Schools as Anchor Institutions for Inner-City Revitalization

7

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Public Schools as Neighborhood Anchor Institutions: The Choice Neighborhood Initiative in Buffalo, New York

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Introduction

When I grew up in North Nashville, Tennessee, African Americans mostly went to Ford Green elementary, Washington Junior High or Pearl High. These were feeder schools that typically kept classmates together from the first grade through high school, thereby fusing them into a network of friends and acquaintances, regardless of the social status of their parents.[1] North Nashville was a cross-class community composed of blacks from across the income spectrum, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, university professors, preachers, professionals, business persons, racketeers, police, fireman, porters, janitors, waitresses and blacks who were barely able to eke out a living. Institutions, like the church and public schools, blended together these diverse social groups and transformed them into one people, despite the socioeconomic cleavages that separated them.

Back in those days, the school, even more so than the church, melded the population together and gave the community a sense of pride and *oneness.* Schools were sacred neighborhood institutions and sources of great pride. Pearl High, for example, was an iconic symbol of North Nashville, not just because of its legendary basketball teams, but also because generations of family members graduated from it. My uncle, mother and brother went to Pearl High, and so too did most of my neighbors. Older and younger family members often had the same teachers, and there existed a "community memory" of Pearl High, and its place in the life and lore of North Nashville. These "memories" bonded the community together and reinforced neighborhood traditions, mutual respect and solidarity.

Teachers were an omnipresent feature of the North Nashville landscape. You saw them on neighborhood streets and in the grocery store, pharmacy, bank and church. They led organizations, were scout masters, summer park recreation leaders, little league baseball coaches and engines of neighborhood growth and development. In North Nashville and other black communities across the United States, public schools were neighborhood anchor institutions (Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Milner & Howard, 2004).

In the post-Civil Rights era, this started to change. As inner-city public schools faltered and black neighborhood conditions worsened, the role of schools in the neighborhood and community building process changed radically. The school choice strategy was the big culprit. The school choice idea was rooted in the neoliberal view of introducing accountability through forms of market-based competition and expanded parental choice. The advocates of this school reform strategy claimed that increased parental choice would force schools to bolster academic outcomes by making them more responsive and efficient (Hoxby, 2003). Parents would become consumers with the ability to send their children to the best schools in the district. This increased competition among schools would lead to the improvement of all schools as they competed for students within an open market. The choice approach also severed the traditional relationship between schools and communities, thus ending the era of neighborhood schools and diminishing the role of inner-city schools as anchor institutions.

This strategy failed. The school choice method did not improve school performance and student academic achievement among black, Latino and Native Americans (Swanson, 2009). The persistence of the urban education crisis caused US President Barack Obama to reexamine the link between schools and neighborhoods. There is an irony evident in the paradox of the Obama Administration, with its core belief in school choice, initiating policies that seek to go "back to the future" by establishing place-based school reform strategies. At the core of both the Promise and Choice Neighborhood Initiatives is the notion of formulating strategies that essentially lead to the creation of de facto neighborhood schools, which are repurposed as community assets and anchor institutions (Khadduri, Schwartz & Turnham, 2008).

Using a social institutional and neoliberal framework, this chapter will explore this theme by examining the HUD Perry Choice Neighborhood Planning Initiative in Buffalo, New York. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the role played by the "choice" strategy in undermining the role of schools as anchor institutions, while section two examines the connection between neighborhood conditions and educational reform. In the final section, the HUD Perry Choice Neighborhood and the repurposing of schools as anchor institutions is discussed.

Public Schools as Anchor Institutions

Inner-city public schools are anchor institutions that are situated in distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhoods. They are rooted in these locales because of their mission, capital investment and clientele (Harkavy & Zuckerman, 1999; Netter Center for Community Partnerships, 2008). This spatial immobility (Cox & Mair, 1988) creates an expectation that anchors will play a role in improving and developing the neighborhoods of which they are apart. This motivation of anchors is based on the interplay of mission, self-interest and sometimes government incentives. According to the Anchor Institution Task Force (AITF), for an institution to be considered an "anchor" it must be more than merely *rooted* in a neighborhood, also it must promote positive socioeconomic development and social justice in that neighborhood. Anchor institutions, then, from an AITF perspective, are obligated to play a positive role in the development of their host communities. Spatially immobile institutions typically achieve an "anchor institution" status when they realize it is in their "self-interest" to become engaged with their local community. When this consciousness is institutionalized, the investment activities of anchors become sustainable (Porter, 2010; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Developing and institutionalizing "anchor institution consciousness" is a complex task for inner-city schools because they operate under the auspices of superintendents, school boards and, in some instances, local government. So, their actions at the neighborhood level are dependent on approvals by the central school administration. Regardless, the fate of inner-city schools and distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhoods are co-mingled. The reason is that school performance, student academic achievement and neighborhood conditions are interactive (Owens, 2010; Sinha, Payne & Cook, 2005). Even if a child lives in an underdeveloped neighborhood, but attends a school outside that community, his or her academic performance will still be impacted by neighborhood conditions. Consequently, neighborhood regeneration and school reform must march in tandem. This is what Jeffrey Canada, founder of the Harlem Children's Zone, meant when he said, "Fix the schools without fixing the families and community, and children will fail; but they will also fail if you improve the surrounding community without fixing the schools" (Tough, 2004).

Schools and neighborhoods are intertwined because neighborhoods are not just *neutral sites* where everyday life and culture unfolds; rather they are catalytic places that will positively or negatively influence socioeconomic outcomes of its residents, including the children (Driscoll, 2001). The reason is that neighborhoods act on people and people act on the neighborhoods, with social institutions functioning as a mediating force betwixt and between them. For example, the neighborhood effects literature argues that poorly

organized, distressed and underdeveloped neighborhoods will contribute to negative socioeconomic outcomes such as poverty, joblessness, dilapidation, poor health, food insecurity, mental illness and children with persistently low levels of academic achievement. On the flip side, highly organized, thriving and developed neighborhoods are argued to contribute to positive socioeconomic outcomes by providing the community with the capacity, resources and supports that are needed to produce a vibrant, thriving and healthy place with positive socioeconomic outcomes.

This is where education and schooling become critical factors. Inner-city schools are not immune to the challenges facing distressed neighborhoods, because the children living in such places will bring the issues that originate in their home and community with them to school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Dryfoos, 1994; Raikes, Luze, Brooks-Gunn, Raikes, Pan, Tamis-LeMonda, Constantine, Tarullo & Rodriguez, 2006). Moreover, the lack of neighborhood-based infrastructure, which supports education, means that many inner-city children will not meet critical developmental milestones. This, along with the lack of neighborhood-based infrastructure will negatively influence student academic achievement and ensure that inner-city children will not meet critical developmental milestones (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002; Sarsour, Sheridan, Jutte, Nuru-Jeter, Hinshaw & Boyce, 2010).[2]

Given the scenario just outlined, it is in the interest of schools to become anchors that work with others to improve the conditions of life found inside distressed, underdeveloped neighborhoods, thereby eliminating non-academic barriers that thwart school performance and educational achievement. This perspective is based on the hypothesis that neighborhoods matter in determining the educational outcome of students living in distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhoods. If this hypothesis is correct, then, the academic outcomes of inner-city students will not improve significantly until the neighborhoods in which they live are improved. For this reasons, it is important to repurpose schools and make invaluable neighborhood assets.

School Choice

The school choice strategy is the main obstacle to achieving this task. This approach emerged in the post-Civil Rights era, starting with the busing efforts beginning in the 1960s, which sought to desegregate the schools, often under court order. The school choice movement, which grew exponentially with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s, is a building-centric method based on the belief that school characteristics are the prime determinant of student academic achievement. Within this framework, school performance is bolstered by creating competition among the schools, which are reconstituted as entrepreneurial institutions designed to compete in a highly competitive education marketplace
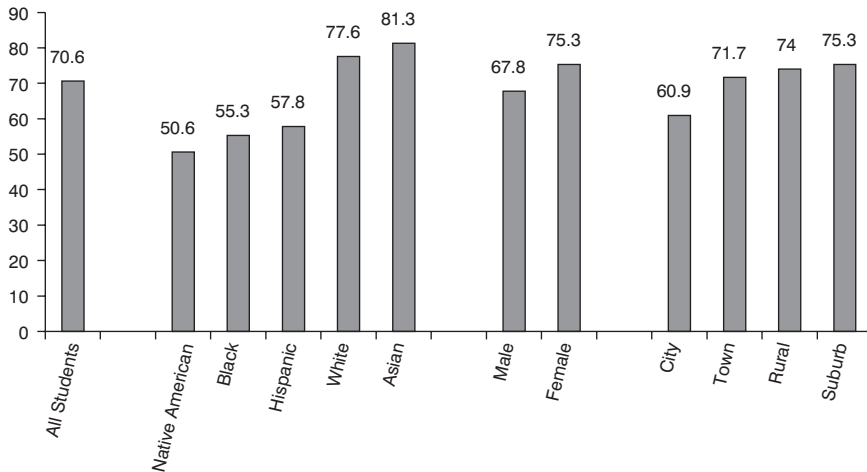
FIGURE 7.1   National Graduation Rates (Percentage), Class of 2005

(Betts & Loveless, 2005; Henig & Sugarman, 2000; Hoxby, 2003). In this setting, students and families are reimagined as consumers with the power to choose their own school from a menu of options.[3] According to neoliberal market theory, competition will improve the quality of education by forcing "poor schools" to fail, or adopt better teaching methods and curriculum, or be taken over by those with better ideas on how to run the schools and teach the children. The neoliberal school choice model, then, would solve the education crisis.

This did not happen. The neoliberal school choice model failed to deliver on its promise of improving the quality of inner-city schools (Henig, 1994; Hursh, 2007; Swanson, 2009). The high school graduation rate is the single most important indicator of school performance in the United States. This metric makes it clear that US public schools are in a crisis mode. For example, a 2009 report by the Education Research Center indicated that three in ten students fail to finish high school with a diploma and that almost 50 percent of Native Americans, blacks and Latinos did not graduate from high school in 2005 (Figure 7.1).[4]

The education crisis is a crisis of the central city. For example, among 71 of the nation's largest metropolitan area, the graduation rate for central cities was 59.3 percent and 77.3 percent for suburbs, a differential of 18 percent. A significant number of these central cities (22 percent) had graduation rates of 55 percent or less, including New York City, Columbus, Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Nashville, Albuquerque, Wichita, Milwaukee and Cleveland. The school choice model also failed in Buffalo and other New York State central cities. In 2012, for example, Buffalo's graduation rate (4-year graduates) was 54 percent, which placed it ahead of Syracuse and Rochester, with graduation rates of 48.4 percent

and 45.5 percent respectively. Nationally, the Schott Foundation (2010) for Education listed Buffalo as one of the ten lowest performing school districts for black males in the United States, along with New York City, Cleveland, Detroit, Charleston County, South Carolina, Duval, Palm Beach, Dade and Pinellas counties in Florida and Jefferson County in Louisiana.

Merryl H. Tisch, Chancellor of the Board of Regents, stressed that the education problem is more than an issue of students not graduating from high school, but it is also an issue of them graduating from high school without being ready for college or a career. He said, "New York's overall graduation rate has improved, but nearly a quarter of our students still don't graduate after four years. And too many of those students who do graduate aren't ready for college and careers" (New York State Education Department, 2012). This concern was echoed in a 2012 report by the American College Test (ACT), which indicated that 60 percent of the 2012 high school graduates are at risk of struggling in college and in their careers. African Americans were the most at-risk group among this cohort (ACT, 2012).

The school choice movement failed because the transformation of the black institutional ghetto into a distressed, jobless, underdeveloped community in the post-Civil Rights era undermined the schooling process (Wilson, 1996). The interaction of two forces caused neighborhood decline to impact the schooling process. First, in neoliberal society, poverty and low incomes keep working class black families from purchasing the commodities needed for their children to develop the attitudes, skills and competencies required for success in school and in the workforce. Second, in the post-Civil Rights era, the rise of neoliberalism triggered the *institutional failure* of organizations servicing the black community. Social institutions are mediating institutions that are obligated to help low-income residents manage successfully the problems generated by the neoliberal economic and urban growth processes. When these institutional are dysfunctional and do not work properly, residents feel the full brunt of the negative socioeconomic forces spawned by the urban economic and growth processes. When low incomes meet institutional failure in neoliberal society the resultant outcome is social dislocation with its concomitant inadequate schools and student academic underachievement.

The guiding thesis is that poverty and low incomes do not automatically equate with hardship, misery and institutional failure. During the ghetto era, when the welfare state was a fixture of the liberal democratic order, the black community was anchored by the philosophy of racial solidarity and self-help. In this setting, blacks built an institutional framework to support and inform everyday life and culture. Collectively, these social institutions not only formed the social glue which held the community together, but also they functioned as a mediating force that lessened hardship, while simultaneously providing residents with the ability to set social norms and fight to improve their lives in a
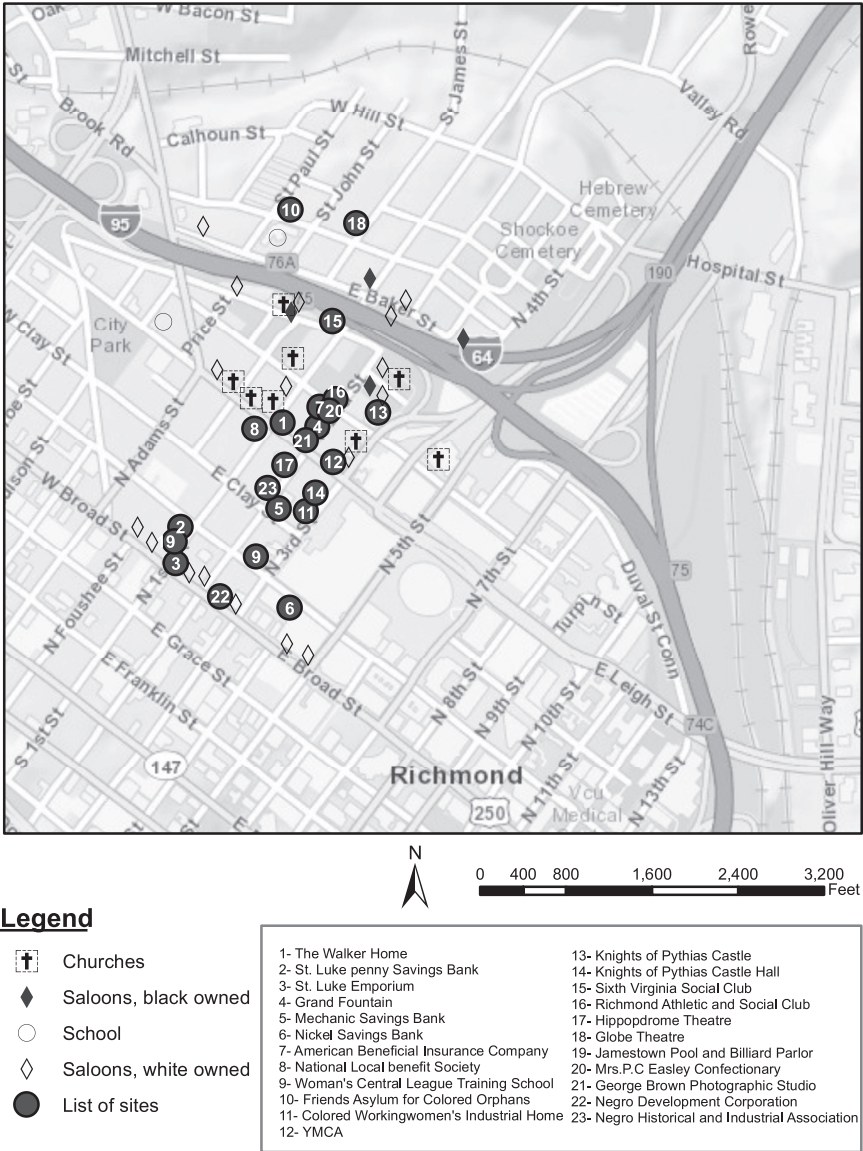
racist, class-stratified society (Bertaux & Washington, 2005; Milner & Howard, 2004). The dramatic victories against school segregation and the stunning success of the Civil Rights Movement are the metrics that provide evidence of the strength of those institutions serving the black community. For example, in Black Richmond, in the early 20th century, within a four-block area between Broad and Charity streets to the east and west and First and Fourth streets to the north and south there were a host of social institutions: Richmond Hospital, Women's Central League Training School and Hospital, Friends Asylum for Colored Orphans, Colored Workingman's Industrial Home and Nursery, YMCA, Kings of Pythias Castle, Knights of Pythias Castle Hall, Sixth Virginia Social Club, Richmond Athletic and Social Club, Hippodrome Theater, George Brown Photographic Studio, Negro Development Corporation, and Negro Historical and Industrial Association (Map 7.1). These and other institutions formed the framework that helped Black Richmond advance during the Jim Crow era and ultimately shatter the ghetto walls. The Richmond story could be repeated in just about every city where blacks lived.

Black urban life changed dramatically following the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s. From the late 1960s onward, the triumph of neoliberal capitalism combined with the integration movement and the demise of the welfare state to catalyze an astounding breakdown of the institutional foundation of the black community and trigger a corresponding sharp rise in black social dislocations. In this new black residential setting, operating in the context of neoliberalism society, and a weakened institutional framework, the disappearance of work, the crack cocaine epidemic and the mass incarceration movement combined to devastate the black community (Mauer, 2006).

The breakdown of the public schools, more than any other institutions, made grappling successfully with the challenges posed by neoliberal society difficult, if not impossible. Concurrently, the public schools are interconnected with other institutions in the black community. Therefore, to improve the schools and rebuild the neighborhood, it is necessary to redesign and rebuild the entire neighborhood institutional framework. To gain insights into ways to reform the schools, and recreate them as neighborhood anchors with a social purpose, within the context of redesigning the dysfunctional *social institutional infrastructure* of distressed neighborhoods, we examined Buffalo's Perry Choice Neighborhood.
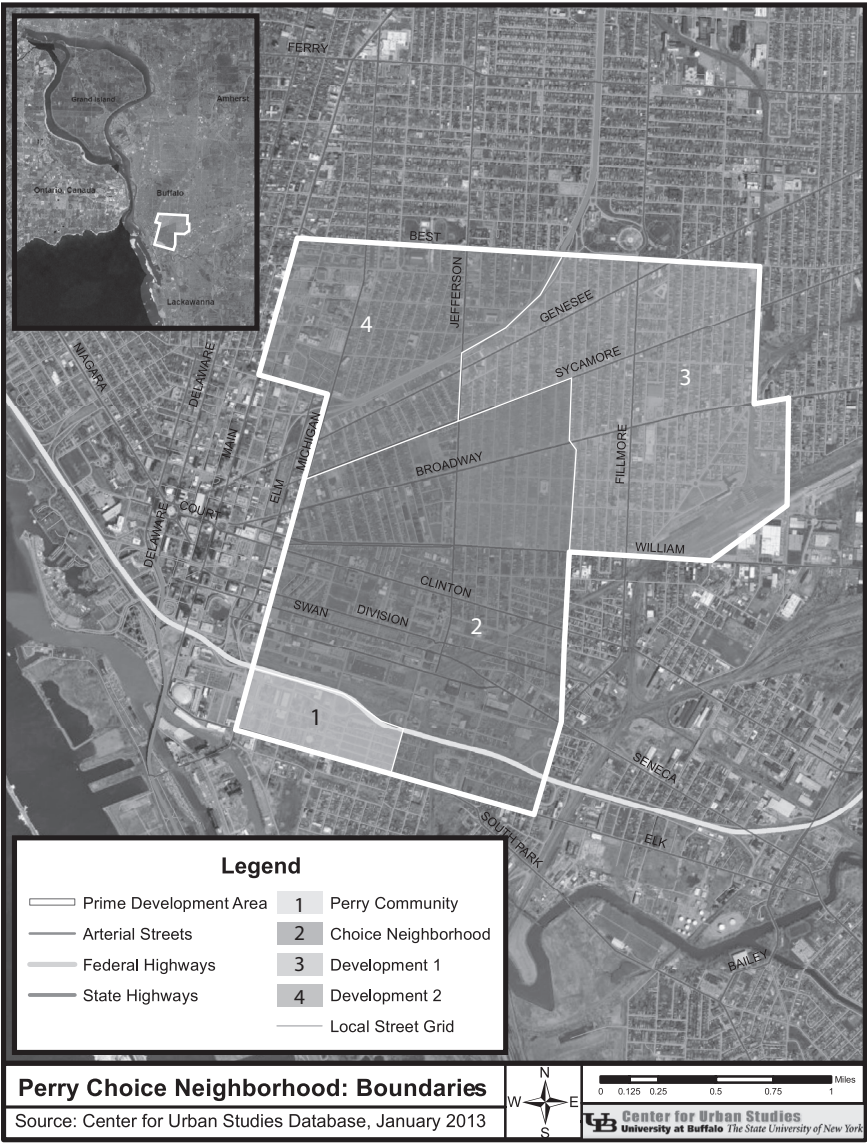
The Perry Choice Neighborhood

The Perry Choice Neighborhood (PCN) is a mostly African American community (80 percent), along with a handful of whites (14 percent) and Latinos (7 percent), which is situated in the southwestern corner of the City, near the Buffalo River (Map 7.2). The PCN is not a neutral site where everyday

MAP 7.1   Black Richmond, Virginia in 1920s [Institutions overlaid on 2010 Map]

Legend

✝	Churches
♦	Saloons, black owned
○	School
◇	Saloons, white owned
⬤	List of sites

1- The Walker Home
2- St. Luke penny Savings Bank
3- St. Luke Emporium
4- Grand Fountain
5- Mechanic Savings Bank
6- Nickel Savings Bank
7- American Beneficial Insurance Company
8- National Local benefit Society
9- Woman's Central League Training School
10- Friends Asylum for Colored Orphans
11- Colored Workingwomen's Industrial Home
12- YMCA
13- Knights of Pythias Castle
14- Knights of Pythias Castle Hall
15- Sixth Virginia Social Club
16- Richmond Athletic and Social Club
17- Hippopdrome Theatre
18- Globe Theatre
19- Jamestown Pool and Billiard Parlor
20- Mrs.P.C Easley Confectionary
21- George Brown Photographic Studio
22- Negro Development Corporation
23- Negro Historical and Industrial Association

life and culture unfolds, but rather it is a dynamic place that influences the attitudes, values, beliefs and aspirations of the people living there. The PCN is bounded by Sycamore Avenue to the north, South Park Avenue to the south, Michigan Avenue to the west and Smith Street to the east. The neighborhood is situated in a gritty landscape of vacant land, modest working class cottages,

MAP 7.2   The Perry Choice Neighborhood and Environs

abandoned houses and building and factories, along with commercial and retail establishments.

Most PCN residents live on the economic margin. The neighborhood has a jobless rate of 58 percent and 42 percent of the population live below the poverty line. The median household income is only $19,620 and a staggering

42 percent 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, which depresses their already low wages. Accordable to HUD, the acceptable definition of affordability is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of their income for housing. In the PCN, 48 percent of the population living in rental units pays 35 percent or more of their income on housing, with 38.3 percent paying 50 percent or more of their income on housing. This lack of affordable housing is a significant hardship for PCN families, and it reduces the amount that families can spend on other basic commodities, such as food, medical care, clothing, transportation, and telephone service.

In neoliberal society, the residents' low educational levels chain them to the economic margins, because a correlation exists between education attainment and median annual earnings. Simply put, annually, those with higher levels of education will earn markedly more than people with lower levels of education. For example, a person with a Bachelor's degree will make about $25,000 a year more than a person with less than a high school diploma (US Census, 2006–2010). In 2010 about 61 percent of PCN residents had a high school diploma or less (26.1 percent). About 29 percent of the population had "some college, but no degree," while only a handful of residents had college degrees. Thus, it is not likely that most PCN residents, without obtaining specialized skills training, will be able to improve considerably their economic plight. They are situated at the bottom of the City's economic order.

Poverty, Low Incomes and Schooling

Williams Julius Wilson argues that from the late 1960s onward, the disappearance of work undermined black life and culture and destabilized the inner-city schooling process. In his analysis of Chicago he noted that, "For the first time in the twentieth century most adults in many inner city ghetto neighborhoods are not working in a typical week" (Wilson, 1996). Wilson's observations certainly mirrored the Buffalo experience. Life on the economic margins combined with institutional failures to create serious educational challenges for PCN residents. For example, these residents did not have the fiscal resources to provide their children with the real-life experiences, academic enrichment and social supports necessary for them to develop the resiliency, aspiration, skills and competencies required to succeed in school and in life. The CEO of the Buffalo Hearing and Speech Center said that top early learning centers spend from $12,000 to $15,000 per child, but inner-city early learning programs do not even begin to approach these spending levels (J. Cozzo, Personal communication, 2012). The government does provide subsidies and vouchers, but they are too low, so PCN parents cannot use them to purchase access to high quality early learning programs. There are numerous licensed and unlicensed daycare centers in

the Perry Choice Neighborhoods, but these are not the type of high quality academic based centers that will get children ready for first grade.

   This is just part of the problem. These parents/caregivers also do not have enough money to take their children on vacations and field trips that will enrich their lives, expand their horizons, and trigger their curiosity and desire to learn. Many residents cannot afford a computer or access to the internet, or fill up their home with books and magazines. Indeed, many parent/caregivers do not know how to create a literacy rich home environment that encourages their child to read, problem-solve and become excited about learning new things (Raikes et al., 2006). Moreover, many parents/caregivers do not even know the appropriate way to dialogue with their children or how to read to them properly. These conditions are the result of institution failure operating in the context of low incomes. The outcome is that most PCN children will reach first grade not ready to learn, thereby placing them at great risk to dropout or not finish high school ready for college or entry into the workforce.

   There are other problems that erect obstacles to school performance and student academic success. In distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhoods even the physical environment contributes to the construction of non-academic barriers to school performance and student academic success. For example, in these communities, the unhealthy housing units and the dilapidated, unkempt and foreboding visual appearance of the neighborhood functions as a disincentive to learning, growing and developing. The average PCN dwelling unit was built in 1947, more than sixty years ago. Many them are out-of-date, unsafe, unhealthy and do not even provide children with a good place to read and study. As part of the Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant, the UB Center for Urban Studies conducted focus groups with K–12 students who lived in the Commodore Perry Homes. The children at Perry were mostly in middle and high school, and they attended almost ten different schools. In addition to these children, focus groups were also held with students attending East High school. The participants ranged in age from 12 to 17 years.[5] The children attending these focus groups complained about not having access to computers or quiet places to study, either at home or in the community. They also complained about the rundown appearance of the neighborhood and about landlords who are slow to fix things when they are broken. In this setting, children often feel alienated, helpless and hopeless, and this places them at risk for making bad decisions or yielding to temptations, such as joining gangs, engaging in premature sex, and using drugs and alcohol.[6]

The Social Institution Framework

Before discussing Obama's Choice Neighborhood strategy, we want to return the discussion to the dysfunctional institutional structure found in the PCN.

By social institutional structure, we are referring to all those neighborhood institutions that form a system that is meant to promote upward mobility, self-sufficiency, or improved quality of life, including those institutions that provide activities such as literacy training, early learning, primary education, adult education, job training, day care, youth services, physical and mental health services, transportation, economic development, safety and security, and other programs and activities for which the community demonstrates a need (Choice Neighborhoods Grant Program, 2012).[7] This system is composed mostly of non-profit community-based organizations and private companies that must compete with each other for limited grants and contracts, which fund their operations, in a highly competitive supportive service marketplace. There are some institutions that are funded by government, but their budgets are very unstable, and they must augment their finances by competing for grants and contracts.

The highly competitive nature of this battle for funding causes many organizations to retreat into silos and prioritize the survival of their organizations over the delivery of services. Concurrently, the PCN social institutions are there to help the residents grapple successfully with a range of urban issues. Also, as part of the HUD Choice Neighborhood Initiative, the UB Center for Urban Studies was required to conduct a Needs Assessment of the PCN. According to the survey, most residents did not even know the type of supportive services that existed in the neighborhood. This, combined with the absence of a good intra-neighborhood transportation system, meant that residents rarely used the supportive service institutions found in their own neighborhood. Concurrently, a number of neighborhood-based institutions did not even track the number of neighborhood residents that used their services. Most did not even have an outreach program to attract residents to their services. These institutions were in the neighborhood, but treated it as nothing more than the site where they were located. A big reason is that the clientele of many institutions came from outside the neighborhood, and those that serviced a neighborhood market seemed to have a niche and did not have the resource base to expand. The neighborhood-based institutions worked mostly in silos and had little or no understanding of how their services impacted the neighborhood and/or its residents. Indeed, there was not a single institution in the neighborhood that systematically measured their impact on neighborhood life and culture. The result is the PCN neighborhood social institution structure does not provide the individuals, children and families with the supports they need to grapple successfully with the challenges they face.

The plight of the neighborhood's early learning institution framework will illustrate this point. The existing PCN early learning network consists of a handful of head start and early head start programs, along with a parent–child home program, about 22 licensed daycare centers, and an indeterminate

number of unlicensed daycare centers. There are two major problems with the institutional network. First, head start is the most sophisticated of these early learning programs, but they can only service a small number of children. In metropolitan Buffalo, the Community Action Organization of Erie County (CAO) operates 63 Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These programs, however, provide services for only about 1,102 children. In the PCN alone, there were 1,422 children of five years of age and younger living in the community. Most important, according to Nate Hare, executive director of the CAO, it is virtually impossible to get new Head Start applications approved (Personal communication, 2012).

There are about 300 children attending the licensed daycare centers in and near the PCN, but most of the centers have not been certified by QualitystarsNY, which is a system for determining high quality daycare centers. We do not know how many children are in unlicensed programs, but we suspect that many more children attend these unlicensed daycare programs or they stay at home with their mother or caregiver. In both of these settings, we believe that the children are not getting the type of stimulation and experiences that would get them ready to read and excited about learning. There is a very strong Parent–Child Home Program (www.parent-child.org) operating in the PCN, but the organization does not have the resources to expand its operations. The PCN early childhood institutional framework is a dysfunctional one that is not preparing most PCN children to enter first grade ready to learn. As long as this institutional framework is not working properly, African Americans are going to struggle in Buffalo schools, no matter what type of reform system the various schools adopt.

The really bad news is that many of Buffalo's inner-city primary schools are inadequate. Consequently, even if a PCN child gets to first grade ready to succeed, the absence of a pre-K to primary school transitional program will cause many of these students to lose ground before they reach fourth grade. Standardized tests show that the cognitive benefits that are derived from their participation in early invention programs quickly erode and vanish by fourth grade. Scholars refer to this as "fade-out" – "the gradual convergence in test scores of the children who participated in early learning programs with comparable children who had not" (Strategic Research Group, 2011; Wilson, 1996).

The purpose of this section has been to use examples of the PCN early learning network and elementary school issues to demonstrate the problem of failed inner-city institutions. Similar examples could have been drawn from any set of institutions in the PCN: health, youth development, food security, job training and employment, economic development, and transportation. All these institutions have failed in their responsibility to provide effective and efficient services to residents in the PCN; and these failed social institutions represent a huge problem in distressed, jobless, and underdeveloped neighborhoods.

The Obama Choice Neighborhood Strategy

The Obama Administration recognized that failed social institutions were part of the landscape of inner-city communities (Whitehouse.gov: Administration, Executive Office of the President, Office of Urban Affairs, Initiatives, Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative; online). Implicit in the establishment of the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative was the view that community-based social institutions have failed to design the type of interconnected solutions that were required to solve problems such as concentrated poverty, unemployment, broken homes, violence, crime and failing schools. So, shortly after his election in 2008, President Obama launched the White House initiative to tackle this issue. He approached the problem by recreating the federal–local partnership through the establishment of place-based initiatives anchored by the interweaving of school reform and neighborhood regeneration. The Obama strategy was informed by five interrelated principles:

1   Interdisciplinary – to address the interconnected problems in distressed neighborhoods;
2   Coordinated – to align the requirements of federal programs so that local communities can more readily braid together different funding streams;
3   Place-based – to leverage investments by geographically targeting resources and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action;
4   Data- and results-driven – to facilitate program monitoring and evaluation, to guide action needed to make adjustments in policy or programming, and to learn what works and develop best practices; and
5   Flexible – to adapt to changing conditions on the ground.

Operating within this context, the Choice and Promise neighborhood initiatives were implemented as projects designed to demonstrate the practicality of a regeneration strategy based on the interplay of neighborhood revitalization and school reform. These two initiatives were essentially the same, but differed in terms of emphasis and target population. Choice seeks to revitalize those neighborhoods with a significant concentration of dilapidated public housing or assisted housing units, while Promise targets those distressed communities without such a concentration of public or assisted housing. Within this scenario, both programs are comprehensive place-based strategies informed by the credo *you cannot reform schools without transforming the neighborhoods of which they are a part*.[8] In this regard, it is best to think of Promise and Choice not as one initiative, but as multiple initiatives anchored around the transformation of a particular place.

To fund these place-based strategies, Obama sought to restructure the operations of several key federal departments, so their investments would be more closely aligned with his place-based initiatives. This increased efficiency

would make the federal investments more effective. Concurrently, Obama sought incentivized collaboration, especially cross-sector ones, among non-profits at the neighborhood levels. He did this by providing organizations extra points on grant applications if they were working in collaboration with partners in high priority place-based initiatives. This approach was based on the notion that interconnected social problems demanded interconnected solutions. For this to happen, non-profits would have to abandon their silos and work in collaboration with others. The inaugural Choice and Promise Neighborhood request for proposals were announced in early 2011, and the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) in partnership with the University at Buffalo Center for Urban Studies applied for the Choice planning grant.[9] That spring, the BMHA was one of 17 inaugural planning applicants selected from a pool of 119 aspirants.

The Perry Choice Neighborhood Planning Initiative

The Choice Neighborhood Initiative, although operating within a HUD framework, still gave locales considerable leeway to design their solutions. In the Perry Choice neighborhood, the planning team placed school reform at the core of its theory of neighborhood change, with the goal of interweaving school reform, neighborhood regeneration, and institutional redesign. The reason is the development of social capital and young people are the essential ingredients for the neighborhood change process. Within this context, the education process is the key link in the transformation process. Without changing the schools, you will not change either the neighborhoods or the broader society in which it is embedded.

The reason is that the development of social capital is viewed as the essential ingredient in the neighborhood change process. Without transforming the educational system, then, it is not possible to develop a sustainable strategy for bolstering the neighborhood's social capital. Thus, only by changing the neighborhood's education trajectory can the community be transformed from a distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhood into a desirable mixed-income community of opportunity.

The Education Strategy

In Buffalo, the interweaving of school reform and neighborhood development is very difficult because of school choice. This challenge notwithstanding, the prime goal of the planning team is to strengthen select public schools within the PCN and repurpose them as anchor institutions with a social purpose mission. Then, as the academic performance of these schools improves, parents/caregivers will increasingly choose them over other school options, thereby transforming these "choice schools" into "de-facto neighborhood schools."

Buffalo public schools are plagued by a host of in-school and out-of-school issues, including demoralized teachers, high stakes testing, low test scores, high suspension rates, absenteeism and other issues. At the same time, the students attending these low-performing schools are beset with a host of non-academic barriers to academic success, which *originate* in the distressed, jobless and underdeveloped neighborhoods where they live. These barriers not only include the stress of living in neighborhoods characterized by crime, violence, family instability and hard times, but also issues that stem from lack of exposure to broad cultural and life experiences, poor academic preparation, and insufficient interest in learning and studying. Therefore, one of the keys to improving student academic performance is the elimination of non-academic barriers to academic success.

In many respects, the planning team also felt that many building-centered problems were indirectly related to a combination of neighborhood-based problems faced by the students, on the one hand, and budgetary, pedagogy and other issues spawned by neoliberalism. Against this analytical backdrop, the planning team decided the best way to attack the problem of underperforming schools was to eliminate non-academic barriers to academic success and to bolster the resiliency, skills and competencies of the children. Over time, the team would gain the type of support in the neighborhood, the schools and the district, which would make engagement over these broader building issues possible. Most important, this strategy would make possible the repurposing of the schools and transformation into neighborhood anchor institutions. Toward this end, the planning team established an education strategy centered on five outcomes.

1   All PCN children enter first grade ready to learn.
2   Non-academic barriers to academic success are eliminated as factors influencing educational outcomes among PCN children.
3   Children develop the attitudes, skills and competencies required for success in school and life.
4   Children graduate from high school ready for college or entry into the workforce.
5   School reform and neighborhood revitalization are interwoven in the PCN.

The team adopted an education pipeline strategy to reach these outcomes. The pipeline approach was based on creating a continuum of programs and activities that would envelop the child from birth to college or entry into the workforce. The goal was to create critically conscious students that would graduate from high school ready for college or entry into the workforce. Strategically, the pipeline aimed to guide children from birth to college and/or entry into the workforce. In this regard, the pipeline's credo is "The purpose of education is to prepare students both to earn a living and to create a world

worth living in." The idea is to develop students with a critical consciousness and strong desire to build a better world and create a good society.

The planning team called their approach the "mini-education pipeline." They chose this name because the pipeline was embedded in a specific neighborhood, and within this context, it intentionally sought to move the children from the neighborhood to college or entry into the workforce.[10] The pipeline approach had three interactive goals. The first was to construct a bridge between the school and neighborhood. The idea was to develop interaction relationships between parents/caregivers, neighborhood-based service providers, and leaders of the neighborhood revitalization movement and school principals, teachers and staff members. The second was to develop a network of high quality learning programs that would prepare students for first grade. Research shows that unless children enter the first grade academically and socially ready to learn, they will be at risk to struggle academically, end up in prison, live their lives on the economic margin, or die prematurely. The third goal was to connect the pipeline to a series of neighborhood-based youth development programs, including those that promoted the development of a safe and secure neighborhood. Within this framework, a mini-education pipeline was established with five interactive components (Figure 7.2).

1   *The Early Learning Network* – the early learning network consisted of about 22 head start and early head start programs, along with 22 licensed daycare centers. Rather than launch new programs, the planning team made the decision to strengthen existing pre-school programs by hiring reading specialists, who could work with daycare providers on strategies to develop language abilities and pre-literacy skills, as well as working with parents/caregivers on improving the home learning environment and developing the literacy skills of their children. A "feeder" system will be established that funnels children from the early learning network into the pipeline primary schools.

2   *The K–12 Pipeline, which provides a range of academic enrichment and supportive service programs* – the K–12 pipeline consist of two primary schools and two high schools; a variety of academic enrichment and supportive services are offered in these schools and interactive links are built between the schools and parents/caregivers, as well as between the school and supportive service organizations in the neighborhood.

3   *BMHA-UB Summer Academic Camp on Neighborhood Development* – an academic summer camp was established to lessen the loss of learning during the summer and to strengthen the academic skills and competencies of middle-school students from pipeline schools by involving them in project-based learning activities related to improving conditions in their community.
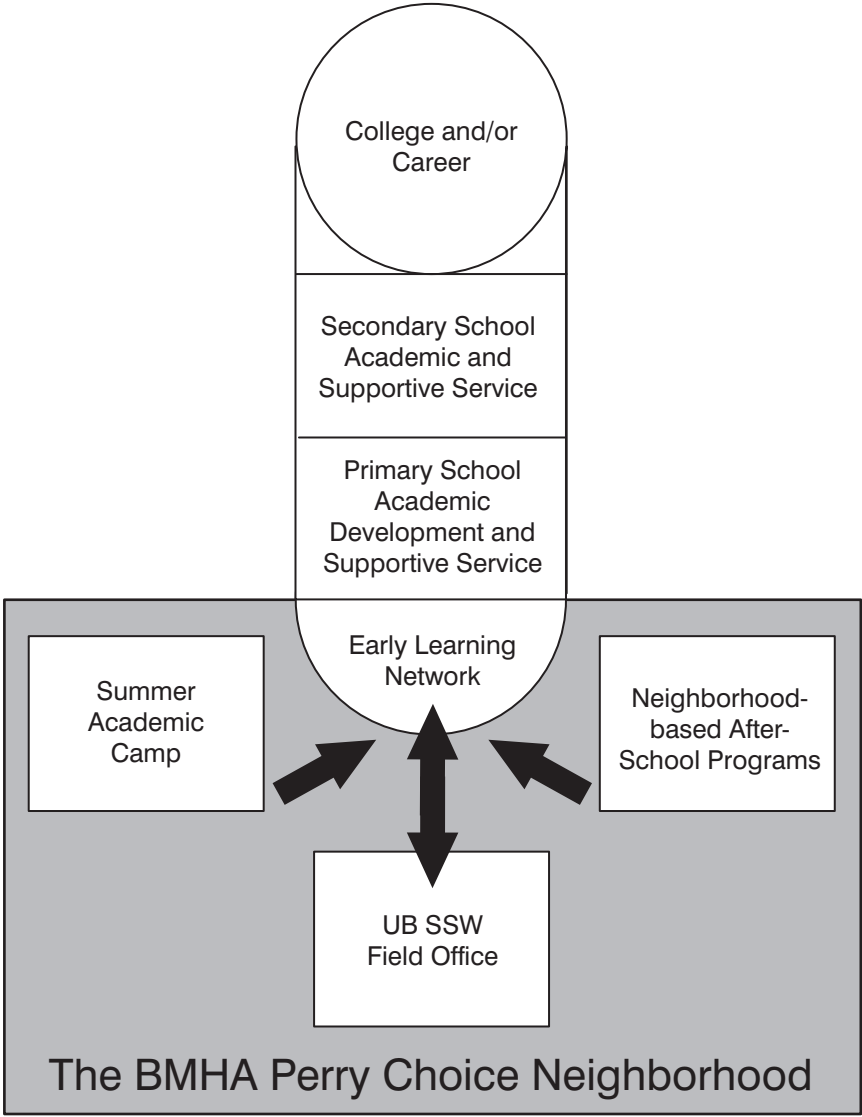
FIGURE 7.2 The Mini-Education Pipeline

4   *The Neighborhood-based Extended Day Network* – extended-day programs are hugely important in the lives of students. However, for various reasons, many students do not attend school-based extended day programs. Therefore, to capture these students, three different neighborhood-based extended day programs were established in the PCN.

5   *The School–Neighborhood Bridge* – the school–neighborhood connector consist of a series of neighborhood-based programs that reinforce and strengthen the mini-education pipeline. These programs include the BMHA-UB Case Management and Service Coordination Unit, the PCN Youth Council, the Citizen Action Parent Institute, the Interventionist, a youth violence and gang prevention program, and other youth development and neighborhood-based health initiatives. A coordinator is responsible for creating strong interactive relationships between the participating schools and the members of the school–neighborhood connector.

Building the Mini-Education Pipeline

A fundamental goal of the mini-education pipeline is to bolster the academic performance of the four participating schools and to repurpose them as anchor institutions with a social purpose mission. In this way, once these schools are improved, parents/caregivers will increasingly choose them over other options. To realize this complicated task in practice, the PCN must overcome three interactive obstacles: the Buffalo education regime; building the education collaborative in a neoliberal city, and funding the mini-education pipeline.

The Buffalo Education Regime

Education regime theory is a model that seeks to explain how educational decisions are made at the local level. The urban education regime is the engine that drives the city's schooling and education process. The federal government constructs the broad framework within which educational reform unfolds at the state and local levels. Although state governments possess the resources and authority to directly shape urban education policy, they typically leave these issues to the local education regime. In Buffalo, and elsewhere, all decision-making and education change occurs within the context of this governing framework. So, it is the education regime that defines the district's educational problems and decides how to address them. It determines how educational resources are to be accessed and in what ways they are to be distributed. Given its power and authority, the only way to effect sustainable educational change in the Buffalo public schools is to operate within this framework.

To bring about change in educational policy, then, an organization must have an inside and outside strategy. The inside strategy involved gaining influence within the educational regime, while the outside strategy involves using protest, in all its iterations, to influence policy and increase the leverage and power of progressive groups operating within the region. The intentional goal of the BMHA-PCN planning team was to become part of the education regime, thereby placing it in an optimal position to influence power.

The interplay of three factors made it possible for the planning team to achieve this goal. First, and most important, the Buffalo education regime was reconstituted in 2011, following the dismissal of the superintendent of schools, Dr. James Williams. The re-formed regime constituted what Shipps (2008) called a "performance regime," which is based on social-purpose politics and composed mostly of coalition partners who shared core beliefs and commitments and are willing to remain loyal to those ideals regardless of their differences over other issues (Wallace, 2008). The emergence of the new regime was triggered by a ground swell of dissatisfaction over Buffalo's failing schools. The uproar led to Williams' dismissal in August. Shortly afterwards, *Say Yes to Education* was brought to Buffalo by a group of business and civic leaders. *Say Yes,* a national non-profit organization, founded in Philadelphia in 1986, promised to dramatically increase high school and college graduation rates and to provide students who graduate from a Buffalo public school (traditional or charter) with up to 100 percent of the tuition needed to attend college, regardless of the family's income (www.sayyestoeducation.org/). *Say Yes* convinced local business leaders, government officials and local foundations to invest $18 million to support the initiative, and quickly emerged as leader within Buffalo's new education performance regime.

Say Yes changed the discourse over education in Buffalo. It anchored its reformed strategy within a social purpose framework, which linked school reform to stimulating economic development and getting middle-income families to stay or relocate in the City. *Say Yes* argued that by using their strategy to fix public schools, the city would reduce crime, increase property values and attract middle-income residents to the City. To implement their strategy in the schools, *Say Yes* created an inner-council composed of three school reform groups, including *Say Yes*, Closing the Gap in Student Performance, a local group comprised of the United Way of Erie County, Buffalo Public Schools, and Catholic Charities, and the Buffalo Promise Neighborhood, an initiative funded by the US Department of Education and led by the M&T Bank.[11] Also joining the inner council were two representatives from the Office of the Superintendent of Schools. This inner-council implemented the *Say Yes* reform strategy in Buffalo schools. From the planning team's perspective, the *Say Yes* inner council, because of its connection to implementation of the school reform strategy, was a critical component of the City's education regime. So, the planning team sought to join it. The planning team's request to join the inner council was readily accepted by *Say Yes*.

The BMHA-UB partnership provided the mini-education pipeline team with the stature and prestige it needed to be accepted by council members. Most important, the mini-education pipeline strategy was complementary to the educational model used by the other groups. All four groups, including *Say Yes*, believed in a pipeline strategy that centered on enveloping children

from distressed neighborhoods in a continuum of academic enrichment and supportive service programs and activities from birth to college or entry into the workforce. The complementary nature of the four groups' approaches to education reform served as the glue which held them together, despite some differences between the various models.

Building Collaboratives in the Neoliberal City

The second barrier that had to be overcome was the building of a cross-sector collaborative (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Iachini, Flaspohler, Bean & Wade-Mdivanian, 2010; Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005). The ability to provide a comprehensive menu of academic enrichment and supportive services for children from birth to graduation from high school is beyond the scope of any one agency, organization or discipline. The mini-education pipeline strategy, therefore, was based on the necessity of building a cross-sector collaborative among four public schools and a host of non-profit service providers. The goal was to bring together service providers from the early learning network, the four public schools, the neighborhood-based extended day programs, and the summer academic camp under a single administration structure. For the pipeline to be successful, these disparate organizations needed to plan and work together as a team.

Building such a collaborative in the neoliberal city is extremely difficult. The reason is that neoliberalism imbues society with competitive market principles (Read, 2009). As such, non-profits are expected to be enterprising and entrepreneurial organizations engaged in a fierce competitive struggle with each other for limited resources. Under neoliberalism, to offset the loss in services caused by government spending cuts, grants and contracts are made available to non-profits and private companies, which must compete for them in a fiercely competitive education marketplace. This competitive landscape of neoliberalism promotes and reinforces siloism, which causes agencies and organizations to work independently of each other and to come together only when such partnerships or collaborations provide them with a competitive advantage.

In this setting, the building of a cross-sector collaborative not only required overcoming the traditional issues of turf, politics, distrust, and building a common vision, but also necessitated tackling the competition issue head-on. So, to build the collaborative, in addition to following the principles of developing effective collaborations, the planning team offered its potential partners three reasons why they should join the pipeline. First, joining the mini-education pipeline would provide them with a competitive edge in the struggle to secure grants to fund their operations. At both the federal and state levels, organizations, agencies and institutions working in Choice and Promise neighborhoods are

given extra points, thereby giving them an edge over competitors. Second, the planning team told the service providers that by planning and working together as a team, their individual programs could be greatly enhanced. Lastly, the pipeline planning team said the education landscape in Buffalo was rapidly changing and that service providers could best protect their interest by being part of a collaborative, directly tied to the education regime (Shipps, 2008). This approach worked, and the planning team was able to build a collaborative composed of 45 non-profit organizations.

It should be noted that the planning team appealed to the self-interest of the service providers, while placing the mini-education pipeline within the broader context of providing a viable solution to the City's education crisis. This approach appealed both to the survival and social purpose instincts of the service providers. Hence, they would not only be able to participate in a highly innovative school reform strategy, but also acquire a competitive edge in the struggle to gain the funding for their programs. Lastly, the ability to bring this collaborative together was also directly related to the role played by the UB Center for Urban Studies. The perceived *neutrality* of the University at Buffalo made it an ideal group to build a collaborative in such a fiercely competitive environment. Had the lead organization for the pipeline been a member of one of the "competing" partners, it is doubtful if such a collaboration could have been built.

Funding the Mini-Education Pipeline

The third obstacle was forging a locally based financial strategy to fund the initiative. The funding needed to provide inner-city schools with the academic enrichment and supportive services comes mostly from grants and contracts given by government and foundations, which are awarded in a highly competitive educational marketplace. Most of the academic enrichment and supportive services are offered by non-profit organizations and private companies that compete in this fiercely competitive market place. The neoliberal quest to create "small government" has led to the increased reliance on non-profits and businesses to deliver a range of educational services. The mini-education pipeline must compete with others in this market for the resources to fund its strategy.

To rationalize this competitive process at the federal level, the Obama Administration developed a process that gives a competitive advantage to those organizations delivering services in place-based initiatives. Toward this end, the White House formulated an interagency strategy designed to engage the White House Domestic Policy Council, White House Office of Urban Affairs, and the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Education, Justice, Health and Human Services and Treasury in support of local solutions to revitalize

and transform neighborhoods. Obama argued that struggling schools located in communities with problems that feed into and perpetuate each other could not be transformed without an integrated, place-based strategy. To facilitate the development of this type of strategy, the president called upon the White House to work closely with five key federal departments to align their place-based investments with programs being developed at the local level. This approach to funding gave those organizations working collaboratively on place-based initiatives a competitive advantage over other grant applicants in the education marketplace.

In 2012, New York State adopted a similar strategy. Using language almost identical to the Obama Administration, the Cuomo Administration established the New York State Community, Opportunity and Reinvestment Initiative Solicitation of Interest.[12] This program seeks to build the well-being of communities and assure that all New Yorkers will have the opportunity to thrive in a safe and stable community from a supported childhood to a productive adulthood. The idea is for the state to work closely with local communities to better coordinate and align their resources with communities targeted for transformation. This place-based approach to funding has created an environment that provides the mini-education pipeline with a competitive advantage in the search for funding. At the same time, securing funding to support the multiple components of the program will be extremely difficult. Neoliberalism constructs a setting where funding to support programs takes place in a hyper-competitive marketplace where there are only a few winners. Locally, this funding environment is made more complex by the dominance of major groups, such as *Say Yes to Education*, Catholic Charities and United Way, along with a large number of non-profits and private companies that compete with each other for limited resources. In this setting, it will be difficult to secure a funding base sufficient to launch the mini-education pipeline and even more difficult to sustain that initiative over time.

Conclusion: Repurposing Neighborhood Schools as Anchor Institutions

The big question driving this chapter is how we get back to the future. That is, how do we reconnect schools to the neighborhoods in which they are located and repurpose them as anchor institutions? The mini-education pipeline strategy provides some clues to this challenge. Two things must happen to repurpose the neighborhood schools as anchor institutions. The first is that inner-city schools, including the principals and teachers, must understand the important role their school can play in the redevelopment of the neighborhood in which it is located. Concurrently, a strong, interactive relationship must be established between the school, the parents, residents, stakeholders and the network of academic

enrichment and supportive service programs operating in the neighborhoods. These two elements must happen simultaneously, and the relationship between school and neighborhood will gradually be cemented as school performance and student academic achievement improves.

The process of building the mini-education pipeline is designed to build and cement this relationship, thereby recreating the school as an inner-city neighborhood asset and a social-purpose anchor institution. In building the pipeline, the goal is to establish enrichment programs and supportive service programs both inside the school and in the neighborhood. For example, at the primary school level, the pipeline will establish both school-based and neighborhood-based after-school programs, which are interrelated. This way, the extended day program will be able to create enrichment opportunities for those students that choose not to attend the in-school program. In both the high schools and primary schools, service learning programs will be established to build and strengthen the bonds between the school and neighborhoods. During the summer, the BMHA-UB Academic Camp will recruit students directly from the neighborhood and engage them in projects designed to improve neighborhood conditions.

The school-based supportive service program will work closely with the neighborhood-based supportive service team, which will be headed by the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. The plan is for site coordinators for the participating pipeline schools to work closely with the BMHA-UB Case Management and Service Coordination Unit, so that they can collaboratively tackle the problems facing children and their families. Over time, varied projects will be developed that are aimed at building close relationships between the school and neighborhood. For example, each year, Futures Academy, a participating pipeline primary school, holds a neighborhood Clean-a-Thon. The students, teachers and residents form brigades that clean up the neighborhood during the morning hours. In the afternoon, they have a block party, replete with food, dancing and games.

These and similar activities will raise the visibility of the school within the neighborhood, while simultaneously recreating it as an important neighborhood asset. As the school performance increases and as the academic achievement of the students is bolstered, an increasing number of parents/caregivers will choose the neighborhood school over other options. In this way, the Choice school strategy will be used to create a de-facto neighborhood school. Of course, the mini-education pipeline is in a nascent stage of development and faces many obstacles before it achieves the goal of repurposing the pipeline schools and establishing them as neighborhood anchor institutions. Nonetheless, the strategy is sound and this is an experiment worth monitoring.

Notes

1 These are the reflections of Professor Henry Louis Taylor, Jr.
2 By neighborhood education infrastructure, we mean enrichment programs, high quality early learning centers, quiet places to study, computer access, and neighborhood-based tutoring and homework assistance.
3 Some cities have created voucher programs that allow private schools to be added to this menu of school choices.
4 Graduation rates are calculated using the Cumulative Promotion Index method with data from the US Department of Education's Common Core of Data, 2009.
5 For the purposes of this study, the term children refer to young people between the ages of 6 and 18 years. Children younger than this are considered preschoolers.
6 Outlaw culture is a concept that covers a broad range of anti-social behavior from vandalism, bullying, harassment, and the justification and rationalization of criminal activity. Outlaw culture rejects the black communal norms and community building, while promoting predatory individualism, conspicuous consumption operating within the context of neoliberal market values, gangsterism and gang life (Mark Naison, "Outlaw Culture and Black Neighborhoods," 1 RECONSTRUCTION, 4, 1992, p. 128).
7 Of course, there are some institutions, which are designed to provide services for a neighborhood, but are not located in it. These institutions are considered part of that dysfunctional and failed institutional framework.
8 Interestingly, the Obama administration does not account for the role played by school choice in complicating this quest to connect school reform to neighborhood revitalization.
9 BMHA selected the Choice initiative over Promise because of its control over a significant number of public housing units in need of major repair.
10 In the late 1990s and 2000s, school reformers begin to focus increasingly on the development of pre-K though 12 education pipelines, which were designed to ensure that students successfully made their way through the schooling process without getting derailed. Groups started to emerge, such as the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati, the Alignment Nashville, Say Yes to Education and similar programs around the country, which are based on a full-service community school model. While building on these models, including the community schools method, the BMHA-PCN Mini-Education Pipeline approach focuses on the building of a pipeline that extends from the neighborhood to college and/or a career and employs a hybrid of the community school model.
11 Buffalo Promise Neighborhood (2011). Project Narrative for Buffalo Promise Neighborhood. Buffalo, NY: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/2011/u215n110046narrative.pdf
12 New York State Department of Health (2012). Online: http://www.health.ny.gov/funding/soi/opportunity_and_reinvestment_initiative/opportunity_and_reinvestment_initiative.pdf

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