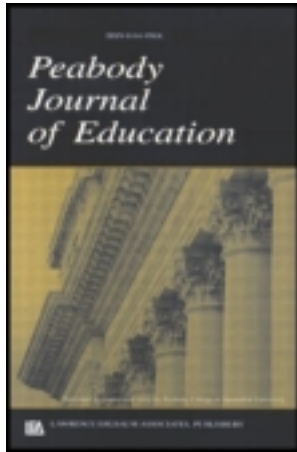


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Neighborhoods Matter: The Role of Universities in the School Reform Neighborhood Development Movement

Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., Linda McGlynn, and D. Gavin Luter

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Where you find distressed neighborhoods, you will also find poorly performing public schools. Yet many contemporary school reform efforts ignore neighborhood-level factors that undeniably impact school performance. The purpose of this study is to use a case study approach with social institutional and urban school reform regime frameworks to demonstrate why school reform and the re-creation and redevelopment of distressed neighborhoods should occur simultaneously. At the same time, researchers will examine the role of higher education in catalyzing partnerships with so-called anchor institutions for the explicit purposes of simultaneously improving neighborhoods and reforming schools. By focusing on a federal Choice neighborhood initiative, the study will not only make the case for connecting school reform and neighborhood development but also present a model that demonstrates how this can happen. The study will also make a strong case for the university's unique role in fostering neo-collaborative structures fit to take on wicked problems of neighborhood distress and urban decline.

INTRODUCTION

Persistently low-performing inner-city public schools are a top domestic problem in this country, and this is an issue largely defined in terms of race and class, rather than in terms of neighborhood space. Yet there is a substantial amount of literature which argues that a causal relationship exists between inadequate public schools and distressed neighborhoods (Ainsworth, 2002; Ceballo, McLoyd, & Toyokawa, 2004; Crowder & South, 2003; Hadley-Ivers, Stiffman, Elze, Johnson, & Dore, 2000; Holme, 2002; Jennings, 2012; Owens, 2010; Sinha, Payne, & Cook, 2005). This viewpoint is based on the notion that socioeconomic issues (housing, health, transportation, safety and security, food, recreation, social and physical infrastructure, as well as education) in distressed neighborhoods are interactive and mutually reinforcing and breakdowns in one or more of these areas will negatively affect others. This perspective would then suggest that low-achieving schools and inner-city distress are interrelated. Thus, if school reform is to be successful, it must be interwoven with neighborhood revitalization (Driscoll, 2001; Khadduri, Schwartz, & Turnham, 2008; Taylor, 2005).

Two issues that emerged in the post-civil rights era greatly complicate this task. First, in the late 1960s and onward, many cities adopted a school choice and open enrollment strategy to

improve the quality of public education. Through this approach, families were given the right to choose the schools their children attended (Betts & Loveless, 2005; Henig & Sugarman, 2000; Hoxby, 2003). **This method ended the age of neighborhood schools as increasingly parents chose to enroll their children in schools outside their community.** Second, with the rise of neoliberalism, an urban education regime emerged that was increasingly influenced by privatization and market-based principles (Hackworth, 2007). In this new setting, market principles dominated and school reform was controlled by the urban education regime (Shipps, 2008). Thus, no organization or group could bring about meaningful change without moving through channels controlled by the education regime.

This article discusses the role of the University at Buffalo Center for Urban Studies (UB Center) in designing a school reform strategy that is part of a broader neighborhood revitalization plan. Using a social institution framework, this study examines the experiences of the UB Center in formulating a school reform strategy interwoven with neighborhood revitalization. The UB Center, as an academic unit in a major university, was an ideal institution to play the lead in connecting school reform to neighborhood revitalization. This piece will be divided into two parts. The first analyzes the impact of school choice on the reform of inner-city schools and the effort to revitalize distressed neighborhoods, and explores the unique role that higher education can play in interweaving school reform and neighborhood development. The second section examines the role of the UB Center for Urban Studies in building the Perry Choice Neighborhood (PCN) Mini-Education Pipeline.

PART 1: THE SCHOOL CHOICE MOVEMENT AND DISTRESSED NEIGHBORHOODS

Before the 1960s, especially in the African American community, most schools were neighborhood schools and a relationship existed between the schools and the communities in which they were located. This happened, in part, because teachers and administrators also lived in the community. These professionals were integrated into the fabric of everyday life and culture (Milner & Howard, 2004). In their daily lives, these teachers and principals encountered their students and their parents on the streets, in the grocery store, at church, and in varied institutions that served the community. Moreover, because they lived in the communities from which their students came, the teachers also understood more deeply the problems faced by their students. Thus, in that moment of time, the fates of schools and inner city neighborhoods were intertwined.¹

This changed in the post-civil rights era. In the late 1960s, school desegregation became the force driving school reform, and this led to the emergence of the school choice strategy. This strategy used busing to make it possible for students to attend schools located outside of their neighborhoods (Mills, 1973). Rooted in the philosophical principles of neoliberalism, school choice was based on the hypothesis that improving educational outcomes could best be achieved through the utilization of market principles and this could be best accomplished by allowing parents to choose the schools their children attended, thus making building-based factors the most important ones in improving schools (Desimone, 2002; Edmonds, 1979; Herman et al.,

¹In this era, however, the schools never were the hubs of community life imagined by John Dewey. This potential was never realized. Even so, they still were critical neighborhood-based institutions.

1999).² By turning parents into consumers of public education, schools would be forced to compete for students and those schools that could not garner the students or improve sufficiently to become competitive, would be closed (Hoxby, 2003). It was believed that this increased competition would trigger the improvement of schools and the closing of the persistently low-achieving schools. Over time, because most children lived in one neighborhood and attended school in another, the interactive link between schools and neighborhoods was broken.

Ultimately, the school choice hypothesis proved false. Giving parents the right to choose the schools their children attended did not lead to improved academic performance. Neighborhood-based issues confronting students continued to thwart the development of the skills, competencies, and aspirations required for academic success, as well as erecting other nonacademic barriers to success in school. These two neighborhood-based issues followed the children to whatever school they attended, causing them to struggle academically.

The hypothesis offered here is that neighborhoods matter in the education and schooling process. There are two prime reasons why this is the case. Neighborhood conditions will create nonacademic barriers to the academic success of students. Rosenbaum, Reynolds, and DeLuca (2002) said that children in such communities experience lower levels of life satisfaction, lower levels of self-efficacy, and an increased fear of criminal victimization, and they are more likely to have reduced cognitive development, created by the higher incidence of lead poisoning, malnutrition, and/or exposure to trauma (Perry, 2001). Youth in these communities are also at a higher risk for acquiring antisocial attitudes and values, along with poor problem-solving skills. Such a worldview will increase their likelihood of dropping out of school, underachieving academically and becoming involved in outlawed cultural activities. Moreover, the parents living in distressed neighborhoods encounter social and economic problems that destabilize the family and keep them from creating the type of home environment conducive to educational success.

The second is that distressed neighborhoods lack the educational infrastructure and community culture needed to support academic success and align the neighborhood sociocultural activities with the mission, goals, and policies of the school district. In these neighborhoods, no network of high-quality early learning centers and preschools exist for children to access. There are no vehicles in place to ensure that preschoolers go on field trips to museums, zoos, and other places that can provide rich educational experiences that their parents (caregivers) cannot afford. Most students do not have a quiet place to study at home, or computer and/or Internet access, or family members who can help them with assignments or homework. Most homes are not filled with books or other items that create a lively learning environment, and the neighborhood culture does not promote the idea of lifelong learning and going on to higher education. Many people had negative experiences in school and saw around them people who were not able to cash in on the investment in schooling by making improvements in their lives. The outcome of these two factors is that distressed neighborhoods send many children to kindergarten or first grade “not ready” for school because they lack the skills, competencies and aspirations needed for success, and they are continually confronted with nonacademic barriers that thwart educational

²Building-centric approaches to school reform focused on improving building-level factors, such as teacher effectiveness, curriculum and instruction, and building-specific leadership (Desimone, 2002). These models wholeheartedly ignored the context of neighborhood factors that, in many ways, reinforced the problems and issues appearing in schools manifested by substandard academic performance.

achievement. These problems do not disappear simply because students attend school in another neighborhood.

The hidden issue in this debate is that powerful socioeconomic and racial forces trap African Americans and Latinos inside of distressed neighborhoods. So, for them, there is no escape from the forces that spawn barriers to their academic success. Patterson and Yoo (2012), by showing how the policies that were designed to produce open housing have been a dismal failure, provide a convincing argument that Blacks and Latinos are locked in distressed neighborhoods. They demonstrated that HUD Sections 8 and 9 housing vouchers, Fair Housing Acts, inclusionary zoning laws, and various mixed housing strategies have not made it possible for low-income African Americans and Latinos to move into higher income neighborhoods. These groups remain trapped in underdeveloped communities, and this simple fact will continue to frustrate school reform efforts.

The HUD Choice Neighborhood Strategy

Given this reality, it is not surprising that the school choice method did not improve student academic achievement among Blacks and Latinos (Swanson, 2009). The persistence of inadequate educational outcomes for this group caused President Barack Obama to reexamine the link between schools and neighborhoods (Office of Urban Affairs, n.d.). There is an irony evident in the paradox of the Obama administration, with its core belief in school choice, initiating policies that seek to establish place-based school reform strategies. Nonetheless, both the Choice Neighborhood model, and its corollary, Promise Neighborhoods, are based on the assumption that you cannot reform schools without changing the neighborhoods in which the children reside. Thus, at the core of both of these strategies is the goal of designing solutions that eliminate distressed neighborhoods as obstacles to the education of low-income Blacks and Latinos (Khadduri et al., 2008).

The inaugural round of Choice Neighborhood planning and implementation grants was issued in spring of 2010; and it is still too early to determine their effectiveness. Nonetheless, it is possible to gain insight into the challenges involved in designing solutions, building multisector collaborations and actually bringing about fundamental change to inner-city public schools. Most critically, even at this early stage, it is possible to examine some of the issues involved in designing a neighborhood redevelopment strategy that includes school reform.

The purpose of the Choice Neighborhood Planning Initiative is to develop a strategy for transforming distressed communities into stable and vibrant mixed-income neighborhoods, in which residents have access to high-quality early learning centers, effective schools, high-quality supportive services and enhanced public transportation (“Choice Neighborhoods Grant Program,” 2012). School reform stands at the core of the HUD Choice Neighborhood strategy. The underlying assumption is that you cannot transform a distressed neighborhood without simultaneously building a robust neighborhood education infrastructure and dramatically improving the quality of public education.

The Challenge

The interweaving of school reform and neighborhood development is easier said than done. The most daunting aspect of this challenge is the transformation of the schooling process in distressed

neighborhoods. In the United States a linear relationship exists between educational attainment and income. Consequently, without changing the educational trajectory of inner-city children, their life outcomes cannot be altered. **To transform inner-city schooling, three fundamental challenges must be met.**

The first challenge is to overcome opposition from the local education regime. The regime is a leadership body composed of government and non-government representatives. Operating within the context of federal and state governments, it controls schooling at the local level. Although state governments possess the resources and authority to directly shape urban education policy, they typically leave most issues to the local education regime. So, then, at the local level, the regime drives the schooling process. It defines the education problem, outlines its characteristic features, and then determines what is to be done. The regime decides how educational resources are to be accessed and in what ways they will be distributed. Given its power and authority, the only way to effect sustainable educational change in any city is to operate within the constructs of the urban education regime.

The education regime is a layered one, typically composed of politicians, business and civic elites, teachers, union leaders, parents, researchers, and intellectuals (Shipps, 2008). Its activities are driven by a core group composed of the most ideologically sophisticated and/or technically competent members, whereas the outer layer consists of business elites, political elites, and foundation leaders. This core group is typically aligned with and works on behalf of the outer group, where the real power and influence is found. The prominence of the outer group is derived in the resources, financial support, and legitimacy they bring to the school reform movement. Within this framework, much of the day-to-day work of the regime is carried out by the core group on behalf of the elites. The majority of regime members are sandwiched between these two power groups. Within this context, the middling members of the regime consist of a combination of teachers, researchers, intellectuals, and civic leaders. This middle group tends to be progressive and people-orientated, which makes the regime appear more democratic than it is in reality. This façade of democracy notwithstanding, the real power lies with the inner and outer cohorts, and not with the progressive middle cohort.

The education regime controls the schooling process. Therefore, the only way to bring about meaningful change in urban education is to operate through their auspices. Thus, any organization seeking to bring about meaningful changes in the public schools must become part of the urban regime. **Concurrently, for this to happen, a reform group must have an *inside* and *outside* strategy of change (Shipps, 2008). The *inside* strategy will focus on acquiring influence *inside* the regime, whereas the *outside* strategy will focus on developing popular support for changing the system. The idea is to create a mass movement with the power to pressure the regime to act, while having *inside* groups with the capacity to implement programs and activities.** Thus, to succeed, the outside strategy requires building a social movement that includes parent organizations, teacher groups, neighborhood-based agencies, and other groups and organizations that are sympathetic to the progressive reform agenda. At the same time, these more radical activities of the outside group must be aligned with activities of the inside reform group. The pressure from outside will make it possible for the inside group to use protest as leverage to bring about sustainable positive change.

The second challenge is to rethink the way that local institutions interact with each other and invest their resources. A new paradigm is needed in which public institutions and community-based organizations plan and work together to address urgent social problems, including

TABLE 1
Black Population Growth in Select Cities 1950–1970

Black Population Growth	1950	1970	Difference	% Change
Detroit	300,506 (16%)	420,210 (46%)	119,704	40
Cleveland	147,847 (16%)	287,841 (38%)	139,994	95
Philadelphia	376,041 (18%)	653,791 (34%)	277,750	73.8
New York City	747,608 (10%)	1,668,115 (21%)	920,507	123

Note. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990* (Population Division Working Paper No. 27), June 1998.

education. After 1970, the rise of neoliberal society combined with the Devolution Revolution caused nongovernment organizations (NGOs) to assume unprecedented levels of importance in local governance and in addressing urgent social problems. To put this significant development in perspective, let us quickly review other critical urban changes that accompanied the rise of neoliberal society.

First, between 1950 and 1970, the racial and socioeconomic geography of the U.S. urban metropolis changed dramatically. In the 20-year period between 1950 and 1970, millions of African Americans moved from rural communities to cities mostly in the North and Midwest. For example, between 1950 and 1970, the Black population of Detroit jumped from 16% to 46%, Cleveland from 16% to 38%, Philadelphia from 18% to 34%, and New York City from 10% to 21% (see Table 1). At the same time that Blacks moved into the cities, an even larger number of Whites moved out. Between 1950 and 1970 the White population in Detroit declined by 46% ($N = 706,970$), in Cleveland by 40% ($N = 307,180$), in Philadelphia by 24% ($N = 413,920$), and in New York City the White population fell by 15% ($N = 1,067,600$) as more than 1 million people left the Big Apple (see Table 2).

Just about everywhere, the story was the same; Blacks were moving into the cities and Whites were fleeing from them. Blacks were concentrated in the central city while Whites were taking up residence in the suburban hinterland. The die was being cast, and a radical reconstruction of the racial and socioeconomic geography of the region was taking place. By 1970, for the first time in U.S. history, more people lived in the suburbs than in the central city. The new urban geography was informed by class, with a deep racial overlay. Low-income groups from across the racial divide were also being concentrated in the urban core, whereas higher income

TABLE 2
White Population Decline in Select Cities Between 1950 and 1970

City White Pop Growth	1950	1970	Difference	% Change
Detroit	1,545,847	838,877	706,970	46
Cleveland	765,264	458,084	307,180	40
Philadelphia	1,692,637	1,278,717	413,920	24
New York City	7,116,441	6,048,841	1,067,600	15

Note. Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990* (Population Division Working Paper No. 27), June 1998.

groups were being concentrated in the outlying areas of the metropolis. Because Blacks were overrepresented in jobs at the bottom of the occupation ladder, they were overrepresented in distressed neighborhoods. Concurrently, because Whites were concentrated in jobs in the middle and the top of the occupation ladder, they were overrepresented in prosperous middle and upper income neighborhoods. Within this context, the central city became the primary living space for Blacks, Latinos, low-income Whites, and other people of color.

White flight from the central city was not benign. The liberal support that Blacks received from Whites during the civil rights era disappeared with urban rebellions and the emergence of the distressed Black neighborhood. Black rage grew over the slow pace of socioeconomic change in the United States. Black migration to the “Promised Land,” the civil rights movement, and Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty did not change the growing joblessness in the African American community. Hope disappeared. And in August of 1964, Black rage exploded. Between 1964 and 1968, every metropolitan city with a sizable Black population experienced a riot or some form of civil disorder, as “Burn Baby Burn” and “Black Power” became rallying cries in the African American city (Gale, 1996). The violence and anger not only intensified the White movement to the suburbs, it also caused a push for “Get Tough on Crime” policies, a loss of faith in the effectiveness of social programs, and many Whites to embrace the neoliberal call for small government. A combination of White middle-class flight from cities and the economic shift from manufacturing to service and knowledge-based sectors produced a fiscal crisis in central cities (Beauregard, 2001; Fishman, 2000).

The central city fiscal crisis took place at the precise moment that the social welfare needs of urban centers became greater than ever before. The crisis worsened with the onset of the *Devolution Revolution* in the late 1970s. This revolution represented a process of devolving many federal powers back to the states and local areas (Harkavy, 1997). The hidden agenda of the Devolution Revolution was a large-scale withdrawal of support for social welfare and a reduction in the size of government. Slowly, from 1975 onward, the welfare state weakened as neoliberal economic and governance policies came to drive the metropolitan city building process.³ As government retreated from its service delivery role, NGOs grew increasingly important in the delivery of supportive services in distressed urban communities.

Second, from 1970 onward, conditions in the Black community steadily declined. The millions of Blacks who came to urban centers looking for jobs and opportunities for a better life had their dreams crushed by the shifting economy. The culture of work was a traditional value in the African American community. Historically, most Blacks were members of the labor force. Even during bad times, when unemployment was high, Blacks never stopped looking for work. They remained in the reserved army of labor. This started to change in the 1950s (Taylor & Hill, 2000). As the demand for Black labor declined, a growing number of Black workers became discouraged and stopped looking for work altogether. They dropped out of the labor force; they left the reserve army of labor.

³The basic idea undergirding this approach to economic development and governance is that *competition* is good. Within that context, there are four basic characteristics of neoliberalism. The first is that the market rules in “free” societies. Therefore, market principles should drive the activities of all sectors in society, including the public and nonprofit sectors. Most critically, the best way to stimulate the economy and produce jobs and opportunities is to deregulate the market. The belief here is that a thriving economy benefits the entire society. The second trait is the cutting of public expenditures for social development, including education and health care, whereas the third relates to deregulation. The final trait is privatization and the imbuing of public and private institutions with market principals.

By 1970, when the racial and socioeconomic restructuring of the metropolis was complete, Black workers had been victimized by structural unemployment and entrapment in the low-wage labor market. At the same time, there emerged a new dualism in Black life and culture. For the first time, middle-class and elite Blacks used “open housing” legislation to move out of distressed neighborhoods into either middle/upper-income Black communities or predominantly White middle-income communities. A combination of the developments caused the Institutional Black Ghetto to disintegrate (Wilson, 1996). By the late 1970s, William Julius Wilson says the Institutional Black Ghetto had given way to the *Black distressed neighborhood*—a new type of Black neighborhood.⁴

The Institutional Black Ghetto differed significantly from the distressed neighborhood. Although segregated, the *institutional ghetto* was nonetheless a thriving, cross-class, and highly organized community, which was filled with hope, optimism, and determination (Katzman, 1973). It was informed by the values of solidarity and struggle, led by teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers, and workers. It was anchored by the school, church, and public park and imbued with a culture of work and self-determination. Although faced with hard times and the constant struggle for survival, residents of the Black institutional ghetto nevertheless created jazz, blues, the gospels, and the melodic sound of soul music (Keil, 1992; Kenny, 1993).

The institutional ghetto started to break up in the late 1960s, and by the mid-1970s it had morphed into a *distressed community* (Meier & Rudwick, 1970). Sociologist Paul A. Jargowsky (1997) said that between 1970 and 1990, as “jobless poverty” spread, the number of Blacks living in high-poverty neighborhoods increased by more than 70%. *Structural joblessness* amplified neighborhood problems, causing issues like underperforming schools, poverty, crime, family dissolution, and outlaw culture to increase exponentially. Then, in the late 1970s and 1980s, as hardships grew and opportunities diminished, the Black community was pounded by a devastating crack cocaine epidemic and mass incarceration. As socioeconomic conditions worsened, higher income Blacks started to leave the neighborhood, thereby greatly weakening the community’s organizational and institutional structure. In this transitional setting, a new institutional structure emerged, which was composed mostly of support service agencies and NGOs, mostly led by Whites.

There are three dimensions to the rise of the distressed neighborhood that deserve special mention. The first is that the rise of distressed neighborhoods led to a breakdown of traditional institutions in the African American community. Thus, as the urban distress grew among Blacks, the neighborhood organizational infrastructure, which they needed to help mitigate the new urban challenges, did not exist. Second, the educational infrastructure that had served the *institutional ghetto* was dismantled. Last, the skills, competencies and aspirations needed for success in schools started to wane, whereas nonacademic barriers to educational achievement started to grow.

This was the *nadir* in Black urban communities, as underperforming schools, joblessness, outlaw culture, and other forms of distress became the most characteristic features of the inner city (Wilson, 1996). In this new Black residential setting, operating within the context of a neoliberal society and a weakened institutional framework, the disappearance of work, the crack cocaine

⁴Wilson called this distressed neighborhood a jobless ghetto. However, distressed neighborhood is a more accurate term. The civil rights movement ended “ghettos” because Blacks were coerced into living there and because higher income groups chose to leave.

epidemic, and the mass incarceration movement combined to devastate the Black community (Mauer, 2006).

The Devolution Revolution took place when cities started to grapple with mounting fiscal problems. In this setting, the diminishing role of government in service delivery caused NGOs to assume new and greater importance in addressing the urgent problems facing the city. Because government no longer had the resources to deal effectively with the mounting social problems facing urban centers, it had no choice but to forge a new type of relationship with NGOs, especially big nonprofit institutions, like higher education, local foundations, and United Ways. These nonprofit institutions came to be known as *anchor institutions*. They are called anchor institutions because they are large, place-based institutions that are not likely to move out of cities. They are rooted in urban space because of a combination of capital investment, mission, and tradition (Harkavy & Zuckerman, 1999; Taylor & Luter, 2013). These developments created the necessity for nonprofits and anchor institutions to play a more strategic role in the redevelopment of urban centers. *Our second challenge, then, is to realize that this potential requires that we rethink the way in which local institutions interact with each other and make investment decisions.* Put another way, in this new setting, the only way to grapple with the complex, interactive problems confronting urban centers is to build multisector collaboratives.

The third challenge is how to fuse these disparate NGOs into highly effective and efficient multisector collaboratives with the capacity to address complex urban problems. The biggest obstacle to getting NGOs to work and plan together is competition for scarce resources. NGOs operate in a type of survival of the fittest world created by neoliberalism. Individual success is the key to continued existence, and this reality produces a silo mentality that makes building sustainable partnerships difficult. At the same time, the complexities of urban problems place resolution beyond the ability of any one organization. Hence, NGOs need to work and plan together. The bottom line is that only a cross-disciplinary, multisector approach to problem solving can succeed in grappling with these wicked problems.

The challenge, then, is to build a new type of multisector collaboration in an urban setting dominated by competition. Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, and John Puckett (2007) referred to the process of building this new type of collaborative organization, the Democratic Devolution Revolution. They viewed the multisector collaborative as potentially a new form of local governance. This perspective is based on the ideas of John Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare under Lyndon Johnson. Gardner, a leading spokesperson for the engaged university, foresaw the emergence of a Democratic Devolution Revolution, and he envisioned the university as the ideal institution to lead it. Gardner called for new forms of government interaction and integration, both vertically—among federal, state, and local government—and horizontally, among agencies at each level of government. He believed that a new type of alignment between and among governments would lead to improved governance at the local level.

Benson et al. built on Gardner's argument by arguing that a new type of relationship needed to be forged between government organizations and NGOs. However, in this new governance structure, government would function as a *second tier* deliverer of services with prime responsibility to catalyze and facilitate the formation of multisector collaborations to address socioeconomic issues. In this role, the federal government would assume responsibility for working closely with state and local government to fund place-based and people-based programs and to leverage local investments to address urgent socioeconomic problems. In this strategy, big nonprofit institutions, community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, unions, and the private sector

would be assembled in multisector collaboratives designed to address specific types of problems. The goal of these collaboratives would be to leverage the capacities and resources of discrete organizations and to strategically focus them on the resolution of an urban problem(s) (Harkavy & Hodges, 2012).

We believe that the Democratic Devolution Revolution envisioned by Benson et al. is already in its early stages of development. Across the country, multisector collaborations are emerging in which government, NGOs, community-based groups, and the private sector are coming together to solve problems that affect the community. The big question, then, is how to grow and develop the multisector collaborative.

The Democratic Multisector Education Collaborative

We believe the Democratic Devolution Revolution strategy is the best approach to attacking the problem of persistently low-achieving schools in the inner city and for interweaving school reform and neighborhood revitalization. This poses the question, How do you build the democratic multi-sector education collaborative? Given the challenge of building a multisector collaborative (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005) in an urban setting characterized by competition and turf wars, higher education appears to have the greatest potential for building a progressive and democratic multisector education collaborative. **There are four reasons why higher education is best positioned to play this leadership role.** First, America's colleges and universities represent huge concentrations of human and economic capital, with nearly 4 million employees, 20 million enrolled students, \$400 billion in endowments, and \$1 trillion in annual economic activity (Harkavy & Hodges, 2012). Second, colleges and universities are place-based institutions that are rooted in their host communities. As such, they are not only very big and powerful institutions but also hold a unique stake in the development of the local schooling system. Increasing the number of high school graduates that are ready for college is going to aid in their recruitment efforts. Moreover, because urban colleges and universities are rooted in the central city, their fate and those of their host community are intertwined (Taylor & Luter, 2013). Third, many people view higher education as a "neutral" institution, which would make it easier to function as a catalyst and facilitator in building partnerships across sectors. As a "neutral" institution, NGOs believe that higher education does not have any turf to protect, and does not it have any special interest to pursue. It is this perceived sense of neutrality and impartiality that makes it easier for higher education to pull together disparate groups.

Last, higher education has a unique institutional organizational structure composed of "semi-independent" departments, schools, and centers, along with faculty and staff members who can engage in varied civic engagement projects without approval of the university leadership. Yet, at the same time, when involved in civic engagement projects, any unit or faculty/staff member does operate under the university brand.⁵ The interaction of these four factors is what gives universities the greatest potential to lead the Democratic Devolution Revolution (Taylor & Luter, 2013).

⁵Throughout this article, the term *university* is used interchangeably with *higher education*.

PART 2: THE BUFFALO STORY: CHOICE NEIGHBORHOOD, EDUCATION AND URBAN REGIMES

The remainder of this article focuses on a case study of the HUD PCN Initiative. Buffalo is an ideal site to explore the challenges involved in the building of a progressive multisector collaborative that seeks to address the problem of school reform and the interweaving of school reform and neighborhood development through the process of building a presence in the local education regime. The Buffalo Public School district is a choice school district, where open enrollment allows the students to attend schools outside of the neighborhoods where they live (Rossell, 1987). The school choice strategy has not improved public schooling in Buffalo. Of the district schools, 28 (or 50%) are priority schools, which are so listed because they are persistently low achieving. In 2011 the 4-year graduation rate was only 54%. The school district has launched an aggressive reform movement, but with the exception of the Promise Neighborhood, none of the reform efforts have aligned their activities with efforts to revitalize the communities where the students live. **In Buffalo, school reform and neighborhood development have travelled along separate pathways.**

This is a significant concern because Buffalo's inner-city neighborhoods do not have an educational infrastructure capable of supporting the district's lofty mission of "providing every child with a world-class education." By educational infrastructure, we mean a neighborhood-based system of programs, activities, facilities, and practices that support K-12 education and beyond. Such a framework would include housing units with quiet places to study and computer and Internet access, along with books and other reference materials. It would have high-quality day-care, early learning centers, and parent-child programs to teach caregivers the appropriate way to read and talk to their children and how to turn the home into a stimulating learning environment. The neighborhood educational infrastructure would also include learning centers, with computers and tutors, and branch libraries or other places with books and learning materials, all of which would imbue the neighborhood with a culture that supported lifelong learning and encouraged participation in higher education programs. Most critically, the neighborhood would be aligned with the mission and priorities of the school district, so that interactive linkages would be built between the two. **Thus, a city with an open-enrollment policy, with persistently low-achieving schools, combined with highly distressed neighborhoods that do not have a neighborhood educational infrastructure, all make Buffalo an ideal site for investigating the role of universities in interweaving school reform and neighborhood development.**

The Mini-Education Pipeline Strategy

The UB Center established a university-assisted school program, called the Community as Classroom, at School 400, a K-8 public school, in 2000. This project-based learning approach was informed by the belief that inner-city students underachieved academically, in part, because they did not see a relationship between schooling and being able to improve the conditions in their communities and their lives. To many inner-city students, school was nothing more than a "stop over" on the "road to nowhere," an irrelevant intrusion into everyday life and culture. To change this antieducation mind-set, we sought to develop a pedagogical model that would create "critical consciousness" among the students. Using project-based learning to solve real-life problems that

would then actually improve conditions inside the neighborhood, the hope was that students would be motivated to become invested in the learning process.

Over time, the UB Center came to three conclusions. First, although the Community as Classroom Initiative was successful, it did not provide the UB Center with the leverage needed to impact significantly the education outcomes at School 400. Second, when the students moved on to high school, we lost our ability to have any real impact over their educational experience, and depending on the high school attended, the work done at School 400 could be completely undermined. Third, unless the UB Center was able to bolster the number of young children entering school ready to learn, the long-term challenge of educating these students would be exacerbated. Based on this assessment, the UB Center developed an education pipeline strategy, based on a hybrid community school model, to attack the problem outlined above.

The pipeline strategy was based on creating a continuum of “feeder” programs, activities, and schools that were linked together and managed as a singular unit, operating within the context of a multisector education collaborative, tied to the BMHA–PCN regeneration strategy. In this approach, a birth to college and career pipeline would be established among neighborhood-based programs and activities, which are intentionally linked to primary and high schools. The primary goal is that every child moving through this pipeline will graduate from high school on time and be ready for college or the workforce. The pipeline would be embedded in an organized continuum of supportive services that would build interactive linkages among the school, community, parents, and caregivers. This pipeline, then, would not exist independently from the neighborhood but would be rooted inside the neighborhood.

The mini-education pipeline (MEP) strategy is based on a *hybrid community school model* (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Dryfoos, 1994; Kronick, 2005). In this approach, the goal is both to eliminate nonacademic barriers to academic success and to improve the students’ skills, competencies, and aspirations so as to bolster their academic success. Consequently, in this model, school-based managers are hired to coordinate both academic enrichment and supportive services and to link students and their families to supportive services found inside their neighborhood. Most critically, in the *hybrid model*, a major responsibility of the school-based managers is to create interactive linkages between activities and resources inside the school building and those in the neighborhood, especially those that support the school’s academic mission. Last, the goal of this *hybrid model* is to intentionally produce students who become caring adults imbued with citizenship skills based on critical consciousness; democracy; and a strong sense of social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

Within this conceptual framework, the pipeline has three interactive tasks. The first is to establish a K-12th grade Academic Enrichment and Supportive Service Program, which is designed to reinforce classroom activities by strengthening the skills, competencies, and aspirations of children and by removing nonacademic barriers to educational achievement. The second task is to build a *neighborhood-based education infrastructure* in the Perry Choice Neighborhood, which is aligned with the mission and educational goals of the School District and the schools participating in the Mini-Education Pipeline. The *education infrastructure* would also consist of high-quality after-school programs, youth organizations, supportive services, learning centers with computers, access to tutors, and quiet places to study, along with programs and activities designed to build a college bound culture and neighborhood commitment to learning and academic excellence (Figure 1). The third task is to build a summer academic camp on neighborhood development, which is informed by project-based learning. The summer camp is designed both

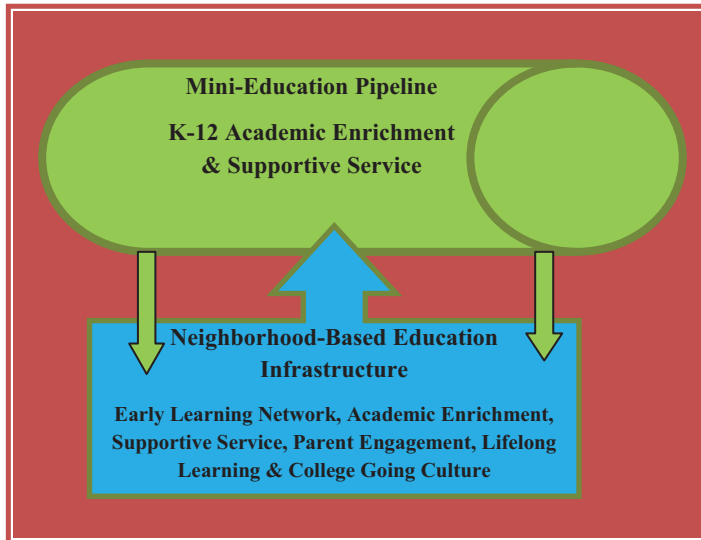


FIGURE 1 The Mini-Education Pipeline. Source: UB Center for Urban Studies. (color figure available online).

to prevent summer learning loss and to show children that a link exists between the things learned in the classroom and their ability to improve the conditions inside their neighborhood. This camp creates the ideal opportunity for the children to learn that the purpose of education is not only to acquire the skills needed to earn a living but also to build a better society.

The HUD Perry Choice Neighborhood Initiative

The Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) was the recipient of an inaugural HUD Choice Neighborhood planning grant. The Choice Initiative is a 2-year planning grant, after which the BMHA will apply for a \$30 million implementation grant. There are four dimensions of the Choice initiative that should be stressed. The first is that Choice demonstrates the powerful role that the federal government can play in catalyzing collaborative partnerships. A core principle of the Choice Initiative is the recognition that urban distress is caused by the interplay of multiple problems, thus the solution to these problems must be a multisector one. For this reason, HUD demands that Choice grantees build multisector collaboratives that include local governments. Here, the grantee is expected to leverage the ideas, capacities, and resources of multiple partners to address such problems as dilapidated housing, joblessness, family instability, crime and violence, and persistently low-achieving schools. Within this context, HUD expects the grantee to formulate a strategy for sustaining the initiative after the grant period.

HUD does not provide the grantee with a blueprint but rather stresses that each recipient should devise a plan based on the realities of his or her own local community. The third core principle is that education, including early learning, should be situated at the core of the planning initiative. The final principle is that residents must be engaged and involved in leadership positions at all

levels of the planning process and in all stages of the implementation plan. Thus, the HUD Choice strategy requires that a grantee engage in a new type of community organizing, which mobilizes not only the residents but the NGOs in the community as well, while building linkages with local government.

The BMHA contracted with the UB Center to serve as the project's planning coordinator. As the planning coordinator, the UB Center was strategically situated to play the lead in designing the planning strategy and organizing the PCN multisector collaborative. This brought together two *anchor institutions* to lead the planning initiative. Each of these two organizations brought a unique set of capacities to the PCN initiative. BMHA, the lead organization, is a "special-purpose" government entity with enormous power. It has its own development company, possesses bonding capacities, and is one of the largest landlords in the city. The UB Center is a research and neighborhood planning unit that is nationally recognized for its work on inner-city development.

The Neighborhood

The PCN is a mostly African American community (80%), along with a handful of Whites (14%) and Latinos (7%), which is situated in the southwestern corner of the city, near the Buffalo River (Figure 2). The PCN is bounded by Sycamore Avenue on the North, South Park Avenue on the South, Michigan Avenue to the West, and Smith Street to the East (Figure 2). The neighborhood is situated in a gritty landscape of vacant land, modest working-class cottages, abandoned houses, and factories, along with commercial and retail establishments.

Most PCN residents live on the economic margin. The neighborhood has a jobless rate of 58%, and 42% of the population lives below the poverty line. The median household income is only \$19,620, and a staggering 42% of households earn less than \$15,000 annually. For Blacks and other PCN working-class groups, the lack of affordable housing is a huge problem. According to HUD, the definition of affordability is that no more than 30% of one's income should be expended for housing. In the PCN, 48% of the population living in rental units pays 35% or more of their income on housing, with 38.3% paying 50% or more of their income on housing. This lack of affordable housing is a significant hardship for PCN families and reduces the amount that families can spend on other basic commodities such as food, medical care, clothing, transportation, and telephone service.

In Neoliberal America, the majority of PCN residents are not going to climb out of poverty. The mandated HUD goal of making all residents financially self-sufficient is not realistic in Buffalo or elsewhere. The reason is simple. The PCN residents do not have the education and training required to compete with White Buffalonians and/or suburban Whites for the best paying jobs and positions in Metropolitan Buffalo. In the United States, a high correlation exists between educational attainment and median annual earnings. A person with a bachelor's degree will make just over \$25,000 a year more than a person with less than a high school diploma (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Consequently, those with higher levels of education will earn markedly more than those with lower levels of education. In 2010, about 61% of PCN residents had a high school diploma or less (26.1%). About 29% of the population had "some college, but no degree," whereas only a handful of residents had college degrees. Figure 3 brings the relationship between place and education into sharp focus and demonstrate the challenge of Black East Side residents competing with

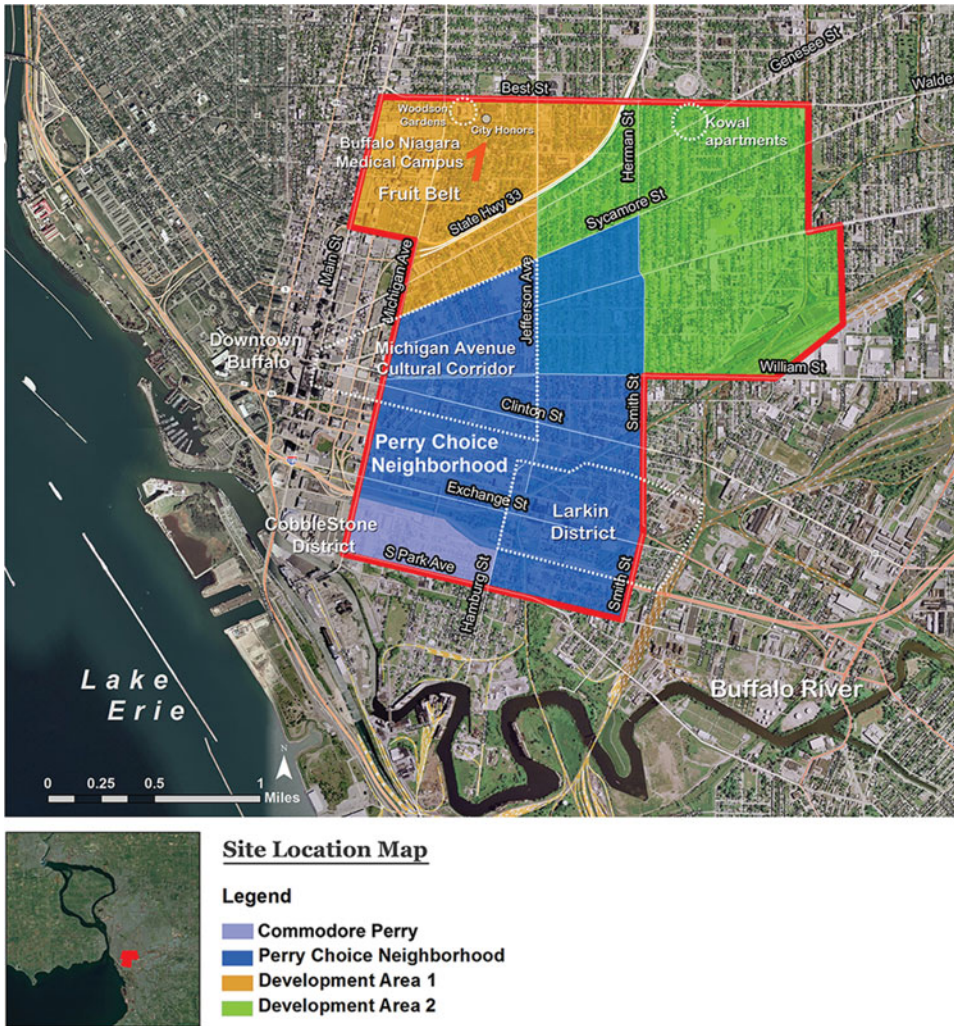


FIGURE 2 Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant. Source: UB Center for Urban Studies. (color figure available online).

Whites for “middle-income” jobs in metropolitan Buffalo. Moreover, when Buffalo schools are compared to other public schools in the metro, the Buffalo City School District is at the bottom of the region’s educational hierarchy, ranked 97 of 97 (Thomas, 2012). **Most of the schools attended by Blacks and Latinos are actually at the very bottom of the Western New York school hierarchy.** Given the handful of jobs in the city that fall into the middle-income cohort, the notion of PCN Blacks competing with metro Buffalo Whites for middle-income jobs is not realistic.

What does this observation mean for the PCN Initiative? In Buffalo, the starting point in the development of the Perry Choice Planning Initiative was the belief that “being poor” did not have to equate to living in a dilapidated, rundown neighborhood that was underserved and the site of

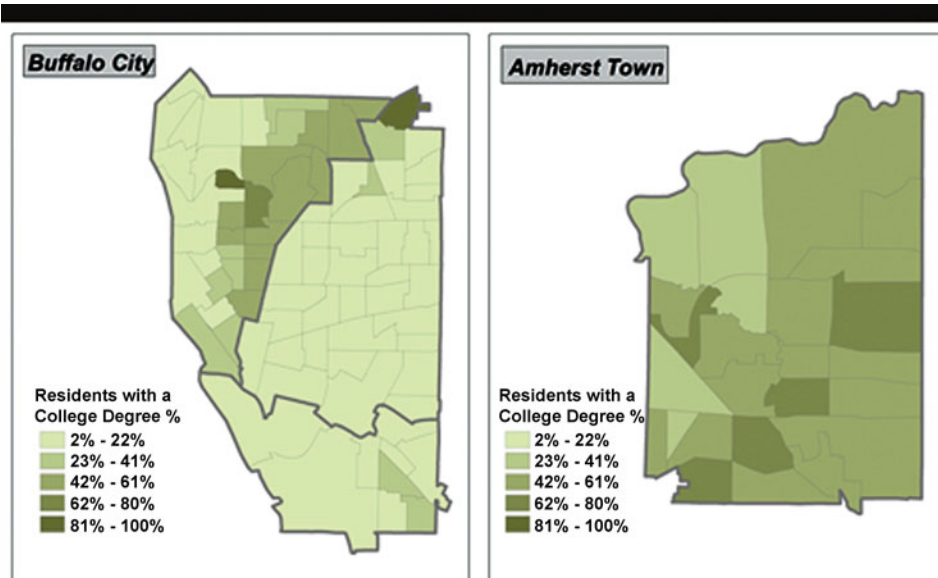


FIGURE 3 2010 ACS 5-year estimates data. (color figure available online).

disinvestment, abandonment, violence, crime and persistently low-achieving schools. Having a low income and living on the economic margin did not have to mean a life sentence in a distressed neighborhood. A goal of the Buffalo Perry Choice Initiative is to transform communities of poverty into communities of opportunities, thereby changing the traditional relationship between poverty and the quality of one's life. A goal of the planning initiative is also to increase the number of those individuals and families that are financially self-sufficient and to bolster the training and opportunities open to others while creating a neighborhood setting that bolsters the standard of living and the quality of life for all residents, regardless of where they fall on the income spectrum.

The Education Challenge

The process of interweaving school reform and neighborhood redevelopment involves meeting four key challenges—becoming part of the education regime, building the multisector education collaborative, building the neighborhood educational infrastructure, and establishing a K-12 academic enrichment and supportive service program. President Obama's White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which provides broad oversight for the government's place-based initiatives, catalyzed this effort by creating the Choice and Promise Neighborhood Planning Initiatives. These initiatives made it possible for the UB Center to move its work on education and neighborhood development to a new level.

The Promise Neighborhood Initiative, unlike Choice, requires that the grantee established a partnership with the school superintendent and the school board prior to submitting an application. The UB Center, in partnership with the Community Action Organization of Erie County, originally

planned to apply for the Promise Neighborhood Initiative. Although the UB Center and the CAO decided not to pursue the Promise Neighborhood Initiative, the effort nevertheless led to the development of a strong working relationship with the Buffalo School Superintendent. Later, when the BMHA won the Choice planning grant and selected the Center as its planning coordinator, then superintendent, Dr. William Fox, endorsed the initiative and worked with the BMHA to gain support for its education initiative from the school board.

Fox's support provided the legitimacy needed to pursue the PCN education strategy. To strengthen the relationship between the UB Center and the three schools identified as the core members of PCN education strategy, the superintendent called a meeting between the director of the UB Center and the three principals. This meeting solidified the partnership with the three schools (PS 400, PS 402 and Evans High School) and made it possible for the PCN to move forward with its strategy of building the multisector education collaborative. When Dr. Molly Wolfe was named the new superintendent in June 2012, the PCN education team had the momentum needed to continue their involvement within the education regime, albeit on the outer edges.⁶ The ability of the UB Center to organize the education collaborative was based on a combination of being legitimized through endorsements by the superintendent and school board and BMHA's receipt of the prestigious HUD Choice Neighborhood planning grant and the possibility of BMHA receiving a \$30 million implementation grant. These events positioned the UB Center and the BMHA to implement their education strategy.

Building the Mini-Education Pipeline—The Democratic Devolution Revolution

From the beginning, the UB Center conceived the building of the multisector education collaborative as the spawning of a Democratic Devolution Revolution in Buffalo. The UB Center used a democratic process to build the PCN multisector education collaborative. The template for the PCN education strategy was developed through an interactive process, which included focus groups, interviews, and working meetings with service providers and all three participating schools. This, combined with fieldwork in the neighborhood and traditional research, gave birth to the MEP strategy.

In forging the pipeline strategy, the team decided to avoid “classroom and curriculum” issues and not to get involved in the high-stakes testing debate. This was a tactical decision. In Buffalo, the “high-stakes testing” issue is embroiled in a fight between the Teachers Union and the State Board of Education, and there are millions of dollars involved in the union and state forging a satisfactory conclusion to this debate. Locally, this is viewed as a city versus state and federal government issue, and there is broad-based support for its elimination among principals, teachers, and union representatives. However, because of the way the problem is conceptualized, it is almost never discussed within the parameters of school reform issues at the building level.⁷

⁶The UB Center retained its connection with the regime through the tenure of an interim superintendent and the naming of a new superintendent. A number of important changes took place in the composition of the urban regime and the power relations within it. A discussion of these dynamics is beyond the scope of this article.

⁷Each priority schools—persistently low-achieving schools—must develop a reform strategy that is designed to transform conditions inside that school. That reform strategy must be approved by the district and the State Education Board and it becomes a template for improving academic outcomes in the school. Impacting school building and curriculum activities are extremely difficult within this context.

Within this context, it was believed that teachers and reform groups operating outside the education regime should lead this effort. Although the PCN team would be highly supportive of these efforts, the *in-school* strategy would be to focus on the development of programs and activities that would complement and reinforce classroom instruction, including increasing the resiliency and aspiration levels of the students. Thus, in this contextual environment, the PCN planning team consciously and intentionally forged a strategy that focused on developing programs that increased the skills, competencies, and aspirations of children, combined with the elimination of nonacademic barriers to educational achievement. In addition, the team sought to construct a neighborhood education infrastructure to support public education while aligning the MEP to progressive organizations outside the education regime.

The final plan was an evidence-driven strategy based on five research findings. The first was that nonacademic issues in the lives of children and their families form barriers that thwart the academic success of children. The second was that many students lack the skills, competencies, and aspirations required for them to succeed in school and life. Third, many children enter kindergarten or first grade not ready to learn. These cohorts start school behind other children and often never catch up. Fourth, the majority of students are not enrolled in any after-school programs, nor do they attend academic-based summer programs. Fifth, distressed inner-city neighborhoods do not have an infrastructure that supports the education mission of the school district or a learning culture that supports lifelong learning and/or going to college. These five research findings informed the design of the MEP.

The MEP is a new type of multisector education collaborative. It is composed of 45 service providers, four participating schools, the UB Center, and the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority. Moreover, the MEP is one component of a larger collaborative—the People Collaborative, which is a subsection of the Perry Choice Neighborhood Collaborative (Figure 4). The MEP, in turn, is part of the Education Success⁸ and Students Can Succeed United Front of School Reform Groups. This is the group that directly connects the MEP to the school district. This organizational relationship makes it possible for the MEP to have direct links to the school district as a whole while engaging in building level school reform work with PS 400,⁹ PS 402, Evans High School, and Redshire High School.¹⁰

Although the MEP has established itself as a major school reform initiative, and occupies a strategic place in the city's reform movement, it is nevertheless in a very tenuous position. The ability of the MEP to maintain its standing in the education regime is based on its ability to generate millions of dollars to support its activities. It has the potential of generating significant funding from the HUD Choice grant that initially enabled the MEP to establish itself as a major factor in the school reform movement. However, to survive, the MEP must acquire the capacity to raise significant resources to sustain its activities. Without such a fiscal base, the MEP will wane in importance. Currently, the MEP has established an aggressive income generating strategy and has already started to implement it. The long-term success of this model depends on its ability to generate the forces necessary to further grow and sustain it.

⁸These are pseudonyms for educational nonprofit groups in the city.

⁹These are pseudonyms for our partner schools.

¹⁰Redshire joined the Mini-Education Pipeline after it was established.

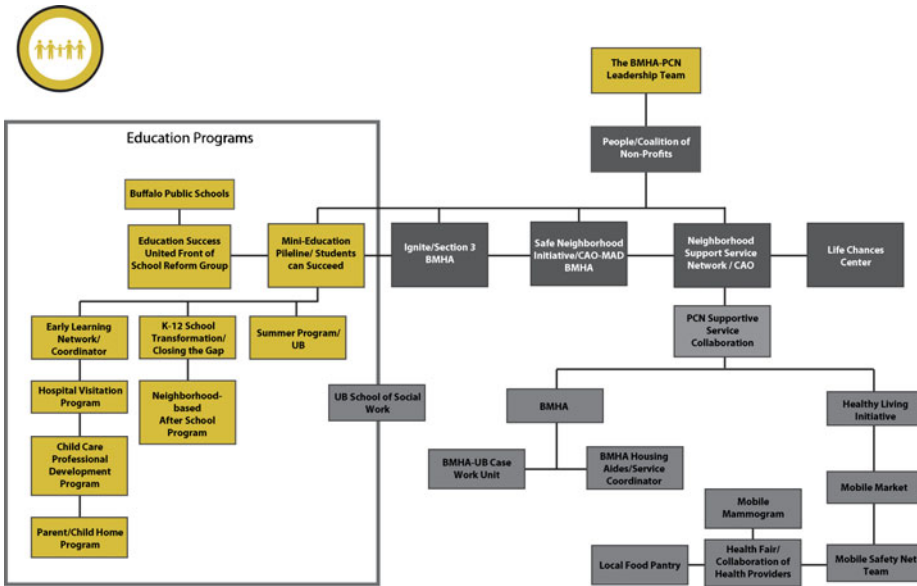


FIGURE 4 BMHA Perry Choice Neighborhood People Organizational Chart. (color figure available online).

CONCLUSION

The literature on social stratification argues that the purpose of schooling is to reproduce the social order (Anyon, 1980; Calarco, 2011; Lareau, 2002; Willis, 1977). If this is the case, then persistently low-achieving public schools are doing their job. With a high percentage of students dropping out of school or graduating not ready for college or a job (that which provides a livable income), the majority of Blacks and Latinos living in distressed urban neighborhoods will continue to be structurally locked in the economic basement of American society. This will happen because they do not have the skills and competencies to compete with better educated central city and suburban Whites. If schools are not designed to reproduce the social order, then the American educational system is a broken one, in serious need of repair. Either way, unless the approach to education in the United States is radically changed, the public school system, regardless of conscious intent, will continue to structurally function to reproduce the existing social order.

The approach outlined in this article argues that we can bring about a change in the education of inner-city students in three interrelated ways. The first, and most important, is to create interactive linkages between schools and distressed neighborhoods. **This means that a strong educational infrastructure, anchored by high-quality early learning programs, must be built in inner-city neighborhoods.** These programs must be aligned with the stated mission and goals of the school district. The goal is to ensure that every child reaches kindergarten or first grade ready to learn. The second is to establish high-quality K-12 academic enrichment and supportive service programs. These programs should seek to accomplish two interrelated goals. The first is to bolster significantly the skills, competencies, and aspirations of the students so they will be able to achieve academic success. Second, through a robust supportive service program, remove nonacademic barriers to

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educational success. The third key to altering educational outcomes for inner-city students is to establish high-quality summer enrichment programs, providing project-based learning experiences that focus on community development. The summer programs will prevent “summer loss of learning” and create opportunities to strengthen the skill base of students and bolster their aspiration levels. The development of this type of approach to education reform will require the building of a multisector collaborative, which is best developed and led by higher education. Only such an organization will have the capacity and legitimacy required to take on the urban education regime.

There are limitations to this approach to school reform. This approach does not deal with issues of classroom instruction or other issues that occur within the school building. Most important, however, the approach does not deal with the larger issue of high-stakes testing. The reason is these larger challenges are best tackled by groups operating outside the urban education regime. Issues such as high-stakes testing, for example, require action at both the state and national levels. This is where the inside and outside strategy approach would be most effective. The outside strategy should concentrate on those activities that require the mobilization of the masses and that need a more radicalized approach to meet with success. There is tremendous support for eliminating high-stakes testing among children and teachers, but this policy measure is attached to millions of dollars of support to school districts. As long as this battle is fought at the local and school building levels, it has a low probability of meeting with success. So it must be waged against the education regimes operating at the state and national levels.

However, if the inside and outside strategy is implemented and if the democratic multisector education collaborative is built, then inner-city public schools can be transformed into institutions of neighborhood development that will produce academically successful children that will grow into critically conscious and engaged adults. If this happens, schooling in inner-city neighborhoods will be effectively repurposed. It will no longer be about reproducing the existing social order but the building of a new society anchored by democracy, equity and racial, social, economic and environmental justice.

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