- (Bryson et al. 2006) and multi-sector entities (i.e. public and private) that work with entire districts and individual schools to share information and resources from two or more sectors to reach an outcome that might not be achieved by a solitary organization or sector.

Fundamental to many of these entities is their ability to link individual classrooms, schools, and districts, particularly those with economic need, to funding streams, social programming, and services in ways that maximize strategies for addressing barriers to overall student well-being while at and outside of school (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2010). Some entities focus specifically on addressing connections between schools, students, and the local context to increase community social capital, or the connectedness among neighborhoods, in ways that enhance trust, a sense of belonging, and civic engagement for the public good (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993). Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that this approach would increase family access to social resources, thereby creating a cyclical pattern of benefit between schools and the community (Furstenberg and Hughes 1995). Scholarship has found this to be of particular importance to Black and Latinx students attending schools in urban environments that tend to be resource poor due to residential and racial spatialization patterns. As discussed in subsequent sections, the lack of financial and infrastructural resources is the result of historic discriminatory municipal housing policies, white flight, suburbanization, and gentrification.

Some contend that to improve student achievement within these contexts, it therefore is necessary to reject inherited divisions of labor within city life. Instead the focus should be on forms of power, exclusion, and inequality that underpin neoliberal sociopolitical and economic formations (Anyon 2005; Brenner 2009; Lipman 2011) and promulgate damaging educational policies (Green and Gooden 2014). Just as neoliberal restructuring occurs at the global level to integrate nations into a single capitalist world economy that disenfranchises the masses, these same processes are enacted through localized urban (and suburban and rural) political and policy contexts (Purcell 2002).

Where education is concerned, critical educational research has documented the central role of schools in the neoliberal project—and to this end, the history of attacks on public education, increased business elite influence on and

surveillance of school settings, restructured knowledge production through market-oriented policies and curricular reform, and community pushback against these and other efforts that fail to resolve student achievement gaps (Au 2007; Cuban 2004; Lemke 2015; Lemke and Zhu 2018; Nichols and Berliner 2008; Noguera 2003; Sleeter 2008). Not only have new economy business logics failed to improve the academic performance of Black, Latinx, and Native American students, but concomitantly they disappear social safety nets including the role of public schools as “anchor” or core institutions in urban neighborhoods (Taylor et al. 2013). It therefore, is not simply a matter of pumping resources into urban contexts, but the need to redesign and rebuild the entire community and its institutional framework (Taylor et al. 2013). Though the failure to authentically incorporate the community is precisely why market-driven urban school district reforms and partnerships often fail, from a critical urban perspective, “another, more democratic, socially just and sustainable form of urbanization is possible, even if such possibilities are currently being suppressed” (Brenner 2009, p.198).

Key to this kind of urban educational development is the role that public and private entities play in connecting the K-12 sector with educational research. This includes sharing knowledge about theories of instructional design, equity-focused leadership practices, and culturally responsive and trauma sensitive approaches, which account for local context and history. Organizational entities that have acted as external change agents within public educational settings include civic capacity, community-based, affiliation, external assistance, reform support, and intermediaries. Through the involvement of community-based organizations (CBOs) in particular, educational reform efforts have increased elements necessary to effect transformative change in urban schools (Vasquez Heilig et al. 2014). Although school- and school district-organizational partnerships are rife with challenges (Warren 2005, 2011), public education stands to benefit from leveraging broad-based community, activist, and philanthropic knowledge.

Drawing from critical geography, critical history, and critical educational studies, this article examined community organizing and public school district partnerships as relevant to improving U.S. urban educational reform efforts and schooling practices. In particular this research drew on respective disciplinary foci on place, space, power, identity, and their shifts over time (Helfenbein 2006; Helfenbein and Taylor 2009), and those value-laden processes that elevate some historical narratives within collective memory and policy, while silencing or eliminating others (Apple 2000; Lemke 2015; Stearns et al. 2000). Thus, the purpose of this research¹ was to utilize

¹ As a researcher, I am interested in bringing the past into conversation with the present and the future, and in a way that whenever possible, fuses interdisciplinary perspectives. It is necessary to acknowledge here that despite this aim, a comprehensive analysis of the region, its policies, and schools, and thus aspects of the Buffalo-Niagara urban development story, was beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, as a critical and feminist scholar of educational policy, I am cognizant of the need for congruence between theory and methodology, and transparency concerning researcher positionality so to de-colonize knowledge production. In this article I was interested in how, “spatial differentiation in historical contexts opens up the questions of how people respond to cultural forces at work on them” (Helfenbein 2006, p. 124). In line with this thinking, I must acknowledge the salience of my racial identity and privileges as a white scholar, and in relation to the specific research topic, which includes being born and raised in the Buffalo-Niagara area, and thus benefiting from the very forms of discrimination this article seeks to disrupt. Still, my entire scholarly agenda is centered on critical analyses of educational policy and actualized

interdisciplinary knowledge to interrogate the presence of external entity school-district partnerships across the U.S.—what kinds of multi-sector entities exist, what do CBOs and respective partnerships look like in a continued era of accountability-driven educational reform, and why does context and level of community organizing matter—toward the end of underscoring those dynamics integral to increasing educational equity within urban schools serving traditionally underserved students.

To illustrate and concretize the article purpose, key historical and geospatial dynamics in the specific case of the Buffalo-Niagara Region and Buffalo Public Schools (BPS), were examined. Primary and secondary public source documents relevant to contemporary community organizations working with BPS also were reviewed. In focusing on area history and community assets for educational leaders (Khalifa 2012), this article builds on research that centers and strengthens community constituencies within efforts to increase equity within urban schools (Warren 2011; Warren and Mapp 2011). It also contributes to research focused on the relationship between space, educational reform, and contextually lived experience (Ares et al. 2017). Thus, it underscores the role of the city, its inhabitants (Lefebvre 1996; Lipman 2011; Purcell 2002), and local schools in (un)doing spatially fixed inequality.

Public School District Organizational Partnerships

As educational research on how external organizations shape systemic educational reform remains limited (Datnow and Honig 2008; Supovitz 2008) it is important to distinguish between the range of key entity formations with a view toward their unique political and economic interests. By doing so we can extrapolate reasons for why we need certain kinds of efforts within local communities, as well as appreciate how reform-driven partnerships between external entities and public schools historically existed, and how they have changed over time. Contemporary entities outside public education that have come to interact with district personnel often brokering relationships with major philanthropic bases include: *affiliation networks* (Smith and Wohlstetter 2001); *intermediary organizations* (Honig 2004; Lopez et al. 2005; Mitra 2009; Trujillo 2014; Trujillo and Woulfin 2014); *reform and external support organizations* (Finnigan et al. 2009; Kronley and Handley 2003); and *civic capacity or community-based organizations* (CBOs) (Anyon 2009; Fruchter 2007; Glickman and Scally 2008; Gold et al. 2004; Stone 2001). Though operating with different levels of capacity, political connection to educational institutions and its actors, and longevity of presence within local communities, as a general rule these entities claim to support public schools, particularly in terms of strengthening

Footnote 1 (continued)

change for marginalized and underserved youth. My work also is informed by a career in Texas urban K-12 public education prior to working in public higher education, also in Buffalo, NY. In reflecting on and discussing part of my professional and personal orientation to this research, I hope to push, “a culture of debates and capacities to interrogate the dominant politico-economic orders—especially from de-centered perspectives, be those political (e.g. of the marginalized, alienated and disenfranchised) or cultural (e.g. non-Western, non-white, non-masculine)” (Golubchikov 2015, p. 156).

knowledge infrastructure, networks, and other forms of sociopolitical and economic capital. Research documented successes and problems associated with these entities as relevant to educational reform efforts, and especially within urban school district contexts.

Examining the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), Smith and Wohlstetter (2001) found that building *affiliation networks* between schools or with partner organizations developed capacity in schools. Here an affiliation network involves different organizations working together to collectively problem-solve an issue that would be too large for any one organization to solve alone. *Intermediary organizations* operate in the space of at least two other entities and have the core task of monitoring and/or brokering change for these entities (Honig 2004). In a study of national and state intermediary organizations, Lopez et al. (2005) found that intermediaries had an important role in building individual, relational, and organizational capacity for family involvement in schools. Sustainability of capacity was dependent on providing alternatives to school-based approaches to involvement, intensive support, and meaningful knowledge for parents within the community. Similarly, Mitra (2009) found that to build capacity through vision, stable leadership, financial resources, and knowledge networks, intermediary organizations were better suited to long-term reform efforts. Yet, other studies underscored problems associated with intermediaries and reform efforts in urban school districts serving high populations of English language learners and poor students of color. Trujillo (2014) found intermediaries to function as, “efficiency experts” that enacted reductive, managerial data management systems as the core driver of reform, and at the expense of professional judgment and democratically engaging teaching and leadership. As discussed in the introduction, such organizations are aligned with neoliberal thought processes and practices that promote lengthy teacher trainings and standardized curricula, which have little impact on pedagogy (Trujillo and Woulfin 2014).

Kronley and Handley (2003) studied what they referred to as *reform support organizations*, which included a range of groups that work with school districts in systemic reform. Here, reform partnerships can energize educators, discover untapped abilities, and engage skills in school and district staff (Kronley and Handley 2003). Yet, in a study of low-performing Chicago and California schools, Finnigan et al. (2009) found that *external support providers* used haphazard and market-structured approaches that were limited in quantity and therefore had little positive impact on teaching in learning. Their work underscored a need for external support providers to demonstrate a well-informed link between their program and school improvement, as well as have that program be integrated with individual school needs that the state or district can effectively evaluate.

Finally, in the U.S. there is a long history of community members using organizing efforts to build alliances, organizations, and institutions that support their interests—including those associated with education (Anyon 2009). Throughout the 1980 s and 1990s, neighborhoods, communities, and larger municipalities turned to *community-based organizations* (CBOs) to assist with local problems (Glickman and Scally 2008). CBOs are non-profit organizations often work on behalf of community residents on a range of concerns rooted in that same community. Where education is concerned, CBOs often address intersectional elements of generational

poverty, community isolation, food insecurity, disinvestment in public provisions, and increased high-takes accountability measures and staff turnover in schools. The following section examines organizational responses to urban disenfranchisement and those intersectional aspects of historic and space-based marginalization that limit, but also must provide opportunities for urban residents and school students to be agents of social transformation (Clouse 2018).

Community Organizing, CBOs, and the Schoolhouse

There is a long, rich, and fruitful history of community organizing for change in the United States (Fuentes 2012). Such organizing was recognized as, “a powerful form of public engagement for education reform across the country” (Warren and Mapp 2011, p. 139). Tied to progressive, labor, and civil rights-oriented activism, CBOs historically focused on collective education and action to solve shared societal problems (Glickman and Scally 2008). Though tending to hold the universal view that the improvement of community sociocultural, economic, and physical health was essential (Rubin 1998), specific organizational approaches to achieving this end has differed by place and over time.

During the Progressive Era, reformers researched, documented, and lobbied local, state, and federal governments to improve endemic problems such as poor health, illiteracy, and adult education. Concerned with the uneven distribution resources, late nineteenth century social action council members and settlement house workers targeted education as a key mechanism in transformative sociopolitical and economic change (Austin and Betten 1977; Cremin 1964; Tyack and Hansot 1982). Early examples of CBOS that aimed to educate communities, standardize community fact-finding techniques, and assist the poor included the Bureau of Associated Charities in Chicago (1893), Hull House (1899), and a range of charities in Pittsburgh (1908), Milwaukee (1909), St. Louis (1911), Cleveland (1913), and Cincinnati (1913) (Austin and Betten 1977; Cremin 1964).

By the end of World War I, CBOs such as these had contributed to progressive reform of state and national educational politics, which included the practices of the local schoolhouse. Key to such reforms were “administrative” and “pedagogical” coalitions, wherein the former sought educational change through corporate, Taylorist models and the latter adopted a “whole child” approach rooted in its closeness to the community (Cuban 2004). This division in approach is echoed in current debates over neoliberal technocratic approaches to educational reform and those who envision public education as embryonic sociopolitical communities where learning is directed toward democratic ends.

Following the Great Depression, community organizing picked up steam through national labor entities such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). Despite criticisms of gender-blind organizing tactics (Stall and Stoecker 1998), the IAF did ground-breaking work in poor, immigrant, and labor communities, such as those in Chicago. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the national push for racial and gender equality was accompanied by a range of local movements for social justice (Tyack and Hansot 1982). Activism over voting discrimination, school desegregation, and women’s liberation, occurred alongside union clashes with industry, the

anti-war movement, and clean environment protests concerning events like Love Canal (1978). Where education was concerned, local chapters of national groups helped enact key Great Society policies and programs including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA 1965) and Head Start (1965), enforced desegregation orders, and organized walk-outs around teacher labor and bilingual education.

In the 1960s and 1970s, CBOs that focused specifically on education emerged, with many expanding far beyond the local community context within which they originated. During this time, public school desegregation and integration plans were court ordered [and often abandoned when orders were lifted]. Still, as discussed by Renée and McAlister (2011), “public will to challenge racist practices and accept huge changes in the structure of public schools was the result of decades of careful research, planning, and community organizing” (p. 1).

Though CBOs might have differed in approach, focus, and size, against this historical backdrop, a common agenda included eliminating repressive educational environments and funding inequities (Anyon 2005, 2009; Oakes and Rogers 2006; Warren 2005; Warren and Mapp 2011). This included for example, Marion Wright Edelman’s Freedom Schools that stemmed from the 1964 Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) adult education Summer Project in Mississippi (Rachal 1998). Today Edelman’s Schools provide after-school enrichment, nutrition, reading, and social action programming to approximately 11,500 students across twenty-five states (Lemke 2014). Other larger CBOs included the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and the PICO Network that originated in the Alinsky progenitor model of community organizing (Alinsky 1946, 1971) in low-income communities (Glickman and Scally 2008).

From the 1970s the present, federal educational reform efforts have been marked by a tension between neoliberal and conservative attacks on New Deal and Great Society reforms, and a continued push for more equitable public education, livable wages, and the elimination of discriminatory and predatory housing policies (Tyack and Hansot 1982). At the local level, education-focused CBOS and educational organizing in particular, “emerged as a distinct subset of community organizing... as local groups increasingly identified inadequate schools as a key issue facing their neighborhoods” (Glickman and Scally 2008, p. 559). The formation of these entities and ongoing activism underscored the reality that traditional public school reform efforts were negligent where race, class, and other power dynamics were concerned (Oakes and Rogers 2006). CBO efforts therefore, sought ways to challenge traditional modes of reform by creating localized alliances, programming, and capital to help address isolation and marginalization within public schools.

Warren and Mapp (2011) estimated there to be approximately 500 out of 800 CBOs within the U.S. working on educational reform and policy, with the current wave of community organizing around and CBO work concerning public education focused on interrelated issues. According to (Fruchter 2007) organizing efforts have included: 1. marginalization of inner-city poor and communities of color; 2. perennial fiscal crisis and resultant disinvestment in public schools; 3. widespread cognizance of linkages between education and financial success; and 4. institution of state and federal educational accountability systems. In urban contexts, CBOs specifically have focused on teacher salary increases, lead paint removal, peer review of

student discipline reports, and school board of education membership and replacement. CBOs in these spaces also have examined connections between schools and neoliberal maintenance of the urban ghetto through housing policies that reinforced hyper-segregation, or severe urban segregation that eliminates contact between communities of color and whites (Massey and Denton 1993). Examples of such groups are the Philadelphia's Alliance Organizing Project (AOP), Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), Mothers on the Move (MOM) in the South Bronx and Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) and Block's Together (BT) (Glickman and Scally 2008).

Expanding beyond the local context, in Detroit for example, a "liberal-labor-Black" coalition of local and national community organizations came together to address problems within city schools (Mirel 1993, p. 251). Other examples of coalitional CBO efforts included the Chicano/a student walkouts in California and la Raza Unida's *movimiento* to institute ethnic and bilingual education Crystal City Independent School District (Trujillo 1998). Thus, larger alliances of, "neighborhood and block groups, parent-teacher associations, and youth programs" came together in contextually unique and equally powerful ways to "improve urban neighborhoods and reduce social isolation" (Freudenberg 1998, p. 18). In this way, the work of CBOs and larger CBO alliances are similar to social movements that "develop community power and to collaborate with others in making fundamental shifts in the political and social arrangements that have caused inequities, exclusions, and subordination" (Anyon 2009, p. 194). Yet unlike social movements that seek to transform an entire system, CBOs, and specifically those dedicated to educational equity, look to increase accountability within and between communities through reflection on educational policy implementation, problems, successes, and failures (Anyon 2009; Freudenberg 1998).

The Buffalo-Niagara Region

The previous section underscored the range of interests, knowledge, capacity, and motivation that various entities, including CBOs, bring to bear on educational reform and schooling practices. It further demonstrated the complexity of these relationships due to time, context, and presence of community organizing, in the new economy. Moving from the macro to micro view, this section considers how factors such as history, demography, educational policy, urban development, and racial spatialization coalesced to shape the case of the Buffalo-Niagara Region and one urban school context—Buffalo Public Schools (BPS). In light of these factors and current district initiatives, this section also offers a detailed discussion of the kind of CBOs partnering with BPS today so to unpack how area schools leverage community knowledge and resources toward increased educational equity.

New York State (NYS) is part of the Great Lakes corridor, a region that encompasses seven other states and the Province of Ontario, Canada. Its proximity to Canada via four U.S.-Canadian bridges (Peace, Rainbow, Whirlpool and Lewiston-Queenston) and other industrialized northeastern urban cores prompted the Buffalo region's population and commerce to swell following the War of 1812. Railroad

expansion and completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 linked area steel and grain manufacturing from the St. Lawrence Seaway to the tip of Lake Superior, making Buffalo a hub for immigrant settlement (Taylor 1998). The city's first federal census (1820) for example, listed 2095 residents, but by 1860, Buffalo which became the government seat of Erie County, was the tenth largest U.S. city at 81,129 residents.

Development of hydroelectric power in Niagara Falls and the Pan-American Exposition of 1901 served as an impetus for continued immigrant settlement in the region. For example, Irish, German, Polish, Italian, and Russian Jews settled in distinct ethnic enclaves. Despite encountering xenophobia and nativist hostility, each group carved out unique sociopolitical and economic niches in the area. Polish immigrants for example, made key economic and political in-roads at municipal and state levels in comparison to Italians who arguably were more segregated than Buffalo's small early free Black population (Taylor 1998). Such social divisions also arguably contributed to continued inter-ethnic conflict and northern white racial animus against Black Americans.

Though host to abolitionist activities such as the 1843 National Negro Convention and becoming a key stop on the Underground Railroad, notably, Buffalo's antebellum Black population was small (Taylor 1998). Hovering at approximately 700 Black residents, the first Great Migration of Black Americans arrived prior to WWI, bringing this population to over 1000. Black leaders such as W.E.B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey frequented the area, and the N.A.A.C.P. was founded in Niagara Falls, Ontario Canada in 1905. By 1920, Buffalo's Black population had grown to 4511, and would continue to expand post-World War II (Taylor 1998).

Between 1916 and 1928, Buffalo had a commission system of government, with executive and legislative powers designated to five commissioners chosen in non-partisan primaries; however, the 1928 charter restored a mayoral plan of government comprised of the mayor, comptroller, council president, five at-large councilmen and nine district councilmen. Beginning in 1934 and continuing to the present, Black Americans have been elected at all levels of local governance—county, city council, and Buffalo Board of Education (Taylor 1998)—aside from the mayoralty, which was held by all major regional ethnic groups. In 2005, Democrat Byron W. Brown was elected the city's first Black mayor, an office he currently holds.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Buffalo was the nation's eighth largest city standing at 352,387 residents. This trend continued in the World War II era and through 1950 when the population stood at 580,132 residents; however, in 1960 the population dropped to 532,759 with substantial decline over the next three decades—1970 (462,768), 1980 (357,870) and 1990 (328,123) (Gibson 2012). As discussed in the next section, this decline is tied to fundamental shifts in the post-WWII era including the neoliberal geospatial transition of the Buffalo-Niagara region from an industrial to knowledge economy.

Today, the Buffalo-Niagara Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is the second-largest NYS metropolitan region consisting of two counties, five additional cities, 37

towns, 21 villages, and three Seneca Nation Reservations² (The Brookings Institute 2010). The constant decline in population since the 1960s contributed to the characterization of the City of Buffalo and the surrounding region as part of the “rust belt,” which means that it is an industrial core with low growth, diversity, and educational levels (The Brookings Institute 2010). Although migration from the MSA included movement to other NYS regions or the Northeast, current trends followed historic migration patterns to warmer climates including the Carolinas, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and on large-scale to Florida (Bruner 2010). Similar to other northeastern industrial cores, the City of Buffalo consists of 32 distinct, often ethnic or racially identifiable and segregated neighborhoods (University at Buffalo 2010). As discussed previously, these contemporary urban racial spatialization patterns are part of older immigration and Great Migration flows. Most recently, the City of Buffalo and its schools have experienced an influx of resettled refugees, Hurricane Maria survivors, and other displaced peoples. Still, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB 2019), a net loss of residents in the urban core of Buffalo continues through the present with an estimate of city inhabitants at 255,284.

The Politics and Policies of Racialized Spatialization

For reasons already discussed, Buffalo and various outlying suburbs, including Niagara Falls, amassed great wealth. While pockets of resources remain in close proximity to academic and historic centers, as populations declined, jobs and economic stability shifted outwards to the towns and villages. It is important to underscore here that there was an ostensibly unequal distribution of community wealth. While known for its industrial base, over time manufacturing jobs were difficult to obtain as a Black urban residents. Tied to global neoliberal outsourcing and insourcing processes in the 1970s (Burgmann 2016; Lipman 2011), Black residents increasingly were isolated in lower-wage sectors. Thus, the compounding factors of manufacturing job loss and white flight to the suburbs, which included discriminatory suburbanite blockbusting practices, jettisoned the Buffalo area to becoming one of most racially and economically segregated U.S. metropolitan regions with populations of approximately 250,000.

Although the Supreme Court outlawed racial zoning in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917) and racially restrictive covenants in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), courts uphold segregation on the basis of income via municipal zoning ordinances that operate to

² The two counties include Erie and Niagara; the five other cities include Lackawanna, Lockport, North Tonawanda, Olean, and Tonawanda; the 37 towns include Alden, Amherst, Aurora, Boston, Brant, Cambria, Cheektowaga, Clarence, Colden, Collins, Concord, Eden, Elma, Evans, Grand Island, Hamburg, Hartland, Holland, Lancaster, Lewiston, Lockport, Marilla, Newfane, Newstead, Niagara, North Collins, Orchard Park, Pendleton, Porter, Royalton, Sardinia, Somerset, Tonawanda, Wales, West Seneca, Wheatfield, and Wilson; the 21 villages include Akron, Alden, Angola, Barker, Blasdell, Depew, East Aurora, Farnham, Gowanda, Hamburg, Kenmore, Lancaster, Lewiston, Middleport, North Collins, Orchard Park, Sloan, Springville, Williamsville, Wilson, and Youngstown; and the three Seneca Nation Reservations include Tuscarora, Tonawanda, and Cattaraugus.

avoid annexation by major cities. This is a seeming legal contradiction when per capita income-levels are directly correlated with ethnicity, race, and gender, and specific groups have faced historic *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination. Such economic philosophy also runs contrary to the Supreme Court's landmark holding in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, 1954. These contradictions are indicative of two things: competing economic and political agendas at the federal, state and local levels, and the legal appeasement of the white status quo.

In particular, a racialized politics of appeasement and spatialization created a deeply entrenched system of segregation and racial isolation not only across the south, but urban contexts throughout the north (Massey and Denton 1993). Prejudiced local media outlets and restrictive covenants, as well as the discriminatory federal HOLC "red-lining" system, and FHA and VA practices each were part of Buffalo's regional history. From the 1950s forward, the practices of the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA), which adhered to FHA guidelines, and that of private real estate and the Common Council of the City of Buffalo not only worked to prohibit integrated housing, but promoted residential segregation (415 F. Supp. 904, W.D.N.Y. 1976). Furthermore, as of 1966, court records indicate that of the thirteen public housing units operating in the City of Buffalo, only four were considered fully integrated (Taylor 1998). As discussed in the following section, such actions would become part of the N.Y. District Court case, *Arthur v. Nyquist* (1976), which aimed to address the effects of racially segregated public schools in the City of Buffalo and metropolitan area.

In addition to the squeezing of Black residents into the central city in the 1950s, the Ellicott District Redevelopment (EDR), an urban renewal program, had the effect of razing a number of homes (415 F. Supp. 904, W.D.N.Y. 1976), and over the long term, contributed to pockets of vacant buildings and the forced relocation of over 2000 families, 80% of whom were Black (Blatto 2018). As found with other urban renewal plans across the U.S., these same communities were further disenfranchised and displaced by the building of expressways and highways. One example in Buffalo was the development of the Kensington Expressway, a two decade long project completed in 1971, which permitted ease of access from the eastern suburbs to downtown Buffalo. Not only did the expressway disfigure the East Side of Buffalo and contribute to area air pollution, but further confined some Black residents to specific sections of the East Side (Kraus 2000).

Though early spatialization shifts benefited suburbs, over time the region also developed multiple at-risk developing and economically stressed suburban areas. These include Niagara Falls, the City of Lockport, Lackawanna, and Cattaraugus. As discussed by Orfield (2002), this means that these areas can experience many of the following: small tax base, but high taxes; concentration of communities of color in certain neighborhoods; lack access to public transportation, commercial development, and social services; have banking, food, and technology deserts; repeat crime in the same areas; multiple older houses with lead paint; and discrimination in real estate. Arguably, these conditions contribute to current racial tension between whites who abandoned urban living for the suburbs in the mid-twentieth century and Black residents who later relocated to these same spaces because of white upper-class gentrification of urban cores.

The consequences of these policies remain for current City of Buffalo inhabitants, including its students. As of 2000, owner occupied housing in Buffalo stood at 66.2% with Non-Latinx white controlling the largest percentage at 71.6%; renter occupied households was 45.4%, wherein Black and Latinx occupants constituted 55.3% and 54.2% of this respectively (Brookings Institute 2010). More recently, 76% of Erie County and 45% of the City of Buffalo's population was white; conversely, Black residents comprised 13% of Erie County and 37% of the City of Buffalo, with 85% of all Black residents residing east of Main Street (Blatto 2018). The Buffalo metro area also was ranked the 7th most segregated region in the U.S., with more than 80% of its white residents living in predominantly white neighborhoods (Sauter et al. 2017).

In actual terms, of the five major employment centers in Erie County, only one is located within the City of Buffalo with 58% of area jobs inaccessible (Blatto 2018) so spatially isolated residents who lack public transportation. Without mass transit, accessing a range of basic needs, such as healthy food, healthcare, and banking centers, remains an issue for urban residents. Furthermore, part of systemic institutional racism experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) across the U.S., there are significant concerns about Buffalo area law enforcement practices, including disparities in arrest data and policy brutality. In 2013 for example, while Black residents accounted for less than 14% of Erie County's population, they constituted 43% of arrests (Blatto 2018). Since 2006, across the Western New York area there also were 15 reported cases of police brutality resulting in serious injury or death; thirteen of these were of people of color, including the deaths of four men within the last four years (Specht 2020). Urban residential and hyper-segregation helps to account for such disparities given Buffalo Police Department checkpoints, road-blocks, and ticket citations occur in Buffalo's east and west sides where some of the poorest Black residents live.

As of 2018, the Buffalo-Niagara region settled the third highest number of refugees in the country and Erie County settled one-third of all state arrivals (Refugee Processing Center 2018). The resettlement of refugees from countries as diverse as Congo, Burma, Iraq, Puerto Rico, and Somalia, is credited with helping contribute to a regional economic boom. Still, as of 2010 Buffalo-Niagara MSA poverty levels were above the national average with 18.4% of minors living in poverty (The Brookings Institution 2010). More importantly, today that rate has more than doubled in the City of Buffalo, with a childhood poverty rate of 54% (USCB 2017). Arguably then, while there is the appearance of an urban renaissance happening in certain parts of the city, the area largely remains resource poor and begs the questions for whom is this renaissance really happening and to what effects for local students.

Buffalo Public Schools

It is the finding of this court that the Board of Education, the Superintendent of Schools, the Common Council, the Commissioner of Education, and the Board of Regents have violated the plaintiffs' fourteenth amendment right to equal protection under the laws by intentionally causing and maintaining a segregated school system (415 F. Supp. 904, W.D.N.Y. 1976).

The segregation of public school students is assessed by the concept known as dissimilarity, or the evenness by which one group is isolated and would have to move to another school so that the racial composition of each respective school would mirror the composition of students in the area as a whole. For reasons already mentioned, as of 1972, more than 70% of Buffalo Public Schools (BPS) were segregated (Lankes and Pasciak 2014). After *Nyquist*, neighborhood schools were eliminated and bussing increased, but white students remained heavily concentrated in a small number of white schools, while students of color, namely the city's Black children, remained in socially isolated, high poverty schools.

Currently, BPS has 56 schools and 31,203 students. As of 2017, the breakdown of students by major demographic groups were estimated at: Black (46%); white (20%); Latinx (20%); Asian (9%); multi-racial (4%); Native American (1%) (New York State Education Department [NYSED] 2018a). More than 82% of students were from economically disadvantaged families, nearly 89% qualified for free and reduced lunch, and approximately 3% were in transitional housing or experience homelessness, with rates for some schools reaching 7% or greater. Given the influx of refugees to the local area, more than 80 languages were documented as spoken by PBS students, with 18% of students identified with ENL (English as a New Language) status (NYSED 2018a).

To provide a baseline understanding of academic success and completion rates, as 2017, graduation rates were distinct and reflected on-going segregation within BPS schools. Graduation rates were as follows: White (74%); Black (62%); Latinx (51%) respectively (Blatto 2018). For comparison sake, City Honors, which is considered one of the best district schools, was predominantly white, with 33% poverty, 4% student disability, and 96% graduation rates; Lafayette International, predominantly serves displaced students (i.e., refugee and Puerto Rican students displaced by Hurricane Maria), with 82% poverty, 21% student disability, and 47% graduation rates (NYSED 2018b). In other words, race, poverty, language ability, and learning disabilities are factors that are correlated strongly with respective school performance (Tan 2013).

BPS has one of the most linguistically diverse and economically challenged student and family populations in the state. Although numbers were stymied by recent federal executive orders (Lemke 2017), BPS also serves refugee and other displaced student subgroups, each having unique academic, socio-emotional, mental, and trauma-specific needs. As demonstrated throughout this article, the City of Buffalo is a hyper-segregated urban space, which is resultant from historic multi-level policy-oriented and institutional practices. Many of these though neutral on their face, had crippling effects, while others were intentionally classist and racist. Despite

efforts such as *Nyquist* to reverse these effects for Buffalo residents and students, deeply engrained discrimination remains.

A one-size fits all approach to district reform therefore, is not enough to address these and other on-going, contextually specific needs of BPS and its students. Rather an on-going, critically focused, and context sensitive approach to the design and implementation of educational policy and programming is needed. Such an approach underscores the significance that CBOs have for helping to undo spatially fixed inequality across the city and corresponding deeply engrained educational injustices. Because of their own localized history and ties to organizing efforts within a specific context, community coalitions can help to interrupt legacies of racial tension, economic stratification, and general mistrust (Trujillo et al. 2014) in well-intentioned school reform plans. Concerns around bottom-up efforts and the challenges associated with community organization capacity to engage meaningfully in educational reform have been dually noted (Green and Gooden 2014; Horsford and Sampson 2014). Given historic and overlapping forms of economic and racially motivated injustice at federal, state, and local policy levels, organizational focus, capacity, will, and motivation are key considerations in district partnerships.

District Reform and Organizational Partnerships

One way BPS has sought to engage and strengthen relationships with local organizations is through its New Education Bargain (NEB) (Buffalo Public Schools [BPS] 2019). Broadly, this plan includes work with a wide range of community agencies, faith-based institutions, and organizations to help provide services to students and families. It also aims to target what the district determines to be its “neediest children and families” with certain criteria including: identified adjustment, trauma, and/or mental health issues; learning or physically disabled; prior attendance and/or behavioral issues; pregnancy or a newly parenting; transitional housing and/or homelessness (BPS 2019).

Compiled from primary and secondary source documents collected during an Institutional Review Board approved study, as of 2018, there were 93 organizations partnering in varying capacities with BPS elementary, middle, and high schools. Consisting of both public and private entities, these service providers participate in the shared operation of 112 programs across the district (see Table 1). These programs, roughly split between those under contract and those operating at no cost to the district, offer a range of student and family services including academic, enrichment, language, health, legal, parent/guardian, socio-emotional, mental, physical, and post-secondary readiness.

As found in Table 1, multiple state and local CBOs have partnered with BPS. Though operating with different levels of capacity, motivation, longevity of presence within Buffalo and the region, and level of political connectedness to the district, overall, these entities seemingly aim to assist BPS staff, families, and students. It is important to note here that this is may not be an exhaustive list of partnering organizations. Furthermore, an independent analysis was not done on the history, purpose, and politics of these entities, nor the length of relationship and indicators of student

Table 1 BPS community partners and programs

Partner and program (if available)	Elementary	Middle	High school
21st Century, Community Action Organization			X
Adult Education, ESL Classes			X (18 and up)
African American Cultural Center, Dance and Drumming	X		
Americorps	X		
Baker Victory Dental Center, Chompers Dental Program	X	X	X
Be Proud, Be Responsible!	X	X	X
Best/Self Behavioral Health, Closing the Gap and Building Brighter Futures	X	X	X
Best/Self Behavioral Health/Catholic Charities of WNY/Baker Victory Services, Mental Health Counseling	X	X	X
Big Lots	X	X	X
Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo, Butler Mitchell Clubhouse	X	X	X
Butler Mitchell Kiwanis	X	X	X
Buffalo Immigrant Leadership Team, Parent Engagement Leadership			
Buffalo Jewish Coalition, Literacy Volunteers	X		
Buffalo Maritime Center, 6 Hour Canoe Building Course		X	X
Buffalo Metropolitan Credit Union, Saving Safari Club	X		
Buffalo Museum of Science, Museum at Annex	X		
Buffalo Museum of Science, Night at the Museum	X		
Buffalo Promise Neighborhood	X		
Buffalo State College, Anne Frank Project		X	X
Buffalo State College, Blue Economy			X
Buffalo State College, CEURE	X		
Buffalo State College, Internationals Network for Public Schools			X
Buffalo State College, The PD School Consortium	X		
Calvary Church, In-and-After school Supports	X		
Canisius College, Academic Talent Search, TRIO Program		X	X

Table 1 (continued)

Partner and program (if available)	Elementary	Middle	High school
Canisius College, Service Learning Tutoring Program	X		
Catholic Charities, Foster Grandparents	X	X	X
Cicatelli Associates, Raising Healthy Children	X		
CITRS (Character, Integrity, Trust, Relationships, Success), Character Counts	X	X	X
Community Neighborhood Health, Mobile Health Clinic			X
Curriculum Associates, I Ready	X		
Daemon College, Tutoring			X
Erie County Council for the Prevention of Alcohol and Substance Abuse	X	X	X
Erie County Department of Senior Services, Retired Senior Volunteer Program	X		
Erie County Medical Center	X	X	X
Erie County Medical Center, Farmers Market	X		
Every Person Influences Children, Parent Support	X	X	X
Fathers Armed Together to Help Education Restore and Save Lives (F.A.T.H.E.R.S.)	X		
First Hand Learning	X		
Flower Garden			X
Food Bank of Western New York, Back Pack Program	X	X	X
Gateway Longview Inc., Mental Health Clinic	X		
Girls on the Run	X	X	X
Girl Scouts		X	X
Go Bike Buffalo, Recycle-A-Bicycle	X		
Health Foundation of WCNY, Positive Emotional Development and Learning Skills (PEDALS)	X		
Heritage Center, Service Coordination	X		X
Hispanic Heritage Council of Western New York			X
Hillside, Work Scholarship Program		X	X

Table 1 (continued)

Partner and program (if available)	Elementary	Middle	High school
Houghton Mifflin Scholastic, Reading and Math 180			X
International Baccalaureate (I.B.)	X	X	X
International Institute of Buffalo			X
Junior Achievement			X
Just Buffalo, Writing Center		X	X
Kaleida Health		X	X
Kiwamis	X		X
Lafayette Alumni Association			X
Lawyers for Learning	X		
Lewis J. Bennett Alumni Center			X
LINKS Inc., Reading Support Program	X		
M&T Bank, Winter Needs/Wear and Share	X	X	X
Matilda Cuomo Mentoring, Peer Mentoring			X
Meals on Wheels	X	X	X
Mental Health Association, Too Good for Violence and Too Good for Drugs	X	X	X
National Urban Alliance	X		
Native American Community Services	X		
Neglia Ballet	X		
Niagara University, Tutoring			
Northwest Community Center, Northwest Buffalo and Subcontracted Partners	X		X
New York State Education, Liberty Partnership Program		X	X
New York State, Promise Initiative			X
New York State Day School, Falk School	X		
Parker Academy	X		

Table 1 (continued)

Partner and program (if available)	Elementary	Middle	High school
Parent Network Drop In			X
Perseverance Lodge of Masons	X	X	X
Planned Parenthood, Sexuality Education, Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (CAPP)			X
Project SOAR at Cradle Beach	X	X	X
Read to Succeed Buffalo, Experience Corps Literacy Program	X		
Research to Better Teaching, Skillful Teacher	X	X	X
Recycle Re-Store	X	X	X
Riverside Club/Boys and Girls Club			
Ripple, WNY United Against Drug and Alcohol	X		
Sam's Club	X	X	X
Say Yes to Education Buffalo, Legal Clinic			X
Say Yes to Education Buffalo, School-Based Preventive Services	X	X	X
Say Yes to Education Buffalo, Youth Empowerment Services Program		X	X
Seimer Institute, Housing Case Management	X		
SENSES, Credit Recovery and Tutoring			X
Soccer for Success	X		
SPCA, Paws for Love	X		
Step up to Writing	X		
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Books for Success Classroom	X		
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Incentive Program and Supplies	X		
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Warm Bodies = Strong Minds	X		
SUNY Research Foundation, Project-Based Learning Professional Development		X	X
The Rotary Club of Buffalo/NYS Mentoring Program	X		
The Summit Center, Genesis Behavioral Health	X		

Table 1 (continued)

Partner and program (if available)	Elementary	Middle	High school
University at Buffalo, Alberti Center for Bullying Abuse Prevention			X
University at Buffalo, Gateway to a Dental Home	X		
University at Buffalo, Gear Up		X	X
University at Buffalo, Smiles Dental Clinic		X	X
University at Buffalo, Tutoring	X		
United Health Care	X		
Upward Bound		X	X
Vocational Training (ACCESS-VR)			X
West Ed, Teacher Parent Teams	X		
West Ed, Leadership Coaching	X	X	X
Westminster Foundation, External Partner Organization	X		
West Side Community Services, Second Step	X		
Western New York United Against Drug and Alcohol, Leaders in Training SCAT	X	X	X
Youth Soccer League	X	X	X

academic improvement in relation to district partnerships. Additional research would provide a more nuanced understanding not only of these organizations, but their specific ability to take charge of, affect, and build broad-based ownership around issues related to educational equity.

Following then from the premise that students who receive a solid academic foundation in the early grades are far more likely to have academic success in their future years (Campbell and Ramey 1994) the NEB includes seven specific priorities focused on supporting rigorous early elementary education, fostering holistic, trauma-sensitive and culturally relevant practices, and extending learning opportunities across the educational pipeline. To begin, the NEB aims to reduce class sizes, introduce more challenging vocabulary, and hire literacy coaches. According to BPS (2019) self-reported data, K-2 class sizes in the neediest schools were reduced to 18-20 students; each elementary school also was given access to literacy coaches and a library of over 12,000 high-quality digital books.

Second, BPS supported the development of a community schools initiative in each quadrant of the City of Buffalo. As of 2017, 15 community schools were launched, with 36 collegiate, corporate, faith-based, and healthcare partners also supporting four Promise Zones citywide. The Promise Neighborhoods (PNs) program was part of a federal grant competition, which awarded support for up to 20 communities with 1-year planning grants for economically disadvantaged areas. The aim of PNs was to improve student educational and developmental outcomes in urban schools through building community capacity for education reform. According to BPS (2019) self-reported data, in these schools and zones, over 50 courses often offered through Saturday Academies, were available for students and their families; more than 26,000 participants also were estimated to engage with Saturday and evening programs, and an average of 41,000 free meals were served.

Third, the NEB included plans to redesign and launch new high schools to bridge the equity gaps between traditional and district criterion schools. In doing so, reform efforts aim to provide more opportunities for students in the form of career development aligned to local community and industry needs within Western New York. With the aim of increasing flexibility, four virtual credit recovery centers were launched to help aging-out, under-credited high school students (BPS 2019). Fourth, through its partnerships with state and local area community organizations BPS revamped after school, Saturday school, summer camps, alternative education, and technology-based learning. After school programming is said to be enriched at each school for example, with the requirement that each campus offer at least 2 additional hours of learning each week (BPS 2019).

Fifth, the NEB has targeted the district's traditionally underserved and most isolated students by updating and providing new educational opportunities for families on the East Side of Buffalo. According to BPS (2019) self-reported data for example, 52 of 56 BPS schools should have mental health clinics through Say Yes to Education Buffalo. Though often accessible to students only during Saturday Academies, four Parent Centers were launched in area schools with the aim of supporting family needs. These include language and legal aid supports among others. Akin to this aim, the NEB also emphasizes parents' critical role in supporting their children's growth through a range of school-based parental outreach initiatives (BPS

2019). Finally, the NEB aims to improve historically strained administrative leadership relations with district teachers who are represented by the Buffalo Teachers Federation. As articulated in the NEB, fair wages, rigorous and relevant professional development, and the improvement of teacher knowledge concerning culturally diverse practice were part of this goal. This included that the Trauma-Informed Care and Technical Assistance Center offer training for all teachers and principals, and a partnership with Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn would help to increase teachers of color throughout K-12 education (BPS 2019).

As with the organizations (Table 1) discussed previously, more research on the NEB is needed and to what extent it has delivered for its students and families. Such analyses would offer insight into district decision-making processes relevant to community partnerships, curriculum, program functioning, resource allocation, and anticipated and actualized outcomes relative to student academic performance. We know that many regional policies and institutional approaches had crippling effects on the area and in particular, its Black residents. In fomenting policies to address the equity needs of underserved communities, BPS students and families of color do not need more of the same.

Discussion

With collaboration, a joint vision, and a fortuitous catalyst, public engagement efforts like education organizing and alliance building could develop into a national social movement (Anyon 2009, p. 200).

CBOs and community coalitions can help to ameliorate systemic problems associated with race- and class-based discrimination (Trujillo et al. 2014) and push in the direction of societal transformation. Research also documents concerns about these relationships (Green and Gooden 2014; Horsford and Sampson 2014), educational reform as relevant to the lived experience of urban residents (Ares et al. 2017), and because of larger configurations of power, who gets to participate and to what extent (Purcell 2002). Still, community-based alternatives to traditional educational accountability and standards reforms forge ahead (Anyon 2005, 2009; Oakes and Rogers 2006; Warren 2005; Warren and Mapp 2011) and with good reason. Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2002, copious research details how test-taking skills are emphasized to the neglect of critical thinking, and that the threat of sanctions, prompts educators to cheat the system and its students (Jacob and Levitt 2003; Lemke 2015; Loeb and McEwan 2006; Nichols and Berliner 2008; Vasquez Heilig and Darling-Hammond 2008; Vasquez Heilig 2011). Moreover, the tendency within traditional attempts at reform has been to ignore student identity, simultaneously adopting a deficit outlook that places the onus for student achievement solely on parents and communities (Delpit 1997; Gold et al. 2004; Valencia et al. 2004). More than found wanting, traditional and reconstituted curricula continue to be negligent on race, gender, and class (Lemke 2015; Oakes and Rogers 2006; Skrla and Scheurich 2004).

It has been argued that students, parents, and communities alone, particularly those marginalized by the system, do not harness the tools necessary to reform public schools (Warren 2005; Warren et al. 2009; Warren and Mapp 2011). To argue otherwise would be to neglect the power dynamics at work within macro and micro systems. Still, community organizations gain strength from a *mélange* of historical cognizance, spatial context, community capacity, local will, and efforts at a collective imaginary. In particular, reflection on past reforms can, “confer the benefits of psychological distance on issues obscured by the passions of the present” (Tyack and Cuban 1995, p. 6). Moreover, the utilization this history can facilitate the transfer of community knowledge to current generations, concomitantly underscoring mechanisms, possibilities, and shortcomings of community-based change within the national narrative. In doing so, a pipeline between community and public schools is maintained and a process for valuing student identity, history, and cultural values is created. Such a pipeline helps facilitate more holistic, identity-centered, and trauma sensitive learning processes within K-12 settings. It also buttresses connections to the local community during student postsecondary work and/or study, thereby shoring up community structures, assets, and power. According to Fuentes (2012):

This [grassroots community organizing] is an especially powerful tool in communities that have been historically deemed “powerless” in negotiations with schools. This affirmed community power can then be used to influence change in institutional policy, practices and structures. In doing so, families who are often deemed as uninvolved, become active citizens and as a result are often seen by the larger school community as a resource. (p. 630).

As discussed in this article, research indicates that urban schools do better when community-based entities are part of the conversation. Studies demonstrate that social capital built between parents and educators (Bryk et al. 2010) and school leaders and their communities (Ishimaru 2013) serve as valuable resources for public schools. Put simply, building relationships among stakeholders in urban school settings is key to the kind of community involvement that brings about transformative change in district policy, teaching, and learning (Warren 2011). To take this a step further, such involvement requires that urban communities are authentically engaged and empowered participants in educational policy and reform processes (Vasquez Heilig et al. 2014).

According to the NEB, Buffalo educators are working to form sustainable and strategic partnerships not only with families, but with multisector entities at local and other levels. For these relationships to be effective, school leaders in this district must be willing to authentically engage with established CBOs and to be open to participating in on-going difficult critical dialogues with community members about what is needed to make district organizational partnerships, community or otherwise, work. One option to assist this process is an equity audit, which when focused on in- and out-of-school student learning experiences, are beneficial in urban settings. In this way, community organization institutional knowledge might shed light on the interplay between detrimental policies and the social, economic, and structural inequities in the community context, which directly affect schools (Green and

Gooden 2014). In other words, critical, transparent, and shared processes permit us to evaluate and revise established educational policies and reforms like NEB in ways that are accountable to the community.

Conclusion

Ostensibly, public schools such as those found in Buffalo, benefit from the leveraging of local community knowledge, resources, and input. This premise is built on research, which supports the premise that community and parent involvement in urban schools (Gold et al. 2004; Glickman and Scally 2008; Warren 2005; Warren et al. 2009; Warren and Mapp 2011) and the incorporation of youth into school organizing processes (Christens and Dolan 2011; Delgado and Staples 2008; Shiller 2013) creates meaning in the lives of students and respective community members far beyond graduation (Fuentes 2012). Arguably, CBOs are best situated to improve student achievement, socioemotional strength, and overall community health, as such organizations often provide marginalized populations a voice in the schooling processes that affect them. Their involvement helps educators, families, and community members to develop a sense of collective responsibility when good outcomes are achieved (Anderson-Butcher, et al. 2010; Sanders 2009; Warren and Mapp 2011). Such partnerships also open up the possibility for sustainable urbanization (Brenner 2009), which over the long-term, promotes the kind of economic and socially equitable growth that undoes spatially fixed inequality.

Acknowledgements I want to thank the reviewers for their feedback and suggestions. I also want to thank of Dr. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., UB Professor of Urban and Regional Planning for his feedback on later versions of this manuscript. His research expertise on distressed urban neighborhoods, social isolation, and race and class issues as relevant to urban schooling, and in the Buffalo area, provided an invaluable contribution to this article.

References

- Arthur v. Nyquist*, 415 F. Supp. 904, W.D.N.Y. (1976)
- Alinsky, S. (1946). *Reveille for radicals*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Alinsky, S. (1971). *Rules for radicals: A pragmatic primer for realistic radicals*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Anderson-Butcher, D., Lawson, H. A., Iachini, A., Flaspohler, P., Bean, J., & Wade-Mdivanian, R. (2010). Emergent evidence in support of a community collaboration model for school improvement. *Children & Schools*, 32(3), 160–171. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/32.3.160>.
- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Anyon, J. (2009). Progressive social movements and educational equity. *Educational Policy*, 23(1), 194–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808328523>.
- Apple, M. W. (2000). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ares, N., Buendía, E., & Helfenbein, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Deterritorializing/reterritorializing: Critical geography of educational reform*. New York, NY: Springer.

- Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher*, 36(5), 258–267.
- Austin, M. J., & Betten, N. (1977). Intellectual origins of community organizing, 1920–1939. *Social Service Review*, 51(1), 155–170.
- Blatto, A. (2018). *A city divided: A brief history of segregation in Buffalo*. Buffalo, NY: Partnership for the Public Good. Retrieved from https://ppgbuffalo.org/files/documents/data-demographicshistory/a_city_divided_a_brief_history_of_segregation_in_the_city_of_buffalo.pdf.
- Brenner, N. (2009). What is critical urban theory? *City*, 13(2–3), 198–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604810902996466>.
- Bruner, J. (2010). Map: Where Americans are moving. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/06/04/migration-moving-wealthy-interactive-counties-map.html>.
- Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: Propositions from the literature. *Public Administration Review*, 66(1), 44–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00665.x>.
- Buffalo Public Schools. (2019). *New education bargain with students & parents*. Blackboard, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.buffaloschools.org/Page/83911>.
- Burgmann, V. (2016). *Globalization and labour in the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Campbell, F. A., & Ramey, C. T. (1994). Effects of early intervention on intellectual and academic achievement: A follow-up study of children from low-income families. *Child Development*, 65(2), 684–698.
- Christens, B. D., & Dolan, T. (2011). Interweaving youth development, community, development, and social change through youth organizing. *Youth & Society*, 43(2), 528–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10383647>.
- Clouse, T. C. (2018). Critical geographic inquiry: Teaching AP Human Geography by examining space and place. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 13(2), 224–237. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SSRP-12-2017-0066>.
- Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, s95–s120.
- Cremin, L. A. (1964). *The transformation of the school: Progressivism in American education 1876–1957*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Cuban, L. (2004). *The blackboard and the bottom line: Why schools can't be businesses*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Datnow, A., & Honig, M. I. (2008). Introduction to the special issue on scaling up teaching and learning improvement in urban districts: The promises and pitfalls of external assistance providers. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 83, 323–327.
- Delgado, M., & Staples, L. (2008). *Youth-led community organizing: Theory and action*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Delpit, L. (1997). Education in a multicultural society: Our future's greatest challenge. In J. E. Strouse (Ed.), *Exploring themes of social justice in education: Readings in social foundations* (pp. 211–219). Columbus, OH: Merrol.
- Finnigan, K. S., Bitter, C., & O'Day, J. (2009). Improving low-performing schools through external assistance: Lessons from Chicago and California. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 17(7), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v17n7.2009>.
- Freudenberg, N. (1998). Community-based health education for urban populations: An overview. *Health Education & Behavior*, 25(1), 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500103>.
- Fruchter, N. (2007). *Urban schools public will: Making education work for all our children*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fuentes, E. H. (2012). On the rebound: Critical race praxis and grassroots community organizing for school change. *Urban Review*, 44, 628–648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-012-0208-3>.
- Furstenberg, F. F. Jr., & Hughes, M. E. (1995). Social capital and successful development among at-risk youth. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57(3), 580–592. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353914>.
- Gibson, C. (2012). *Population of the 100 largest cities and other urban places in the United States: 1790 to 1990*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html>.

- Glickman, N. J., & Scally, C. P. (2008). Can community and education organizing improve inner-city schools? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 30(5), 557–577. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.2008.00418.x>.
- Gold, E., Simon, E., Mundell, L., & Brown, C. (2004). Bringing community organizing into the school reform picture. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(3), 54S–76S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764004265439>.
- Golubchikov, O. (2015). Negotiating critical geographies through a “feel-trip”: Experiential, affective and critical learning in engaged fieldwork. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 39(1), 143–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2014.1003800>.
- Green, T. L., & Gooden, M. A. (2014). Transforming out-of-school challenges into opportunities: Community schools reform in the urban Midwest. *Urban Education*, 49(8), 930–954. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914557643>.
- Helfenbein, R. J. (2006). Space, place, and identity in the teaching of history: Using critical geography to teach teachers in the American South. In A. Segall, E. E. Heilman, & C. H. Cherryholmes (Eds.), *Social studies, the next generation: Researching in the postmodern* (pp. 111–124). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Helfenbein, R. J., & Taylor, L. H. (2009). Critical geographies in/of education: Introduction. *Educational Studies*, 45, 236–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131940902910941>.
- Honig, M. (2004). The new middle management: Intermediary organizations in education policy implementation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 65–87. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737026001065>.
- Horsford, S. D., & Sampson, C. (2014). Promise neighborhoods: The promise and politics of community capacity building as urban school reform. *Urban Education*, 49(8), 955–991. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914557645>.
- Ishimaru, A. (2013). From heroes to organizers: Principals and education organizing in urban school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(1), 3–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X12448250>.
- Jacob, B. A., & Levitt, S. D. (2003). Rotten apples: An investigation of the prevalence and predictors of teacher cheating. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 118(3), 843–878. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w9413>.
- Khalifa, M. (2012). A re-new-ed paradigm in successful urban school leadership: Principal as community leader. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48, 424–467. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11432922>.
- Kraus, N. (2000). *Race, neighborhoods, and community power: Buffalo politics, 1934–1997*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kronley, R. A., & Handley, C. (2003). *Reforming relationships: School districts, external organizations, and systemic change*. Providence, RI: The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.
- Lankes, T., & Pasciak, M. B. (2014). Segregation in Buffalo schools has returned to early 1970s levels. *The Buffalo News*. Retrieved from <https://buffalonews.com/2014/04/05/segregation-in-buffalo-schools-has-returned-to-early-1970s-levels/>.
- Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writings on cities*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Lemke, M. (2014). Children’s defense fund. In L. Ganong, M. Coleman, Marilyn, & J. G. Golson (Eds.), *The social history of the American family: An encyclopedia* (pp. 220–222). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lemke, M. (2015). (Un)making the neoliberal agenda in public education: A critical discourse analysis of Texas high school social studies policy processes and standards. In K. M. Sturges (Ed.), *Neoliberalizing educational reform: America’s quest for profitable market colonies and the undoing of public good* (pp. 53–77). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Lemke, M. (2017). Trafficking and immigration policy: Intersections, inconsistencies, and implications for public education. *Educational Policy*, 31(6), 743–763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817719528>.
- Lemke, M., & Zhu, L. (2018). Successful futures? New economy business logics, child rights, and Welsh educational reform. *Policy Futures in Education*, 16(3), 251–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317751269>.
- Lipman, P. (2011). *The new political economy of urban education: Neoliberalism, race, and the right to the city*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Loeb, S., & McEwan, P. J. (2006). An economic approach to education policy implementation. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 169–186). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Lopez, M. E., Kreider, H., & Coffman, J. (2005). Intermediary organizations as capacity builders in family educational involvement. *Urban Education, 40*(1), 78–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085904270375>.
- Massey, D., & Denton, N. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of an Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mirel, J. (1993). *The rise and fall of an urban school system: Detroit, 1907–1981*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Mitra, D. L. (2009). The role of intermediary organizations in sustaining student voice initiatives. *Teachers College Record, 111*(7), 1834–1870.
- New York State Education Department [NYSED]. (2018a). *Buffalo City School District enrollment: 2017–2018*. Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2018&instid=800000052968>.
- New York State Education Department [NYSED]. (2018b). *Buffalo City School District graduation rate data: 4 year outcome as of June*. Retrieved from <https://data.nysed.gov/gradrate.php?year=2017&instid=800000052968>.
- Nichols, S. L., & Berliner, D. C. (2008). *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America's schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Noguera, P. (2003). *City schools and the American dream: Reclaiming the promise of public education*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Oakes, J., & Rogers, J. (2006). *Learning power: Organizing for education and justice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Orfield, M. (2002). *American metropolitics: The new suburban reality*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press.
- Purcell, M. (2002). Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant. *GeoJournal, 58*, 99–108.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993). The prosperous community. *American Prospect, 4*(13), 1–11.
- Rachal, J. R. (1998). We'll never turn back: Adult education and the struggle for citizenship in Mississippi's Freedom Summer. *American Educational Research Journal, 35*(2), 167–198. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312035002167>.
- Refugee Processing Center. (2018). *Refugee arrivals by state and nationality*. Retrieved from <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.
- Renée, M., & McAlister, S. (2011). Community organizing as an education reform strategy. *Education Digest, 76*(9), 40–47.
- Rubin, V. (1998). The roles of universities in community-building initiatives. *Journal of Planning Education and Research, 17*, 302–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X9801700405>.
- Sauter, M. B., Comen, E., & Stebbins, S. (2017). 16 most segregated cities in America. Yahoo Finance. Retrieved from <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/16-most-segregated-cities-america-192040383.html>.
- Shiller, J. T. (2013). Preparing for democracy: How community-based organizations build civic engagement among urban youth. *Urban Education, 48*(1), 69–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085912436761>.
- Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Educational equity and accountability: Paradigms, policies, and politics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sleeter, C. (2008). Teaching for democracy in an age of corporatocracy. *Teachers College Record, 110*(1), 139–159.
- Smith, A. K., & Wohlstetter, P. (2001). Reform through school networks: A new kind of authority and accountability. *Educational Policy, 15*(4), 499–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904801015004001>.
- Specht, C. (2020, June 2). 15 cases of alleged police brutality, excessive force in WNY since 2006: 86 percent involve people of color as victims. *WKBW*. Retrieved from <https://www.wkbw.com/news/i-team/15-cases-of-alleged-police-brutality-excessive-force-in-wny-since-2006>.
- Stall, S., & Stoeker, R. (1998). Community organizing or organizing community? Gender and the crafts of empowerment. *Gender and Society, 12*(6), 729–756.
- Stearns, P., Seixas, P., & Wineburg, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Knowing, teaching & learning history: National and international perspectives*. New York, NY: New York University.

- Stone, C. N. (2001). Civic capacity and urban education. *Urban Affairs Review*, 36(5), 595–619. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780870122185019>.
- Supovitz, J. (2008). Melding internal and external support for school improvement: How the district role changes when working closely with external instructional support providers. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 83, 459–478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01619560802222426>.
- Tan, S. (2013). Stacking the deck against Buffalo's six 'failing schools.' *The Buffalo News*. Retrieved from <https://buffalonews.com/2013/07/24/stacking-the-deck-against-buffalos-six-failing-schools/>.
- Taylor, S. J. L. (1998). *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The influence of local leaders*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Taylor, H. L., McGlynn, L., & Luter, G. (2013). Back to the future: Public schools as neighborhood anchor institutions—The Choice Neighborhood Initiative in Buffalo, New York. In K. L. Patterson & R. M. Silverman (Eds.), *Schools and urban revitalization: Rethinking institutions and community development* (pp. 109–135). New York, NY: Routledge.
- The Brookings Institution. (2010). *State of Metropolitan America, Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/StateOfMetroAmerica/Profile.aspx?fips=15380#?fips=15380&viewfips15380&subject=7&ind=70&year=2008&geo=city>.
- Trujillo, A. L. (1998). *Chicano empowerment and bilingual education: Movimiento politics in Crystal City, Texas*. New York, NY: Garland Publications.
- Trujillo, T. (2014). The modern cult of efficiency: Intermediary organizations and the new scientific management. *Educational Policy*, 28(2), 207–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813513148>.
- Trujillo, T. M., Hernandez, L. E., Jarrell, T., & Kissell, R. (2014). Community schools as urban district reform: Analyzing Oakland's policy landscape through oral histories. *Urban Education*, 49(8), 895–929. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914557644>.
- Trujillo, T., & Woulfin, S. L. (2014). Equity-oriented reform amid standards-based accountability: A qualitative comparative analysis of an intermediary's instructional practices. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(2), 253–293. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214527335>.
- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyack, D., & Hansot, E. (1982). *Managers of virtue: Public school leadership in America, 1820–1980*. New York, NY: Basic Books Inc, Publishers.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Quick facts: Buffalo city, New York*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3611000>.
- United States Census Bureau. (2019). *Quick facts: Buffalo, NY*. Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/buffalocitynewyork>.
- University of Buffalo, SUNY. (2010). *Buffalo, NY: Neighborhoods map*. Retrieved from http://library.buffalo.edu/maps/buffalo-wnymaps/buffalo_neighborhoods.php.
- Vasquez Heilig, J. (2011). As good as advertised? Tracking urban student progress through high school in an environment of accountability. *American Secondary Education*, 39(3), 17–41.
- Vasquez Heilig, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2008). Accountability Texas-style: The progress and learning of urban minority students in a high-stakes testing context. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 30(2), 75–110. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373708317689>.
- Vasquez Heilig, J. V., Ward, D. R., Weisman, E., & Cole, H. (2014). Community-based school finance and accountability: A new era for local control in education policy? *Urban Education*, 49(8), 871–894. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914558171>.
- Warren, M. (2005). Communities and schools: A new view of urban education reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(2), 133–173. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.75.2.m718151032167438>.
- Warren, M. R. (2011). Building a political constituency for urban school reform. *Urban Education*, 46(3), 484–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085910377441>.
- Warren, M. R., Hong, S., Rubin, C. H., & Uy, P. S. (2009). Beyond the bake sale: A community-based relational approach to parent engagement in schools. *Teachers College Record*, 111(9), 2209–2254.
- Warren, M., & Mapp, K. L. (2011). *A match on dry grass: Community organizing as a catalyst for school reform*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.