

Neo-democracy in educational policy making: Teachers' unions, Education Reform Advocacy Organizations and threats to public engagement in the new policy arena

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NEO-DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY MAKING:
TEACHERS' UNIONS, EDUCATION REFORM ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS
AND THREATS TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE NEW POLICY ARENA

Dissertation
by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2015

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ABSTRACT

NEO-DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY MAKING: TEACHERS' UNIONS, EDUCATION REFORM ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS AND THREATS TO PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE NEW POLICY ARENA

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This dissertation explores the many, complex changes to educational policy making in recent years. I conduct a critical policy analysis of a Massachusetts law that limits seniority-based job protections for public K-12 teachers. Garnering considerable controversy, the law was the result of private negotiations between the state's largest teachers' union and Stand for Children, a national Education Reform Advocacy Organization (ERAO). I use data from interviews with policy stakeholders, observations of public meetings and policy artifacts to explore struggles over public engagement in what unfolded as a highly undemocratic policy development process.

My theoretical framework combines Stephen Ball's "policy cycle" (Ball, 1993; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992) with deliberative democratic theory. Aligned with Ball's work, I explore the ways that political discourses shaped struggles in various "contexts" of the policy development process. I demonstrate that policy development was a messy, non-linear process that involved complicated argumentation about teachers' unions, ERAOs, and community organizing. Informed by deliberative democratic theory, I focus on concrete efforts taken to include, or exclude, the public from the policy debate, and I highlight discourses that appeared to justify these political decisions.

I argue that the case is indicative of what I am calling "neo-democratic" decision making, in which high-level interest group conflict leads to narrow forms of democratic

engagement. I trace changes in each organization's political identity over the course of the conflict, and I demonstrate that identity was connected in important ways to underlying beliefs about policy making and public engagement. Fueled by interest group conflict, both Stand for Children and the Massachusetts Teachers' Association sought to promote the organizational identity that best suited their political interests. In the process, each organization pursued narrow forms of democratic engagement that clashed with their own organizational mission statements. I use findings from the case to offer suggestions for moving beyond the "neo-democratic" era and towards a system of policy making that aspires to higher democratic ideals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, for whom an adequate thank you is not possible within the space provided here. It is an understatement to say that I've learned a lot from working with you or that this dissertation was greatly shaped by your feedback and support. More than anything else, our work together has helped me to become more "me" as a researcher: to find a voice and perspective that feels authentic, to build on my strengths, and to connect my work to my own long-held beliefs about the value of education and its role in broader society. Throughout this process, it has meant a lot to be accepted and supported as part of a larger BC family.

To Dr. Dennis Shirley whose pioneering work on community organizing in public education has been, and continues to be, a major source of inspiration for me. Our work together has always pushed me to simultaneously pursue big ideas while also remaining grounded in the realities facing schools and their communities.

To Dr. Lauren Saenz whose feedback, support and patience made the writing process feel much more manageable. Our conversations always helped me to focus on a sharp point amidst the many things that I could say about my topic, research methodology, etc, and your comments often got directly to the core of a particular problem that I was struggling with, helping to carry me through months of edits.

To writing partners and collaborators at BC as well as the Rennie Center and Evidence-based Education Research and Evaluation. Your interest in my work and your friendship have made an enormous difference for me.

To my wonderful friends and family, whose support, concern and laughter over the years has been lifeline of sorts in a process that can sometimes feel isolating. My

relationship with each of you means a great, great deal to me. I love you all, and I am very lucky to have you in my life.

Most of all: to Erin, whose unwavering belief in me made all the difference. This would not have been possible without your love, patience and laughter. Though this journey, and all others, I could not ask for a better partner.

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Chapter One

Fast Forward:

Changing Political Relationships of the New Policy Making Arena

In a remarkably short period of time, lines of political influence in educational policy making have changed dramatically. Although these new power dynamics have had a strong impact on legislation across the country, we know little about them. In this dissertation, I look to Massachusetts as a case study site of nationwide changes to policy and politics regarding teacher tenure. I trace the development a law that was shaped primarily by the political battles between two organizations, yet will have a profound impact on the job security of over 70,000 public K-12 teachers in the state. I use this case to provide a glimpse into the new policy making arena, to make observations about changes to political power and to urge caution regarding aspects of the policy making process that may be undemocratic or otherwise unjust.

Long gone are the days of district-level autonomy and policy battles waged primarily over funding equity and revenue (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Hursh, 2007; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2007). A diverse menu of policy proposals is now debated and developed by an increasingly diverse array of high-powered, high-level political actors (Buras, 2011; McDonnell, 2009; McGuinn, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Change is perhaps most visible within state legislatures across the country, where power and political influence have shifted dramatically (Brookings Institution, 2015). New to state-level policy making, a loosely federated group of non-profit advocacy organizations have enjoyed remarkable success in recent years (McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b). Meanwhile, for better or worse, entrenched political actors, like teachers' unions, now

face credible threats to their longstanding hold on political power (Avlon, 2012; Butrymowicz, 2013; Carey, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012c).

As political dynamics have changed, so have the policies themselves. Fueled by incentives in President Obama's Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program, states have embraced a wide variety of reforms that are commonly considered part of the "neo-liberal" agenda for school improvement (McGuinn, 2012c). As I discuss further below, neo-liberal reform aims to make public education function more like private business, where diverse service providers compete with each other for customers, America's public school students and their families (Hursh, 2005, 2007; Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). The neo-liberal agenda calls for a wide array of education reforms, including increased access to charter schools, the proliferation of alternative routes into teaching, and test-based evaluation of K-12 teachers (Friedman, 1995; Tabb, 2002). In the research conducted here, I investigate changes in the political relationships and power dynamics that have contributed to the recent rise in neo-liberal educational policy.

I focus, in particular, on changes to seniority-based job protections for public K-12 teachers. Tenure reform in the neo-liberal tradition calls for removing job protections that, according to critics, allow underperforming teachers to remain in the profession long beyond their due (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2009; Tabb, 2002). In recent years especially, state legislatures have gone fast forward into the reform of teacher job security, linking teacher tenure more closely with job performance. Between 2010 and 2012, for example, nearly two-thirds of US states changed longstanding teacher evaluation, tenure and dismissal policies to align with a neo-liberal model for public education (McGuinn,

2012b). Currently, in 41 states, districts are required by law to use standardized test results in teachers' evaluations and, in 29 of these, poor evaluations can be used to dismiss teachers, regardless of their length of service (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2014). Perhaps even more shocking: in 2009, not a single state required that evidence of teacher performance was the primary criterion in teacher tenure; by 2013, that number jumped to a whopping 19 (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2014).

Non-profit advocacy organizations have played a critical role in passing neo-liberal policy, despite fervent resistance from state-level teachers' unions (Avlon, 2012; Brown, 2012; Camera, 2014a; Carey, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012c). Newly influential in state-level policy making, these organizations have been variously referred to as advocacy groups (Camera, 2014a; Sawchuk, 2012b), "education upstarts" (Brown, 2012), and Educational Reform Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs) (McGuinn, 2012a). I use the latter term, ERAOs, because it distinguishes these groups from advocacy organizations that are not oriented towards "reform" in the neo-liberal sense of the word: dramatic change to an existing and longstanding public bureaucratic infrastructure.

The rise of ERAOs has perhaps most directly threatened the power and influence of state-level teachers' unions. As seen in the case studied here, an arena long dominated by the influence of teachers' unions, state-level educational policy making is now becoming reshaped by complicated interactions between ERAOs and unions. Changes in political power have had reverberating effects on the political influence of related stakeholders in the state policy arena, including elected officials, representatives of business organizations, community organizers and members of local-level teachers'

unions. As one might expect, changes to power and political influence have a profound impact on the policy making process.

As unions and non-profit organizations engage each other in high-level political battles, observers have begun to question whether, and to what extent, public voice is considered in decisions about public schools (Bartlett & Frederick, 2002; Buras, 2011; Gold, Christman, & Herold, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Sawchuk, 2012d; Simon, Gold, & Cucchiara, 2011). The potential exclusion of public voice is especially troubling considering the mission of many non-profit advocacy organizations and teachers' unions. Non-profit organizations, including the particular group studied here, often claim that policy priorities are developed through grassroots community organizing (Avlon, 2012; Brown, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012b). Meanwhile, teachers' unions have long been considered to be the voice of the working class. Little is understood, however, about how new political relationships have affected the extent to which each entity is listening to the perspectives and policy preferences of its local-level membership.

Research can play an important role in helping to understand changes to the political dynamics of state policy making. Especially considering the rapid pace of change in recent years, it is critically important that we understand what ERAOs are and how they influence the kinds of policies that are debated and enacted in this new policy making arena. To this end, I offer a critical case study analysis of policy conflict in the enactment of Massachusetts S. 2315, a law that limits seniority-based job protections for public K-12 teachers. Unprecedented in the state's history, the law was the result of a compromise between Stand for Children, a non-profit advocacy organization, and the Massachusetts Teachers' Association (MTA), the state's largest teachers' union. In the

winter of 2012, Stand for Children launched a ballot initiative with far-reaching consequences for teacher job security in the Commonwealth. In private negotiations, both sides developed a compromise law, Massachusetts S. 2315, that moderated some of the more dramatic changes proposed by the ballot initiative. Several months later, in June 2012, the law was passed with overwhelming support from the Massachusetts legislature.

Borrowing from Stephen Ball (2005; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992), I offer a case study of the “policy trajectory” of Massachusetts S. 2315, in which I attempt “to capture the complex interplay of identities and interests and coalitions and conflicts within the processes and enactments of policy” (p. 22). I seek, in particular, to characterize the “complex interplay” between teachers’ unions and ERAOs in the policy development process. I use case study analysis to generate critical observations about nationwide changes to power and political influence in the current environment for school policy making. Given the concerns noted above, I devote special attention to the prospects for public engagement during an era of unprecedented change. To set the stage for my analysis, I offer a brief characterization of the major questions facing ERAOs and teachers’ unions the new policy making arena.

Where Are We Going? Questions about ERAOs and Teachers’ Unions

ERAOs have become remarkably influential in a short period of time. A few of the largest and most prominent ERAOs include StudentsFirst, the Foundation for Excellence in Education, and Stand for Children, the group studied here. The sheer star power behind these groups strongly suggests that they seek an extremely high political profile. StudentsFirst was founded by Michelle Rhee following her departure from the Washington DC school system. The Foundation for Excellence in Education was

launched by Jeb Bush who recently announced that Condoleezza Rice will take over as the Executive Director, as he anticipates a campaign for the US Presidency in 2016 (Ujifusa, 2015). Stand for Children, meanwhile, is run by Jonah Edelman, the son of civil rights icon Marian Wright Edelman.

As one might expect from their leadership, ERAOs seek major and controversial changes to education policy making. StudentsFirst recently released a report card that evaluated states according to their enactment of high-accountability, high-choice policies, such as using value-added methodologies to evaluate teacher performance and allowing “parent trigger” turnaround options in underperforming schools. Likewise, the Foundation for Excellence in Education has gained national prominence due to its formal affiliation with the Chiefs for Change, a controversial group of state education commissioners whose stated goal is to advance “bold, visionary education reform” in part by connecting teacher evaluation and teacher pay to student test scores (Brown, 2012; Ujifusa, 2013a). As described below, Stand for Children has been influential in passing reform of teacher tenure laws in Colorado and Illinois, in addition to the Massachusetts law studied here.

Other prominent ERAOs include Democrats for Education Reform, an organization that provides political cover to Democrats who support policies that clash with teachers’ unions, and Education 4 Excellence, founded by Teach for America alumni to support policies that weaken seniority-based tenure in large urban districts (Brown, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b). While there is not a single leading group, ERAOs have formed a partnership in the burgeoning Policy Innovators in Education (PIE) network, which currently supports 49 ERAOs in 31 states, including several of the

groups noted above. Recent research from the Brookings Institution (2015) found that groups like the PIE network play a major role in ERAOs' success. Based on surveys of legislators in "policy insiders" in three states, the authors concluded that "coordination among advocacy organizations that have related policy goals strengthens total impact" (Brookings Institution, 2015, p. 2) in state legislatures.

In addition to conducting state-level legislative advocacy, ERAOs are important to the policy trajectory of Massachusetts S. 2315 because many claim to increase community-based public engagement in school policy (Sawchuk, 2012d). For example, Stand for Children, the group studied here, has a hierarchical structure that includes national-level leadership, which oversees the work of 11 state-level offices. Each state office then oversees community-based "chapters" that engage a membership base of parents, teachers, and other interested stakeholders in policy issues affecting their local schools. Stand for Children's Massachusetts office currently lists community-based chapters in major cities, such as Boston and Springfield. Each chapter is assigned one or more community organizers who are often in charge of holding "listening sessions" and public meetings to mobilize members towards policy change.

Despite claims to grassroots organizing, little is known about who, exactly, is pulling the strings at ERAOs. Many policy observers have begun to question whether ERAOs, in fact, get their directives and policy agendas from national-level leadership as opposed to generating proposals from the preferences of local-level membership (McDonnell, 2009; McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b). For example, Stand for Children's community-based image came under intense scrutiny after the organization began accepting funding from major corporate donors, such as the Walton Family

Foundation and Bain Capital (Libby & Sanchez, 2011; Stevens, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Although it may be difficult to condition funding on specific policy outcomes, “support could come with a type of implied deliverable” (Sawchuk, 2012b), such as advancing the policy agenda preferred by the funding organization. Having made such a big impact in a short period of time, a few observers have begun to wonder whether ERAOs are a new fixture of state policy making or a mere passing trend that will fade when national funding dries up (Libby & Sanchez, 2011; McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b).

Although neo-liberal policy has been widely researched, relatively little attention has been paid to questions about the groups that promote such reforms. Table 1, below, highlights some of the key questions facing ERAOs as well as teachers’ unions in the new policy arena. As I discuss below, the case studied here exposed similar questions about the identity and purpose of Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office. I explore these questions by taking a close look at the organization’s role in state-level educational policy making and local-level advocacy.

Additionally, I investigate Stand for Children’s political relationship with the state’s largest teachers’ union, the MTA, its partner in the compromise negotiations that led to the enactment of Massachusetts S. 2315. With public esteem for teachers’ unions at an all-time low, ERAOs have emerged in recent years as a credible threat to unions’ longstanding influence on educational policy making. Anti-union sentiment has led to high-profile policy changes in erstwhile union strongholds, such as Wisconsin, which successfully reduced collective bargaining rights for public employees, and Michigan, where lawmakers recently passed Right-to-Work legislation that dramatically limits

union activity at the state level. Further, a recent report found that participation in public sector unions is at its lowest point since the 1930s, and that teachers' unions, in particular, have experienced the most precipitous downfall (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). As public support declines, many have begun to question whether unions remain an effective vehicle for the interests of the working class (Bluestone, 2012; Butrymowicz, 2013; Colvin, 2013).

Not surprisingly, decline in public support for unions coincides with dramatic shifts in the education policy landscape. Political winds have shifted far from the so-called consensus policies typically favored by teachers' unions (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013). DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) note that policies of an earlier era were generally consistent with the predilections of national-level teacher unions, who advocated forcefully for increased school revenue, including, but not limited, to elevated levels of federal funding. Scholars in the 1970s and 1980s described the interest group environment as "characterized by consensus, a lack of conflict and a limited role in policy advocacy" (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 20; Mehta, 2013; Hursh, 2005). For the most part, unions and other educational policy interest groups coalesced around federal policy that promoted equity-oriented federal spending with limited accountability demands. Meanwhile, during this time, unions built a national reputation for opposing reforms that were not squarely focused on revenue, especially "school vouchers, choice, charter schools, rigorous standards and tests, alternative teacher licensing, merit pay, and accountability measures" (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 18), reforms typically associated with the neo-liberal agenda (Mehta, 2013).

Critics of unions suggest that traditional unionism, resistant to change or innovation in public education, is now a relic of a previous era, and ultimately an impediment to school improvement (Moe, 2001); these critics often call for the elimination of teachers’ unions altogether (Friedman, 1995; Moe, 2001). For more moderate critics, revitalizing public schools is more a matter of reforming unions than eliminating them (Kerchner, Koppich, & Weeres, 1997); according to these observers, “reform unionism” holds the promise of an improved public system in which unions embrace some measure of privatization while preserving public sector jobs (Bluestone, 2012; Bluestone & Kochan, 2011; Kerchner et al., 1997).

As highlighted in Table 1, unions, like ERAOs, face difficult questions about their political influence: no longer able to unilaterally impose policy preferences, unions have been forced to choose between sticking with the issues that made them so influential in an earlier era or risking irrelevance by embracing some form of, often corporate-oriented, change to public school infrastructure.

Table 1: Questions about ERAOs and Teachers’ Unions

	Political Influence	Public Engagement
ERAOs	Can ERAOs maintain influence in state-level policy making?	How do ERAOs balance priorities at the national level with policy preferences of grassroots membership?
Teachers’ Unions	Has unions’ reputation for obstruction lost them a seat at the table? Must unions embrace reform/innovation in order to preserve political influence?	Facing declining public support, are teachers unions still the voice of the working class?

Background to the Massachusetts Case: ERAOs and Unions Clash in Illinois

Unions' reputation for obstruction may have contributed to the rise of "a set of allies for the standards and accountability movement" (Mehta, 2013, p. 310), including business groups, ERAOs, state legislators and even civil rights organizations. Referring to the unions' role in recent state-level policy making, one observer noted that "the fact that they didn't have a seat at the table was because they'd decided they'd rather fight everything than compromise" (Sawchuk, 2012c); in the process, unions may have left a seat open for ERAOs and the neo-liberal agenda they champion (Camera, 2014a; McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk 2012c).

It is important to note that recent changes in campaign spending rules, especially the US Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, has only added fuel to high-stakes policy battles between unions and ERAOs. Since *Citizens United*, many teachers' unions and ERAOs have established Super PACs and 501(c)4 organizations, which allow groups to spend unlimited amounts of money on political advocacy, often without having to disclose their donors (Sawchuck, 2012c). Stand for Children and the MTA, the two groups studied here, are not exceptions to this trend, as both have established 501(c)4 wings of their organization. In a recent *Education Week* article, the Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts defended these efforts, explaining that "you can't simply [make policy change] with a traditional 501(c)3; legally and strategically, you have to do it through these other channels" (Sawchuk, 2012b). Teachers' unions have similarly embraced recent changes. In the 2014 midterm elections, unions spent more money than ever before in state- and local-level elections (Camera, 2014b).

As seen most prominently in the 2012 Chicago teachers strike, disputes between teachers' unions and ERAOs have risen to new levels of public controversy. Aligned with the neo-liberal model for tenure reform, Illinois' 2010 Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) established a new teacher evaluation system that used student growth, often measured via test scores, as a "significant factor" in teacher evaluation. Subsequently, legislation known as Senate Bill 7 (SB-7) passed in the summer of 2011 added high-stakes consequences for teachers deemed underperforming according to the new evaluation system. In particular, SB-7 reduced seniority-based job protections for teachers, allowing districts to revoke tenure after two "unsatisfactory" ratings in a seven-year period.

Particularly important for the research conducted here, SB-7 received major legislative support from Stand for Children. Through a combination of high-level lobbying and grassroots advocacy, the organization was able to sway state-level lawmakers in favor of changes to teacher job security considered anathema to erstwhile politically untouchable teachers' unions. Fanning the flames of tensions between ERAOs and unions, Stand for Children's national Executive Director, Jonah Edelman, detailed the group's political tactics in a widely viewed and now-infamous YouTube video, stating, in part:

We hired 11 lobbyists, including four of the absolute best insiders, and seven of the best minority lobbyists – preventing the unions from hiring them. We enlisted a state public affairs firm. We had tens of thousands of supporters. ... We raised \$3 million for our political action committee.

That's more money than either of the unions have in their political action

committees. And so essentially what we did in a very short period of time was shift the balance of power. And I can tell you there was a palpable sense of concern, if not shock, on the part of the teachers' unions in Illinois that Speaker Madigan had changed allegiance and that we had clear political capability to potentially jam this proposal down their throats the same way pension reform had been jammed down their throats six months earlier.

Clearly, changes to political dynamics in this new era are both unprecedented and spectacular. As teachers' unions and ERAOs fight each other in high-stakes political battles, it is important to investigate the impact on the culture, values and relationships that drive political decision making. How has the balance of political power and influence changed? What arguments have the most impact on policy outcomes? And, is there still space for public voice amidst high-level, high-stakes political maneuvering? In the next section, I provide an overview of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case study, including major events in the timeline of the Massachusetts law as well as a discussion of the political pressures faced by Stand for Children and state teachers' unions. In this discussion, I outline the ways in which the Massachusetts case can help to answer key questions about the new policy making arena.

The "Great Teachers, Great Schools" Case Study

Like Illinois, the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case pitted Stand for Children against the state teachers' unions, albeit with a very different result. In October 2011, Stand for Children announced that it was collecting signatures for a ballot question that aimed to limit seniority-based job protections for Massachusetts public K-12 teachers.

Spurred by President Obama's Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program, in June 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approved a new system for teacher supervision and evaluation. The new regulations combined classroom observations with measures of student performance to rate teachers on a four-point scale from "exemplary" to "unsatisfactory."

In the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative, Stand for Children proposed adding "teeth" to the new system in the form of higher consequences for underperforming teachers. Organized originally as a ballot question, Massachusetts' citizens would vote to approve or reject the proposed policy changes in the November 2012 election. Resembling a "last-in, first-out" model, Massachusetts' law at the time allowed districts to use a teacher's length of service at a particular public school as the primary factor in decisions about dismissal or in-district transfer. As originally written, the ballot question would have prohibited such practice, replacing seniority with performance evaluations as the primary factor in personnel decisions.

Upon its formal announcement, the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative came under immediate criticism from the state's two teachers' unions, the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), an affiliate of the National Education Association, and the Massachusetts chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT-MA), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. For both unions, the timing of the ballot question was extremely inconvenient politically. In addition to the US Presidential election, the Massachusetts ballot featured a highly-contested US Senate race that would turn out to be the most expensive in US history at the time (Cilizza, 2013). However, instead of spending money in support of the generally pro-union Democrats in

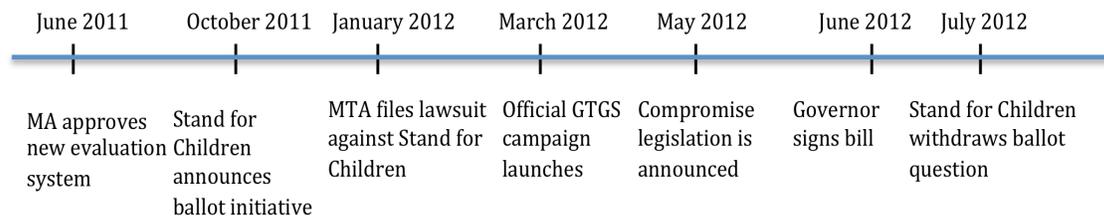
each race, teachers' unions would have to divert funds to fight the ballot initiative. Additionally, at the time, it was reasonable to believe that the anti-seniority ballot question could have drawn conservative voters to the polls, potentially tipping the US Senate race towards the Republican, Scott Brown.

Early in the campaign, the unions' main opposition came via a lawsuit challenging the form, rather than the content, of the ballot question. In January 2012, the MTA filed suit challenging the constitutionality of the ballot initiative's summary. The union argued that the initiative violated state law prohibiting ballot questions from containing multiple, unrelated parts and requiring that ballot questions are accompanied by a short, readable summary. Little, however, in state history suggested that the lawsuit was anything but a long shot. The last time a court had ruled in favor of plaintiffs with a similar argument was 1999, in a dispute about a ballot question that would legalize dog racing.

Worse for unions, early polls suggested that Stand for Children was headed towards victory on Election Day. Often cited in the media coverage, for example, a UMass Amherst poll indicated that the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot question had the support of likely voters by a margin of 85%-15%. Nonetheless, the stakes were high for Stand for Children as well. Formed originally as a community-based, grassroots organization, the ballot initiative was Stand for Children's first major independent foray into state-level policy making in Massachusetts. The outcome of the initiative, therefore, had strong implications for the organization's standing as a future player in the state policy arena.

Given its lead in the polls, many were shocked when Stand for Children and the MTA, the larger of the state’s two teachers’ unions, announced publicly that they had developed a compromise bill in private negotiations. Officially announced in May 2012, Massachusetts S. 2315, the so-called “compromise law” was passed without amendment by both chambers of the Massachusetts legislature in late June 2012 and signed into law shortly thereafter. In early July, Stand for Children removed the ballot question from the November 2012 election. Figure 1 provides a timeline of major events in the policy trajectory.

Figure 1: “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Policy Timeline



In important ways, the compromise law limited the reach of the ballot initiative. Massachusetts law provides due process protections to teachers with professional licensure, a close analog to tenure that is typically awarded to teachers in good standing after three years of service at a particular school. While the initiative would have eliminated these protections, the compromise law preserved them. Under the ballot question, a teacher with higher performance evaluations based on the state’s new evaluation rubric could replace another, regardless of whether s/he had attained professional licensure. Under the compromise, however, teachers with professional

licensure retained preference over non-professional status teachers, regardless of their performance evaluations.

Additionally, the ballot initiative aimed to give the state veto power over district-level evaluation protocols, effectively nullifying local-level collective bargaining over teacher evaluation. The Massachusetts teacher evaluation system sets broad parameters for teacher performance according to four “indicators”: Curriculum, Planning and Assessment; Teaching All Students; Family and Community Engagement; and, Professional Culture. As originally written, the evaluation system allowed districts wide discretion to determine the specific performance measures for each indicator. While the ballot initiative would have given the state veto power over teacher evaluation protocols developed at the district level, the compromise law preserved districts’ freedom to collectively bargain the parameters of their teacher evaluation system without fear of a state-level veto.

Additionally, the ballot question and compromise law contained very different provisions regarding decision making authority over in-district transfers. In the ballot initiative, teacher transfers would be subject to “pure mutual consent,” meaning that both the teacher and the school principal would have to officially approve a new placement decision. The compromise law relaxed this provision, however, requiring only that principals and district superintendents negotiate “in good faith” over in-district transfer decisions. Lastly, in compromise negotiations both sides agreed to push back the effective start date of the law. If passed as a ballot question, the provisions noted above would have become effective in some districts roughly seven weeks later, at the start of 2013. The compromise bill, however, will not be implemented in all Massachusetts

districts until the 2016-2017 school year, giving schools a few years to pilot the new evaluation system.

Table 2 contains a broad overview of the main differences between the ballot question and compromise law. In the interest of space and conceptual clarity, I have listed the policy changes that featured most prominently in public debate. It is important to note, however, that provisions in both the ballot question and compromise law contained nuances that are important to understanding the political struggle that led to the compromise law. In the chapters that follow, I provide additional details about the ballot initiative and compromise law as policy nuances become relevant to the political debate and, more generally, to understanding changes in the political dynamics between Stand for Children, the MTA and local level members at each organization.

Table 2: Differences between the Ballot Question and Compromise Law

	Ballot Question	Compromise Law
Job Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance is primary factor in dismissal and transfer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional status teachers retain job protections
Collective Bargaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State veto power over districts' teacher evaluation protocols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> District collective bargaining over local evaluation protocols
Teacher Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual consent between teacher and principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good faith negotiation between principal and superintendent
Start Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 2013 in some districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September 2016 in all districts

As with most compromises, both sides claimed victory. In light of the differences between the ballot question and the compromise law, the MTA published a list of 31 provisions initially included in the ballot question and argued publicly that it was able to narrow the compromise bill down to three provisions. Meanwhile, Stand for Children countered that, despite changes in the compromise bill, the law ultimately accomplished the organization's key political objectives: limiting the role of seniority in K-12 personnel

decisions. Others certainly agreed. In recognition of its efforts, Stand for Children's Massachusetts office was awarded the "Game Changer of the Year" Eddie Award at the 2012 summit of the Policy Innovators in Education Network. As I describe in subsequent chapters, the organization's reception in the Massachusetts policy making community was much different.

As indicated vividly in the case studied here, unions and ERAOs are not monolithic entities engaged in mutual opposition with each other. The compromise between Stand for Children and the MTA illustrates that "the relationships between the advocacy groups and unions are far more complicated than the often-supercharged rhetoric indicates" (Sawchuk, 2012c). A dizzying array of factors is at play when ERAOs and unions face off in political conflict. ERAOs face conflicting political pressures in their effort to gain influence at the state level while maintaining their grassroots mission. Similarly, union leadership and local-level membership have widely divergent perspectives on how unions should respond to the influence of ERAOs and, more generally, to the rise of neo-liberal reform. Depending on the pressures felt by either entity, policy conflict can lead to the fireworks of the Chicago teachers' strike or to the relatively benign compromise seen in Massachusetts and anywhere in between; meanwhile, the fate of major policy change is left hanging in the balance.

Research Questions and Objectives

This dissertation is a critical policy analysis of the "Great Teacher, Great Schools" case. My theoretical framework is guided primarily by Stephen Ball's policy cycle (Ball, 1993; Bowe et al., 1992). I rely on the notion of "policy as discourse," a key component of policy cycle theory, to understand how the arguments, metaphors, and

narratives evident in the policy debate appeared to shape the actual events of the policy timeline. My approach is “critical” in its focus on political power. I highlight the discourses that had the greatest impact on the policy trajectory, and I identify marginalized perspectives on school policy and political decision making. Ultimately, I look to the political argumentation in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case to gain a better understanding of the political struggles shaping policy making and public engagement in the new policy arena.

Informed by Critical Discourse Analysis, this case study is premised on the notion that political power is visible in the arguments, or discourses, that animate the policy development process (Fairclough, 2003, 2004; Luke, 2002; Rogers, 2004a). According to post-structural theory, “discourses” are the arguments or themes that establish relationships between different selections of text (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1994b; Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1972; Sharp & Richardson, 2001). Foucault (1972) explains that discourse is not an “internal construction” developed “in the mind of man” (p. 60). Discourses do not appear whole in any single text. Instead, discourses are an “anonymous dispersion through texts” (Foucault, 1972, p. 60), formed not by a single author, but by the combination of themes, topics, and perspectives that appear across a full body of texts (Bacchi, 2000; Sharp & Richardson, 2001). According to discourse analysis theorists, individual statements draw from common narratives – or, discourses – to appear to be part of a comprehensive, over-arching truth.

The concept of discourse is useful to policy analysis because discourses “give shape through metaphors and practices to a particular policy-making process or debate” (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 195; Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 2005, 2008; Fischer, 2003). By

analyzing discourse, we can get a sense of what is possible in policy making and policy implementation. Dominant policy discourses contribute both to the “construction of the need for reform” (Ball, 2005, p. 13), and they “[provide] and [make] obvious and necessary ‘appropriate’ policy responses and solutions” (Ball, 2005, p. 13). Importantly, discourses not only set the topic of the conversation, they also fix boundaries of what is acceptable in dialogue and in practice. Perspectives that clash with dominant discourses are likely to be marginalized. Meanwhile, because they appear to be aligned with accepted truths about what constitutes good school policy, perspectives that appeal to dominant discourses are likely to have more impact on political debate and legislative action.

Throughout various venues of policy debate, I identify the discourses that appeared to have the strongest influence on the actual events of the policy development process in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. By identifying dominant discourses across my collected data, I explore “how aspects of the schooling situation reflect wider developments in the political and economic arena” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 6), especially regarding changes to political power in the new educational policy making arena. I aim to understand how discourses common to the current policy making era enabled certain political possibilities in the Massachusetts case, while constraining others. Additionally, I critique influential discourses for important values and perspectives that may be missing. I use this discussion to raise concerns about the current era of educational policy making and to develop suggestions for improving on observed shortcomings.

Specifically, I take up the following questions:

- What can the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case tell us about the new educational policy making arena? Is this the kind of policy making system we want in a democratic society? If not, how can we do better?
 - What were the major political struggles of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory?
 - What was the relationship between discourse and political decision making across the policy trajectory?
 - How were political discourses related to struggles over democratic engagement in the policy development process?

Conversation is a major driver of political change. The fast embrace of neo-liberal policies and the rise of ERAOs are related, in large part, to argumentation that gives each a newfound political cache. Similarly, the declining influence of teachers’ unions is shaped in important ways by changes in how unions are perceived and discussed in the political arena. Changes like these will have a profound impact on the kinds of school policies that are created in the years to come. I look to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case to provide a greater understanding of nationwide changes to the values and relationships shaping educational policy. Ultimately, I use this case to ask, in a broad sense: Is this the kind of policy making system we want in a democratic society? If not, how can we do better?

This dissertation makes the argument that the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case is indicative of what I am calling the “neo-democratic” era of educational policy making. Specifically, I use the term “neo-democratic” decision making to refer to cases where high-level interest group conflict leads to narrow forms of democratic engagement.

In the case studied here, Stand for Children and the MTA engaged in high-stakes conflict that reflected larger battles between teachers' unions and ERAOs. I trace changes in each organization's political identity over the course of the conflict, and I demonstrate that identity was connected in important ways to underlying beliefs about policy making and public engagement in the new policy making arena. I demonstrate that Stand for Children and the MTA both abandoned explicit commitments to democratic engagement of local-level membership in an effort to preserve their own political influence.

In Chapter Two, I use the literature to define dominant discourses about educational policy making in the neo-liberal era. I begin this discussion with a brief summary of policy discourses dominant during the so-called social welfare era between the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the 1983 release of the *A Nation at Risk* report (Conley, 2003; Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ranson, 1995, 2012). I then describe how political discourses and policy mechanisms shifted in the transition from the social welfare era to the current neo-liberal era. Importantly, I note that modes of democratic engagement changed alongside shifts in political discourse. The social welfare era featured a sort of "minimalist democracy," in which the public trusted elected officials and school leaders to make decisions about public schools (Fung, 2007; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2012). When the public lost trust in this system, due in large part to *A Nation at Risk*, political decision making transitioned to the "aggregative democracy" dominant in the neo-liberal era. According to aggregative modes of decision making, the public engage in policy development via individual choices in a so-called educational marketplace (Fung, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Hursh, 2009; Ranson, 2007; Rogers, 2006). I argue that both approaches fall short of the broad

public engagement that is necessary to restore public trust in educational policy making (Fischer, 2003; Ranson, 2007). I offer deliberative democracy as an alternative model, and I use the notion of public accountability as a touchstone for evaluating public engagement in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case.

Then, in Chapter Three, I detail my research design, including my theoretical framework, data collection, and data analysis methodology. I present a version of Stephen Ball’s “policy cycle” (Ball, 1993; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Lingard, 1996) that is merged with deliberative democratic theory. As its name implies, the policy cycle is an alternative to the more linear forms of policy analysis that characterize the modern, technical-rational paradigm (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Lingard, 1996). Using modernist policy analysis as a backdrop, I characterize the strengths and shortcomings of policy cycle analysis, which aligns with the post-structural tradition. I then describe how I use deliberative democratic theory to respond to critique of the policy cycle. In this effort, I join others who work “on the cusp” of modern and post-structural forms of policy analysis by using analysis of political discourse and local-level complexity to point a way towards broad social justice (Fischer, 2003; Howe, 1998; Vidovich, 2007). I then offer a detailed account of the methods that I used to translate policy cycle analysis into a functional research design. I detail my full portfolio of collected data as well as the three-stage method that I used to analyze data. Lastly, this chapter presents what I am calling an “analytic framework,” a structured diagram that I use to present data in each subsequent chapter.

Chapters Four through Six present findings from my analysis of the case. In Chapter Four, I report on findings related to the rise of interest group conflict in

Massachusetts educational policy making during the years leading up to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative. I demonstrate that, following the launch of Race-to-the-Top, Massachusetts educational policy making became dominated by changes that characterize the new policy making arena, such as the rise of neo-liberal reform, the increased influence of ERAOs, and the changing role of teachers’ unions. I note, during this time, the emergence of local-level critics who argued that their voices were not heard in the decision making of state leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA. Paving the way towards compromise, I note that leaders at each organization shared underlying beliefs about policy that conflicted with those of their own members.

In this chapter, I use data from leaders and critics at Stand for Children and the MTA to identify competing frames about each organization’s political identity. I demonstrate that Stand for Children was caught between two ways of framing its organizational purpose, which I am calling the “ERAO as antidote” and “ERAO as antagonist” identities. Similarly, I build the argument that the MTA was engaged in an internal battle between two very different perspectives on union political activity; I label these the “union as reformer” and “union as advocate” identities. Introduced in Chapter Four, these frames serve as major themes in my analysis and presentation of data throughout the policy trajectory.

In Chapter Five, I explore the debate and political outcomes of the ballot initiative, specifically. I build the argument that, fueled by high-level interest group conflict, both Stand for Children and the MTA pursued narrow forms of democratic engagement that clashed with their own organizational mission statements. Indicative of what I am calling the “new age of aggregative democracy,” both organizations used

individual surveys or polls as stand-ins for more collective forms of democratic engagement. I trace burgeoning conflict within each organization, noting important differences between the political discourses influencing state-level leadership and local-level membership.

Chapter Six explores the political outcomes of the compromise law. Because it was developed in private negotiations between Stand for Children and the MTA, I view the compromise law as an example of the kinds of policies that are possible in the “neo-democratic” era. Instead of shaping policy through deliberative democratic engagement, both organizations were primarily motivated by concerns about preserving their own political influence in an environment characterized by high-stakes policy battles. I demonstrate that the exclusion of public voice led, perhaps unexpectedly, to major negative consequences for leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA. As a result, both organizations now face an uncertain future in Massachusetts educational policy making, and the public is left with even fewer avenues for influencing public school policy.

Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I summarize major themes from the case, and I offer suggestions for moving beyond the “neo-democratic” era and its detachment from meaningful democratic engagement in educational policy making. I observe that in an era of high-level political decision making, barriers to public engagement have become part of an accepted common sense about policy development. In reflecting on the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, I ask if there is a better way to make policy. With non-state actors embroiled in high-level conflict, I build the argument that the state can play a role in promoting structural change that creates a space for public voice to influence

decisions about public schools. Toward this end, I offer three concrete, research-supported methods for inclusive, democratic educational policy making.

Chapter Two

Literature Review:

Discursive Shifts in Modern Educational Policy Making and Public Engagement

As background for understanding the new policy making arena, I trace major discursive changes from the era of social welfare policies to the current era of neo-liberal reform. After providing a brief overview/definition of each era, I examine: (a) the discourses justifying policy priorities in each period and (b) the role of democratic engagement and its impact on public trust in dominant modes of policy making. My characterization of policy discourses is based on key analyses of the changing political and policy landscape from a variety of perspectives, including process tracing (Mehta, 2013), domain analysis (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009), discourse analysis (Hursh, 2005, 2009), and critical policy analysis (Valenzuela & Brewer, 2011). I draw further insight from conceptual scholarship on characteristics of the neo-liberal era, including its relationship to the rise of global capitalism (Ball, 2005, 2010; Ranson, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009) and its affinities with neo-conservative principals (Apple, 2006; Buras & Apple, 2008).

I also use literature on democratic theory to generate a historical reconstruction of how trends in democratic decision making have changed along with shifts in dominant policy discourse (Chambers, 2003; Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007, 2012; Villa, 1992). I draw on two additional fields of empirical research. Firstly, I explore the findings of empirical investigations of democratic engagement in cities like New Orleans (Buras, 2011) and Philadelphia (Gold et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2011), now widely recognized as experimental sites for neo-liberal policy change. Secondly, because it is particularly

relevant to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, I review empirical literature on the use of the ballot initiative as a vehicle for policy change (Lascher, Hagen, & Rochlin, 1996; McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Saenz, 2008, 2012; Moses & Farley, 2011). Though emerging from very different traditions, each field of research raises questions about the extent to which the public is engaged in reforms of the neo-liberal era.

Trends in Policy Discourse and Democratic Decision Making

Throughout this review, I use the notion of “public accountability,” drawn from deliberative democratic theory, as a touchstone for evaluating the merits of dominant modes of educational governance. While the term “accountability” is typically reserved for test-based measures of student and teacher performance, it nonetheless carries the weight of bigger and more auspicious beginnings. Dunshire (1978) defines accountability as “having to answer questions about what has happened or is happening within one’s jurisdiction” (p. 41). More than numerical measures of performance, this broader notion of accountability espoused by theorists in the deliberative democratic tradition includes what Ranson (2007) describes as a “dimension of ‘answerability’” wherein policy makers and practitioners alike are “held to account” publicly for the reasons for their actions and for their related political consequences (Dunshire, 1978; Giddens, 1984; Ranson, 2012). In this view, accountability is oriented not merely towards surveillance, but also towards building “shared understanding and accounts” (Ranson, 2007, p. 200; Fischer, 2003) about the value of certain policies.

Importantly, this broader notion of accountability in deliberative theory is oriented towards increasing public trust in the public school system. As Ranson (2007) explains, “trust and achievement can only emerge in a framework of public

accountability that enables different accounts of public purpose and practice to be deliberated in a democratic sphere” (p. 214; see also: Fischer, 2003). In order to reach shared accounts of the purpose and impact of certain school policies, affected stakeholders must engage in meaningful debate with one another, where individuals challenge one another to defend their opinions towards collaboratively developing policies that best reflect the interests and values of all who are affected (Fischer, 2003; Warren, 2009). Below, I track efforts towards approximating this notion of accountability. I begin with the equity-oriented policies of the social welfare era through to the current era of standards and test-based accountability. I argue that differences between neo-liberal and deliberative notions of accountability are worth considering closely because the contrast helps to highlight what may be missing from the current policy making arena.

The Social Welfare Era, 1965-1983

In the social welfare era, educational governance adhered to the notion that “the government shared some responsibility for safeguarding the conditions that could enable people to flourish” (Hursh, 2007, p. 495; Conley, 2003; Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Hargraeves & Shirley, 2009; Ranson, 1995, 2012). This political framework led to the spate of government spending and social programs that helped the country to emerge from the depression and to lead allied forces in World War II. DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) note educational policy making in this era was characterized by an “equity rationale” (p. 17) where the national government supplemented state funding in an effort to equalize educational opportunity for low-income students (Conley, 2003; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Howe & Meens, 2012). Table 3, below, provides a general

overview of the discussion here, highlighting the discourses, policies and forms of democratic governance dominant during the social welfare era.

In particular, two related discourses are evident in educational policy of the social welfare era. Firstly, political decision making was driven by then-dominant discourses about the role of the government in promoting school achievement (Mehta, 2013; Hursh, 2005, 2007). Mehta (2013), for example, notes that, before the release of *A Nation at Risk*, debate about education policy adhered to the notion that “social forces were responsible for academic outcomes” (p. 286). According to this perspective, school improvement is a social responsibility, not a matter of policies and practices within a particular school building. As I discuss further below, neo-liberal policies of a later era turned this notion on its head, promulgating the discourse that school-based practices can promote academic achievement regardless of the social forces, such as poverty and access to health care, affecting students’ lives outside of school.

Policy making in the social welfare era reflected the dominant discourse about school improvement. The most prominent example of social welfare educational policy was the Title I funding formula at the center of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Mehta, 2013). Widely recognized as a redistributive form of social improvement (Fraser, 1989), Title I provided funding to schools in low-income communities to help balance disparities in state funding, which often relied heavily on generating revenue from local property taxes. Consistent with the social welfare perspective on social justice, the government aimed to spur academic achievement by mitigating the harmful effects of social forces, like poverty, on student performance.

Relatedly, educational decision making was driven by discourses about the value of local control over public schools. As described by Howe and Meens (2012), “equity-minded reformers...adopted [local control] as a tool of education reform” (p. 5) in order to advocate for policies that increased access to educational opportunity. According to the local control discourse, the role of centralized government was limited to the provision of social opportunity (Hursh, 2009; Mehta, 2013). Pedagogical practice within schools, meanwhile, was left to local school leaders, who had wide discretion over school’s curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Tyack, 1974).

In the social welfare era, the local control discourse was an influential part of the educational policy debate. Howe and Meens (2012) note, for example, that arguments about local control were used by conservatives to resist the expansion of school choice policies. Meanwhile, civil rights leaders used discourses about local control to argue for increased decentralization of school government, which, in part, empowered minority communities to independent governance over school policies. Perhaps most importantly, the discourse of local control contributed, in large part, to the wide promulgation of a localized accountability system that eschewed the top-down mandates for student performance that have come to define the neo-liberal era. Social welfare policies, such as Title I, included only very limited accountability requirements, as government funding was tied exclusively to student income, not in any way to student performance (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2007, 2012).

Minimal Democracy. Ranson (2012) situates social welfare policies within the “age of professionalism” (p. 245) where the public largely deferred trust for educational quality to elected officials and practitioners (Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 1995, 2012). In this

way, the social welfare era of educational policy making was characterized by what Fung (2007) describes as “minimal democracy,” which “favors comparatively low standards of public accountability” (p. 454) and largely relies on “elections as the central political institution” (p. 448) and policy making apparatus. As one might infer from its name, the standard of minimal democracy falls far short of the broad, multi-voiced debate favored by the deliberative democratic tradition; instead of shaping policy through dialogue and debate, the public primarily engage in policy making indirectly, via election of school board members and other local officials (Fung, 2007; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2012).

Public trust in social welfare policies was decimated with the publication of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983, which sparked public and political attention to student achievement and global economic competitiveness, effectively ending the era of social welfare policy making (Conley, 2003; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2012). Mehta (2013) notes that *A Nation at Risk* “called into existence a broad public backing for school reform” (p. 300), including broader discussion of education policy goals and more strident calls for performance-level accountability. In the report’s aftermath, federal policy making shifted from the “programmatically optimism” (Ball, 2005, p. 56) of the social welfare approach to the “radical pessimism” (Ball, 2005, p. 56), reflected in the language of *A Nation at Risk*, which charged that “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk*, then, simultaneously marked the end of the social welfare era and the beginning of the current era of neo-liberal policy making.

Table 3: Overview of the Social Welfare Era

Social Welfare Era	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Defined by an “equity rationale” that aimed to improve educational opportunities of the poor and disadvantaged.	
Dominant Discourses	Policy Mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School improvement as a social responsibility• Local control over public schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redistributive financial support for disadvantaged communities (i.e., Title I)• Localized school accountability that eschews top-down mandates for student performance
Form of Democracy	Impact on Public Engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minimal Democracy – Low standards of public accountability and high-trust in elected officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public influenced education policy indirectly, via the election of local- and state-level leaders• Public trust in school policy decimated with the publication of <i>A Nation at Risk</i>

The Neo-Liberal Era, 1983-Present

Neo-liberal reform operates from the premise that the market, as opposed to government bureaucracy, is an efficient solution to inequitable access to social goods (Hursh, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Translated into educational policy, neo-liberalism aims to use market principles, such as competition and choice, to ensure that the educational system more efficiently provides social goods, such as high-quality teachers, to its “consumers,” America’s public school students and their families (Ball, 2005, Hursh, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Because it aims to make public schools function more like private businesses, I use the term “neo-liberalism” as a closely-related synonym of terms like “marketization” and “corporate-oriented” reform.

Tabb (2002) describes neo-liberalism as

The privatization of the public provision of goods and services – moving their provision from the public sector to the private – along with deregulating how private producers can behave, giving greater scope to the single-minded pursuit of profit and showing significantly less regard for the need to limit social costs or for redistribution based on nonmarket criteria. The aim of neoliberalism is to put into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market (p. 29)

Market-oriented, or neo-liberal, approaches to school policies emerged largely in response to perceived shortcomings of the low-accountability, redistributive policies dominant in the social welfare era. In the decade following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, distrust of social welfare policies, along with the shift to a Republican-controlled Congress in 1995, “created a policy making environment that was less disposed toward the old equity consensus and more inclined toward innovation” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 23; Mehta, 2013). In his survey of the changing landscape of educational policy making, Conley (2003) observes that state leaders and legislators “used the failed reforms of the 1980s as proof that schools would not change and that the system needed to be abandoned” (p. 5). In place of the social welfare status quo, leaders and lawmakers saw neo-liberal policies as vehicles of long-overdue accountability for educational innovation and improvement (Conley, 2003; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

I argue that a variety of related policy discourses have come to characterize the current neo-liberal policy era, leading to significant policy changes at the state and federal levels. Table 4 provides an organizer for this discussion, as it juxtaposes

discourses about school policy with enacted legislation. Similar to the above characterization of the social welfare era, I also trace changes in the relationship between democratic decision making and public engagement in school policy; Table 4, then, also contains a summary of key arguments from the literature's characterization of public engagement in the neo-liberal era.

One major discourse evident in neo-liberal reforms is the notion that, given changes in the global economy, neo-liberal school policies are both necessary and inevitable (Ball, 2008; Fairclough, 2004; Hursh, 2009; Sleeter, 2008). Mehta (2013) helps us to understand that the embrace of the neo-liberal policy framework was fueled by paradigmatic changes in dominant beliefs about the purpose of education. In particular, orientation towards so-called economic purposes of education led to a spate of unprecedented changes that characterize the neo-liberal agenda, including changes in the mechanisms used to ensure public accountability, changes in the role of the state in providing educational opportunity, and changes in the amount and type of service providers entering the public education arena. Important for the research conducted here, political shifts that characterize the neo-liberal era created a new policy making environment that is hospitable to ERAOs and threatening to the political influence of teachers' unions.

According to the neo-liberal framework, a shift towards a more inter-connected and information-oriented global economic marketplace has changed the knowledge and skills necessary for economic success and, thus, the guiding purpose of public education (Ball, 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Ranson, 2007). As opposed to industrial or service-oriented economies of earlier eras, in the global knowledge economy, labor is no

longer primarily physical and, instead, laborers “work with their heads and produce or articulate ideas, knowledge and information” (Ball, 2008, p. 19). In order to compete with others in a now-globalized economic marketplace, advocates for neo-liberal reform argue that it is no longer adequate, or even possible, for America's students to graduate from high school and earn a middle-class income performing physical labor in America's post-industrial economy. Instead, proponents of the neo-liberal agenda argue that graduates of the public K-12 system need to possess the standardized skills and content-area knowledge necessary to compete in a global knowledge-oriented economy (Olssen et al., 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Tabb, 2002).

Informed by interviews with key stakeholders as well as artifact analysis of major public speeches and legal documents in three US states, Mehta (2013) observed that the economic competitiveness discourse became much more prominent in policy debate following the release of *A Nation at Risk*. As an example, before 1983, governors in Michigan devoted approximately 4.8% of their State of the State addresses to discussing public education. Following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the proportion of speeches devoted to public education jumped to 19.2%, with much discussion focused on the value of public education for students' economic success and, therein, for the nation's long-term economic competitiveness. Results were similar in each state studied, demonstrating a consistency that endured through governors of different parties and across differences in states' geography and policy preferences.

Widely accepted by leaders of both parties, beliefs about the purpose of public education in a globalized economy led to a series of policy changes oriented towards greater embrace of common learning standards, ostensibly ensuring that all students

would graduate from public education with the basic skills necessary to compete with their global peers (Howe & Meens, 2012; Mehta, 2013). In 1994, President Clinton's Goals 2000 Act funded the development of state standards in Math and English Language Arts and the re-authorized ESEA tied Title I funds to the development of common state standards (Conley, 2003; Mehta, 2013). Both Goals 2000 and the 1994 ESEA re-authorization signaled major early milestones in the development of common standards. Standards-based reform has increased its reach in recent years, as states are currently negotiating differences in state-level standards towards the development of national-level standards to be codified in the Common Core State Standards initiative. Due in part to incentives in President Obama's Race-to-the-Top competitive grant initiative, 43 US states have adopted the so-called "common core" standards, although this number is changingⁱ among increasingly contentious political debate about the new standards.

The embrace of common learning standards was fueled also by a discursive shift away from local control of public schools. In the neo-liberal era, policy change is driven by the notion that school failure is rooted in egregious local autonomy that contributed to the development of what was characterized in *A Nation at Risk* as an uneven "cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In place of local control, neo-liberal policy making adheres to the discourse that top-down, test-based accountability is a preferable mechanism for ensuring that all schools are held to rigorous academic standards (Howe & Meens, 2012; Ravitch, 2001). Ranson (2007) explains that standardized assessment is intended as a "clear, technical, means-end rationality" (p. 204)

that is supposed to restore public trust in a system that had gone soft (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2009; Mehta, 2013; Rogers, 2006; Tabb, 2002).

Following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, an overwhelming majority of US states developed tests to measure students' mastery of state-level standards (Conley, 2003; Mehta, 2013; Ravitch, 2001). Fueled by incentives in federal legislation, such as President Clinton's Goals 2000 Act and the 1994 ESEA re-authorization, almost every state developed statewide academic standards (Conley, 2003; Ravitch, 2001). By 1999, 39 states had mandated statewide exams that aligned with new standards, and 19 required that students pass exit exams in order to graduate from high school (Conley, 2003).

As many have noted, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, the 2001 ESEA re-authorization, raised the stakes of standardized assessment far beyond high school graduation (Conley, 2003; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Hursh, 2007). Unprecedented in American educational policy making, NCLB required that states make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) towards closing achievement gaps in their state exams (Conley, 2003). With the enactment of NCLB, students and school leaders faced high consequences for underperformance. Intended to spur educational innovation, especially regarding the instruction of typically underperforming sub-groups of students, states now faced a menu of increasingly severe consequences for failure to meet AYP, including "significant corrective action," such as removing and replacing school leadership or even turning all school operations over to the state or to a privatized portfolio model (Conley, 2003).

Despite the broad bi-partisan consensus supporting its enactment, NCLB was widely panned for its reliance on federal mandates and compliance (Hargreaves &

Shirley, 2009; Puriefoy, 2005). After its passage, NCLB became labeled an “unfunded mandate” as states charged that the law did not provide the support mechanisms necessary to help local districts make their AYP goals. In particular, the NCLB requirement that states close all achievement gaps by the 2014 school year was derided widely as an unrealistic policy goal that impeded productive school improvement.

In response, President Obama’s Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program aimed to provide infusions of funds to states that developed innovative systems of educational reform. McGuinn (2012c) notes that Race-to-the-Top was fundamentally about “helping states construct the administrative capacity to implement these innovations effectively” (p. 137). States were invited to submit reform proposals to the federal Department of Education, and those that scored highest were awarded major, long-term federal grants to help initiate their proposed changes. In tandem with Race-to-the-Top-funded innovation, at the time of this research, the Obama administration had granted ESEA waivers to 41 US states, giving state leaders flexibility from NCLB’s accountability requirements and consequences in exchange for progress towards more achievable accountability goals. A centerpiece of the Obama educational agenda, ESEA waivers were tied closely to state pursuit of so-called College and Career Readiness standards. As an example, under the Massachusetts’ waiver, the commonwealth aims to reduce by half the proportion of students who do not meet College and Career Readiness standards, codified in the common core, by 2017.

Although the Obama Administration has granted flexibility from NCLB accountability mechanisms, current policies, such as those at the heart of the ESEA waivers and the Race-to-the-Top initiative, are no less aligned with the neo-liberal

agenda for school reform. While the goals have changed from NCLB to Race-to-the-Top, the underlying framework for school improvement has remained the same. In some ways, the emphasis on test-based accountability has even intensified. For example, while NCLB attached consequences to state-level exams, under the Obama Administration, test-based accountability has ascended to the national level. Currently, two federally funded consortia, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium have developed assessments in alignment with the common core standards, the closest thing in American educational history to a high-stakes national exam. Pilots, for either PARCC or Smarter Balanced, will be implemented in 25 US states during the 2014-2015 school year.

The advent of Race-to-the-Top marks another major discursive shift from the social welfare era. While policy making before *A Nation at Risk* viewed centralized government as the provider of social opportunity, policies of the neo-liberal era, especially the policy mechanisms incentivized in Race-to-the-Top, use privatized service providers to distribute public goods (Ball, 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). According to neo-liberal discourse, the state's proper role is not to provide social services directly, but to create the conditions necessary for private entities to enter the market to provide access to public goods, like education and health care (Ball, 2010; Mehta, 2013, Vidovich, 2001, 2007). The discourse of market-oriented change has played a major role in opening the door for ERAOs to have more influence over public education policy and practice.

Educational policy making in the neo-liberal era, then, is characterized by the infusion of a complex and diverse array of educational service providers, often entering

from the non-profit and private sectors or via complicated public-private partnerships (Ball, 2008, 2010; Conley, 2003; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Gold et al., 2007; Ranson, 2007; Simon et al., 2011). According to proponents of the neo-liberal agenda, the expansion of service providers accomplishes two important goals. New actors, like charter schools, provide the competition necessary to spur innovation and improvement in public schools (Berends, Cannata & Goldring, 2011; Conley, 2003; Henig, 2008). Relatedly, proponents of neo-liberalism argue that the expansion of educational opportunities provides parents with valuable choices about important educational decisions, such as where to send their children to school (Hursh, 2009; Robertson, 2000).

The shift away from government bureaucracy to a diversified market of service providers occurred, in part, because influential political thinkers began to grow fearful of government influence on individual personal freedom. While social welfare policies viewed social progress in collectivist terms, neo-liberalism, aligned with neo-conservative thought (Apple, 2006; Buras & Apple, 2008), reframed social progress as the sum of individual achievements (Glass & Rud, 2012). Buras and Apple (2008) explain that many “old leftists” (p. 294), disenchanted with corrupt communist regimes in Europe and fearful of social engineering in the name of social improvement, began to embrace a neo-conservatism, which “advocated a more limited welfare state and expressed concerns that Great Society programs and the War on Poverty were creating a culturally deficient underclass dependent on government intervention” (p. 295; Howe & Meens, 2012). No longer the provider of social opportunity, government became viewed as a barrier to social progress, a crutch that zapped individual initiative while inflating government spending.

De-centered government control, coupled with increased influence from private-sector actors, has led to “increasingly blurred boundaries between different tiers of government, and the public and private sectors” (Ball, 2010, p. 124). In particular, neo-liberalism has led to “contractual management” (McDonnell, 2009; Ranson, 2007), where public school districts contract educational services out to private firms and, in some cases, community organizations (see Gold et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2011). As a result, in recent years especially, states have seen an emergence of new actors, especially from the non-profit and business sectors (Conley, 2003; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Mehta, 2013; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b).

Particularly important for the research conducted here, McGuinn (2012a, 2012c) notes that the Race-to-the-Top program has provided the political cover necessary for non-profit organizations, including ERAOs, to gain influence in the policy making arena. Previously, for example, personnel decisions related to supervision and tenure had been considered the “‘third rail’ of education politics” (McGuinn, 2012c, p. 145) because these topics drew the ire of politically powerful teachers’ unions (Kumashiro, 2012; Mehta, 2013; Sawchuk, 2012c). Targeting teacher training, evaluation and retention policies as one of four “core education reform areas,” Race-to-the-Top “shone a bright light on ineffective state policies and helped create new political coalitions to drive reform” often by countering union opposition (McGuinn, 2012c, p. 140; Sawchuk, 2012b). As a result, Race-to-the-Top represented “a coming-out party of sorts” (McGuinn, 2012c, p. 142) for groups aligned with the Obama administration’s policy preferences, including, of course, the neo-liberal embrace of standards and test-based accountability.

Aggregative Democracy. While the social welfare era favored a primarily electoral form of democratic decision making, scholarship typically aligns the neo-liberal era with a notion of aggregative democracy, where the tally of individual choices or, indeed purchases, determines the shape of public institutions and the policy options available to the public (Fung, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Hursh, 2009; Ranson, 2007; Rogers, 2006). According to neo-liberal political discourse, individuals shape policy development, not through active and informed public debate, but through individual transactions in a broad educational marketplace, including, but of course not limited to, the decision to send their children to a public, private or charter school (Gutmann, 1999; Hursh, 2007, 2009; Rogers, 2006).

By providing data to consumers, standardized assessments play an integral role in helping parents and families make choices in this so-called educational marketplace. NCLB created an “unprecedented availability of disaggregated school-level student performance” (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 28) through its measurement of schools’ progress in raising achievement in key subject areas and closing achievement gaps for disadvantaged sub-groups of students. Tests were used as a means of providing data to the consumer and, therein, spurring improvement via market-oriented competition (Ball, 2010; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). As an example, NCLB required public reporting of school AYP data and provided for individualized reporting delivered directly to students’ families. With access to unprecedented amounts of school-level data, parents and community members would, in theory, have the information necessary to make rationally-informed choices about which teachers are best and about where to send their children to school (Puriefoy, 2005; Rogers, 2006).

To explore the impact of aggregative democracy on educational policy making, I engage two very different, yet related, fields of policy research. Firstly, I review empirical research that examines the impact of neo-liberal policies on public engagement in public education (Bartlett & Frederick, 2002; Buras, 2011; Gold et al., 2007; Rogers, 2006; Simon et al., 2011). Proponents of neo-liberal policies argue that the expanded availability of test score data, among other innovations, will spur public engagement in school policy. Meanwhile, critics charge that, built on a consumerist model of society, neo-liberal policies promote a sort of “possessive individualism” (Ranson, 2007, p. 208), where emphasis on individual choice overrides a conception of the common good in which individuals work together to advocate for better policies (Ball, 2006, 2008; Hursh, 2007, 2009; Ranson, 2012); below, I use the literature to determine whether empirical evidence exists for either argument.

Secondly, because it is particularly relevant for my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, I explore empirical literature on the use of the ballot initiative in public policy making (Lascher et al., 1996; McDonnell, 2007; McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Saenz, 2008, 2012; Moses & Farley, 2011; Smith & Tolbert, 2004); where possible, I focus on research from the field of education, specifically. It is important to note here that the ballot initiative emerged from a very different era of public policy making that far precedes the neo-liberal era. Nonetheless, this research base is relevant because the ballot initiative is a prominent form of aggregative democracy that has become a preferred policy-making instrument of neo-liberal reform. In 2012, for example, 35 initiatives across the country offered policy changes that would either directly or indirectly affect public education, including many initiatives that proposed

neo-liberal school reform, such as ballot question approved in Georgia that gives the state legislature authority to create state charter schools (Workman, 2012). I pay close attention to the relationship between democratic engagement and public trust in neo-liberal reform and in the use of the ballot initiative. Despite differing goals, both bodies of literature indicate that aggregative democracy, in the neo-liberal tradition, threatens democratic engagement in school policy making.

Neo-Liberal Reform and Public Engagement. Early empirical scholarship largely focused on the impact of test data availability on parents' engagement in their children's education; much of this research investigated the claim that NCLB would increase parental involvement in public schools (Puriefoy, 2000, 2005; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008; Valenzuela & Brewer, 2011). In recent years, however, research has moved beyond a narrow focus on test scores to examine how a diverse array of neo-liberal policies, including the expansion of charter schools, has affected public engagement in public education (Bartlett & Frederick, 2002; Buras, 2011; Gold et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2011). Although the research reviewed below asks slightly different questions, it suggests that neo-liberal policies present a significant impediment to public engagement in public education.

Research has demonstrated, for example, that, in practice, NCLB's heavy reliance on standardized tests has actually been an obstacle to collective social action (Hursh, 2007, 2009; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008; Valenzuela & Brewer, 2011). Surveys conducted by the Public Education Network (PEN) found that "parents see the names of their children's schools on watch lists, but they don't know what these lists mean" and that "they know they need to speak up in order to get the services their kids deserve, but

they don't know how to voice their concerns or who will listen to them" (Puriefoy, 2005). Meanwhile, a poll of over 1,200 voters revealed that "respondents strongly preferred solutions based on more community involvement" (Puriefoy, 2000, p. 36) in their local public school, as opposed to high-stakes accountability. While increased choice is undeniably important for some, perhaps many, according to the PEN research it does not represent the broad public engagement that many parents want.

Drawing from public opinion polls and reports from public forums, Rogers (2006) sought to assess the extent to which NCLB policies provided low-income parents with new information and "new power" (p. 613) towards improving learning opportunities for their children. Additionally, Rogers (2006) analyzed the narratives of parent power evident in public speeches about the law. His research uncovered a bias in the law towards individual, atomized parental engagement aligned with aggregative models of democratic decision making. For example, a dominant narrative in Secretary of Education Rod Paige's public speeches emphasized that "parents enact power individually" (p. 616-7) by helping children with homework or using NCLB provisions allowing parents to seek tutoring support for their children. Belief in individualized, aggregative change clashed irreconcilably with the goals of Parent-U-Turn, the community organization examined in Rogers' (2006) research. Instead of enacting power individually, Parent-U-Turn aimed to build "alliances with other parent and advocacy groups concerned with guaranteeing all children a quality education" (p. 632). Ultimately, the organization found nothing in the NCLB law that could help them implement a broad, collective advocacy campaign oriented towards changing structures that preserve educational inequity in their local schools.

Recent research, focusing on neo-liberal reform at the city and state levels, points similarly towards the conflict between market-oriented policies and empowered community action. In her investigation of how neo-liberal education policies have impacted access to K-12 education in New Orleans, Buras (2011) found that parents and community members were systematically excluded from the planning process undertaken to revitalize New Orleans' schools. Following Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became an "experimental site" (Buras, 2011, p. 296) for neo-liberal reform in the urban context. Most notably, the city embraced a portfolio model that provided a menu of different types of schools, including the most extensive charterization of any major public urban district at the time. Using stakeholder interviews, document analysis and observations of public debate, Buras (2011) found that the coalitions created to plan the city's redevelopment fostered "exclusionary decision making by elite policy makers" (p. 322) and eschewed broad public input. Perhaps as a result, the city's revitalized portfolio district featured what Buras terms a "unconscionable" dispossession of educational opportunity: a concentration of schools in the predominately white uptown areas of the city and the corresponding absence of schools in the predominately black downtown.

Similarly, in their examination of market-oriented policies in North Carolina, Bartlett and colleagues (2002) found that the predominance of the market discourse excluded non-dominant discourses about school improvement. Compiling 40 interviews, as well as field notes from observations of public planning meetings in two North Carolina counties, the researchers aimed to "probe the social forces shaping political action and inaction" (Bartlett et al., 2002, p. 4) in local-level policy making. Similar to Buras' (2011) research in New Orleans, Bartlett and colleagues (2002) found that elites

dominated the planning process, using the language of economic growth “to justify pernicious educational structures, such as unequally funded districts in Halifax and an abysmal alternative school in Durham” (p. 19). Instead of developing an equitable system of public education, the disproportionate influence of “local growth elite” (Bartlett et al., 2002, p. 19) reserved the best public schools for their own children while leaving underserved students with limited opportunities, as seen also in Buras’ (2011) research.

Likewise, a long-term examination of changes to the Philadelphia public school system found that local community leaders have been systematically isolated from decision making about major changes to the city’s public schools (Gold et al., 2007; Simon et al., 2011). Scholars at Research for Action, a non-profit organization located in Philadelphia, have closely followed the city’s embrace of a “diverse provider model,” which, in the neo-liberal tradition, features an array of school types, including charters, district-run public schools and schools managed by external providers under contract with the district. Between 2002 and 2006, researchers conducted over 70 interviews with variously-positioned stakeholders, including district insiders and leaders of community-based organizations, in addition to regular observation of semi-monthly meetings of the district’s School Reform Commission, a coalition of business leaders, city representatives and district leaders appointed to replace the city’s school board, as per the state’s takeover of the Philadelphia school system.

Most notable among an extensive volume of published research, Gold and colleagues (2007) found that, as in New Orleans and North Carolina, in Philadelphia, “privatization often narrows, rather than expands, public input into policy making” (p. 207). Interviews and public observation revealed that the district effectively neutralized

feedback and criticism from community groups by turning them into contractually-obliged service providers. Once contracted to work with city schools, community-based organizations no longer had the freedom necessary to hold the district publicly accountable for improving outcomes for students. Instead, the “locus and meaning of accountability” (Gold et al., 2007, p. 207) shifted, such that community groups found themselves accountable to the district for the terms of their contract.

Research by Simon and colleagues (2011), also from Research for Action, sheds light into the Philadelphia’s School Reform Commission, suggesting that the planning process was characterized more by secrecy than by public debate. Their examination of the civic engagement of a community organization called Students Empowered found that the organization was repeatedly eschewed from city planning largely because their beliefs about school improvement clashed with the city’s overwhelmingly neo-liberal agenda. Instead, groups “that had the ability to reach leaders were much more successful in achieving their goals than groups that relied on public engagement strategies” (p. 295) to advocate for change. Juxtaposed with research by Gold and colleagues (2007), the research of Simon et al. (2011) suggests that community organizations in Philadelphia faced a lose-lose dilemma: sacrifice critical autonomy by accepting contract work with the district or face near-total exclusion from city decision making.

The Ballot Initiative and Public Engagement. Direct democracy in American society takes three main forms: the initiative, the referendum and the recall. While the referendum and the recall allow citizen intervention on existing laws or lawmakers, respectively, the initiative places a proposed statutory measure or constitutional amendment on the ballot (Moses & Farley, 2011; Smith & Tolbert, 2004). Of the three

forms of direct democracy, then, the ballot initiative is the only one that allows citizens to write and enact law. Currently, 24 states, mostly in the western and mid-western United States, allow state ballot initiatives. Given the increased use of the ballot in recent educational policy making, there is a small, but growing, literature on the impact of the initiative on both education practice and public discourse. Below, I will review this literature in order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of this increasingly popular policy making mechanism on democratic engagement in school policy.

Research on the use of the ballot initiative, both in education and otherwise, illustrates three primary ways in which the ballot initiative may increase public engagement in public policy. The initiative, it is argued, 1) provides citizens access to the lawmaking process (McDonnell, 2007; Moses & Farley, 2011); 2) ensures that legislators are responsive to public opinion (Lascher et al., 1996; McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Farley, 2011); 3) stimulates greater public participation and democratic debate (McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Farley, 2011).

McDonnell (2007) notes that citizens often decide to use the initiative process “based on a strategic calculation that a policy proposal will fare better in this arena than in the legislature” (p. 23). Herein lies the initiative’s most obvious, yet controversial, claim to purpose. A relic of progressive era politics, the initiative is perhaps the clearest manifestation of the populist influence on the lawmaking process. As with its related direct democracy mechanisms, the initiative is designed as a “gun behind the door” (Lascher et al., 1996, p. 760) of the legislative process to keep legislators in check. Amidst the smoky, back-room deals of the progressive era, the initiative provided insurance against legislators run amok. It is argued, then, that the initiative sparks

democratic debate by vesting citizens with the power to make law (McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Farley, 2011). In theory, because citizens are more involved in the lawmaking process, there is a richer and more vibrant public debate.

Despite its promise, however, the weight of research evidence suggests that policy making by ballot initiative actually inhibits public engagement. In particular, research indicates that the influence of special interest groups moderates against the inclusion of ordinary citizens in the lawmaking process (Moses & Farley, 2011; Moses & Saenz, 2008). In addition, research on the role of the media in facilitating public debate about ballot initiatives raises important questions about the nature and substance of public debate about ballot questions in education (Moses & Saenz, 2008).

Although commonly thought to be more responsive to voter interests than the legislative system, research has found that results of ballot initiatives “may be biased away from the views of the median voter” (Lascher et al., 1996, p. 772). Often, voters of lower socio-economic status are underrepresented in ballot initiative votes. Additionally, because organized interested groups have the funding to collect the signatures required to initiate the ballot process and the visibility to trumpet their cause, they typically dominate the ballot process.

Lascher and colleagues (1996), for example, used public opinion surveys in 47 states between 1976-1988 to develop a “grand index” (p. 765) of the liberalism/conservatism of each state’s voters. They compared this index to the general liberalism/conservatism of the policies enacted in initiative and non-initiative states in order to understand if policies in initiative states were more responsive to voter preferences. According to the authors’ hypothesis, if the policy initiative process

enhances responsiveness to voter concerns, there would be a stronger relationship between voter preferences and policy outcomes in initiative states as compared to non-initiative states. The study's findings, however, exhibited no such correlation, indicating "simply that the initiative process in practice does not enhance the extent to which policies accord with public opinion" (Lascher et al., 1996, p. 774). Compared to non-initiative states, the initiative process did not lead to legislation that better reflected the political preferences of the general public. This finding is a sharp indication that the original purpose of the initiative has been co-opted by special interest groups who do not necessarily represent the concerns or preferences of the general public (Ellis, 2002; Moses & Saenz, 2008).

As personified by Ward Connerly's "Super Tuesday for Equal Rights," an effort to put anti-affirmative action initiatives on the ballot in five states, the ballot initiative process is susceptible to corruption by high-financed special interest groups (McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Farley, 2011). In their review of higher education-related ballot initiatives, McLendon & Eddings (2002) note that it takes an "estimated \$3 to \$6 million...to mount an effective campaign" (p. 197). Often, as is the case in the case studied here, money is raised from remarkably well-financed national corporations and philanthropies. Contrary to the original purpose of the ballot initiative, these organizations typically operate well beyond the particular state whose policy they hope to influence. With the ability to control the debate, interest groups effectively "hijack the policymaking process" (Moses & Saenz, 2008, p. 291), giving narrow interests the imprimatur of public opinion.

Further, research has noted that the general public often does not have the expertise necessary to make an informed decision about topics that are featured on ballot initiatives (McLendon & Eddings, 2002; Moses & Farley, 2011). Perhaps as a result, the labeling of initiatives has been shown to have a strong effect on whether or not they are approved by voters (Ellis, 2002). In their analysis of anti-affirmative action initiatives in three states, Moses and Farley (2011) found that campaigns and their wording can become misleading. As an example, Moses and Saenz (2010), in their media analysis of the same anti-affirmative action initiatives, found that the concept of civil rights became “co-opted” (p. 306) to stand for a sort of color-blind version of equality. In this way, the perspective of the initiative’s proponents were framed in common sense, non-controversial terms in order to gain broad public acceptance. In education policymaking, in particular, this often leads to the approval of policies that may not actually represent the true policy preferences of the general public (Moses & Saenz, 2008).

Table 4: Overview of the Neo-Liberal Era

Neo-Liberal Era	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined by a market-oriented theory of change that aims distribute public goods through a privatized system that values competition, choice and test-based accountability 	
Dominant Discourses	Policy Mechanisms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neo-liberal reforms as necessary, given changes to the global economy • Failure of local control over school policy • Value of top-down accountability for student achievement • Value of diverse, non-state educational service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of state curriculum standards (Goals 2000 and the 1994 ESEA re-authorization) • Sanctions for under-performing schools, as measured by standardized state assessments (NCLB) • Incentives for adopting standards for College and Career Readiness (Race-to-the-Top and state ESEA waivers)

-
- Incentives for tying teacher job security to student performance (Race-to-the-Top)
 - Incentives for charter school expansion and contractual management relations (Race-to-the-Top)

Form of Democracy

Aggregative democracy - The tally of individual choices determines the shape of public institutions and the policy options available to the public

Impact on Public Engagement

- Emphasis on individualized action inhibits collective action
 - Evidence that the general public is excluded from important school policy decisions
 - Evidence that the ballot initiative process is typically co-opted by special interests
-

The literature reviewed above demonstrates that dominant discourses shaping educational policy have changed dramatically in the transition from social welfare policies to the current neo-liberal era of school change. The social welfare era was defined by an “equity rationale” that featured a centralized government, single-handedly responsible for creating broad social opportunity (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Hursh, 2005; Mehta, 2013). Policies of the social welfare era were guided by the discourse that school improvement is a collective, social responsibility and that school practice is best left to local-level practitioners. As a result, political decision making tended toward redistributive programs, such as Title I, that provided supplemental funding to disadvantaged communities without the corresponding demand for performance-level accountability.

In the neo-liberal era, discourses dominant during the social welfare era morphed into their virtual opposite. Neo-liberal reform moved away from direct reliance on government programming to embrace a market-like system for the distribution of public

goods (Hursh, 2007; Olssen et al., 2004; Ranson, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Tabb, 2002). Following the publication of the *A Nation at Risk* report, policy makers embraced the discourse that schools were not providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a newly-globalized knowledge society (Howe & Meens, 2012; Mehta, 2013; Ravitch, 2001). In the aftermath of the report, state leaders changed the way they talked about education policy to emphasize competitiveness in the global economic marketplace. Changing beliefs about the purpose of public education also catalyzed major changes in discourses about the value of local-level autonomy and about the government's role in promoting school improvement.

Undeniably central to the neo-liberal framework, the embrace of common academic standards became inextricably paired with high-stakes accountability for mastery of standards, as often measured via standardized tests (Ball, 2010; Hursh, 2005, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). Unlike policies of the social welfare era, schools are no longer conceived as black boxes that received public funds without having to demonstrate improved performance (Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2007; Ravitch, 2001). Instead, as seen in the Goals 2000 Act as well as the 1994 and 2001 re-authorizations of the ESEA, neo-liberal policy features heightened use of accountability measures to promote student achievement and to provide data to consumers about which schools and teachers are best (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2010; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). The argument, according to the neo-liberal discourse, is that combination of standards, testing and competition will give all schools incentives to improve (Apple, 2006; Hursh, 2009; Mehta, 2013; Rogers, 2006; Tabb, 2002). According to this model, the government's

proper role is to protect market-like conditions that provide public goods without negatively impacting corporate profits or intruding into individuals' private lives.

The above review also demonstrates that trends in democratic decision making shifted in important ways alongside changes in dominant discourses about school policy. Social welfare policies favored a “minimalist democracy,” where democratic decision making occurred primarily via the election of school leaders at local and state levels (Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007). Neo-liberal policies, meanwhile, are premised on an aggregative notion of democratic decision making, in which decisions about public schools are guided by the tally of individual choices in a broad educational marketplace (Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007).

Despite the promise of increased accountability in the form of “consumer” choice, neo-liberal policies typically favor political decision making processes that eschew collective public engagement (Bartlett & Frederick, 2002; Buras, 2011; Gold et al., 2007; Rogers, 2006; Simon et al., 2011). The literature on neo-liberal experimentation in cities such as Philadelphia and New Orleans indicates that neo-liberal governance falls far short of the broad notion of public accountability favored by thinkers like Dunshire (1978) and Ranson (2007, 2013). Instead of providing parents and community members with the power to shape decisions about public schools, neo-liberal policy making has actually obviated broad public participation in favor of individualized action (Puriefoy, 2005; Rogers, 2006). Meanwhile, research on the use of the ballot initiative demonstrates that a preferred policy mechanism of the neo-liberal era generally reflects the interests of special interests more so than the general public (Ellis, 2002; Lascher et al., 1996; Moses & Saenz, 2008, 2012).

Due in part to its exclusion of public voice, neo-liberal policy, like that of the social welfare era, is beginning to experience crises of lost public trust. Though it has yet to reach the level of outcry seen after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, public resistance to neo-liberal policies, especially their emphasis on test-based accountability, is becoming more vocal and widespread (McNeil, 2013; Puriefoy, 2005; Ujifusa, 2013b). Major cheating scandals in Atlanta (CNN, 2013) and under Michelle Rhee's leadership in Washington DC (Ujifusa, 2013b) have sparked public backlash against high-stakes testing. Additionally, a number of organized movements have launched opposition to testing, such as the "United Opt Out" campaign, which provides state-by-state guides for teachers who want to opt out of state- and national-level testing requirements. Meanwhile, fueled by public skepticism, an ever-growing number of states have begun to back out of plans to implement the Common Core State Standards and/or their related assessments.

Throughout this dissertation, I use deliberative democratic theory to point the way beyond the shortcomings in minimalist and aggregative notions of democratic decision making. In contrast, deliberative democratic theory calls for policy making that builds public trust through informed critique of dominant policies, thoughtful inclusion of marginalized voices, and local-level deliberation. I draw from conceptual literature to define deliberative democratic theory according to its three guiding principles:

- The reason-giving requirement;
- The principal of equal participation; and
- The principal of equal respect.

The reason-giving requirement at the core of deliberative theory bears a close, if not identical, resemblance to the broad public accountability that is missing from both social welfare and neo-liberal approaches to educational policy making. Chambers (2003) defines reason-giving as “publicly articulating, explaining, and most importantly justifying public policy” (p. 308) to those who are affected. Meanwhile, many scholars discuss equal participation and equal respect as central touchstones of deliberative debate (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2009; Koopman, 2006; Menand, 2002; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Warren, 2009).

Variously termed “membership” (Ranson, 2007, p. 212) or, perhaps most commonly, “non-repression” (Gutmann, 1999), the principle of equal participation holds that deliberation should include “the multiplicity of differences with in a community were present” (Ranson, 2007, p. 212) and that no one dominates the debate and and/or silences others (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008). Closely related to the standard of equal participation is that of equal respect, which states that all relevant perspectives should not only be included in democratic deliberation but that they should all receive comparable levels of respect and consideration. This standard is perhaps most prominently known as Gutmann’s (1999) principle of “non-discrimination,” though it appears in others’ work as “equality of voice” (Ranson, 2007).

In my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, deliberative democratic theory functions as a sort of gold standard for evaluating the policy making process that led to the ballot initiative and compromise law. As noted earlier, educational policies are now debated by a widening circle of policy stakeholders who compete for political power and influence. In a highly contested policy arena, policy is often

developed without meaningful consideration of the concerns of those who are most affected. In the next chapter, I offer a description of the policy cycle framework as a theory of policy making that is suited to capture the complex interplay of discourse and political maneuvering in a changing policy arena. I provide an overview of the strengths and shortcomings of the policy cycle, and I outline the modifications I have made in order to address questions about democratic engagement in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework and Research Design:

Policy Cycle Analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Case

Across this chapter, I build an approach to policy analysis that is responsive to concerns about democratic engagement in the new educational policy making arena. As detailed in Chapter Two, modern approaches to policy making rely on modes of democratic governance that eschew broad, multi-voiced public engagement. Of most concern, policy making in the current neo-liberal era adheres to an aggregative notion of democracy, where public engagement is limited to the tally of individual choices in a so-called educational marketplace. Policy analysis, however, can help to point the way past shortcomings of the modern era by identifying the discourses and political maneuvers that stifle meaningful democratic engagement. My research contributes to this effort by providing a greater understanding of struggles over democratic participation in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case.

In this chapter, I present my theoretical framework: a version of Stephen Ball’s policy cycle (see Ball, 1993; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Lingard, 1996) that is attuned to questions about democratic engagement in educational policy making. Conceptual literature on educational policy analysis widely regards the policy cycle as an alternative to a more linear framework that is typically associated with the modern, technical-rational tradition (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Lingard, 1993, 1996; Ranson, 1995; Taylor, 1997; Vidovich, 2007). I first offer a brief, general outline of the technical-rational paradigm in policy analysis. I then describe my theoretical framework in detail, using the technical-rational paradigm as a backdrop to help illustrate the policy cycle analysis in

sharper relief. In this discussion, I describe my approach to combining Ball's policy cycle with scholarship from deliberative democratic theory (see Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2009; Koopman, 2006; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Warren, 2009).

Lastly, this chapter concludes with a detailed description of the ways that this theoretical perspective has informed my research design. I first describe the role that I played in debate over the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative as a staff member at a local non-profit. I then offer a detailed account of my complete portfolio of collected data: 32 stakeholder interviews, observational notes from seven public meetings, 42 sources of artifact data, and 105 media articles. I locate each interview participant according to her or his place in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" policy web, a heuristic that helps to understand how different political organizations are related to each other (Buras, 2011; Joshee, 2007; Joshee & Johnson, 2005; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). I then explain how the policy cycle framework, combined with deliberative democratic theory helped me to develop a theory of what happened in the case. I describe the data analysis methodology used to code data, identify political discourses, and establish relationships between discourse and political decision making.

Instrumentalism in Policy Analysis: the Technical-Rational Paradigm

The "technical-rational" paradigm is typically associated with "modernist" approaches to policy analysis, while the policy cycle is commonly described as having emerged from post-modern thinking about language and political power (Datnow & Park, 2009; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Lingard, 1996; Stone, 2002; Vidovich, 2001, 2007).

Beyond the sometimes dense vocabulary associated with either tradition, the literature's

distinction between modern and post-modern policy analysis has important implications for the study of school policy, in general, and for my theoretical framework more specifically. Briefly, modernist policy analysis seeks broadly applicable solutions to common policy problems, such as the unequal distribution of high-quality schools. Meanwhile, post-modern analysis seeks to demonstrate that local-level complexity shapes policy development and implementation in important ways, making “grand theory” incomplete or, in some cases, irrelevant (Ball, 1993; Howe, 1998; Vidovich, 2007; Villa, 1992). I seek a framework that marries the two traditions by using analysis of policy struggle in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case as a window into understanding larger struggles regarding democratic engagement in the new era of educational policy making.

Vidovich (2007) explains that “modernism has been identified with instrumental rationality and grand structuralist theories which provide certainty, predictability and enlightened progress” (p. 286) towards better school policies. In the modernist perspective, contemporary society is part of a trans-historical trend, moving inexorably towards justice and equality (Hartley, 1994). In modern policy analysis, then, research seeks the policy levers that can be promulgated widely in the pursuit of broad social justice (Fischer, 2003; Hursh, 2007, 2009; Stone, 2002; Vidovich, 2007). Below, I briefly describe three characteristics of modernist policy analysis: 1) Research emphasizes grand theory and overlooks local-level complexity; 2) Policy recommendations emphasize state-centered power; and 3) Research tends to reinforce the dichotomy between policy development and policy implementation. Throughout this chapter, these three themes are

used as touchstones for comparing technical-rational policy analysis with policy cycle analysis.

Modernist concerns for social efficiency or value-free “instrumental rationality,” in part, gave rise to what Ball (2006) has referred to as “policy science” or “that set of procedures which enables one to determine the technically best course of action to adopt in order to implement a decision or achieve a goal” (p. 56). Also referred to as the “rationality project” (Stone, 2002, p. 7), or “empiricism” (Fischer, 2003, p. 118), this approach to policy analysis relies on the assumption that research can uncover objectively-true facts about school management that can then be used widely to guide social progress (Ball, 1997, 2005; Fischer, 2003; Hartley, 1994; Stone, 2002). For this reason, the technical-rational model has been described as “structural” in that it operates according to the belief that social “relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena, there are constant laws of abstract culture” (Blackburn, 2008); as a result, the terms “structuralism” and “modernity” are often used synonymously in the conceptual literature.

So-called “modernist” or “structural” concerns for technical rationality dominate current conversations about school change, attracting attention of the media and research communities alike. Are charter schools better than public schools? Are alternative entry routes, such as Teach For America, better than university-based teacher preparation programs? Does merit pay improve teaching performance? In the modernist vein, questions like these seek to uncover policy levers that can be applied broadly in the pursuit of school improvement. According to the modernist approach, if charter schools

are determined to be better than public schools, they should be expanded widely, as seen, for example, in New Orleans and Philadelphia.

It is not uncommon for critics to argue that, in pursuing broad policy solutions, questions in the modernist vein tend to oversimplify complicated policy problems (Fischer, 2003; Ranson, 1995; Villa, 1992). As many have noted, for example, charter performance varies widely. Differences in local-level implementation of charter school policies make it almost impossible to talk about “charter schools” as a singular policy; the same has been said of alternative routes for entry into the teaching profession. This critique echoes the larger differences between modernist and post-modern policy analysis. Characteristically modern approaches to policy analysis generally overlook local-level complexity, seeking universal policy truths, while post-modern analyses are premised on the notion that local-level complexity plays a critical role in policy development and implementation (Ball, 1993; Howe, 1998; Lingard, 1996; Ranson, 1995).

In addition to seeking broad policy solutions, modernist policy analysis generally adopts a state-centered understanding of political power (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993; Taylor, 1997; Vidovich, 2007). Vidovich (2001) notes that the modern approach “features decision making controlled from the centre,” where leaders and experts develop policies and transfer them down the line to those responsible for implementation (Ball, 2005; Datnow & Park, 2009; Fischer, 2003; Hartley, 1994; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Stone, 2002). According to a modernist framework, power is something held by individuals and institutions at the top that is then used to ensure policy compliance from a comparatively powerless general public (Gulson, 2011;

Lingard, 1996; Ranson, 1995). As I discuss below, post-modern policy analysis departs from the modernist conception of power and its preoccupation with state-centered political decision making. Instead, according to the post-modern conception, the state is “a point in the diagram of power” (Ball, 1993, p. 14), one actor among a related network of actors who compete for influence over policy development and implementation.

Relatedly, technical-rational policy analyses tend to reinforce the dichotomy between policy development and policy implementation (Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Stone, 2002). According to the modern framework, policy is developed by the state and then transferred down the line to the practitioners in charge of implementation. Policy analysis, then, separates policy development from policy implementation. On the implementation side of the dichotomy, policy analysis focuses on questions related to compliance or fidelity of implementation regarding initial policy proposals (Ball, 1997; Datnow & Park, 2009; Fischer, 2003; Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Stone, 2002). Local-level complexity is assessed according to the extent to which it aids or obstructs policy plans passed down from the political center. As a result, there is very little room in modernist policy analysis for understanding how local-level actors shape policy development and reinterpret policy at the level of implementation (see Ball, 1993, 1994a; Fischer, 2003).

Doyle’s (2006) study of merit-based student grant programs provides a useful point of comparison with my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. While both studies seek to identify factors influential in education policy development, Doyle’s (2006) research stands firmly within the modernist tradition, while the analysis offered here gestures in the direction of post-modern policy analysis. Using a statistical

methodology called Event History Analysis, Doyle (2006) aimed to identify the historical factors that may have increased the probability of a particular policy event, in this case: states' adoption of merit-based grant programs at public institutes of higher education. While many states have a long tradition of offering need-based aid to college students, 15 states had adopted merit-based award systems by 2005. Doyle's (2006) statistical model weighed factors, such as a state's composite ACT/SAT score or the percent of Democrats in the state legislature, that may have led to the adoption of a merit-based program. His research concludes that states with lower proportions of high school graduates who continue directly to in-state colleges are more likely to adopt merit-based policies (Doyle, 2006). Meanwhile, states with a large proportion of students who go out of state for college are less likely to adopt merit-based grant programs (Doyle, 2006).

While Doyle's (2006) research seeks to understand factors influencing state legislation, it takes a very different approach from the research conducted here. Consistent with the modernist tradition of policy analysis, the event history methodology seeks a "grand theory" regarding a certain policy event. In his discussion section, for example, Doyle (2006) notes that his findings "provide support for the idea that merit aid programs are seen by state policymakers as a way to provide better incentives for students to go on to college" (p. 278). In this way, event history analysis seeks findings that rise above the peculiarities of local context to generate a theory that may help shape policy development in other states. Also resonant with the modernist tradition, Doyle's (2006) research is heavily focused on the political power of the state. His model includes, for example, a statistical estimate of "state government liberalism" (p. 272) as well as a measure of Democratic representation in each state's legislature. Lastly, his conception of

policy making separates policy development and implementation, as his research does not include consideration of how states may have adjusted policies to respond to implementation challenges.

I offer the above characterization not as a critique of Event History Analysis, but as an illustration of different approaches to the analysis of policy production. While it is certainly helpful to have an understanding of the factors that influence policy development across states, Event History Analysis cannot tell us much about the peculiarities within states. In seeking broad theory, it sacrifices local-level complexity. In developing my theoretical framework, I argue that understanding local-level complexity within states is central to understanding the new arena for educational policy making. For example, while there is policy conflict between unions and ERAOs in many states, the particular nature of that conflict varies according to each state's particular political environment. While policy differences in Illinois led to high-profile clashes between unions and ERAOs, policy differences in Massachusetts led to compromise. To develop a nuanced understanding of state policy making, it is important to look inside state politics to understand the arguments and political maneuvers that led to different policy outcomes in different states.

The Policy Cycle: An Alternative to the Technical-Rational Paradigm

The policy cycle offers an alternative to the technical-rational paradigm on each of the accounts described above. As Ball (1993) explains, the policy cycle aims to “replace the modernist theoretical project of abstract parsimony with a more post-modernist one of localized complexity” (p. 10). The policy cycle, then, looks beyond

broad institutional structures and universally replicable policy levers to uncover the context-specific complexity that often shapes policy in important ways.

Because it offers several imbricated contexts for policy analysis, the policy cycle framework can “provide theoretical and empirical insights into the complexities of the policy process which barely see the light of day in managerialist studies of policy” (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994, p. 155). In its earliest manifestation, Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) used the policy cycle lens to explore implementation issues related to the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and Wales (see also: Lingard, 1996). Subsequent work has used the policy cycle framework to explore changes to teacher education in the United Kingdom (Furlong, Whitty, Whiting, Miles, & Barton, 2000), teacher education accountability in the United States (Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013), and the expansion of higher education in Vietnam (Minh Ngo, Lingard, & Mitchell, 2006) among other topics.

Alongside empirical examples of policy cycle research, conceptual scholarship in post-modern policy analysis offers a long history of in-depth debate about the merits and shortcomings of the policy cycle framework (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1993, 1994b; Gale, 1999; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993, 1996; Ranson, 1995; Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Vidovich, 2007). This work sometimes engages in direct dialogue with Stephen Ball, credited widely as the progenitor of policy cycle analyses. In the remainder of this section, I use the empirical and conceptual literature on the policy cycle to describe the contours of my theoretical framework, a reimagined version of the policy cycle that is designed to capture the complexity of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory.

This dissertation argues that policy analysis must be able to capture the complicated relationships between government and non-governmental political decision makers that characterizes debate and development in the new arena of educational policy making. To this end, the policy cycle approach offers the following theoretical alternatives to a more traditional, technical-rational approach to policy analysis:

1. By emphasizing a “policy as discourse” approach to policy analysis, the policy cycle framework is well-suited to capture the role of debate/argumentation in shaping policy development;
2. By de-emphasizing the role of the state in policy making and implementation, the policy cycle framework is able to capture the influence of non-state actors, such as ERAOs, which have leveraged increasing influence in the policy arena in recent years;
3. And, lastly, the policy cycle framework is attuned to local-level argumentation and political complexity that often shapes policy development and implementation in crucial ways.

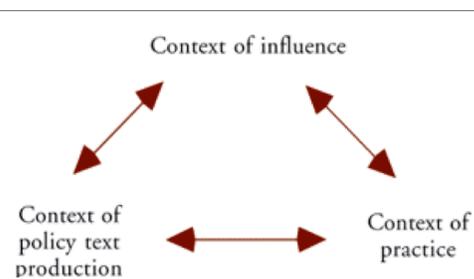
After an overview of the policy cycle framework, I discuss each of these merits in turn, making explicit connections to the case studied here. I then use the literature to characterize critique of the policy cycle framework and to describe the adjustments I have made to craft a framework that responds to shortcomings in Ball’s original conception of the policy cycle while including greater consideration of democratic engagement in educational policy making.

Policy Cycle Overview

As originally designed by Ball and colleagues (1992), the policy cycle framework proffers three interrelated analytical categories, or “contexts,” for analyzing a policy’s trajectory: the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice. Figure 2 below presents a reproduction of Ball’s original conception of the policy cycle framework. Policy contexts are defined as “domains of interdiscursive struggle amongst discourses which employ strategies to establish and maintain their dominance or challenge the dominance of others” (Gale, 1999, p. 400). Put differently, each context is a site for debate about a policy at various points in its trajectory from proposal to development to enactment to implementation (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000).

Perhaps most importantly, the arguments levied in each context influence arguments made about policy in related policy contexts, affecting the policy debate, development and practice in a sort of complex and reciprocal inter-relationship. Debates about the social factors influencing a policy proposal, in the context of influence, affect debates about the particular language and provisions of a policy, in the context of policy text production; and vice versa, across all pairwise combinations of policy contexts. Scholars have argued that the framework is a “very useful heuristic” that “begins to approximate the messiness of actual policy making in education” (Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005, p. 4) by moving beyond the over-simplified modernist narrative of an uncontested trajectory from policy development to implementation (Gale, 1999; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Lingard, 1996; Ranson, 1995; Vidovich, 2001, 2007).

Figure 2: The Original Policy Cycle



Reproduced from Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992)

In empirical and conceptual scholarship, the context of influence has variously been described as the context “where policy is normally initiated” (Ngo et al., 2006, p. 227) or where “key policy concepts are established” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 20) that eventually influence written policy text. In the context of influence, policy stakeholders engage in debate about policy problems and their proposed solutions, and interest groups advocate for their preferred policies or against policies of political opponents (Furlong et al., 2000; Gulson, 2011). While debate in the context of influence is typically thought of as the beginning of a policy’s trajectory, it is important to note that arguments about the purpose or need of a policy change in important ways throughout the policy’s life.

As an example of empirical work concerning the context of influence specifically, Cochran-Smith and colleagues (2013) identified two prevailing arguments about education policy that guide teacher education accountability in the United States. The authors note that arguments about neo-liberalism “have shaped (and continue to shape)” (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013, p. 11) teacher education accountability initiatives, such as the Obama Administration’s push to evaluate teacher preparation programs according to their graduates’ value-added scores. Similar to previous examples of policy cycle

research, I seek to understand political struggles over the need for a change to Massachusetts' policies regarding the role of seniority in K-12 personnel decisions. I pay particularly close attention to role of public engagement and outreach in the time period leading up to the launch of the ballot initiative.

Meanwhile, the context of policy text production refers to the creation of policy text that reflects the prevailing goals, arguments and discourses seen in the context of influence (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000; Minh Ngo et al., 2006; Vidovich, 2007). The policy cycle lens encompasses a broad array of texts in its analysis of text production, including everything from formal legislation to talking points memos created by key policy actors (Fairclough, 2003, 2004). Furlong and colleagues (2000) note, for example, that in “the ‘context of text production’... ‘texts’ include both the official documents that ‘represent’ the policy and the ‘spin’ that is put upon them for the benefit of the contexts of influence and practice” (p. 7). Texts are viewed as the outcome of struggle and compromise “to control the meaning of policy through its representation” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 21) and, as in the related contexts of the policy cycle model, texts are shaped in important ways by the struggle between dominant and non-dominant arguments about educational policy making.

For this dissertation, I read official policy text, such as the actual text of the ballot initiative and the compromise law, against related materials created to advocate for or against policy change. I pay particularly close attention to important differences between the production of the ballot initiative, on the one hand, and the compromise law, on the other. Given the emphasis, described above, on democratic engagement, this analysis seeks to understand the role played by Stand for Children and MTA membership in the

development of each policy text. Ultimately, I characterize the ways in which various political struggles led to the production of two very different policy texts.

Lastly, the context of practice is where policy is interpreted and put into practice by local stakeholders (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000; Minh Ngo et al., 2006; Vidovich, 2007). Analysis in the context of practice captures the ways in which a particular policy text enables or constrains instruction at the school or classroom level. Similar to the tradition of “sense making” in policy analysis (Coburn, 2001, 2006), analysis in the context of practice holds that policy “interpretation is a matter of struggle” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 22), not more-or-less faithful implementation of the policy as written. In this way, the policy cycle lens can “provide a way forward for dispelling false dichotomies between issues of policy production and implementation” (Gale, 1999, p. 405; Bowe et al., 1992; Lingard, 1996) that has dominated policy analysis for decades. Ball and colleagues (1992) remind us that “practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purpose of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of policy” (p. 22). Practitioners’ interpretations of policy, then, create new meanings for the text of the policy and for broader understanding of the factors that influenced policy development in the first place. Because the compromise law will not be fully implemented until the 2016-2017 school year, however I am unable to conduct analysis of the context of practice.

Conceptual and empirical work in the policy cycle tradition argues that, given the framework outlined above, “the policy cycle approach gives some ‘conceptual structure’ to the ‘policy trajectory studies’” (Lingard, 1996, p. 66) that moves beyond the simple, one-way relationships assumed by the modern, technical rational approach to policy

analysis. In particular, policy cycle analysis rejects the policy development/policy implementation dichotomy typical of the modernist approach and attends to the complexities of local-level interpretation (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000). In this way, the “policy cycle” framework is well-suited to capture the rich complexity typical of the new arena for educational policy making.

In the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, arguments for the purpose, design and implementation of education policies intersected with each other in complex ways. In this dissertation, I attempt to capture the complex interrelationships between policy discourses and public engagement as they played out in the law’s policy trajectory. In this way, my use of the policy cycle is closely related to its original application, which aimed “to approach legislation as but one aspect of a continual process in which the loci of power are constantly shifting as the various resources implicit and explicit in texts are recontextualized and employed in the struggle to maintain or change views of schooling” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 13). In the section below, I continue to draw from policy cycle literature to describe the merits of the framework, as it pertains to the study conducted here. In response to criticism of the policy cycle approach, I use outline a reimagined version of the policy cycle that is tailored for greater understanding of struggles over democratic engagement in educational policy making.

Merits of the Policy Cycle

In an early paper defending the policy cycle against its critics, Ball (1993) explained that he “[inhabits] two very different conceptualizations of policy” (p. 10): “policy as text” and “policy as discourse.” Each term derives from post-structural analysis of literary text (Lingard, 1996; Troyna, 1994), and a detailed comparison of each

concept veers too easily into theoretical lacunae beyond the scope of this discussion. Instead, in this section, I offer brief characterizations of “policy as text” and “policy as discourse” in order to highlight the merits of the policy cycle approach, which makes productive use of both concepts.

As one might expect, Ball’s (1993) conception of “policy as text” is perhaps most visible in the policy cycle’s context of text production, however the concept is not specific to any particular policy context. As noted above, “text” is a broad category that includes everything from the written and enacted policy to the supporting documents created by regulatory agencies to memos created to inform or mobilize the public. In the case studied here, policy text includes all of the above, especially the formal language of the ballot initiative and compromise law, as well as the literature created by the MTA and Stand for Children to advocate for their interests at various points in the policy trajectory. As Gale (1999) explains, the “text” can be thought of as the “what” of the policy: the broad constellation of published material that composes the formal and less-formal “stuff” of a policy.

According to the “policy as text” lens, the written word of a text is not the final word. Instead, “policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed” (Ball, 1993, p. 12). To view policy as text, then, is to seek an understanding of how policy stakeholders struggle against ostensibly fixed definitions of policy to create spaces for practices/actions that are aligned with their interests and to narrow the range of practices/actions that conflict with their interests (Ball, 1993; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1996; Troyna, 1994). Policy analysis, then is attuned to the ways that policy actors

engage in “productive thought, invention and adaptation” (Ball, 1993, p. 12) of interpretations of policy text.

In prominent examples of policy cycle research, analysis of policy as text often occurs within the context of practice (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000). In their original application of the policy cycle, for example, Bowe and colleagues (1992) demonstrated that teachers made “secondary adjustments” (p. 13) to classroom practice based on their interpretation of the text of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Similarly, Furlong and colleagues (2000) assert that “implementation allows, indeed demands, interpretation and the policies themselves in a real sense are changed in this process” (p. 7); their analysis likewise focuses on how policy text is interpreted by local-level practitioners. In the research conducted here, I apply a “policy as text” lens, then, to understanding how various texts are contested and reinterpreted by policy actors throughout the policy trajectory, including in the contexts of influence and text production.

Ball (1993) notes, however, that analysis limited to a “policy as text” perspective may miss out on broader reflections on the meaning of a policy text. He argues that thorough policy analysis must conceptualize and critique policy as discourse as well as text (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1993; Gale, 1999). If “text” is the “what” of the policy, discourse is the “how” and “why” of a policy (Gale, 1999). Discourses are the arguments about school problems and their solutions that are invoked in text and then contested in debate about policy goals, the meaning of policy text itself and the constraints on practitioners (Bacchi, 2000; Sharp & Richardson, 2001). Again, in a clear break from the modernist narrative of a clean, linear policy trajectory from development to

implementation, Ball (1993) argues that “there are real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies...that are set within a moving discursive frame which articulates and constrains the possibilities and probabilities of interpretation and enactment” (p. 15). A “policy as discourse” approach attempts to understand the various and complicated ways that broad social discourses appear to enable certain modes of policy development while constraining others.

To take a “policy as discourse” perspective is to use the Foucauldian concept of “discourse” as a heuristic for understanding the policy perspectives and arguments evident in each context of the policy cycle (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1993; Gale, 1999; Sharp & Richardson, 2001). This approach calls attention to “the struggle over ideas” (Stone, 2002, p. 11), including, but certainly not limited to: the process by which people of various perspectives debate policy proposals, the arguments they use to support their policy preferences, their attempts to appeal to common sense understanding of what is best for public schools and their attempts to resist arguments that challenge their political preferences (Gulson, 2011). In this way, the policy as discourse perspective is very much a part of what is known as the “interpretive turn” (Howe, 1998; Villa, 1992) or the “argumentative turn” (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Hawkesworth, 2012) in policy analysis. This perspective resists the technical-rational paradigm, especially its assumption of objective truth and its pursuit of broadly replicable policy levers that are nearly universally successful, regardless of the particularities of the local context (Fischer & Forester, 1993; Howe, 1998, Stone, 2002).

Unlike the technical-rational framework, the “policy as discourse” approach views problem identification as a “non innocent” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 49) process that is

unavoidably shaped by the values and politics of those on various sides of an issue (Gulson, 2011; Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Stone, 2002; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). One particular advantage of discourse analysis, then, is that it allows critical understanding of how power influences policy debates. Because it is oriented towards asking “how, why and by whom truth is attributed to particular statements and not to others” (Sharp & Richardson, 2001, p. 197), discourse analysis is helpful in de-coupling policy arguments from claims to objective truth (Gulson, 2011). Discourse analysis demonstrates that arguments are just that: arguments crafted by political actors, not statements of universal truth. Policy analysis, then, seeks to expose common sense notions about policy as partial, imperfect and, for some, oppressive.

In previous examples of policy cycle research, discourse analysis has been used to highlight policy perspectives evident in the contexts of influence and policy text production (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Furlong et al., 2000). For example, in their analysis of teacher education policy changes across the 1980s and 1990s in England, Furlong (2000) and colleagues used discourse analysis to highlight “voices in the context of influence,” such as neo-liberal and neo-conservative perspectives on teacher education reform. This analysis then set the stage for an investigation of how written policies are interpreted within the context of practice. In this dissertation, I engage in a more expansive use of discourse analysis, seeking to understand the discourses influential throughout various contexts of the policy cycle.

Importantly, the turn to a “policy as discourse” lens entails a turn away from more traditional conceptions of political power. Previously, power was conceived of structurally, as being “held” by influential individuals or organizations, especially the

elected and appointed officials who compose the state apparatus (Gale, 1999; Gulson, 2011; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Lingard, 1993; Ranson, 1995). Lingard (1993) notes, however, that “the policy cycle reflects the acceptance of Foucault’s conception of power as facilitative, dispersed and capillary, rather than possessed, controlled centrally located” (p. 40) within a top-down conception of the state. As viewed through the “policy as discourse” lens, power is not a thing held by particular individuals; instead it exists in the province of argument or debate. Over and above the influence held by political leaders, perspectives have power, and such power animates the political process in important ways, “making obvious and necessary ‘appropriate’ policy responses and solutions” (Ball, 2006 p. 13) to policy problems.

The policy cycle approach attempts to understand how power, evident in discourse, moves through many, diverse policy contexts and policy actors, including, but not limited to state-centered individuals and institutions. Drawing a robust critique in the policy analysis literature, Ball (1993) asserts that “we have to note the de-centering of the state in this, discourses are non-reductionist” (p. 14). By virtue of the discourses they inhabit, some individuals are able to assume power, while others are marginalized, whether state actors or otherwise. It is “reductionist,” then to rely exclusively on structural notions of power and political influence. According to Ball (1993), “we are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows” (p. 14; Ball, 1994b; Gulson, 2011; Vidovich, 2007). Leaders do not gain power by virtue of their ability to understand a so-called objective truth and to use such privileged insight to make public policy. Conversely, and importantly, those on the margins are not oppressed due to some kind of objective lack of expertise or insight.

Instead, according to Ball (1993), the powerful and the oppressed are positioned as such due to their appeal to dominant social discourses, the ultimate progenitor of political power.

A model that de-centers the role of the state, then, is better suited to capture recent changes to educational policy making. Rather than viewing the state as the central apparatus of political power, Ball (1994a, 2005, 2010) conceives of state power as a sort of “steering from a distance,” where the state attempts to shape policy and practice “through *ex post facto* accountability mechanisms” (Lingard, 1996, p. 66) as opposed to imposing rigid and explicit limitations on practice (Gulson, 2011). As a result, “Ball argues then that the workings of the state must be attended to by any ‘decent theory of education policy,’ but that such theory ‘must not be limited to a state control perspective’” (Lingard, 1996, p. 68, citing Ball, 1994a, p. 10) in which policies developed at the state level are implemented without interpretation at the local level.

The notion of “steering from a distance” is evident in federal-level education policies of the post-NCLB era (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). NCLB, for example, established sanctions for states that did not meet targets for student growth. It did not, however, establish a nationwide definition of “proficiency,” nor did it require a consistent nationwide tool for measuring student achievement. Similarly, Race-to-the-Top did not require states or school districts to implement specific educational practices. Instead, it awarded points to states that engaged in practices broadly aligned with the Obama Administration’s policy preferences. As an example, it awarded points for states that used student test scores to measure teacher performance, but it left a lot of room for state-to-

state variation in the particular mechanisms used to do so. In each case, states and school districts were left to maneuver within policy parameters defined by federal legislation.

As noted above, Massachusetts updated regulations on teacher supervision and evaluation largely to compete for Race-to-the-Top funds. These regulations then set the stage for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative, which aimed to add “teeth” to the new evaluation system in the form of higher consequences for underperforming teachers. Ball’s (1993) conception of the state, then, is particularly well-suited for the case studied here, in which “the formal power of the state is...strongly circumscribed by the struggles to influence interpretation and action at each stage of the policy cycle” (Ranson, 1995, p. 437; see also: Lingard, 1993). In displacing the state as the center of policy analysis, the policy cycle approach creates room for analytical attention to the ways in which non-state actors advocate for policies that best reflect their political interests. Ball (1990) argues that “abstract accounts tend towards tidy generalities and often fail to capture the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, compromise, intransigency, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism in the policy process” (p. 9) at the micro level. As noted above, in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, local-level complexity, or “ad hocery” (Ball, 1993, p. 10), was particularly influential in shaping the policy that eventually enacted by the Massachusetts legislature.

The policy cycle approach, then, is a major boon to analyses that aim to understand how non-state actors, like ERAOs, interact with the state apparatus to shape educational policy. As illustrated above, in recent years we have seen an unprecedented increase in the “diversification and expansion of players in the education policy arena”

(DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009, p. 29; McDonnell, 2009; McGuinn, 2012a, 2012c) that characterizes the new policy making arena. Many have called for more research into how these groups “frame their interests” and into “what tactics” they use (McDonnell, 2009, p. 423) to jockey for power (Kumashiro, 2012; McGuinn, 2012a). In characterizing the discourses that cut across state and non-state actors, the policy cycle perspective is well-suited to understand how ERAOs, such as Stand for Children, wield power and influence in the new policy making arena.

Importantly, previous examples of policy cycle research have focused analysis on how classroom-level complexities interact with policy text in the context of practice, leading to implementation that often differs from policy maker’s intentions (i.e., Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000). In this dissertation, however, I attempt to demonstrate how peculiarities of the local context can affect policy development, as opposed to policy implementation or practice. I use case study analysis to demonstrate that, in the new policy making arena, the contradictory and changing influence of the state is evident also in the contexts of policy influence and policy text production.

Critique of the Policy Cycle

Critique of the policy cycle has focused primarily on the framework’s conception of power and agency. In particular, policy theorists more closely aligned with modernist and structural understandings of power have criticized the policy cycle for overlooking the importance of state-centered power in policy development and implementation (Gulson, 2011; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993, 1996; Ranson, 1995). This line of critique argues that, in calling attention to the diffuse nature of

discursive power, the policy cycle approach neglects the very real political power held by the government. Relatedly, conceptual literature critical of the policy cycle also argues that, while it may be a valuable intellectual exercise, policy cycle analyses are ultimately unable to offer useful recommendations for changing oppressive or ineffective social structures (Bacchi, 2000; Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Vidovich, 2007). Critics argue that policy cycle analyses, in some ways, fall victim to their own strength: in offering in-depth understanding of the local-level “ad hocery” affecting policy implementation, results descend into a sort of endless relativism that is unable to offer suggestions for improving the problematic policies on a larger scale.

Ball (1994b) explains “if our analyses remain concentrated entirely upon the coercive state-centered emanations of power, then we run the risk of neglecting other, more subtle forms of power which operate through subjectivity and consciousness” (p. 175). Critics argue, conversely, that if policy cycle analysis remains concentrated on the discursive diffusions of power, it runs the risk of neglecting the impact of power held by elected officials and institutions of the state (Bacchi, 2000; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993). Echoing much of this critique, Henry (1993) charges that, in over-emphasizing discursive power, Ball takes part in “the postmodernist flight from ‘totalising’ structural analyses” (p. 102), which contain room for understanding how power is possessed and exercised by state actors. Lingard (1993) notes similarly that “the washing away of the state in the policy cycle approach reflects to some extent the post-structuralist influence with its emphasis on the discursive to the neglect of the extradiscursive” (p. 40), such as the political power held by high-level state officials.

For these thinkers, policy cycle analysis errs in its neglect of governmental power, not in its attention to discursive power. Critics claim that analysis can productively combine state-centered and discursive conceptualizations of political power (Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993, 1996; Vidovich, 2007). Lingard (1993) and Henry (1993), for example, do not argue for abandoning the policy cycle framework in favor of a more structural or Marxist understanding of political oppression. Instead their critique argues that “a stronger conception of the state needs to be inserted into the cycle” (Lingard, 1993, p. 40) and that “the ‘discursive terrain’ requires a more solid anchoring” (Henry, 1993, p. 103), such as in an understanding of how state power affects policy development and implementation. These authors argue simply that because the political influence of the state “is present in some ways in each” (Lingard, 1993, p. 40) policy context, policy cycle analysis should couple discursive understanding of power with consideration of state power.

In a second overarching line of critique, scholars charge that the policy cycle’s over-emphasis on discursive emanations of power leads to an endless relativism that is unable to offer a “space for challenge” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55) wherein the oppressed may find the power to work productively towards better policies (see also Ranson, 1995; Sharp & Richardson, 2001; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). According to the “policy as discourse” approach, “resistance” for the oppressed largely boils down to “the use of history to give voice to marginal and submerged voices” and to “facilitate an insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Ball, 1994b, p. 176), or non-dominant discourses about education policy making. Those critical of the policy cycle approach claim that this is not enough (see Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Ranson, 1995). Hatcher and Troyna (1994), for

example, charge that by limiting resistance to voice, or to the “discursive level,” is to leave the oppressed trapped in “a spider’s web without the spider” (p. 168), where they can do nothing to address the ultimate cause of their oppression: social structures that preserve injustice.

My adaptation of the policy cycle is responsive to its critics. Henry (1993) notes, for example, that “it seems difficult to conceptualise notions like justice or equality without reference to a material social totality” (p. 104) of some kind. Social problems evident at the local level are linked to larger social structures; as a result “a postmodern politics within education will have to deal with many of the problems, such as poverty and unemployment, which were the focus of the modernist political project” (Lingard, 1996, p. 86). Aligned with critics of the policy cycle, my approach to policy analysis is based on the notion that discursive analysis of power will have to intersect with structural analysis of power to chart a path towards greater social justice.

My approach similarly blends discursive and structural notions of power. Like Ball’s critics, I argue that injustice persists due both to influential arguments about good school policy and due to the social structures in place to develop and implement school policies. In particular, my research explores injustices related to the public engagement in decisions about public schools, an undeniably persistent problem that far transcends the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. I argue that restoring public agency in its school system requires a nuanced understanding of power as both possessed and fluid. In the following section, I describe how I have modified the policy cycle to respond to common lines of critique.

Working on the Cusp

By modifying the policy cycle framework, I situate my research alongside previous efforts to work “on the cusp” (Vidovich, 2007, p. 286) of modernist and post-structural perspectives on state agency, political power and social change. Throughout this section, I synthesize the work of thinkers who have sought to identify common ground between the modernist emphasis on state-centeredness and broad social justice, on the one hand, and the policy cycle’s post-structural emphasis on local-level complexity and discursive emanations of power (Fischer, 2003; Gulson, 2011; Howe, 1998; Hursh, 2007, 2009; Moses, 2004; Ranson, 2007; Vidovich, 2007; Villa, 1992). The literature above informed several key adaptations to the policy cycle. In particular, my research: is focused analysis on policy development, as opposed to policy implementation; retains a role for the government in promoting broad social justice; combines modern and post-structural conceptions of political power; and, ultimately, uses discussion of local-level complexity to develop concrete recommendations for policy making that is more deliberative and inclusive.

Firstly, although I retain the notion of interrelated policy contexts, I focus almost exclusively on contexts related to policy debate and development, as opposed to policy practice. While modernist approaches to policy analysis separate development and implementation, the policy cycle analysis aims to demonstrate that each phase of the policy process affects the other in a sort of reciprocal relationship. Due to the particular circumstances of the case studied here, however, I am unable to explore the interactions between policy text and policy practice. The law enacted in June 2012 will not take effect across Massachusetts public schools until 2016; as a result, while I argue that policy text

and policy implementation are in a dialogic relationship with each other, time constraints prevent me from demonstrating this relationship empirically. It is important to note that this is not a theoretical departure from previous policy cycle analyses, but mainly a matter of the particular circumstances explored in this case; nonetheless, this modification has important consequences for my theoretical framework, analysis and findings.

While previous applications of the policy cycle used the framework to demonstrate that policy is continuously interpreted and reinterpreted by school-level actors upon implementation, I am unable to do so here. I use the policy cycle, however, to demonstrate that, even on the development side of the traditional binary, policy text is developed, debated, and contested in distinct contexts of discursive struggle and political maneuvering. I argue that there is an ongoing and reciprocal relationship between the context of policy influence and the process of policy text production that affects policy in important ways. I use the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case to demonstrate how debate and political advocacy over policy development can lead to two very different policy texts: the ballot initiative and the compromise legislation.

Secondly, I retain a modernist concern for the state’s role in promoting broad social justice. Like others who work “on the cusp” of modern and post-structural perspectives, I embrace the “emancipatory project of modernity” (Howe, 1998, p. 13). I believe the government, at the state and federal levels, can play an important role in promoting a better and more inclusive approach to policy development. Consistent with scholarship at the intersection of modernist and post-structural theory, my approach “rejects the dichotomy of state control versus policy cycle accounts of educational policy

making” (Lingard, 1993, p. 26), claiming that the two can be combined to develop a more powerful, and empowering, theoretical lens.

I retain concern for the state while displacing it from the center of my analysis (Gale, 1999; Gulson, 2011; Ranson, 1995; Vidovich, 2007). In particular, my research is informed by the notion of a “policy web” which includes government as an important part of an interrelated network of policy decision makers (Buras, 2011; Joshee, 2007; Joshee & Johnson, 2005; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Similar to Buras’ (2011) examination of policy making in post-Katrina New Orleans, I aim to capture the “policy ecology,” or “the complex and interconnected set of relationships influencing the shape of educational reform” (p. 297; see also Weaver-Hightower, 2008) in the case studied here, which includes state- and local-level policy makers as well as variously positioned non-state actors, including Stand for Children especially. I discuss the interests represented in each sphere of the policy web, paying close attention to stakeholders’ relative power to influence the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory. I aim to understand how government interacts with non-state actors to promote certain discourses about educational policy making while marginalizing others.

Relatedly, I combine the modernist conception of political power – as something *possessed* by individuals by virtue of their office or title – with the post-structural notion of power – as something *exercised* through language and political argumentation. Fischer (2003) notes that strictly post-structural policy theory takes a “constitutive view of discourse, which understands discourse to actively construct society along various dimensions” (p. 38, see also: Hawkesworth, 2012). According to this perspective, political argumentation gives rise to the social conditions that privilege some while

oppressing others. Meanwhile, modernist approaches to policy analysis take a possessive view of power as something held by those with access to influential, and often state-centered, political decision makers. According to this perspective, shifts in political power occur not through political argumentation, but instead through concrete maneuvering in the style of a “hardball politics,” where adversaries attempt to gain leverage over one another. My analysis demonstrates that groups engaged in political conflict sought political power both ways: through concrete political maneuvering and through the arguments they made about the problems facing Massachusetts public education.

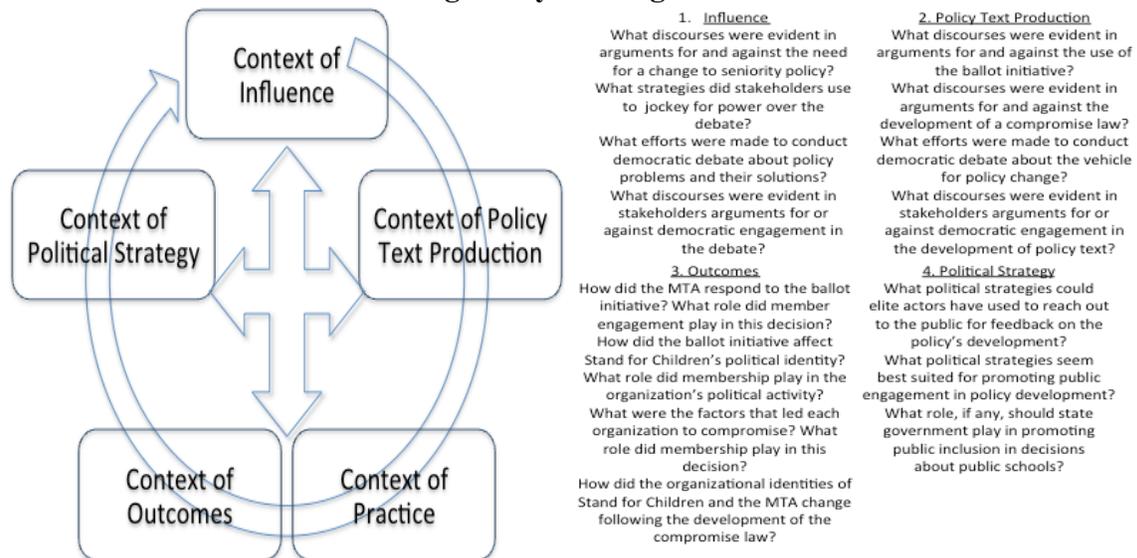
Lastly, I depart from Ball’s original conception of the policy cycle by moving beyond discursive critique to generate specific recommendations for developing better school policies. As cited often in literature critical of the policy cycle approach, those working “on the cusp” argue that “the arrival of postmodernism on the scene need not demand the elimination of all big theory” (Fraser & Nicholson, as cited in Kenway, 1992, p. 140). I join others in seeking a theoretical model that couples attention to local political struggle with the understanding of the case studied here “as part of broader contexts of policy making” (Gale, 1999, p. 404), such as the nationwide embrace of neo-liberal policy and the rise of ERAOs in state-level policy making.

In response to criticism that policy cycle analyses were unable to offer suggestions for meaningful social change, Ball (1994a) himself proffered two additional contexts of policy analysis: the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy (Gulson, 2011; Lingard, 1996; Taylor, 1997; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). Because each context orients policy analysis towards broad questions related to social injustice,

observers argued that the addition of these contexts was evidence that Ball was likewise concerned with broader political struggle associated with the modernist perspective (Lingard, 1996; Taylor, 1997; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). As yet, however, there are very few examples of research that employs the contexts of outcomes and political strategy in policy analysis (see Minh Ngo et al., 2006). I engage both contexts in my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case as part of my effort to connect the particularities of the case to larger questions about democratic engagement in the era of neo-liberal school change.

Figure 3 below, then, connects the contexts of outcomes and political strategy with the contexts of influence and policy text production to form the reimagined policy cycle that guides my analysis. I include key questions that guided my analysis within each policy context.

**Figure 3: The Policy Cycle Reimagined
A Framework for Understanding Policy Making in the Neo-Liberal Eraⁱⁱ**



Analysis in the context of outcomes “is concerned with the impact of policies on existing social inequalities” (Vidovich, 2007, p. 289; see also: Ball, 1994a; Lingard, 1996; Minh Ngo et al., 2006). This context creates analytical space for connecting

political debate and advocacy at the local level to broader struggles for social change. As noted above, it is too early to evaluate the impact of policy practice on social justice. Instead, I focus my analysis on the policy development process, seeking to understand what the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case can tell us about social structures that conflict with normative notions of social inclusion in policy development about public schools. In particular, my analysis offers a detailed account of the ways that the policy development process fell short of standards for public engagement outlined in deliberative democratic theory.

Relatedly, analysis in the context of political strategy “is concerned with identifying strategies to tackle the inequalities” (Vidovich, 2007, p. 289) identified in the context of outcomes (Ball, 1994a; Lingard, 1996; Minh Ngo et al., 2006). While I expose shortcomings in the context of outcomes, I then propose solutions oriented toward promoting greater democratic engagement in the development of public school policy. As guided by critique of the policy cycle, I pay particularly close attention to generating recommendations that move beyond “discursive” resistance towards the development of social structures that push back against social injustices regarding public inclusion in the development of public school policy.

As noted above, research has begun question the role of public engagement – or lack thereof – in school policies of the neo-liberal era. I use analysis in the contexts of outcomes and political strategy to add to this discussion. Similar to analysis in the contexts of influence and policy text production, I identify the relationship between discourse and social action related to a normative notion of democratic engagement in school policy. I hope this discussion will add to our understanding of the discourses that

justify the exclusion of public voice in neo-liberal reform while also pointing the way towards concrete strategies that may promote more inclusive political decision making. In the next section, I describe the data sources used to guide analysis in each policy context, and I explain how my data analysis methodology translates the policy cycle theory into a functional research design.

Research Design

As guided by the policy cycle framework, I demonstrate that policy making is a messy process that is driven, in large part, by dominant arguments about policy problems and their proposed solutions. In this section, I describe my role in the policy trajectory, disclosing the nature of my access to the data collected about the case. Then, in my discussion of data collection, I note how the policy web concept, in tandem with the policy cycle, guided my selection of interview participants and my related interview protocols. Additionally, I provide a detailed characterization of each additional data category: observation field notes, artifacts of ballot initiative and/or compromise legislation, and media coverage of the policy trajectory. Lastly, I describe each stage of my data analysis procedure in detail. Throughout discussion of my research design, I align my approach to data collection and analysis with the research questions reproduced below:

- What can the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case tell us about the new educational policy making arena? Is this the policy making system we want in a democratic society? If not, how can we do better?

- What were the major political struggles of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory?
- What was the relationship between discourse and political decision making across the policy trajectory?
- How were political discourses related to struggles over democratic engagement in the policy development process?

Researcher Role and Access

I first learned about the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot question in my role as the Policy Coordinator for the Working Group for Educator Excellence (WGEE). The WGEE is a non-profit coalition of professional associations, labor unions and advocacy organizations as well as teachers and administrators, who work together to advocate for policies that elevate the status of the teaching profession. As described on its website, the group advocates for “systemic educational excellence,” by developing strategies for aligning all aspects of the teacher development pipeline, from teacher preparation through to re-licensure. WGEE was composed at the time of this research of representatives from 26 different organizations, including individuals representing various public schools. The coalition met regularly to plan research projects related to the teacher professional development and to advocate for state-level legislation that supports teacher professional growth.

I was the Policy Coordinator for the WGEE from July 2011 to July 2012. In this role, I acted as a liaison between the coalition’s leadership and its constituent organizations. For example, I often communicated with representatives from WGEE’s member organizations to get their perspective on a relevant policy topic, such as the

state's new teacher evaluation system. I then culled responses from coalition members into a summary report for WGEE leadership. At the time of my tenure at the WGEE, the two major players in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" policy debate, Stand for Children and the MTA, sent representatives to WGEE meetings. In the fall of 2011, the coalition was focused on advancing state-level legislation unrelated to the law studied here. However, Stand for Children's announcement, in October 2011, that it would launch the ballot initiative campaign dramatically changed the agenda and debate at WGEE meetings.

A meeting held in November 2011, oriented towards discussing legislative strategy for the WGEE's advocacy agenda, quickly developed into a spirited debate between representatives from Stand for Children and leaders from the state's two major teachers' unions about the ballot initiative. While the remaining coalition members appeared sympathetic to arguments from the teachers' unions, many found themselves in an uncertain middle ground of a policy debate that was as contentious as it was unexpected. In the fall and winter of 2011, then, my responsibilities as Policy Coordinator became focused primarily on engaging coalition members in private conversations about the ballot question. I shared highlights from these conversations with WGEE leadership, towards developing consensus among coalition members about the merits and shortcomings of the ballot question. Additionally, I spoke regularly with WGEE members and leadership about whether the coalition would take a public stance on the initiative.

During conversations with WGEE members and leadership, I learned about the many competing interests involved in state-level policy making. I also had the

opportunity to form relationships with key members of the policy community, including leaders at Stand for Children, the MTA and the AFT-MA. I learned that Stand for Children's approach to the policy making process marked a major change in state-level educational policy making. Informally, many members of the WGEE coalition described the policy community as a collaborative, if at times contentious, arena for debating difficult issues and developing policy proscriptions. Members of the WGEE argued that by pursuing a ballot initiative that circumvented the policy community by going directly to voters, Stand for Children upset the generally collaborative culture of policy development in the state.

I became interested, then, in using the research process to learn more about state-level policy making and to explore others' claims about Stand for Children and its role in the policy community. Was the ballot initiative indicative of a major change in policy development? If so, what has changed? How, if at all, are teachers and students affected? Through relationships with members of the WGEE coalition, I began to schedule formal stakeholder interviews. I received approval from the Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB) in June 2012, and I began conducting interviews several months later, in the fall of 2012.

In addition to interviewing several key members of the WGEE coalition, including leaders at Stand for Children, MTA and AFT-MA, I solicited suggestions for additional interview participants in a so-called snowball method of sampling. In cases where I did not know an interviewee from my work with the coalition, I relied on existing connections to establish new relationships with stakeholders involved in debate about the ballot initiative and compromise law. Using this approach, I sought to develop an

interview sample that represented an array of interests at the state and local levels. My role at the WGEE also provided access to many of the observational and artifact data in my research portfolio. Several field observations were generated during WGEE coalition meetings as well as during public hearings that I learned about through WGEE members. Similarly, many of the data sources in my artifact portfolio were handouts circulated at WGEE meetings or materials solicited through direct conversation with WGEE members.

Data Collection

I conducted interviews with 32 differently positioned stakeholders, collected observational notes at seven public meetings, gathered 42 different sources of artifact data, and I located 105 media articles related to the ballot initiative or compromise law. Table 5 contains an overview of collected data, including a brief description of the specific research goals associated with each category of collected data. Below, I discuss each in turn.

Table 5: Overview of Collected Data

Data Source	Quantity	Purpose
Stakeholder Interviews	32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the major events of the policy trajectory • To identify the frames used to characterize ERAOs and teachers’ unions in the new policy making era • To identify the dominant discourses shaping policy development • To identify discourses left out of the policy debate • To understand efforts at public engagement in the policy making process
Observations of Public Meetings	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the frames used to characterize ERAOs and teachers’ unions in the new policy making era • To identify discourses animating public debate
Artifacts of the Policy Process	42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand how policy discourses were translated into official policy text

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the frames used to characterize ERAOs and teachers' unions in the new policy making era • To identify the discourses that various stakeholders used to argue for their policy preferences
Media Articles	105	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the frames used to characterize ERAOs and teachers' unions in the new policy making era • To identify dominant social discourses influential in the policy debate

Policy Web and Interview Participants

The research site for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case was designed to capture, as much as possible, the diffuse nature of the new policy making arena. As I discuss below, research participants varied widely in terms of their place in the policy web. As a result, I used semi-structured interview protocols and probing questions that were tailored to participants’ particular role in policy development and debate. In the nature of a semi-structured interview, I used questions and probes as a general framework for each interview, while also allowing interviews to follow unexpected topics identified as important by the research participants.

All interview protocols contained questions guided by the policy contexts outlined above. For example, to understand participants’ perspectives about the context of influence, I asked each participant to discuss their beliefs about the overarching need for a policy change focused on teacher job security. When discussing the context of influence with Stand for Children staff members, then, I asked probing questions about factors that led the organization to focus on teacher evaluation and tenure as opposed to another topic in school change. Table 6 contains example questions used in interviews with staff members at Stand for Children and the MTA. These questions were adjusted in

interviews with related stakeholders in order to respond appropriately to each person’s particular place in the policy web.

As per IRB protocol, all interview participants signed letters of informed consent, which detailed the benefits and risks of participating in the study. According to the informed consent agreement, the names of all interview participants have been replaced with pseudonyms. I sought permission from each interview participant regarding identification of their title and of the name of the organization that they work for or represent. In cases where I did not receive explicit permission to identify organizational names or title, I use generic labels that indicate the participant’s location in the policy arena without attaching her or his statements to a specific organization. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each interview transcript was checked against the recording for accuracy. Additionally, interview participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts from their interviews and to make line-by-line edits or deletions.

Table 6: Example Interview Questions

Policy Context	Brief Description	Example Questions – Stand for Children	Example Questions – Massachusetts Teachers Association
Context of Influence	Where stakeholders debate the broad purpose or need for the proposed policy	Could you describe how/why Stand for Children decided to focus on teacher evaluation?	If it were up to you, how would you balance seniority vs. performance in personnel decisions?
Context of Policy Text Production	Where policy goals are translated into official legislation and/or supporting documents	Why did Stand for Children decide to pursue a ballot question as opposed to its work, in other states, that has pursued change through state houses?	Why did the MTA choose to develop compromise legislation with Stand for Children as opposed to launching a more aggressive opposition campaign?

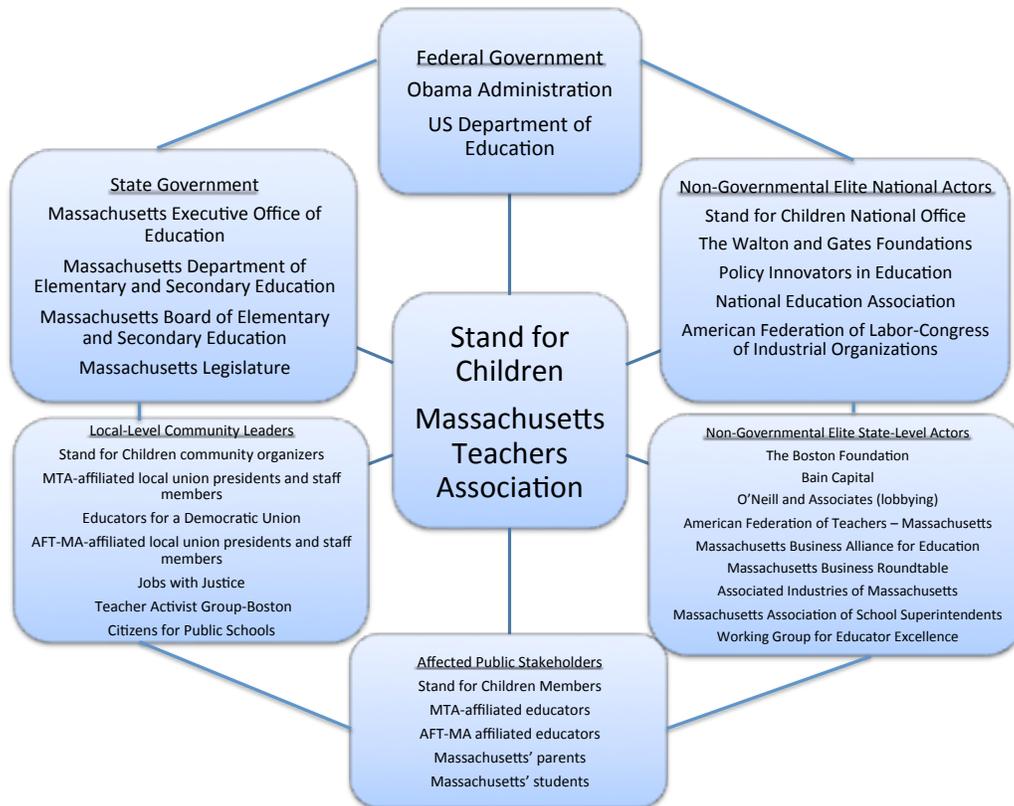
Context of Outcomes	Where affected stakeholders assess the effect of the policy making process on a normative notion of social justice	Can you talk a little bit about how Stand for Children conducts outreach to local communities?	How did the MTA reach out to local membership to get feedback on the compromise negotiations?
Context of Political Strategy	Where affected stakeholders identify strategies for addressing injustice/inequity in the policy making process	What are your goals for community outreach going forward?	What plans are in place to conduct outreach to rank-and-file members regarding future political campaigns?

Borrowing from Buras’ (2011) research in New Orleans, Figure 4 presents a graphical representation of the policy web of the case studied here. In this section, I introduce the individuals and organizations in each sphere of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy web. It is important to note that the narrative does not strive for a complete account of all players involved in the debate and all efforts oriented towards influencing the policy trajectory. Instead, I capture the most active and influential stakeholders, as determined by informal conversations with WGEE members and background research about the policy trajectory. Following my discussion of interview participants and goals, Table 7 contains a list of all stakeholders interviewed, organized by the participant’s place in the policy sphere, organizational affiliation, and title. Throughout my presentation of findings, the names of all interview participants have been replaced with the pseudonyms listed in Table 7.

As I introduce stakeholders in each sphere of the policy web, I highlight those who participated in interviews for the research conducted here; in each case, I discuss the

participant’s role in the policy debate, and I detail the overarching data collection goals for each interview. In some cases, I was not able to gain research access to certain categories of stakeholders. Although I sought access to representatives from the spheres of the federal government and non-governmental elite national actors, none of the leads provided by state-level officials came to fruition. Similarly, due likely to the controversial nature of the policy debate explored here, few representatives from the sphere of state government were willing to speak on the record about either the ballot initiative or the compromise law. Alongside my discussion of interviewed stakeholders, then, I describe the steps taken to supplement any gaps in my data portfolio.

Figure 4: “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Policy Web



Central Stakeholders. Because of their role in negotiating the compromise legislation enacted by the Massachusetts legislature as S. 2315, I locate Stand for

Children and the MTA in the center of the policy web, as the two most influential players in the policy arena. Foundational to the analysis here, I conducted interviews with representatives from Stand for Children and the MTA. Specifically, I spoke with three staff members each at the state-level offices of each organization.

At Stand for Children, I interviewed the Executive Director of the Massachusetts office as well as the organization's Political Director and the Government Affairs Director. The Executive Director was the chief architect of the ballot initiative and the organization's only negotiator in the development of the compromise law. In many ways the face of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign, John Washingtonⁱⁱⁱ, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts chapter represented the organization at many public meetings, including those convened by the WGEE, and he was quoted widely in media coverage about the initiative and law. As described in our interview, Cynthia Pierre, the Political Director was responsible for acting as the organization's liaison both to the state legislature and to the general public. Lastly, I spoke with the state-level Government Affairs Director, Rita Gee. Although not a part of the organization during the campaign, the Government Affairs Director is responsible for organizing a citizen watchdog initiative designed to ensure that the new evaluation system and the compromise law are implemented effectively.

At the MTA, I spoke with the state-level President, Phillip Torrington, and Vice President, Terry Span, as well as the union's Director of Policy Research, Kristen Schierholtz. As with state-level leadership at Stand for Children, the MTA President was the face of the union's response to the ballot initiative as well as the primary liaison to the media and legislature. Along with the Executive Director of Stand for Children

Massachusetts, the MTA President was also the chief architect of the compromise legislation. Although to a lesser extent, the MTA Vice President was likewise involved in all major aspects of the policy trajectory, including the compromise negotiations. As I discuss below, I use responses from both interviews to corroborate claims about the union's interests and political motivations. Lastly, I spoke with the union's Director of Political Research, who was responsible, in part, for conducting member outreach about the new evaluation system and the proposed legislation.

Federal Government. I used interviews with state-level stakeholders to gain a better understanding of how federal involvement shaped the policy trajectory. I spoke with many participants about the influence of the Race-to-the-Top program on state-level policy making. For example, in an interview with a prominent staff member at the Massachusetts legislature, I sought a greater understanding of how policy priorities at the State House changed when Massachusetts was seeking funds from Race-to-the-Top. Additionally, I spoke with MTA members about their perspectives on the union's endorsement of Massachusetts' Race-to-the-Top application, at the time a very controversial and hotly debated question within the teachers' union; this conversation provided important background information to understanding critique of MTA leadership that emerged during the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" debate.

State Government. The category of state-level government actors includes the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education (EOE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and both chambers of the Massachusetts State House. Led by the state's Secretary of Education, an appointee to the governor's cabinet, the EOE is composed of

each major state-level department of education: Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education, Higher Education and the University of Massachusetts system. I collected data in this sphere of the policy web through public comments issued by then-Secretary of Education Paul Reville, including a personal email sent to members of the WGEE.

Led by the state's Commissioner of Education, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is responsible for helping to execute state laws governing K-12 education. Additionally, DESE plays a major role in collecting and analyzing data on virtually every aspect of K-12 public education in the state and in disseminating data to anyone with an interest in the state's public education system. Because the Stand for Children ballot initiative proposed changes to the state's K-12 public education system, it affected the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education more so than any other department in the EOE. To capture the DESE's role in the policy trajectory, I rely primarily on public statements by the DESE Commissioner, described in a subsequent discussion of artifact data sources.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) provides oversight and direction to the DESE. Most notably for the research conducted here, the BESE convened a working group of education policy stakeholders to draft new regulations for the supervision and evaluation of K-12 teachers and principals. Based on recommendations from the working group and from the DESE Commissioner, on June 28, 2011 the BESE voted to approve a new system for evaluating teachers and principals in Massachusetts public K-12 system. Later, the Stand for Children "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative aimed to add "teeth" to the new evaluation system in the

form of high-stakes consequences for teachers who are determined to be below an acceptable level of proficiency. To capture the role of the BESE in the policy development process, my portfolio of artifact data sources includes the BESE meeting minutes in the months leading up to and following the approval of the new evaluation system.

If not the single most important governmental entity at the state level, the state legislature is surely one of the major players in state policy development and enactment. I was able to speak with one high-level staff member in the office of the Massachusetts Speaker of the House of Representatives, Timothy Manning. In particular, I asked about interaction between the State House and representatives from Stand for Children and the MTA, including lobbyists for each organization. I also sought to gain a more detailed understanding of how the ballot initiative and compromise law, respectively, were perceived by legislators and to understand how the policy process affected relationships between state lawmakers and the two major organizations involved in policy development.

Non-Governmental Elite National Actors. As suggested by Jonah Edelman's commentary on Stand for Children's legislative advocacy in Illinois, the organization's national leadership appears to play a major role in the activity of its state-level offices. Additionally, as others have noted, national foundations, such as the Gates and Walton Family Foundations, have played a major role in the emergence of ERAOs, providing the funding necessary for state chapters to launch successful campaigns for state policy reform (Carey, 2012; Kumashiro, 2012; Sawchuk, 2012d). Lastly, coalitions like the Policy Innovators in Education network, which lists Stand for Children as a member

organization, provides a venue for ERAOs to discuss policy priorities and to share lessons learned from state-level advocacy initiatives.

Similarly, each state-level teachers' union receives funding and strategic guidance from national-level offices. As noted above, the MTA is an affiliate of the National Educational Association, and the AFT-MA is an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations. Each national-level office has distinct mission statements about the purpose of education and the role of unions in a changing policy arena. It is reasonable to assume that leadership at the national level may influence, to some degree, the policy priorities and political activity of its state-level affiliates.

I used interviews with state-level stakeholders to get a sense of whether, and to what extent, national stakeholders influenced state-level activity. There are many questions, for example, about the extent to which Stand for Children's national office has directed activity throughout the organizational hierarchy, thus limiting the influence of the grassroots membership (McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b, 2012d). To address some of these questions, I spoke with current and former Stand for Children staff members about their interactions with the national office. Similarly, I spoke with union representatives about the extent to which national union offices influenced the decision making of the MTA or AFT-MA.

Non-Governmental Elite State-Level Actors. The compromise announcement raised many questions about why each organization sought compromise over conflict and about what was said in negotiations in order to convince each side to make key concessions en route to a sort of political middle ground. Of course, it is perhaps

unreasonable to expect unadulterated honesty and transparency from the key players involved in negotiating the parameters of the compromise law. Therefore, I sought interviews with allies and advisors of Stand for Children and the MTA from other spheres of the policy arena to get a more complete picture of each organization's political motivations.

There is wide variety in the types of actors who occupy the sphere of non-governmental elite state-level actors. Some actors influenced Stand for Children and/or the MTA via private contractual relationships, such as Stand for Children's relationship with the O'Neill and Associates lobbying firm, a connection that was revealed through a search of the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance website and corroborated in my interview with a high-ranking State House staff member. Additional actors in this category include The Boston Foundation and Bain Capital, organizations that were determined to have contributed funding to Stand for Children's Massachusetts office. As described by the Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts, The Boston Foundation, for example, funded interview and survey research that informed the early stages of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign.

Additional stakeholders in the non-governmental elite state-level category include representatives from professional associations and coalitions who have unique access to leaders at Stand for Children or the MTA. While many professional associations sought to offer advice and/or advocacy on behalf of their membership, I focused here on the organizations that appeared to have the most influence on the policy debate, as determined through my experience at the WGEE as well as a preliminary analysis of interviews, observations and artifacts.

I conducted interviews with the executive directors of three business associations that are influential in state-level educational policy making. Given their embrace of neo-liberal policies, business organizations are Stand for Children's most likely allies in state policy battles. Before the ballot initiative was announced publicly, Stand for Children met with representatives from state-level business groups to seek their support in the campaign. Interviews with business leaders, then, provided an additional venue for understanding the goals of the ballot initiative campaign as originally framed by Stand for Children. Because business organizations were third-party members of the policy debate, representatives from these groups, perhaps, had little reason to give misleading or deceptive answers to questions about Stand for Children's stated motivations in the campaign; at the very least, their testimony provided an additional point of triangulation with accounts from Stand for Children and other allies.

Because the law proposed major changes to administrators' ability to dismiss so-called underperforming teachers, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) had much at stake in the policy debate. Representing every superintendent and assistant superintendent in the state, support or criticism from MASS conveyed in a public setting could have strong influence on the overall direction of the ballot question. I spoke with Trevor Skaggs, the Executive Director of MASS about the factors that influenced the organization's stance on the initiative and about his perspective on the forces that led Stand for Children and the MTA towards compromise.

Local-Level Community Leaders. I was able to conduct an interview with one community organizer, Charles Cistulli, who left Stand for Children following the campaign. Assigned to organize several neighborhoods in Boston, the organizer I spoke

with was responsible both for galvanizing local-level support for the ballot initiative as well as increasing Stand for Children's membership count in the city of Boston. In addition to facilitating community meetings about the initiative, community organizers were in frequent contact with Stand for Children's state-level leadership, and, to a lesser extent, with national-level staff members, including the organization's national Director of Community Organizing. Frustrated with the direction of the campaign, this organizer left Stand for Children in favor of a position more aligned with his vision for community organizing.

Speaking with a disaffected staff member afforded unique opportunities for insight into Stand for Children's political motivations as well as unique challenges regarding the assessment of interview testimony. On the one hand, because the organizer was no longer affiliated with Stand for Children, there was little reason to doubt the veracity of statements about the organization and the political tactics used during the campaign. However, on the other hand, it is important to remember that this particular interview participant left the organization frustrated with its direction and with the imperatives from higher-level staff members. As a result, to the extent possible, any claims attacking the organization's integrity or political motives were triangulated with interview responses from differently positioned stakeholders, including Stand for Children staff members, as well as with what is known, from the research literature and from educational reporting, about the political tactics and motivations of ERAOs.

On the union side of the ledger, I spoke with three local union presidents, two from the MTA and one from AFT-MA. Although “Great Teachers, Great Schools” was a statewide campaign, much of its public outreach emphasized the need for change in large,

urban districts. In order to understand the implications of the law for these districts, then, I interviewed both the President the Boston Teachers Union, Ryan Swarzak, as well as the BTU's Political Director, Amy Cashner. Importantly, the BTU is an AFT-MA affiliate and the state's largest local union.

When interviewing local-level leadership at MTA, I sought out district-level union presidents who were critical of MTA's decision to compromise. In part a response to MTA's decision to compromise with Stand for Children, a group of local-level presidents joined with rank-and-file members to form an organization called Educators for a Democratic Union (EDU), with the explicit purpose of ousting current state-level leadership in favor of a more transparent and, as the name implies, more democratic union president. To capture EDU's critique of the MTA, I spoke with two local presidents who were a part of this coalition, Michelle Nolasco and Joan Wheeler. I collected field observations from EDU meetings. One of the local MTA presidents whom I spoke with, Michelle Nolasco, was also a member of the MTA's executive board, one of the key governing bodies directing union political activity; in this capacity, she was privy to discussions about the MTA's response to the ballot question well before the public announcement of the compromise legislation.

Similar to interview responses from disaffected Stand for Children staff and membership, interviews with MTA insiders provided perhaps the best opportunity to shed light on internal conversations and motivations. Criticism of state-level leadership, however, was likewise interpreted with caution. As with criticism of Stand for Children, I attempt, as much as possible, to triangulate critique of the MTA across interview participants and across data sources.

In addition to the local-level community organizing conducted by Stand for Children as well as each major teachers' union, several community-based organizations played important roles in facilitating debate about the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot question and the related compromise legislation. Most notable for the research conducted here, a non-profit community-based organization called "Jobs with Justice" developed a partnership with the Boston chapter of the Teacher Activist Group (TAG). A national coalition of grassroots organizing groups, the TAG network is oriented towards promoting educational justice, including advocating for democratic school governance and for school-level improvements that promote student critical thinking and cultural inclusion. Due, in part, to its impact on teacher job security, the group chose the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative as a major focus during the 2011-2012 school year.

To develop its advocacy campaign, TAG-Boston met regularly with organizers at Jobs with Justice, a wider coalition of community, faith and labor organizations oriented toward preserving workers' rights in public and private settings. Additionally, Jobs with Justice was approached by the AFT-MA and the MTA to help coordinate unions' advocacy campaigns. I spoke with Raymond DeJesus, the Executive Director of Jobs with Justice, about its partnerships with TAG-Boston and with each state union. I sought to understand the messages used to persuade the public to vote against the ballot question and to understand how the campaign changed when Stand for Children and the MTA announced that they would pursue compromise legislation, thereby removing the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" question from the November 2012 ballot.

While it did not develop formal partnership with any of the major players involved in the debate, an additional community-based organization called Citizens for

Public Schools was active in advocating against the ballot initiative. I spoke with Alice Oswald, the organization's Executive Director, about the interests and values motivating the Citizens for Public Schools campaign against the ballot initiative and about the impact of the compromise decision on the shape and direction of the group's organizing efforts.

Affected Public Stakeholders. The sphere of "Affected Public Stakeholders" includes dues-paying members of each teachers' union as well as members of Stand for Children who have signed the organization's official pledge. As directed by state-level leadership at Stand for Children, I spoke with Jaime Lind, a parent in Boston who was very active in support of the initiative, and Nancy Clippard, a teacher who helped with Stand for Children's public outreach campaign. Interestingly, the teacher I spoke with taught in an MTA-affiliated district and was therefore able to speak from the perspective of both a local-level Stand for Children member and a dues-paying MTA member.

I also spoke with former members of Stand for Children who left the organization, in part, out of frustration with the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative. During the campaign a group of parents and teachers publicly rescinded their affiliation with Stand for Children in an open letter, published in several news outlets, that criticized the organization for changing its mission to suit the interests of new national funders, such as the Gates and Walton Family Foundations. I spoke with Tanya Nathan, one of the lead authors of the open letter and a current school committee member in Worcester, and I spoke with Angelina Weiss, a teacher in Boston who left Stand for Children after it announced the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign. As with testimony from Stand for Children's former community organizer, interview responses from disaffected

members provided both unique opportunities for insight into the organization's approach to public outreach as well as stinging criticism that should be interpreted with caution.

Lastly, I sought interviews with local stakeholders affiliated with the MTA and AFT-MA. I spoke with three teachers in MTA-affiliated public districts, seeking MTA members who were a part of the EDU caucus critical MTA’s state-level leadership. In these conversations, I aimed to get a better understanding of the extent to which MTA’s political advocacy engaged its rank-and-file members, and I sought teachers’ perspectives on how the law might affect their classroom practice. Additionally, I spoke with five teachers in the Boston Public Schools district, the largest local affiliate of the AFT-MA. As noted above, despite being a state-wide campaign, the ballot initiative targeted practices more common in large, urban districts, such as in-district transfer. I asked interview participants to be as specific as possible about how their teaching might change as a result of the new law, and I sought a detailed understanding of the extent to which state- and local-level AFT-MA leadership engaged local teachers in the policy debate.

Table 7: Interview Participants

Policy Sphere	Organization/ Affiliation	Title	Pseudonym
Central Stakeholders		Executive Director	John Washington
	Stand for Children	Policy Director	Cynthia Pierre
		Government Affairs Director	Rita Gee
		President	Phillip Torrington
	Massachusetts Teachers Association	Vice President	Terry Span
		Director of Political Research	Kristen Schierholtz

State Government	Massachusetts State House	Staff Member – Massachusetts House of Representatives	Timothy Manning
Non-Governmental Elite State-Level Actors	American Federation of Teachers – Massachusetts	President	Tyson Gilford
		Vice President	Evan Dunster
		Political Organizer	Bill Lowrie
	Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education	Executive Director	Lisa Niese
	Associated Industries of Massachusetts	Senior Vice President of Communications and Research	Alex McCarthy
	Massachusetts Business Roundtable	Executive Director	James Cingrani
	Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents	Executive Director	Trevor Skaggs
Local-Level Community Leaders	Stand for Children (formerly)	Community Organizer	Charles Cistulli
		Local Union President, Concord-Carlisle	Michelle Nolasco
	MTA	Local Union President, Brookline	Joan Wheeler
	AFT-MA	Local Union President, Boston	Ryan Swarzak

		Local Union Political Director, Boston	Amy Cashner
	Jobs with Justice	Community Organizer	Raymond DeJesus
	Citizens for Public Schools	Community Organizer	Alice Oswalt
Affected Public Stakeholders		Parent Member	Jamie Lind
	Stand for Children	Teacher Member	Nancy Clippard
		Teacher Member (formerly)	Tanya Nathan
		Teacher, Framingham Public Schools	Chester Morrison
	MTA	Teacher, Winchester Public Schools	Nancy Clippard
		Teacher, Newton Public Schools	Margarite Owings
		Teacher, Boston Public Schools	George Volstad
		Teacher, Boston Public Schools	Ryan Kershaw
	AFT-MA	Teacher, Boston Public Schools	Jennifer Tosh
		Teacher, Boston Public Schools	Bryan Mazzaro
	Teacher, Boston Public Schools	Angelina Weiss	

Observational Data Sources

In addition to interviewing relevant stakeholders, I collected data that helps to capture the aspects of the policy trajectory not empirically evident in interview responses, including the interactions between those with different perspectives on the ballot

initiative. In all, I collected a total of seven examples of observation data, taken from public meetings convened by the following four organizations: The Working Group for Educator Excellence, the Massachusetts State House, Jobs with Justice, and Educators for a Democratic Union. Table 8, below, organizes each observation data source according to venue and date. Additionally, I provide a brief summary of the goals of each observation.

On several occasions in the fall of 2011, representatives from Stand for Children met with state-level union leaders in the context of meetings convened by the WGEE. As noted above, the ballot initiative was not a major agenda item planned for the group's meeting on October 4th 2011; however, the group's conversation quickly became consumed by debate about the ballot initiative, which had only been announced, at that time, to policy insiders. Following the October 4th meeting, WGEE held two additional meetings devoted to the ballot initiative: a meeting of the WGEE Board of Directors on November 3rd and a full coalition meeting on November 11th. Following the November 11th meeting, WGEE leadership decided to table all work related to the ballot initiative in order to devote attention to its own legislative priorities. My portfolio of observational data sources includes the notes that I took at each meeting as part of my responsibilities as WGEE Policy Coordinator, used here with permission from current WGEE leadership.

On April 10th, 2012, representatives from Stand for Children, the MTA and AFT-MA spoke publicly before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Education at the official legislative hearing for the ballot initiative. At the time, the Massachusetts legislature had the option of approving the ballot initiative as law before the November 2012 election, thereby circumventing the ballot initiative process. At the legislative

hearing, various policy stakeholders made arguments for and against the outright enactment of the ballot initiative.

As noted above, Jobs with Justice and TAG-Boston formed a partnership to resist the ballot initiative through community organizing. On April 26th, 2012, members of each organization met to develop a “messaging” strategy that would resonate with average voters. Perhaps moreso than any other data source, notes from this meeting contained a frank discussion of the discourses influential in the policy debate. Just a few days later, the compromise decision was announced. At the May 8th, 2012, the President of the MTA was invited to address the TAG-Boston group and to defend the compromise decision. I attended each meeting and collected detailed notes. In each case, meeting notes were verified through email conversation with at least one other member of TAG-Boston.

One source of observational data was collected in the summer of 2012, after the enactment of Massachusetts S. 2315. As noted above, a group of MTA members who were frustrated with the union’s decision to compromise with Stand for Children formed a caucus within the union called Educators for a Democratic Union (EDU). Although EDU was formed in the months following the compromise with Stand for Children, interviews with key members revealed a relatively long history of tensions between state-level MTA leadership and rank-and-file members about the union’s political decision making. In December 2012, following the enactment of Massachusetts S. 2315, EDU held its first annual coalition conference, which included a breakout session devoted to the Stand for Children ballot question and compromise law. I attended the conference and took observational notes at the breakout session on Stand for Children.

As with interview data collection, I was not able to get access to several key venues of observation data, such as meetings that were restricted to MTA members and community meetings convened by Stand for Children before the ballot initiative was announced publicly. To supplement gaps in collected observation data, I rely on interview data with stakeholders who were present at these venues to summarize the topics and arguments that predominated in debate about the proposed policy changes.

Table 8: Observational Data Sources

Venue	Date	Purpose
Working Group for Educator Excellence	October 4 th , 2011	Meeting of WGEE members to discuss priorities for the 2011-2012 school year
	November 3 rd , 2011	Meeting of WGEE leadership to discuss the organization's response to the ballot initiative
	November 11 th , 2011	Meeting of WGEE members to discuss the ballot initiative
Massachusetts State House	April 10 th , 2012	Official legislative hearing for the ballot initiative
Jobs with Justice	April 26 th , 2012	Meeting of TAG-Boston members to plan an advocacy campaign against the ballot initiative
	May 8 th , 2012	Meeting of TAG-Boston members and the MTA President to discuss the union's decision to compromise
Educators for a Democratic Union	December 8 th , 2012	Meeting of EDU members to discuss strengths and shortcomings of MTA's decision to compromise

Artifact Data Sources

To capture the complex and interconnected nature of the policy trajectory, I collected an extensive portfolio of artifact data sources. In all, I collected 42 sources of artifact data, from six distinct categories of artifact sources: relevant legal and legislative records; documents created to advocate for or against the law by MTA, AFT-MA and Stand for Children, respectively; email communication and meeting minutes from state-level government sources; and documents created by community-based organizations to conduct public outreach about the ballot initiative and/or compromise law. Table 9, below, contains a full list of artifact data sources, organized by category and date.

In the category of “legal and legislative records,” I collected: the actual ballot question filed by Stand for Children; the actual compromise legislation enacted by the Massachusetts legislature; and, the supervision and evaluation regulations approved by the state BESE. As described above, the supervision and evaluation regulations were approved several months before Stand for Children announced that it would certify a ballot question for the November 2012 election. Especially given the vibrant debate about effective forms of teacher evaluation, it is critically important to understand what, exactly, was included in the state’s new evaluation system. Meanwhile, analysis of the actual ballot question and enacted legislation is oriented towards understanding how discourses about school policy became translated into formal policy text.

The category of “MTA Sources” is composed of 14 data sources that provide insight into the union’s arguments against the ballot initiative, its rationale for seeking compromise, and its efforts at member outreach during the policy trajectory. For example, I collected documents created by the MTA to educate members about the ballot

question and compromise law, including a legal summary produced by the union as well as a talking points memo sent to members and materials stored in a web-based “toolkit” designed to mobilize members against the initiative. Additionally, I collected the official mission statement from EDU, a coalition of MTA members oriented towards unseating current state-level leadership in favor of more transparent administration.

In part because the AFT-MA was not a central player in the policy trajectory, the breadth of artifact data sources does not compare to that of its union counterpart, the MTA. I was able to collect four artifacts that demonstrate AFT-MA’s position on the ballot initiative and compromise law: a talking points memo sent to members, a fact sheet produced by the state-level office, a letter to a local union affiliate announcing an information session about the ballot initiative and a website maintained by the Boston Teachers Union, an affiliate of the AFT-MA and the largest public district in the state. As above, artifact data sources collected from the AFT-MA were used to gain an understanding of the union’s mechanisms for member engagement about the initiative as well as the arguments used to sway members against the initiative.

I collected nine artifacts in the category of “Stand for Children Sources,” intended to provide a sampling of the organization’s political tactics and policy messages used at key junctures in the policy trajectory. Because it was mentioned in virtually every interview, I included analysis of Jonah Edelman’s comments in the infamous Aspen Institute video. Additionally, in my interview with the Executive Director of Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office, I learned about survey research conducted by Stand for Children in 2010, a full year prior to the organization’s public launch of the ballot initiative campaign. Funded by The Boston Foundation, a local philanthropic

organization oriented towards supporting non-profit activity in the greater Boston area, Stand for Children conducted survey and interview research with Boston teachers in order to determine priorities for its next legislative campaign. Following our interview, the Executive Director provided access to documents that highlight key findings from the interview and survey data, respectively. Similarly, I collected several documents related to the compromise legislation, including Stand for Children's email announcement to members regarding the compromise law, the organization's website update announcing the official enactment of the law, and the organization's published plans for ensuring that the law is implemented effectively.

As noted above, a number of Stand for Children members became openly critical of the organization's perceived decision to abandon its grassroots members in favor of the corporate agenda touted by major national funders. In an effort to capture this criticism, I have included in my artifact portfolio the open letter from former Stand for Children members that publicly criticizes the organization for its ties to big business. Of course, Stand for Children's fundraising became a major source of controversy during the policy trajectory for many, including the media and community-based organizations as well as the organization's own former members. To explore Stand for Children's financial ties in detail, I collected artifact data from the Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance. Specifically, I searched a publicly accessible database of campaign contributions to understand how the organization allocated financial resources during the campaign and to corroborate claims, during interviews and in public statements from unions, about the organization's political motivations.

To get a sense of state leaders' reactions to the ballot question, I collected email messages sent to the WGEE from the state Secretary of Education and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. Both leaders were invited to a public debate about the ballot initiative convened by the WGEE; in lieu of their attendance, each sent formal position statements about the initiative to the entire WGEE membership. Although limited, email messages from state leaders provide some indication of the support, or lack thereof, for the initiative among the state's highest education officials; these data help us to understand whether, and to what extent, Stand for Children was acting as an independent entity within the state-level policy making arena.

Similarly, although I was not able to gain interview access to members of the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, I was able to collect artifact data from the BESE's website, including official minutes from ten meetings held across 2011, at critical junctures in the policy trajectory studied here. During the early part of 2011, the BESE met regularly to discuss the development of the state's new teacher evaluation system; minutes from these meetings provide insight into the BESE's goals for revamping teacher evaluations and its beliefs about the purpose of teacher evaluation. Analysis of the BESE meeting minutes also helps to corroborate claims identified in stakeholder interviews about the role of Stand for Children in policy development and about the extent to which the organization sought collaboration or partnership with others in the state policy making arena.

Lastly, in the category of "public outreach about the ballot initiative and/or compromise law," I collected seven data sources from three non-profit organizations involved in the policy debate. Specifically, I collected four artifact data sources from

Citizens for Public Schools, a non-profit organization that advocated publicly against the ballot question. I collected articles from the organization’s newsletter, a flyer announcing a public meeting about the ballot question and a fact sheet created to educate the public about the perceived impact of the proposed law. Similarly, I collected three artifacts from Jobs with Justice, a non-profit that partnered with the Boston chapter of the Teacher Activist Group to advocate against the ballot initiative. I collected a letter written by the TAG group to the chair of the Joint Committee on Education in the Massachusetts legislature, a flyer announcing a community forum about the compromise law and the corporate agenda in education, and materials from the portion of the Jobs with Justice website devoted to the Stand for Children ballot initiative. Lastly, in preparation for a public meeting on the ballot initiative, the WGEE surveyed its 26 member organizations to get a sense of whether its membership supported or opposed the ballot question. I collected the results of this survey, which provide indication of the extent to which the ballot question had the backing of policy makers and practitioners in the state policy community.

Table 9: Artifact Data Sources

Category	Document	Date
Legal and Legislative Records	Official rubric and guidelines for educator supervision and evaluation	June 2011
	Official ballot question	October 2011
	Official enacted legislation (S.2315)	June 2012
MTA Sources	MTA legal summary of the ballot initiative	January 2012
	MTA fact sheet	January 2012
	Letter to legislators	January 2012

	Email to members about the union’s ballot initiative “toolkit”	January 2012
	MTA talking points memo	February 2012
	Provisions of the ballot initiative	April 2012
	Memo to membership about the compromise law	June 2012
	Official compromise announcement	Summer 2012
	Editorials from the MTA President published in the MTA Today, the union newsletter	Summer 2012
	Mission statement of Educators for a Democratic Union	December 2012
Stand for Children Data Sources	Highlights from interviews with BPS teachers	Summer 2010
	Highlights from surveys of BPS teachers	November 2010
	Transcript from Aspen Institute Video	July 2011
	Ballot initiative fact sheet	November 2011
	Letter to legislators	February 2012
	Email to supporters announcing the compromise law	June 2012
	Website update about the compromise law	June 2012
	Open letter from former Stand for Children members	June 2012
	Implementation plan for S.2315	December 2012
	Data from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance	December 2012
AFT-MA Data Sources	Talking points memo to members	Winter 2012
	Ballot initiative fact sheet	Winter 2012
	Website update about the ballot initiative	February 2012
	Letter to local affiliate in Lawrence	March 2012
Government Sources	Meeting Minutes from the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education	January, February, March,

		April, May, June, September, October, November and December 2011
	Email from the Secretary of Education	November 2011
	Email from the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education	November 2011
	Citizens for Public Schools article about the ballot initiative	October 2011
	Citizens for Public Schools fact sheet	Winter 2011
	Survey of WGEE membership	February 2012
	Citizens for Public Schools flyer	March 2012
	Citizens for Public Schools article about the compromise law	Spring- Summer 2012
	TAG-Boston letter to state legislature	June 2012
	TAG-Boston community forum announcement	June 2012
	Jobs with Justice website update	June 2012

Public Outreach Against the
Initiative and Law

Media Data Sources

Media coverage provides an indication of the varied and competing discourses that shaped public understanding of policy debate and development (Fairclough, 1995; Haas, 2007; Jefferies, 2009). Media articles make arguments about everything from the merits and shortcomings of the proposed policies to the political motivations of each major party involved in the policy making process. As others have noted, media sources can have a strong impact on shaping public opinion about key policy actors (Fairclough, 1995; Jefferies, 2009). In this case, media coverage played an important role in contributing to the public's understanding of Stand for Children and the MTA. I use

media analysis then to identify common frames used to describe each organization's identity and purpose in the Massachusetts policy making arena.

I collected media articles between October 2011, when Stand for Children announced the ballot initiative, and July 2012, when compromise legislation was signed into law. I built a portfolio of media articles via a Google News Alert for "Stand for Children" and "Massachusetts Teachers Association." I then conducted electronic searches of "Massachusetts Newsstand" and "Lexis Nexis" to identify any missing articles. Because they are valuable reflections of public opinion, I included Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor as well as online blog posts. However, in order to keep analysis manageable, I did not review comments sections of online articles, and I did not include audio or video sources.

Following the guidelines above, I located 105 media articles. A total of 56 articles covered the ballot initiative, spanning an eight-month period from Stand for Children's initial announcement of the ballot initiative, in October 2011, to the public announcement of the compromise law, in May 2012. Meanwhile, in the final two months of the policy timeline, a flurry of 49 articles were published that covered the compromise legislation. As one might expect, the organizational identities of both major actors changed in important ways when the two groups announced that had worked together to develop a compromise bill. I use the compromise announcement, then, as a key temporal boundary to understand changes in the media discourse about the influence of each major policy actor. Below, I describe my approach to using collected data to generate a theory about what happened in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case.

Theorizing the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Policy Trajectory

In this section, I describe how the notion of working “on the cusp” between modernist and post-structural theory has informed my analysis of collected data. Using examples from the case, I first offer an overview of the coding procedure used to identify major themes in the case. Then, I describe my approach to displaying data, outlining the analytic framework that I use to present a theoretical reconstruction of the key political pressures and discourses shaping democratic engagement in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case.

Data Analysis on the Cusp

As described by Ball (2005, 2008), policy discourses set boundaries for what is possible in the policy making area. Dominant discourses enable certain political possibilities while constraining others. Consistent with post-structural policy analysis, then, I situate policy decisions within the “discursive frame” (Ball, 1993, p. 15) set by the arguments and beliefs about policy making that were most prominent across the policy trajectory. Meanwhile, consistent with modernist concerns for social emancipation, I connect discourses to broader struggles for democratic engagement in the neo-liberal era.

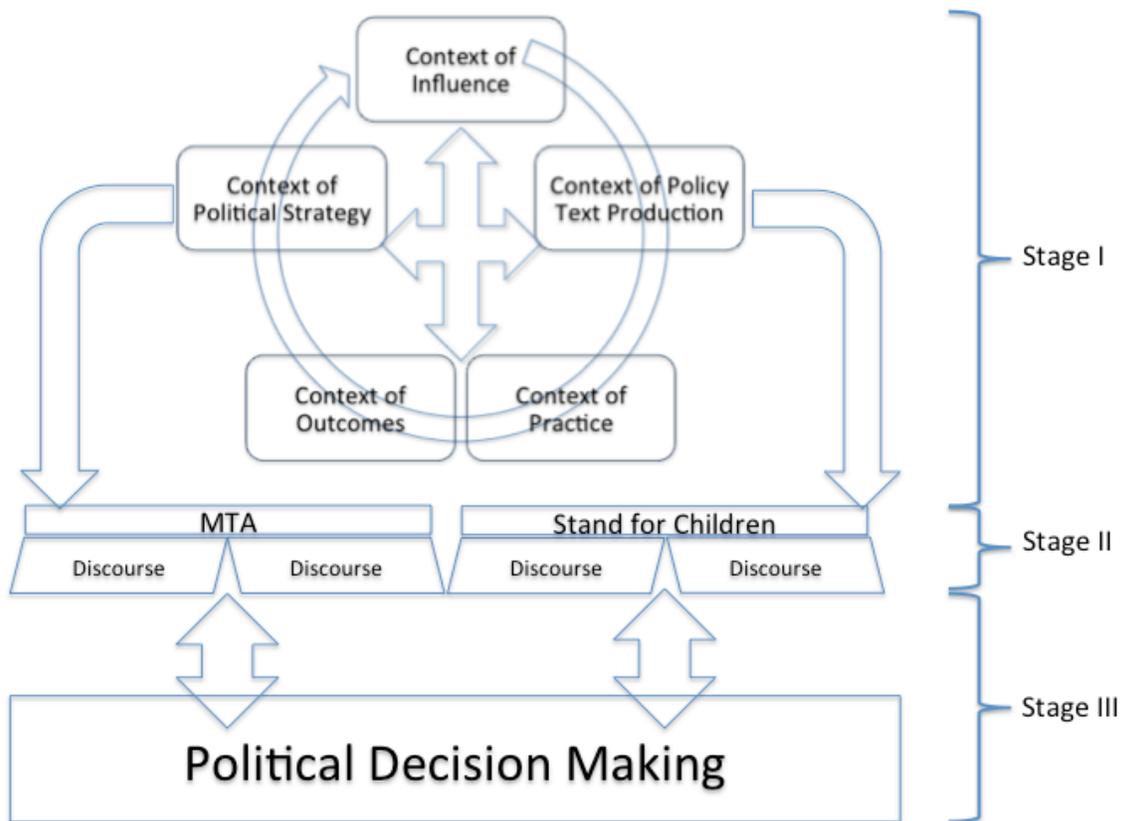
To captures the complex interplay of discourse and political decision making, I conducted data analysis at three distinct, yet related, stages:

- Stage I: Data sources were organized according to the policy cycle contexts described above.
- Stage II: Organizational frames and policy discourses were identified within each policy context.

- Stage III: Assertions were created to explain the relationship between discourse and political decision making within each policy context.

In order to create as detailed an account as possible, I used each major category of data collected – i.e., interviews, observations, artifacts and media articles – to inform each stage of data analysis. Figure 5 connects the policy cycle framework introduced earlier to the data analysis methodology described here.

Figure 5: Data Analysis Methodology



Stage I: Identification of Policy Contexts. In the first stage of data analysis, I used axial coding to organize data according to each relevant policy context and policy actor. This process aimed to de-contextualize data from its original source so that it can be later re-contextualized in the form of organizational identities and underlying policy

discourses (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Erickson, 1986). As noted above, because the provisions of Massachusetts S. 2315 will not take effect until September 2016, I was not able to collect data on aspects of the policy trajectory that characterize the context of practice, such as school- or classroom-level implementation. I therefore used eight initial codes: four policy cycle codes – i.e., the contexts of influence, policy text production, outcomes and political strategy – for each of the two major policy actors – i.e., Stand for Children and the MTA. Importantly, I applied all eight codes across my full portfolio of collected data. As I describe below, each subsequent chapter presents analysis from a single policy context, with the exception that Chapter Five reports findings from both the contexts of text production and outcomes of the ballot initiative.

When coding for the context of influence, I indexed instances where research participants discussed the overarching purpose or need for a policy change related to teacher transfer and dismissal, as opposed to another topic in school change. For example, in our interview, a key member of Stand for Children explained that the focus on teacher job security was a response to “stories about frustration especially from younger teachers that were saying ‘we’re getting tired of seeing that someone can put her feet up on the desk and say ‘it doesn’t matter what you say, I’m gonna be here at the end of the year, you’re not.’” This was coded as “Stand for Children- Context of Influence” because it provides an indication of common arguments that Stand for Children made about the need for changing current policies regarding teacher evaluation and job security.

Importantly, the context of influence codes also include instances where research participants described overarching changes in Massachusetts educational policy making

in the years leading up to the ballot initiative. As I describe in Chapter Four, following the Obama Administration's launch of Race-to-the-Top, Massachusetts enacted a suite of neo-liberal reforms that in many ways set the stage for the ballot initiative and compromise law. I used the context of influence codes, then, to capture the arguments, beliefs and political events that shaped policy development during this time.

When indexing transcripts for the context of policy text production, I looked for arguments about the particular mechanisms chosen as vehicles for policy change. For example, when seeking policy change in Illinois, Stand for Children pursued legislation at the Illinois state legislature. In Massachusetts, meanwhile, the organization opted to go directly to Massachusetts' voters in the form of a ballot initiative. When I asked the organization's Executive Director about this decision, he explained that legislators "weren't even willing to have the public conversation and that's what led us to say, we're gonna make sure that the conversation happens and that was filing the ballot initiative." This excerpt was indexed with a code for "Stand for Children- Context of Policy Text Production" as key argument informing Stand for Children's original decision making about the appropriate vehicle for policy change.

In analysis of the context of outcomes, I sought to understand the political consequences of the ballot initiative and the compromise law. For example, after launching the ballot initiative, Stand for Children found itself largely isolated from the Massachusetts' policy making community. A prominent business leader explained that the organization was "maybe expecting more support than they got, from not just our group but from a lot of groups" in the business community. This excerpt was coded as "Stand for Children- Context of Outcomes." Additionally, I indexed concrete actions

taken in response to the ballot initiative and compromise law. As an example, excerpts discussing the MTA's lawsuit against the ballot initiative were coded as "MTA- Context of Outcomes."

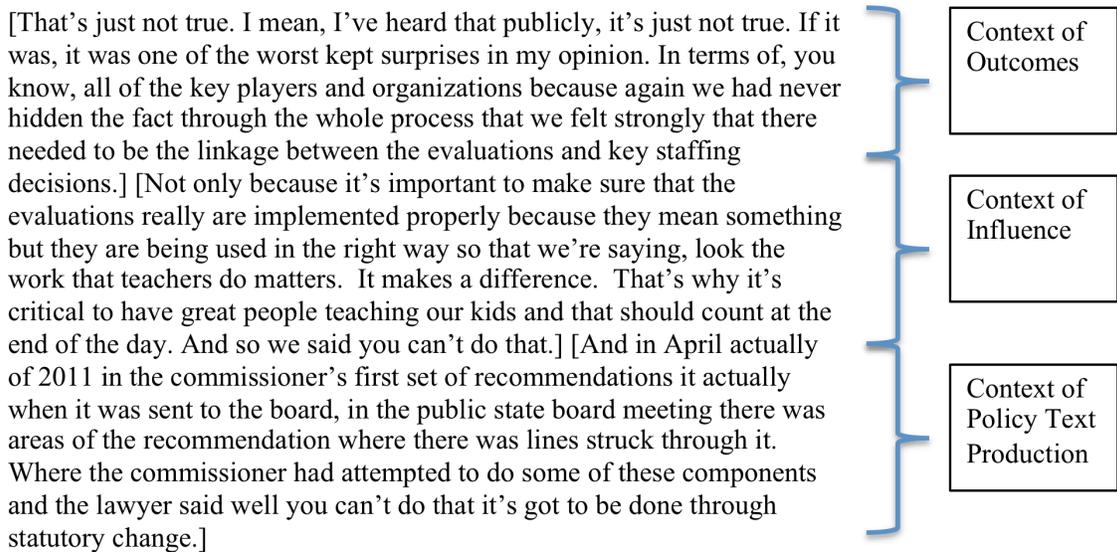
Lastly, analysis in the context of political strategy sought to identify changes to social structures and political decision making that can remedy injustices observed across the policy trajectory. In particular, I indexed examples of strategies for increasing public engagement in political decision making. Many of the MTA teachers that I interviewed criticized state-level leadership for ignoring the concerns of local-level members. These members often offered detailed descriptions of the public outreach mechanisms that the union could have used in order to garner feedback from rank-and-file members; these excerpts were coded as "MTA- Context of Political Strategy." I also indexed mechanisms for public outreach as well as common arguments for greater public engagement in future educational policy making.

Policy context codes were applied at the level of what I am calling a "topical thread." In interviews and public venues, for example, stakeholders' discussion of policy making often weaves several topics, themes or arguments together to create a rich and comprehensive illustration of the thinking that informed political decision making. Guided by the above definition of policy contexts, I used coding to organize topical threads according to the contexts of influence, policy text production, outcomes, and political strategy.

Figure 6 provides an example of how topical threads were often woven together in interview data. In the excerpt below, the Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts is describing the organization's initial decision to pursue a ballot question

related to seniority-based job security. As mentioned above, several months before the ballot question was announced the Massachusetts’ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convened a working group to rewrite the state’s regulations on teacher supervision and evaluation. Although Stand for Children was a member of this working group, many charged that the organization did not publicly discuss its plans to seek legislative changes that would add consequences for teachers deemed underperforming according to the new evaluation system. In the excerpt below, the Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts responds to this critique, while weaving together comments about the underlying purpose of the new law and the particular mechanism chosen for bringing about policy change.

Figure 6: Identification of Topical Threads



In the first bracketed section of the above excerpt, the interview participant is responding directly to claims that Stand for Children had not notified others in the state policy making community that it was planning to seek policy change regarding teacher job security. Following the announcement of the ballot initiative, Stand for Children

became labeled as uncollaborative and disconnected from the state policy making community. This image featured prominently in public outreach against the ballot initiative. As a result, critique of Stand for Children, as well as the organization's response to critics, are part of a topical thread related to the outcomes of the organization's decision to pursue a ballot question.

The second bracketed selection, meanwhile, is coded as an indication of the underlying arguments influencing Stand for Children's focus on teacher job security. In this short excerpt, the speaker echoes broader discourses about the value of using high-stakes accountability to ensure that changes to teacher evaluation policy are implemented effectively and about the importance of teacher quality over and above out-of-school factors that may influence student achievement.

Lastly, in the third bracketed selection, the interviewee shifts from discussing the purpose of the new law to the vehicle chosen for policy change. It is important to note that the teacher evaluation working group convened by the DESE only made changes to regulations governing existing law; they did not write new law. As described in the excerpt above, in April 2011, the state Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education had tried to use regulatory changes to add consequences for underperforming teachers to the state's new evaluation system. However, lawyers for the state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education rejected this proposal, asserting that changes to teacher job security had to be done by implementing a new law – i.e., statutory change – as opposed to merely rewriting the rules on an existing law – i.e., regulatory change. This discussion is part of a larger topical thread related to Stand for Children's decision to

draft the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot question; as a result, it is coded as part of the context of policy text production.

Stage II: Identification of Organizational Frames and Policy Discourses.

Once data had been sorted according to its particular policy context, I first employed an open coding technique to identify common frames used to describe Stand for Children and the MTA, and I then identified key policy discourses evident within those frames. Throughout this process, I used a version of Foucauldian discourse analysis (see Sharp & Richardson, 2001) that draws from frame analysis literature (Coburn, 2006; Entman, 1993; Jefferies, 2009; Oliver & Johnston, 2000) as well as the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2004; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005; Rogers, 2004b; Woodside-Jiron, 2004).

In CDA scholarship, discourse is closely linked to the concept of “situated identity,” or the ways in which groups situate themselves within a certain political arena (Gee, 1999; Rogers, 2004a, 2004b). Particularly important for the case studied here, analysis of identity includes identification of the “cultural models – or storylines – that people carry with them about their various social roles” (Rogers, 2004b, p. 52) in the policy making process. I demonstrate how Stand for Children and the MTA choose their own social location within various contexts of the “Great Teachers, Great Teachers” policy cycle by identifying political identities associated with each organization. Importantly, Rogers (2004a) notes that “any one individual may have more than one identity that is in conflict or alignment with another part of their identity” (p. 52; Fischer, 2003). This is particularly relevant in the shifting landscape of the new policy making arena, when social identities of ERAOs and teachers’ unions are changing in dramatic

ways. To capture this complexity, I identify frames used by leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA to describe their organizational purpose as well as alternative, competing frames often promoted by critics of each organization. I then connected these frames to underlying discourses regarding educational policy development and democratic engagement.

Unlike discourses, frames do appear whole in a single text or statement (Coburn, 2006; Entman, 1993; Jefferies, 2009; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Stevens & Piazza, 2010). I therefore used frame analysis as an entrée towards identifying underlying political discourses. Made popular by Goffman (1974), frame analysis has been used in social movement literature (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hawkesworth, 2012; Snow & Benford, 1992) and in media analysis (Jefferies, 2009; Piazza, 2014) to understand how groups market their political perspectives to others. Oliver and Johnston (2000) define a frame as “a mental structure that orients interpretation” (p. 46). Frames, in other words, are ways of using language that direct thinking towards certain aspects of social life while distracting attention from other aspects of social life (Coburn, 2006; Entman, 1993; Jefferies, 2009; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Stevens & Piazza, 2010). As I describe below, discourses are part of the “substance” evident within frames, as discourses express the assumptions and underlying system of beliefs that give frames their salience in public dialogue.

In my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, I view ERAOs and teachers’ unions as social movements in their own right. Like leaders of social movements, decision makers at Stand for Children and the MTA framed their organizational identity in ways that justified their political actions in the campaign.

Meanwhile, critics offered alternative framings of each organization's political identity, directing attention towards troubling underlying beliefs that may have been influential in each organization's decision making. In this way, critics of each organization similarly acted like leaders of social movements who aimed to rally others to their cause. When presenting findings in subsequent chapters, I organize my discussion according to competing frames evident in debate about Stand for Children and the MTA, and I describe the underlying discourses that provide "substance" to these frames when they are used in political debate.

To identify frames, I first used MaxQDA coding software to create reports for topical threads according to all eight original codes used in stage one of my data analysis. Then, using methods common to qualitative analysis in general, I employed open coding as an analytic strategy with the goal of identifying frames used to describe MTA and Stand for Children (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Erickson, 1986). I relied on the characterization of the new policy arena in Chapter One to generate a set of codes. For example, I paid close attention to instances where Stand for Children was framed as an upstart intent on pushing a neo-liberal agenda of school reform or, conversely, as an innovative reformer with a promising approach to improving public education. Likewise, I indexed instances where unions were framed as either resistant, or adaptive, to Stand for Children's political advocacy. I also remained open to emergent characterizations of ERAOs and unions not seen commonly in research or public debate.

Then, based on the characterizations of each organization, I identified competing organizational identities for the major actors in the policy trajectory. I used analytic memoing to identify "key linkages" demonstrating that multiple instances of data – i.e.,

various characterizations of Stand for Children – are “analogous instances of the same phenomenon” (Erickson, 1986, p. 148), or organizational frame. By linking data thematically, I began to develop assertions about competing frames at various points in the policy’s trajectory. I then compared burgeoning assertions with “discrepant cases” (Erickson, 1986), or disconfirming evidence, in order to develop a nuanced picture of how identities promoted by leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA were challenged by each organization’s critics.

As the term implies, frames are windows into viewing the underlying discourses shaping the debate. In particular, frames use social discourses, drawn from dominant cultural norms, to market certain perspectives or beliefs to the general public (Jefferies, 2009; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Once they were identified, then, I then looked inside each organizational frame in order to uncover relevant underlying discourses. I identified discourses by piecing together arguments evident within common frames to articulate overarching, “co-authored” discourses evident in each policy context. I used an axial coding method that drew codes from my discussion in Chapter Two of common policy discourses in the neo-liberal era. I also remained open to emergent discourses, especially regarding underlying beliefs about the role of democratic engagement and the meaning of social justice in the current policy making arena.

While my goals resemble that of traditional CDA, my method differed from the often line-by-line analysis of text seen in CDA scholarship (see Young & Harrison, 2004). Borrowing from Gee (1999), it is important, here, to distinguish between Discourse with a capital D and lower-case discourses. While the former refers to various ways of representing the social world, or the larger “identities and meanings that go along

with such ways of speaking” (Rogers, 2004a, p. 5), the latter refers to the “language bits” (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 370) used to convey capital-D Discourse. While discourse is “the grammar of what is being said” (Rogers, 2004b, p. 5), capital-D Discourse encompasses the ideologies and social meanings that give individual excerpts of text their social or political import.

Since I seek to characterize the social meanings and beliefs about school policy evident in arguments by a wide variety of stakeholders, the broader notion of Discourse is better suited to the research goals outlined here. Although line-by-line analysis of grammar or syntax – i.e., Gee’s (1999) notion of lower-d discourse – is a valuable method for understanding policy dialogue, the volume of data collected here makes lower-d discourse analysis prohibitive and potentially overwhelming. At the risk of causing confusion, I spell discourse with a lower-case d, although I am referring to this broader notion that is capitalized in Gee’s (1996) work.

Of course, there are many political discourses at play in a policy trajectory, like the one studied here, that includes complicated arguments about school reform, teacher quality, teachers’ unions and non-profit advocacy groups. In analyzing data, I sought to create an exhaustive account of the various discourses that appeared to be influential within each policy context. In presenting my analysis, however, I limit discussion to the prevailing discourses that competed for influence over organizational identities of Stand for Children and the MTA, respectively. I then trace changes in these discourses over the course of the policy trajectory.

The MTA, for example, found itself caught between two competing frames about the unions’ role in responding to neo-liberal reform. Some research participants argued

that MTA's decision to seek compromise legislation demonstrated that "the unions actually can be part of change rather than obstacles to it" by using political influence to moderate the impact of neo-liberal policies. Meanwhile, other participants, including many MTA members, argued that "compromise is capitulation," not an indication of political strength. Multiple MTA members stated that they would have preferred that the union fight the ballot initiative, and risk losing, then to negotiate changes to traditional union issues, such as teacher job protections.

Each organizational framing directs attention towards very different discourses about the role of teachers' unions in the new policy arena. Arguments in favor of compromise appear to be related to the discourse, identified above, that neo-liberal reform is inevitable (Hursh, 2005, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Sleeter, 2008). This perspective asserts that, since the rise of neo-liberal reform cannot be stopped, it is in unions' best interest to mollify neo-liberal proposals in any way possible. Meanwhile, the argument of MTA's critics draws from the discourse that neo-liberal reform is a unilateral path to the privatization of public education (Kumashiro, 2012; Sleeter, 2008). According to this discourse, all efforts at neo-liberal policy change must be resisted at all costs. In presenting my analysis, I characterize the ways that each organizational identity competed with each other for influence over the MTA's decision making. Throughout each chapter, I engage in a parallel discussion of a different set of competing organizational frames about Stand for Children's role in Massachusetts educational policy making.

Stage III: Connecting Discourse and Political Decision Making. In the final stage of data analysis, I connected policy discourses about ERAOs and teachers' unions

to the concrete political decisions and events that shaped the policy trajectory. Consistent with the “on the cusp” approach, this stage of my data analysis methodology is premised on the notion that power is evident in language as well as in concrete political maneuvering. According to the post-structuralist perspective, political arguments “actively construct society” (Fischer, 2003, p. 38), leading to social structures that privilege some while oppressing others (see also: Hawkesworth, 2012). By contrast, modernist policy analysis views power as something held by those with access to influential political decision makers. Conceptions of social change vary according to each tradition’s perspective on political power. According to the post-structuralist perspective, change occurs primarily through the promulgation of marginalized perspectives about social progress. Meanwhile, in the modernist tradition, social change occurs through concrete maneuvering in the style of a “hardball politics,” where non-dominant actors seek to gain greater access to political decision makers.

Consistent with the policy analysis “on the cusp” of modern and post-structural perspectives, I argue that political struggle in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case occurred through concrete political maneuvering as well as through the use of competing arguments about the role of unions and ERAOs in the policy arena. Further, I demonstrate that various attempts to leverage political power appeared to be related to each other in an iterative process. In some ways, dominant discourses shaped each organization’s political decision making. Conversely, key policy events appeared to shape the arguments that each group made about themselves and in response to their political opponents. Throughout my analysis, I highlight the complicated interactions

between political argumentation and political maneuvering in order to understand how each group attempted to resolve policy conflict in their favor.

In conducting analysis in stage three, I used a code called “Political Decision Making” to index instances where stakeholders made explicit connections between political beliefs and concrete political decisions. As one might expect, this code was used most commonly in interviews with leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA. For example, when describing Stand for Children’s decision to launch the ballot initiative, the organization’s Executive Director explained that

I can appreciate when people say there is a value in working towards consensus and getting all the adults in the room comfortable before you move forward. But, when you’re talking about kids; this is an entire generation of kids going through a school system before we’ve gotten adults comfortable and, you know, from our perspective that wasn’t acceptable and we did say we’re open to talking about adjusted timelines but let’s move the ball forward. And it became very clear that if we introduced the bill in the traditional way that you do it, it was going to get tied up and not go anywhere. And that’s what led to the ballot initiative.

In the first stage of data analysis, this excerpt was coded as “Stand for Children-Context of Policy Text Production.” Then, in the second stage of data analysis, I evaluated this excerpt alongside others in the same topical thread in order to identify the frames used to describe Stand for Children’s role in policy making at this point in the policy trajectory. In particular, I identified this excerpt as an example of an attempt to frame Stand for Children as a bold new player in the policy arena that, as their name

implies, stands up for children at the expense of angering the “adults in the room” who are in charge of policy making. In the third stage of analysis, this excerpt was then labeled with the “Political Decision Making” code because it explicitly links organizational beliefs to a concrete political decision – i.e., the use a ballot initiative to bring about policy change. In short, this excerpt contributes to the theory that Stand for Children launched the ballot initiative because it was interested in making urgent policy change for Massachusetts’ public school students.

I also used the “Political Decision Making” code to capture instances where key informants likewise revealed connections between policy discourses and organizational decision making. As one might expect, given highly secretive nature of the policy development process, interviews from others in the policy community helped to supplement, and in some cases to challenge, the testimony of leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA. For example, a prominent member of the state’s business community, and one of Stand for Children’s close allies, described the ballot campaign very differently. Referring to the decision to launch the ballot initiative, she explained that

It was totally opposite of what I had been told they were planning to do, so I just am stuck, I can’t believe it could have been bubbling up in Massachusetts because I had been told a totally different plan, and then I read in the State House News Service that they filed this. So they didn’t even take the time, because they must have had to make the decision pretty close to the deadline for filing, to go out and build a coalition and to even see if people who were like-minded, which we were,

would be supportive of them filing it this year and their failure to do all of that indicates to me that they were being driven by some other motives.

This informant went on to explain that the campaign was likely driven by the anti-union agenda of Stand for Children's national level leadership. As with the excerpt above, this was originally coded as "Stand for Children- Context of Policy Text Production." In the second stage of data analysis, this excerpt was identified as part of an alternative framing of Stand for Children. Here, the interviewee implies that, instead of standing up for children, the organization aimed to weaken state-level teachers' unions. Then, in the third stage of analysis, this was indexed as a key excerpt in connecting Stand for Children's organizational identity to its concrete political decision making. Of course, this excerpt contributes to an alternative theory: that Stand for Children launched the ballot initiative as an effort to attack the political influence of state teachers' unions.

Importantly, I also used the "Political Decision Making" code to capture instances where stakeholders made connections between political discourses and key decisions regarding democratic engagement. I paid equal attention to data sources that provided an understanding of each organization's grassroots community organizing efforts as well as to cases where interviewees justified their decision to not engage in community organizing; given the secretive nature of the case, the latter was much more common. In the following excerpt, for example, the MTA President responds to critics who had wanted the union to launch a more aggressive community organizing campaign against the ballot initiative:

They expect me to fight something that had a polling against us at 70 to 30 percent. Against somebody who had 10 million dollars available to them to go on air with a bumper sticker like “Don’t you think we should have a great teacher in every school?” And I’m supposed to go on TV and newspapers and argue the technicality of all these collective bargaining of Chapter 71 and 38, etc., etc. And, some of the very same people who were looking for MTA to go fight it really have been unable to get members to get directly involved in campaigns for anything; so, I think there was an awful lot of wishful thinking.

In a short excerpt, this response says a lot about beliefs regarding unions’ role in responding to highly funded advocacy organizations. Particularly relevant for my analysis is the notion that unions would not have been able to defeat the initiative by running a ground campaign against the initiative. This excerpt, then, contributes to the theory that the MTA did not mobilize members to fight the ballot initiative because it did not feel that it could win the fight. As I demonstrate in Chapters Four through Six, analysis across my portfolio of data revealed competing theories about why the union was reluctant to engage in grassroots organizing against the initiative.

I applied the “Political Decision Making” code across the original eight “topical threads” for each actor and each policy context. Across all data sources, I indexed instances where data helped to illuminate the relationship between discourse and political decision making. I paid particularly close attention, however, to excerpts that helped to understand political struggles over democratic engagement. I then engaged in analytical memoing to create various theories about the underlying beliefs that were guiding each organization’s political decision making. Towards this end, I produced a MaxQDA report

of the “Political Decision Making” codes for each policy context, and I sorted data according to common themes, such as “Stand for Children as driven by its national leadership” or “Stand for Children as a bold, innovative advocate for students.” I then sought disconfirming data in the full MaxQDA reports for each topical thread, and I revised assertions as necessary. Ultimately, I developed competing assertions about each organization’s role in the case; these conceptual linkages between discourse and political decision making constitute the theory, presented in Chapters Four through Six, about what happened in the case. In Chapter Seven, I reflect on what these linkages can tell us about the values and norms shaping policy development in the new policy making arena.

When developing assertions, I paid attention to data that provided the most explanatory power. Unlike critical ethnography, which seeks saturation of data from participants with shared lived experiences, I was not always able to develop theory based on common, repeated themes evident across my data sources. As noted above, I conducted interviews with stakeholders who were positioned in different places within the Massachusetts policy making arena. Some stakeholders had specialized knowledge of the policy making process, such as the State House staff member that I interviewed or the community organizer who left Stand for Children out of frustration with the ballot campaign. Often data from these participants helped to fill in gaps in testimony from leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA. Instead of presenting the most common themes, then, I identify findings from data that contribute the most to overarching narratives about each organization’s political decision making.

Narrative and Data Display on the Cusp

Ball's policy cycle (2005) provides structure to the narrative that follows, helping to keep track of the messy, complicated process that ultimately led to the compromise law. Specifically, in the remaining chapters, I use policy contexts to organize my analysis chronologically, as detailed in Table 10. Chapter Four explores the context of influence for the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative, defined as the time period between the July 2009 announcement of Race-to-the-Top to the Massachusetts' approval of a new system for teacher supervision and evaluation, in June 2011.

Chapter Five presents analysis of the contexts of text production and outcomes for the ballot initiative, spanning the time period between the conclusion of the supervision and evaluation working group and the May 2012 announcement that Stand for Children and the MTA had developed compromise legislation. This time period includes Stand for Children's announcement of the ballot campaign, in October 2011, the MTA's lawsuit, filed in January 2012, as well as many other major events of the ballot campaign.

Chapter Six reports on major findings from the contexts of outcomes of the compromise law, starting with the June 2012 enactment of Massachusetts S. 2315 and continuing to the present. When discussing the outcomes of the ballot initiative, I offer a detailed description of the reasons that each side decided to pursue compromise; however given the highly secretive nature of the negotiations between Stand for Children and the MTA, I do not have enough data to describe the arguments or political maneuvering that occurred within the context of text production for the compromise law. Chapter Four through Six compose my full presentation of findings from the case.

Meanwhile, Chapter Seven, which contains reflections from the context of political strategy, functions as a concluding chapter. In particular, I summarize overarching themes from the case, and I identify broadly applicable strategies for responding to social injustices identified in my analysis. Unlike Chapters Four through Six, the discussion in Chapter Seven goes far beyond the particular circumstances of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. As a result, while I draw from analysis conducted within codes for the context of political strategy, I supplement these data with reflections from conceptual and empirical literature regarding models for stimulating democratic engagement in educational policy making.

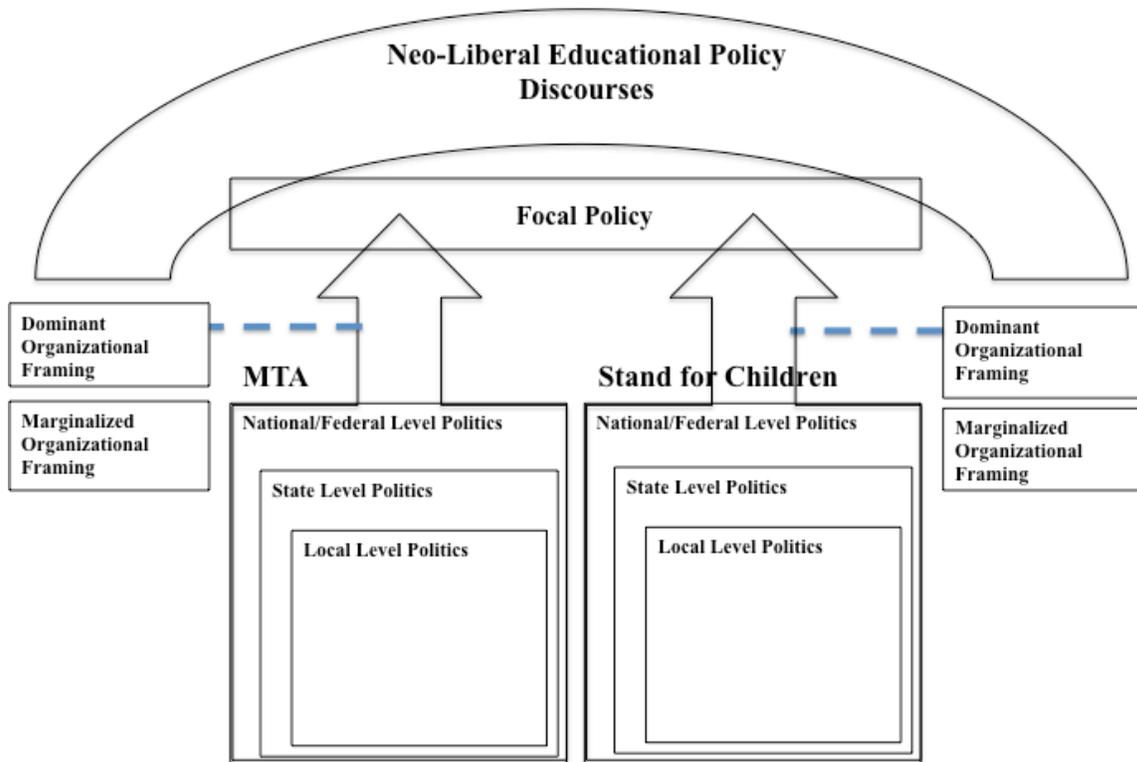
Table 10: Narrative Structure of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Policy Cycle

	Policy Context(s)	Time Period
Chapter Four	Context of Influence	July 2009 – June 2011
Chapter Five	Ballot Initiative: Context of Policy Text Production, and Context of Outcomes	July 2011 – May 2012
Chapter Six	Compromise Law: Context of Outcomes	June 2012 – Present
Chapter Seven	Context of Political Strategy	Future directions for policy making

In Chapters Four through Six, I organize data into what I am calling an “analytic framework”: a diagram of key organizational frames and political events that shaped the case, as determined through the data analysis methodology described above. In Figure 7, I present a generic version of the analytic framework that I use for each context in the policy trajectory. The model below includes labels for each major category, but is not populated with data. This discussion serves as a guide for the subsequent display of my

data analysis. In the following chapters, I present an analytic model for each relevant policy context. In Chapter Seven, I look across the entire policy trajectory to reflect on what the case can tell us about struggles for democratic engagement in a changing policy environment, and I identify models for a more inclusive policy development process.

Figure 7: The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Analytic Framework



Analysis in each chapter begins with an overview of one or more focal policy texts. In Chapter Four, I explore a suite of policy changes enacted in Massachusetts in the years immediately following the Obama Administration’s announcement of Race-to-the-Top. Then, in Chapter Five, I offer a detailed summary of the text of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative, and, in Chapter Six, I summarize key aspects of the so-called compromise law developed between Stand for Children and the MTA. As

illustrated in my analytic framework, I demonstrate that each policy change fit underneath the larger umbrella of neo-liberal school reform.

I first used open coding to identify common policy mechanisms in each text. Common codes included: changes to seniority-based job protections, changes to collective bargaining rights, and changes to teacher transfer rules. By using the same labels in analysis of each policy text, I was able to keep close track of the policy modifications that both sides agreed to when transitioning from the ballot initiative to the compromise law. This analysis was drawn primarily from each official policy text; however, I also relied on related texts, such as talking points memos and email announcements created to describe policy changes to the general public.

I then sorted policy mechanisms according to common neo-liberal discourses identified in Chapter Two: neo-liberal reforms as necessary, given changes to the global economy; the failure of local control over school policy; the value of top-down accountability for student achievement; the value of diverse, non-state educational service providers. As an example, restrictions on district collective bargaining were sorted as examples of policy mechanisms that align with neo-liberal discourses about the failure of local control over school policy. In the policy text section of each chapter, I note the major policy mechanisms of each text, and I identify alignment with prominent neo-liberal policy discourses.

Of course, the policy debate about each text featured complex arguments for and against certain policy changes. In particular, debate over the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative text featured very different perspectives on the value of seniority-based job protections for teachers. It is outside the scope of this research,

however, to characterize this debate in detail. Instead, I provide a brief overview of key changes in order to understand the discourses that shaped debate about policy making, especially regarding the role of unions and ERAOs.

After introducing policy text, in each chapter, I go backwards in the chronology to describe the political decision making that shaped policy development. For each major organization, I describe the complex interplay of discourse and political maneuvering identified in stage three of my data analysis methodology. Based on analysis of the “Political Decision Making” codes, I identified the events and political pressures that figured most prominently in each organization’s decision making. I then organized key events according to three levels of scale: the national/federal level, the state level and the local level. While modernist policy analysis is typically concerned with large-scale events, post-structural analysis aims, instead, to understand the local-level complexity that often interferes with plans developed at the national or state levels. Working on the cusp, my analysis considers political events at both the macro and micro levels. In Figure 7, these data are displayed in overlapping squares underneath headings for the MTA and Stand for Children.

The national/federal level includes all relevant policy pressures outside of the Massachusetts context. This includes everything from federal-level education policy initiatives, such as Race-to-the-Top, to the pressures faced by national level affiliates of each major policy actor. For example, interview analysis revealed that Stand for Children’s success passing legislation in Illinois had a strong impact on the group’s influence in Massachusetts; as a result, the Illinois legislation is listed as a key event at the national/federal level. Meanwhile, the state level category includes all relevant state-

level political pressures faced by the leadership of each major organization. As I describe in Chapter Four, Race-to-the-Top led to the formation a major new state-level coalition promoting neo-liberal reform, called the Race-to-the-Top Coalition; this is listed as a key event at the state level. Lastly, the local-level category includes all events and political pressures associated with each organization’s outreach to local-level membership. For example, following Race-to-the-Top, each organization faced criticism from its own local members about changes in organizational priorities; this critique is listed as a major event at the local level.

Importantly, the analytic framework diagrams align with the spheres of the policy web presented above in Figure 4. Political activity in the spheres of the “federal government” and “non-governmental elite national actors” is displayed at the “national/federal level” in the diagrams presented below. Meanwhile, the “state level” component of each diagram is composed of actions from political entities in the “state government” and “non-governmental elite state-level actors” spheres of the policy web. Lastly, political pressures from those in the spheres of “local-level community leaders” and “affected public stakeholders” are organized in to the “local level” scale of each diagram.

Lastly, in the post-structural tradition, I describe the ways that actors exercised discursive power through argumentation and debate. Events at each level of scale changed perceptions and public discourse about each group. Leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA framed their decision making in ways that justified highly controversial political actions. Meanwhile, critics pushed back against these frames, offering alternative visions of each organization’s identity and purpose in Massachusetts

educational policy making. Alongside my discussion of key political pressures, I detail dominant and marginalized frames regarding each organization's political identity. This debate often featured sharp criticism of the underlying beliefs shaping each organization's political decision making. When describing each pair of competing organizational frames, then I disclose the underlying discourses identified in stage two of my data analysis and I keep a close account of changes over time in the frames used to describe Stand for Children and the MTA.

Chapter Four

Context of Influence:

Adversaries or Allies?

In this chapter, I transition from discussion of my research design and purpose to my analysis of data, which will be presented across Chapters Four through Six. I first introduce key concepts that span the subsequent chapters, including the notion of what I am calling “neo-democratic” decision making, in which high-level interest group conflict led to narrow forms of democratic engagement. After introducing major overarching themes, I engage in analysis of the topic for this particular chapter: the context of influence for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. My narrative follows the structure outlined in the conclusion of Chapter Three. I first offer a general characterization of the focal policy texts relevant to the context of influence. I then describe the organizational framing and underlying discourses that appeared to shape key political decisions at Stand for Children and the MTA. My analysis suggests that, although the organizations appeared to be staunch political adversaries, they were actually aligned on key policy perspectives. Most troublingly, in the process of resolving high-stakes conflict, leadership at each organization found ways to silence or ignore opposition from their own local-level membership.

“Neo-Democracy” in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Case

Many people were surprised when Stand for Children, a newcomer to state-level policy making, was able to pass neo-liberal school reform against the interests of the Massachusetts’ legislature and teachers’ unions. My analysis across Chapters Four through Six uses collected data to create a theory about how this happened. In contrast

with modernist notions of enacted legislation as static and final, I view the compromise law as “a continual process” (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 13) in which policy actors engaged in struggle over what beliefs should guide educational policy making while also jockeying for power over political decision making. In the remaining chapters, I explore the ways that the compromise law was shaped by various political struggles across the policy trajectory. Of course, political conflict in the case took many different forms. To list just a few examples, Stand for Children and the MTA engaged in struggle over: access to legislative leaders, debate about the value of seniority-based job protections, and political messaging regarding which side “won” and “lost” in compromise. It is outside the scope of this research to present an exhaustive account of the multiple, overlapping struggles that shaped policy development.

Instead, I focus on political conflict over democratic engagement in the policy making process. Stand for Children and the MTA each faced conflict from local-level membership who felt that their voices were not included in the policy development process. Via political argumentation and complex political maneuvering, a tug-of-war played out between state-level leadership and local-level membership over each organization’s efforts at grassroots community organizing. I use data from the case to “explore the assumptions, ambiguities and inconsistencies underlying conflicting frames, along with the consequences to which their uses might lead” (Fischer, 2003, p. 145). I demonstrate that Stand for Children was caught between two competing frames, which I am calling: “ERAO as antidote” and “ERAO as antagonist.” Additionally, I build the argument that the MTA experienced tension between its own set of frames, which I label as “union as reformer” and “union as advocate.”

While Stand for Children presented itself as an “antidote” to problems in educational policy making, critics framed the organization as an “antagonist” to teachers’ unions and to public education more generally. Meanwhile, the MTA framed itself as a “reformer,” capable of bringing about reasonable changes to public education policies, while critics called on the union to be an “advocate” against corporate influence in public education. In subsequent chapters, I present a theory about the factors that shaped struggles over organizational identity, and I focus on implications for democratic engagement in the new policy making arena.

Attention to democratic engagement is important considering dominant trends in modern educational policy making. As detailed in Chapter Two, policy making in the social welfare era operated according to a minimalist democracy, where the public trusted local leaders to guide policy and practice (Fung, 2007; Mehta, 2013; Ranson, 2012). Meanwhile, the current neo-liberal era favors an aggregative democracy, where decisions are determined through the tally of individual choices in a broad educational marketplace (Fung, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Hursh, 2009; Ranson, 2007; Rogers, 2006). Despite their differences, modern approaches to policy making fall far short of the broad, multi-voice public debate that is at the center of deliberative democratic political decision making.

Perhaps as a result, policies of the social welfare and neo-liberal eras have become the subject of intense public criticism. Public trust in policies of the social welfare era was decimated following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Although it has yet to reach the same proportions, cracks in public trust of neo-liberal policies are beginning to emerge in the form of opposition to high-stakes test-based accountability (CNN, 2013; McNeil, 2013; Puriefoy, 2005; Ujifusa, 2013b). I join others in the

deliberative democratic tradition who argue that, to build public trust in educational policy making, we need a system that provides more avenues for democratic debate to inform the policy process (see Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2009; Koopman, 2006; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Warren, 2009).

Particularly important for the case studied here, teachers' unions and grassroots community organizations are essential components of any such effort to increase democratic engagement in educational policy development. For decades, unions have been widely regarded as the voice of America's working class. Teachers' unions, in particular, hold a lot of promise for grassroots community organizing. State level unions are composed of a network of so-called "union locals," groups of members in each school district that are led by a local union president and a staff of political organizers that includes building representatives for each district school. Additionally, because schools are often integrated into their surrounding community, school issues can quickly become social issues that affect all in the community who have a stake in public education, including parents, business leaders and government officials. By informing and mobilizing their membership, then, unions can be powerful vehicles for outreach about school issues to the general public.

Non-profit organizations have demonstrated that they can also play an important role in advocating for the public interest. Similar to teachers' unions, many community-based organizations are composed of local-level chapters that each has its own leadership structure and community organizing network. Across virtually all areas of public policy, advocacy organizations have been effective vehicles for educating the public about policy problems, providing a venue for public debate and representing the public interest in

legislative advocacy. As a result, many non-profit organizations, such as the Sierra Club or the American Cancer Society, have become icons for their respective causes and fixtures in political debate.

The two organizations studied here, the MTA and Stand for Children, are not exceptions to the characterizations above. As drawn from their websites, democratic engagement features prominently in each organization's mission statement, reproduced in full:

The Massachusetts Teachers' Association: The Massachusetts Teachers Association is a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles, that accepts and supports the interdependence of professionals and unionism. The MTA promotes the use of its members' collective powers to advance their professional and economic interests. The MTA is committed to human and civil rights and advocates for quality public education in an environment in which lifelong learning and innovation flourish.

Stand for Children Massachusetts: The mission of Stand for Children Massachusetts is to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, graduate from high school prepared for, and with access to, a college education. We recognize that to achieve this mission requires a disciplined and strategic approach, which is why we are committed to grassroots organizing and political advocacy.

Despite these commitments, in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case each organization contributed to a policy making process that was highly undemocratic. Both Stand for Children and the MTA avoided efforts to conduct the kinds of democratic engagement and grassroots organizing that is explicit in their mission statements. Both organizations silenced local-level members who wanted to play a greater role in the debate. And, ultimately, both organizations developed legislation in private negotiations between their state-level leaders and lawyers. In the remaining chapters, I use data to develop a theory that aims to explain how this happened, and I offer reflections oriented towards finding space for democratic engagement in a changing policy making arena. Because it is central to each organization’s mission, I focus on grassroots community organizing, specifically, when discussing the political activity of Stand for Children and the MTA. It is important to note, however, that I view grassroots organizing as one example among the many possible forms of deliberative forms of democratic engagement that were not evident in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools”

Specifically, across Chapters Four through Six, I build the argument that the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case is indicative of what I am calling “neo-democratic” decision making in American educational policy making. As detailed in Chapter Two, there is a close relationship between dominant discourses about educational policy making and dominant modes of democratic governance. As the country shifted from the social welfare era to the current neo-liberal era, modes of democratic engagement shifted from so-called minimalist democracy to the more market-oriented aggregative democracy that is dominant today. Throughout this dissertation, however, I argue that we are moving into a new phase of neo-liberal school reform. As described in Chapter One, the so-called

new policy making arena is characterized by three major changes: the rapid increase of neo-liberal reform, the rise of Education Reform Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs), and the changing role of teachers' unions. In the analysis presented below, I identify and describe a fourth major element of the new policy arena: "neo-democratic" decision making that uses public voice to justify high-level political decisions.

Although it is related to the aggregative mode of democratic decision making that dominates in the neo-liberal era, neo-democratic decision making is something of an offshoot that is specific to the political changes of recent years. As revealed in my analysis, conflict between Stand for Children and the MTA coincided with changes in each organization's approach to grassroots community organizing. Specifically, political changes in Massachusetts contributed to "neo-democratic" decision making in which democratic engagement was, at best, an afterthought in an otherwise chaotic policy environment and, at worst, a front for policy priorities developed by interests outside the state. In presenting my analysis, I identify the factors that contributed to neo-democratic decision making in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case. I pay close attention to the complex relationship between political changes and democratic engagement, and I use the case to point a way towards more inclusive educational policy making.

Because it was a major catalyst of the new policy making arena, I begin my analysis at the Obama Administration's July 2009 announcement of the Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program. As I describe below, political changes in the years following Race-to-the-Top constitute the context of influence for the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative. In this chapter, then, I explore struggles over the definition of policy problems, and I describe the ways that political conflict during this time period

“set the stage” for later conflict over the ballot initiative and the compromise law. Then, in Chapter Five, I explore the contexts of policy text production and outcomes for the ballot initiative, and, in Chapter Six, I describe the political outcomes of the compromise law. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I offer analysis from the context of political strategy. In this final chapter, I detail specific modes of democratic governance that may help to move beyond the shortcomings of “neo-democratic” decision making.

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Context of Influence

According to Ball’s original conception of the policy cycle framework (Bowe et al., 1992), the context of influence is the domain of policy analysis wherein research seeks to understand political struggle over problem identification. Analysis of the context of influence pushes back against the technical-rational notion that policy problems exist “out there” as objective phenomena to be discovered – and, later, solved – by expert policy analysis (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1993, 1994a; Stone, 2002). Instead, Ball (1993, 1994a) and others in the policy cycle tradition (Bacchi, 2000; Furlong et al., 2000) argue that problem identification, like all aspects of the policy trajectory, is a “non-innocent” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 49) process shaped by debate about the values and perspectives that should guide policy making.

I draw heavily from my earlier characterization of the new policy making arena to explore the ways that larger trends affected struggles over policy making in Massachusetts. I focus specifically on the time period between the Obama Administration’s launch of Race-to-the-Top, in July 2009, and Massachusetts’ approval of a new teacher evaluation system, in June 2011. I consider this time period the context of influence for the ballot initiative because of the ways that Race-to-the-Top changed the

values guiding problem identification and policy making in Massachusetts. Following Race-to-the-Top, Massachusetts engaged in new kinds of debates about new kinds of policy problems and solutions. In particular, Massachusetts began to debate and enact an increasingly diverse array of policies that are commonly considered to be part of the neo-liberal agenda for school change. As I demonstrate in later discussion of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative, policy debates that began with Race-to-the-Top would come to shape policy making and political conflict in the years to come.

Across this chapter, I build the argument that, among its many changes, Race-to-the-Top created an environment that is inhospitable to democratic educational policy making. Specifically, I demonstrate that Race-to-the-Top fueled the high-level interest group conflict between Stand for Children and the MTA that led to tensions with local-level membership at each organization. During this time period, teachers’ unions faced new political pressures and began to engage in new kinds of political argumentation and political maneuvering. Meanwhile, Race-to-the-Top largely boosted Stand for Children to prominence in the state. Starting in 2009, the organization transitioned from exclusive focus on community-based advocacy to engage in state-level campaigns for education reform.

During this time, changes in interest group politics had a dramatic effect on each organization’s approach to democratic engagement. Stand for Children and the MTA each made strategic decisions about how it would respond to internal conflict, while also attempting to leverage political power at the state level. Ultimately, two organizations that appeared to be staunch political adversaries were actually allied regarding certain beliefs about educational policy making and democratic outreach. I demonstrate that the

resolution of political struggle in the context of influence points towards a major theme that runs across the policy trajectory: the emergence of “neo-democratic” decision making, where high-level decision makers manipulate public voice in ways that best serve their own political interests.

I begin analysis of the context of influence by providing an overview of the key policy changes enacted in the time period following the Obama Administration’s announcement of the Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program. Although my analysis focuses primarily on policy making, it is important to understand the salient components of the policies themselves. As detailed in Chapter Two, there is a close relationship between policy making discourses, policy mechanisms, and modes of democratic engagement. In the next section, I detail important policy changes enacted following the announcement of Race-to-the-Top, and I note their alignment with common neo-liberal discourses. Following this discussion, I explore the political struggles between Stand for Children and the MTA that helped bring about each policy change. I identify important political maneuvers and discourses that shaped each organization’s role in policy development. I build the argument that the rise of neo-liberal reform in Massachusetts coincided with restrictions on democratic engagement in school policy at both Stand for Children and the MTA.

Focal Policy: Race-to-the-Top and the Embrace of Neo-Liberalism in Massachusetts

While Massachusetts policy making had begun to align with the neo-liberal agenda as early as the state’s landmark 1993 reform legislation, my analysis revealed that Massachusetts’ success in the Race-to-the-Top competition marked the beginning of a wave of neo-liberal reform in the state. I explore three major state-level educational

policy changes related to Race-to-the-Top: the state's so-called *Achievement Gap* legislation, enacted in January 2010; the state's successful Race-to-the-Top application, awarded in May 2010; and the state's new teacher evaluation system, approved in June 2011. I conducted a content analysis of each policy change to identify thematic overlap with the neo-liberal discourses discussed in Chapter Two. I first used open coding to identify common policy mechanisms, such as changes to job security or limits to collective bargaining. I then used axial coding to organize policy mechanisms according to common neo-liberal discourses, such as the value of high-stakes accountability or the increasing role of non-state service providers in public education.

Analysis of policy text revealed that policy changes of this time period implemented a suite of top-down accountability mechanisms affecting virtually all aspects of Massachusetts public education, from individual teachers to entire school districts. Reflecting two important themes of the new policy making era, reforms often clashed with traditional union values and often provided increased role for non-state service providers, such as charter schools, in underperforming districts. Below, I discuss each policy change in chronological order. In the interest of space and conceptual clarity, I focus on the aspects of each policy that are most relevant to the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case.

Considered the most comprehensive Massachusetts education law since the 1993 education reform legislation, the state passed *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap* (hereafter: *Achievement Gap*) in early 2010. McGuinn (2012c) notes that following the announcement of the Race-to-the-Top competitive grant program, "numerous governors pushed state legislatures to change laws to increase their prospects" (p. 141) for winning

grant funding; as confirmed by Timothy Manning^{iv}, a high-level State House staff member, the 2010 *Achievement Gap* bill was intended to do just that. At its centerpiece, the law created a tiered system for ranking each public school in the state, and it authorized a series of interventions aimed at improving student achievement in the bottom 20% of Massachusetts' public schools.

As written in the *Achievement Gap* bill, the state is allowed to void certain aspects of the collective bargaining agreement in underperforming districts in order to implement state-sanctioned turnaround efforts. Shortly following enactment, for example, staff at six underperforming schools were removed from their positions and asked to reapply for their jobs (Vaznis, 2010). In other cases, schools were able to nullify seniority provisions in teachers' contracts and/or to ask teachers to work additional hours without compensation. Attracting considerable controversy, the *Achievement Gap* bill also contained provisions that doubled the number of charter school seats allowed in the state, concentrating the increase in districts determined to be underperforming according to the state's new school rating system. Foreshadowing the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, Stand for Children was part of the coalition that successfully advocated to add pro-charter school provisions to the bill.

Due, perhaps, to the successful enactment of the *Achievement Gap* bill, in May 2010, Massachusetts was awarded a Race-to-the-Top grant of roughly \$250 million from the Federal Department of Education. In large part, the grant set up systems for teacher professional development and for the use of student data to help implement changes enacted in the *Achievement Gap* legislation. Central to the "Great Teachers, Great

Schools” case, in its Race-to-the-Top application, the state agreed to revise its teacher evaluation system to include consideration of student performance measures.

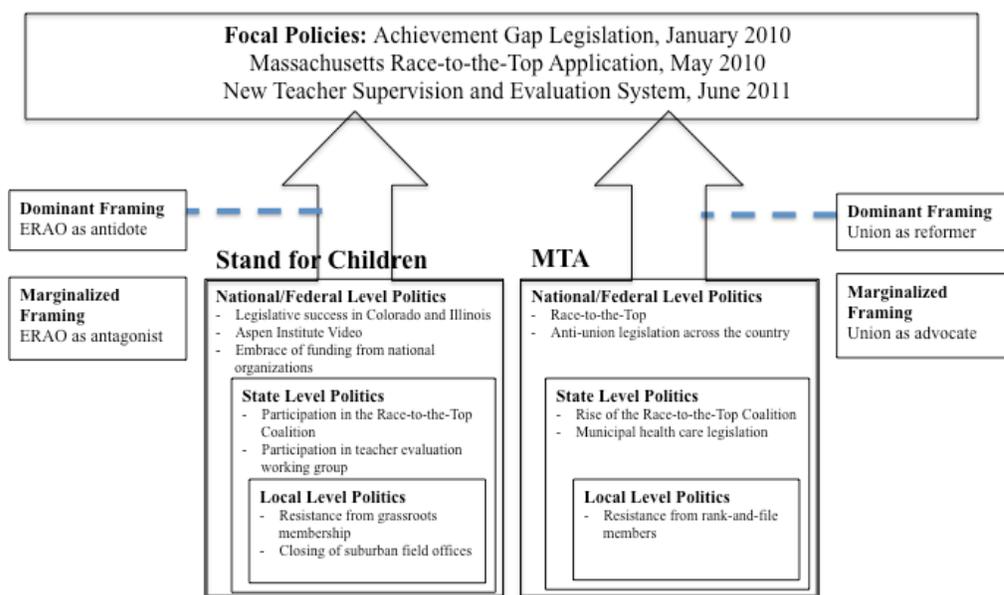
Shortly after receiving grant funding from Race-to-the-Top, then, the state convened a 40-member task force to develop new protocols for the state’s evaluation of teachers and administrators. At the time of the Race-to-the-Top application, it appeared that student test scores would factor directly into teacher performance evaluations. However, bucking national trends, Massachusetts’ new teacher evaluation system only indirectly linked student performance to teacher evaluations. According to the evaluation regulations approved in June 2011, public school teachers receive two separate ratings: an overall “rating of educator practice” on a four-point scale from “unsatisfactory” to “exemplary” based primarily on classroom observations; and a student impact rating of “low,” “medium” or “high” based on standardized test scores and “district-determined measures” of student performance. Unlike many other states, then, test-based measures of student performance do not factor into a teacher’s overall rating.

Additionally, the evaluation system approved in June 2011 contained only relatively low-stakes accountability mechanisms. Teachers who receive a “low” student impact rating are required to complete a one-year growth plan, even if he or she received an overall rating of “exemplary.” Meanwhile, teachers who receive student impact ratings of “medium” or “high” are directed into two-year long growth plans. In the state working group, Stand for Children would argue that accountability provisions in the new evaluation system did not go far enough. As described by its leadership, the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative aimed to “finish everything and have the

legislative action taken” to add higher consequences for teachers determined to be below proficiency according to the new evaluation system.

Not unlike its impact in other states (McGuinn, 2012c), then, Race-to-the-Top focused policy attention in Massachusetts on neo-liberal reform, especially performance-based accountability. Facing reforms that clash with longstanding values, unions found themselves in new kinds of policy battles with newly influential, neo-liberal interest groups. In the remainder of this chapter, I go back in time to explore how these battles led to the policy changes described above. I demonstrate that, following Race-to-the-Top, high-level interest group conflict between Stand for Children and the MTA coincided with changes to the democratic engagement of membership at each organization. I first discuss the political pressures and policy discourses that appeared to influence Stand for Children’s political decision making during this time, and then I turn my attention to the MTA. Figure 8 provides a guide for the analysis presented in the remainder of this chapter, using the analytic framework described in Chapter Three.

Figure 8: The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Context of Influence



Antidote or Antagonist?

Stand For Children's Emergence in Massachusetts Educational Policy Making

In this section, I identify competing frames regarding Stand for Children's role in Massachusetts educational policy making that emerged during the time period between 2009 and 2011. Based on analysis across my full portfolio of data, I use the label "ERAO as antidote" to refer to the frames used by Stand for Children and its supporters, and use the term "ERAO as antagonist" to refer to the frames promoted by the organization's critics. Stand for Children's leadership described the organization as an antidote to existing problems in educational policy making, including most notably: a perceived lack of attention to performance-based accountability across state policy. According to its supporters, Stand for Children was a unique voice for bringing about necessary policy changes, one that combined state-level reform with local-level community organizing. Conversely, Stand for Children's critics reinforced the notion of the organization as an antagonist driven from outside the state by the anti-union agenda of its national leadership. According to this framing, Stand for Children's Massachusetts chapter got its policy priorities from national leadership and funders, not from grassroots organizing.

Although each organizational identity emerged during this time period, they would bump up against each other throughout the policy trajectory. This section, then, serves as an introduction to key frames that I develop when presenting data from subsequent policy contexts. Throughout my discussion of the policy trajectory, I build the argument that the organizational identity, for Stand for Children and the MTA, was connected in important ways to perceptions of each organization's efforts at grassroots

community organizing. In Stand for Children's case, the tension between the antidote and antagonist identities had a lot to do with questions about whether and to what extent the organization was driven by the concerns of its local-level membership.

In this section, I describe the key political events and political pressures affecting Stand for Children's Massachusetts' office, as revealed in analysis of "Political Decision Making" codes. As noted above, this discussion is organized according to national/federal politics, state politics, and local politics. During this time period, Stand for Children experienced major organizational changes at each level. I build the argument that, consistent with the antagonist framing, Stand for Children's state-level political decision making aligned with their political action at the national level. Additionally, during this time, changes at the national and state levels led to conflict with local level membership, raising serious questions about the role of membership in the organization's decision making. In response to critics, Stand for Children staff and supporters argued that organizational changes during this time were driven by local membership who became increasingly supportive of changes to teacher personnel policies.

National/Federal Level Politics

As many interview participants argued, it is important to view Stand for Children's Massachusetts' office within the context of major changes that occurred at the organization's national office. As depicted in Figure 8, the following three events were revealed as influential in analysis of "Political Decision Making" codes: Stand for Children's legislative success in Colorado and Illinois, the release of Jonah Edelman's Aspen Institute video, and the organization's embrace of funding from national organizations aligned with the neo-liberal agenda. For many interview participants, these

events provided confirmation that Stand for Children’s national office had abandoned the group’s grassroots mission to promote reforms that aimed to weaken state-level teachers’ unions.

Interviews with Stand for Children’s leaders, as well as a review of the organization’s grant funding, revealed that Stand for Children was part of what McGuinn (2012c) refers to as a “coming-out party” (p. 142) for Education Reform Advocacy Organizations following the launch of Race-to-the-Top. During this time, Stand for Children became active in state legislatures in a new way, helping to pass controversial policy changes in Colorado and Illinois. Bearing a strong resemblance to Massachusetts’ “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative, Colorado’s 2010 “Great Teachers and Leaders” law requires that at least 50% of teacher evaluations are based on student growth measures, and it prohibits consideration of seniority in decisions about teacher layoffs. Meanwhile, Illinois’ 2010 Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) created a new teacher evaluation system that connects teacher performance to student test scores. Then, passed in 2011, Illinois legislation known as “Senate Bill 7” (SB-7) tied teacher job security to the performance evaluation system created under PERA. Among many controversial changes, SB-7 dramatically reduced seniority-based job protections for teachers determined to be “unsatisfactory” according to the state’s new evaluation system.

For many of the people I interviewed, the Colorado and Illinois bills were evidence that the organization had shifted political priorities sometime around late 2009 to advocate for policies that conflict with core union issues, especially regarding teacher tenure and job security. This quote from Raymond DeJesus, a community organizer, was

typical: “so when Stand pops up, based on their performance in Illinois, you can see that their agenda is to break the power of teachers’ unions.” Many people I interviewed agreed with this estimation, arguing that Stand for Children’s ascendance to state-level policy making in Massachusetts was likewise driven by an anti-union agenda orchestrated by the organization’s national-level leadership.

Released on YouTube in July 2011, Jonah Edelman’s Aspen Institute video was further confirmation for many that the organization’s new political direction was shaped by national leadership. In a videotaped conference session, Edelman, Stand for Children’s national Executive Director, described the organization’s political tactics in Illinois using rich and salty detail. After explaining how the organization was able to use high-powered lobbying to “shift the balance of power” within the Illinois state legislature, Edelman asserted that teachers’ unions were shocked when they realized Stand for Children “had clear political capability to jam this proposal down their throats the same way that pension reform had been jammed down their throats six months earlier.” The Aspen Institute video was mentioned in virtually every interview I conducted. Even Stand for Children’s political allies believed that Edelman had revealed the organization’s true hand.

For many interview participants, changes in the organization’s funding explained why Stand for Children had embraced neo-liberal reform, and offered evidence of how a previously small organization had enough money to wage major state-level campaigns against well-funded teachers’ unions. A review of Stand for Children’s financial disclosures confirms that the national organization’s funding did change dramatically following the launch of Race-to-the-Top. In 2007, Stand for Children’s national office

received a Gates' Foundation grant worth roughly \$680,000 (Libby & Sanchez, 2011). Three years later, Gates' Foundation funding increased to \$3.5 million, across a two-year grant starting in 2010 (Libby & Sanchez, 2011; Sawchuk, 2012d).

Additionally, Reckhow and Snyder (2014) recently reviewed the tax returns of the top 15 education foundations, including the Gates' and Walton Foundations, and traced donations back to individual advocacy and/or research organizations. Their review found that, in 2010, Stand for Children was among the top five recipients of grants from these foundations (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). Further, in 2011, Stand for Children received an additional Walton Family Foundation grant worth more than \$1.3 million (Libby & Sanchez, 2011; Walton Family Foundation, 2011). During this time, Walton Foundation grants were overwhelmingly provided to groups promoting neo-liberal reform, including pro-charter organizations such as the Pioneer Institute and the Building Excellent Schools network among its Massachusetts grant recipients (Walton Family Foundation, 2011).

Stand for Children staff resisted the notion that they were driven by national leadership and funders. Consistent with interview responses from Stand for Children's Executive Director, the Political Director explained that the national office played only "an advisory role" in the decision making of the Massachusetts' office. John Washington, Stand for Children's Massachusetts Executive Director, strongly rebuffed the organization's critics, explaining that "in terms of what you heard our opposition say where there was some sort of, you know, national conspiracy, that's just not true. We make our decisions around what we advocate for and how we do it locally." Both interviewees further insisted that the organization only accepts funding from

organizations whose beliefs align with the “advocacy agenda” developed through grassroots community organizing.

State Level Politics

Stand for Children’s Massachusetts’ office also changed dramatically in the years following the announcement of Race-to-the-Top. Consistent with political activity at the national level, the Massachusetts affiliate demonstrated greater embrace of neo-liberal reform while becoming more engaged in conflict with state-level teachers’ unions. Analysis of “Political Decision Making” codes indicated the following two events were key to Stand for Children’s organizational transformation at the state level. First, in October 2009, Stand for Children joined the controversial Race-to-the-Top Coalition convened by the Boston Foundation. Then, in August 2010, Stand for Children was invited to be part of the diverse 40-member working group that helped to develop the state’s new teacher evaluation system. In each case, Stand for Children played an influential role advocating for neo-liberal reforms, including increased access to charter schools as well as high-stakes teacher evaluation.

Stand for Children Massachusetts was an original member of the state’s Race-to-the-Top Coalition, convened in October 2009 by the controversial Boston Foundation. As described on its website, the Boston Foundation is a prominent grant-making organization that funds projects focused on “accelerating structural reform and promoting autonomies in Boston schools” especially through increased access to in-district charter schools. By uniting a diverse array of organizations under the umbrella of neo-liberal reform, the Race-to-the-Top Coalition emerged during this time as a major adversary of state-level teachers’ unions. Although policy struggle between unions and the Race-to-

the-Top Coalition played out, and continues to play out, in complicated ways, I focus on the events most relevant to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign.

Interview data from a key informant at the State House indicated that political tactics used by the Race-to-the-Top Coalition may have served as a sort of blueprint for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign. During debate over the *Achievement Gap* legislation, the coalition announced it had the funding and public support to launch a ballot initiative that would eliminate the cap on the number of charter schools allowed in the state. Facing the threat of a more extreme ballot question, the MTA agreed to add provisions to the *Achievement Gap* bill that would double the number of charter school seats in the state. Several interview participants, including Timothy Manning, a former high-level assistant to the Massachusetts’ Speaker of the House, tied the “Great Teachers, Great School” campaign to the *Achievement Gap* legislation. Manning argued that Stand for Children aimed “to do what the [Race-to-the-Top] coalition did” by using the threat of a ballot question to force the teacher’s union to accept policy changes that clash with traditional union values.

For its part, Stand for Children state-level staff members also pointed to Race-to-the-Top and the *Achievement Gap* bill as major turning points for the organization. However, as described by John Washington, the Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts, changes at the organization were driven primarily by local-level membership:

We had a very, you know, challenging, hard, difficult conversation. But that’s one of the things I love about our organization and our members. We’re not afraid to have uncomfortable, kind of messy conversations when you’re dealing with a

diverse membership base. To say we really got to figure out how we continue to do the revenue work ‘cause you gotta make sure you always have adequate resources but what types of targeted reforms can we do in terms of how we’re using our resources. To actually make sure we’re not just number one in some communities with certain demographics of students but with all kids in all communities. And so that led us to make the decision to get involved in Race to the Top Coalition and in the *Achievement Gap* [legislation].

Of course, Washington’s account differs sharply from that of Stand for Children’s critics. His comments are strongly evocative of the antidote way of framing Stand for Children’s organizational identity. Instead of taking direction from national level leadership, Washington argued that the organization shifted priorities based on the feedback it was getting from conversations with grassroots members. Also, instead of seeking political power over teachers’ unions, Washington explained that the organization’s new political approach was aimed at helping to close the state’s achievement gap.

Stand for Children, then, used its role on the state’s teacher evaluation working group to advocate for reforms to teacher personnel policies. As described by Washington, the group “felt strongly that there needed to be the linkage between the evaluations and key staffing decisions.” However, as noted above, the new evaluation system would ultimately include only low-stakes accountability mechanisms. Underperforming teachers were directed into a more intensive growth plan, but did not face consequences regarding placement or job security. Following the conclusion of the working group, then, Stand for

Children began to discuss the potential of pursuing legislative change. Of course, this would serve as the direct impetus for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign.

Local Level Politics

Although Stand for Children would claim that it was driven primarily by the interests and concerns of its community-based membership, there are major questions about whether this was actually the case. Interview data revealed that two events were most indicative of the decision making that led to organizational changes at the local level: conflict with the Worcester chapter, and the organization’s closure of many suburban field offices. When discussing conflict with the Worcester chapter, I rely on interview data from a key informant, Tanya Nathan, who had specialized knowledge of Stand for Children’s conflict with local level members. Meanwhile, in discussing the closure of state-level offices, I rely on accounts from Stand for Children’s leadership, especially John Washington and Cynthia Pierre, the organization’s Political Director.

In at least one case, Stand for Children’s participation in the Race-to-the-Top Coalition led to major conflict with a local chapter, ultimately causing members to end their six-year affiliation with the organization. A flagship field office, the Worcester chapter was launched at the time of Stand for Children’s arrival in Massachusetts in 2003. As described by Tanya Nathan, a volunteer member of the chapter’s executive board, Stand for Children’s Worcester field office was an influential voice in a variety of issues, helping, for example, to pass tax overrides that brought increased revenue to Worcester Public Schools. She explained that the state-level organization played the role of facilitator during this time by educating members about complicated school problems,

encouraging debate about pros and cons of various solutions, and organizing members to advocate for their preferred policy changes.

Nathan reflected, however, that Race-to-the-Top was a major turning point for the organization. Left weary by a largely failed charter school experiment in their city, Stand for Children members in Worcester circulated a letter denouncing the organization's support for the pro-charter school ballot initiative proposed by the Race-to-the-Top Coalition. Nathan reflected that she was surprised when Stand for Children's state-level leaders responded with resistance. The state office sent a community organizer out to the Worcester chapter, but "the tone of the meeting largely was 'you guys have misbehaved and you need to get back in line'." Nathan explained that members were particularly "shocked" at manner in which Stand for Children approached the conversation. According to her account, "that was never how Stand put things," preferring historically to engage members in a more balanced policy debate.

Following this meeting, Stand for Children's Worcester chapter took a formal vote against the organization's support for Massachusetts' Race-to-the-Top application. Among other issues, members in Worcester opposed an Obama Administration stipulation that all Race-to-the-Top applications include provisions that link teacher evaluation to student test scores. Again, state organizers with Stand for Children visited city-wide leaders and "more or less said 'you're going to support [Race to the Top] because it's going to make money for education'." Years later, Nathan learned that the anti-Race-to-the-Top vote was unilaterally reversed by the president of the Worcester chapter, under pressure from state-level leadership. This experience left Nathan convinced that "contrary to organizing locally, they're actually being instructed from on

high that there are particular things that they need to be organizing parents to want to do, or have to do.” Frustrated with state-level leadership, members began to leave the organization, and the Worcester chapter disbanded shortly thereafter.

In addition to conflict in Worcester, many longtime members left Stand for Children in late 2010 as part of a major effort to rework its community organizing infrastructure. Described by Massachusetts’ leadership as “a bit of a shift nationally,” the organization began to close chapters in suburban communities and consolidate community organizers in urban neighborhoods. Stand for Children state-level leadership argued that the Massachusetts office shifted community-based chapters from Wellesley, Lexington, Reading and other metro-west suburbs to the neighborhoods of Boston and Springfield in order “to go deep in the areas we were needed most,” the Massachusetts communities that are typically on the lower end of the state-wide achievement gap.

Stand for Children’s transition to urban communities represents a theme that, interestingly, lurks in the background throughout the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory. Although it is rarely mentioned explicitly by interview participants, beliefs about race and school achievement were clearly a major factor in decision making at both Stand for Children and the MTA. In Stand for Children’s case, the organization transitioned from predominantly white metro-west suburbs to the state’s majority minority communities. Pierre, the organization’s Political Director, explained that Stand for Children made the transition “into the urban areas because that’s where parents who might be working multiple jobs or parents who have other challenges are really hungry to this sort of skill sets that we can bring to bear,” such as organizing, ostensibly, around issues of local-level concern. Later, I use interview data to assess the extent to which the

organization was engaged in genuine local-level organizing. For now, it is important to note that, as described by Stand for Children leadership, the notion of helping to empower minority parents was a key part of the antidote identity.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Influence

In the years leading up to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative, Stand for Children experienced major organizational changes at the national, state and local levels. Along with the changes during this time, two competing organizational identities emerged regarding Stand for Children’s role in educational policy making, what I am calling: “ERAO as antidote” and “ERAO as antagonist.” My analysis of data revealed that following underlying political discourses are evident “within” the antidote framing:

- Neo-liberal reform is a vehicle for closing the achievement gap.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.
- ERAOs are unique organizations that combine state level advocacy and grassroots community organizing.

Arguments about the state’s achievement gap were central to the antidote framing. According to Washington, concern for the achievement gap was the driving factor behind Stand for Children’s organizational changes:

But, yet, the achievement gap; if you look at the data from when [Stand for Children] came to Massachusetts in 2003 to where we were six years later in 2009

after all that revenue being added to the system, it was either still just as wide or actually sadly getting wider in certain areas.

As noted above, attention to students on the low end of the achievement gap suggests that the organization became more concerned with school-based outcomes for low-income and minority students. Because the terms “race” and “ethnicity” were not mentioned explicitly in my interviews with Stand for Children leaders, I am limited in my ability to discuss the role that concerns about race played in the organization’s decision making. Nonetheless, it is clear that organizational leaders aimed to portray Stand for Children as an antidote to longstanding educational problems, especially the persistent gap between white students and their racially diverse counterparts.

The antidote framing, then, appears to be related to an underlying discourse common in the current educational policy making era: the notion that neo-liberal reform is aligned with the civil rights movement. According to this perspective, reform of public school infrastructure, including longstanding policies regarding teacher tenure, is necessary because public schools have not found broadly applicable methods for meeting the needs of vulnerable, under-resourced or otherwise under-served students. Of course, this perspective is reflected most commonly by proponents of neo-liberal reform who argue that test-based accountability is necessary to identify subgroups of – often low-income and minority – students whose achievement lags behind state benchmarks for proficiency. In Stand for Children’s simultaneous transition to neo-liberal advocacy and urban community organizing, it appears that the organization was similarly driven by an underlying belief that neo-liberal reform could be an effective vehicle of change for students on the lower end of the achievement gap.

Additionally, the “ERA0 as antidote” framing appears to be related to the argument that school improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes. Later in the interview, Washington explained that the achievement gap was evidence that “it wasn’t okay to just simply focus on override or revenue campaigns at the local and state level.” In addition, the organization became engaged in advocating for “targeted reforms” of “how we’re using our resources.” In this way, Washington aimed to portray Stand for Children as a sort of antidote to the policy making status quo. While other groups were stuck in silos, focused exclusively on revenue or exclusively on system reforms, Stand for Children was capable of making real change because it combined the two.

Additionally, Washington explained that the organization’s dual focus on revenue and reform was the result of “uncomfortable” and “messy conversations” with members who began to push the leadership in a new direction. Herein lies another key element of the antidote framing: claims that Stand for Children is unique vehicle for policy change because it relies on grassroots organizing to drive its state-level advocacy campaigns. Washington, for example, described Stand for Children as “the only group right now in the [education] reform community nationally that actually operates on both of those fronts simultaneously,” referring to the organization’s grassroots community-level organizing and state-level political advocacy.

Importantly, the antidote framing was dominant in my analysis of the context of influence, as it was promoted commonly in media coverage and corroborated in interviews with stakeholders who interacted with Stand for Children in the period leading up to the ballot initiative. For example, Manning, a high-level State House official, noted

that during the *Achievement Gap* bill, “they were active in a lot of communities and so it was, it was really kind of an indigenous, odd, deep group that had a presence” that helped their advocacy efforts with state-level lawmakers. In subsequent chapters, I use data to examine these claims in detail and to explore changes in Stand for Children’s community organizing efforts over the course of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign.

Of course, Stand for Children’s critics offered a very different interpretation of the organization’s role in Massachusetts policy making. My analysis of data revealed that the “ERAO as antagonist” framing points towards the following larger political discourses:

- ERAOs are anti-union organizations.
- ERAOs are driven by their national leadership and funders.

Critics, including local community organizers and former Stand for Children members, claimed that the organization entered state-level policy making as an antagonist, intent on pursuing reforms that attack state-level teachers’ unions. Particularly important for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, interview data from Tanya Nathan, a former volunteer leader at Stand for Children’s Worcester chapter, indicated that instead of taking its direction from local-level members, the organization was actually driven by its national leadership and funders.

Events at the national level appeared to corroborate critics’ claims. Starting around 2010, Stand for Children became engaged in high-stakes political conflict with teachers’ unions, leading to controversial policy changes in Illinois. Confirming the existence of intense interest groups conflict, Stand for Children’s own national Executive Director detailed the group’s machinations against teachers’ unions en route to passing

legislation in Illinois that would dilute teacher job protections. During the same time period, Stand for Children began to receive major donations from prominent proponents of neo-liberal reform. Taken together, these data indicate that Stand for Children's transformation in Massachusetts coincided with the organization's national shift towards neo-liberal policy making; as result, it is harder, perhaps, to buy in to the argument that the organization's changes in Massachusetts were driven by local-level members.

Additionally, although it took a different shape, the political actions of Stand for Children's Massachusetts' office continued the kinds of interest group conflict seen at the national level. Stand for Children's participation in the Race-to-the-Top Coalition signaled intention to take on teachers' unions over controversial policy issues, such as expanding access to charter schools. Most importantly for the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, its advocacy within the teacher evaluation working group indicated that Stand for Children had a growing political interest in linking teacher performance to personnel decisions, another controversial topic that clashes with traditional union values.

Stand for Children's state-level advocacy even led to major conflict with the organization's own grassroots membership. Membership in Worcester protested the organization's support for charter schools, and for Race-to-the-Top more generally. When their vote against Race-to-the-Top was overturned by state leaders, a volunteer leader at the Worcester chapter became convinced that Stand for Children was "actually being instructed from on high" about their political priorities and advocacy campaigns. These claims, of course, raise major questions about the extent to which Stand for Children was taking direction from local-level members.

The analysis above illustrates a major theme of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case: that organizational identity was connected in important ways to perceptions of grassroots community organizing efforts. In subsequent chapters, I track the changing relationship between Stand for Children’s organizational identity, underlying policy discourses, and its concrete political decision making. Ultimately, I argue that Stand for Children’s claims to grassroots community organizing appeared to be overstated. Indicative of “neo-democratic” decision making, analysis of subsequent policy contexts suggests that democratic engagement was often a second-thought in a chaotic policy environment shaped by high-stakes interest group conflict. Importantly, the following analysis of MTA’s political decision making will tell a remarkably similar story.

Reformer or Advocate?

Struggles over Unions’ Role in a Changing Policy Environment

This section provides a parallel discussion of the discourses and political decision making that shaped MTA’s political activity in the period leading up to the launch of the ballot initiative. I identify competing frames about the union’s organizational identity that emerged during this time period and would come to shape political struggle throughout the case. In an interview, Phillip Torrington, MTA’s President at the time of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, explained that unions “can’t just say no, you have to have a counter, you have to be able to say, ‘No, we can’t agree to that but if this is the problem you are trying to solve, there is a better solution’” even if it means accepting policy changes to traditional union issues, such as teacher tenure and seniority. I label this as a “union as reformer” framing of unions’ role in a changing policy arena, and I use the

term “reform-oriented unionism” as a synonym. According to this perspective, unions can no longer oppose all proposed policy changes to bureaucratic infrastructure governing public schools. Instead, proponents of this perspective argue that unions must participate in school reform in order to preserve their so-called “seat at the table” while simultaneously minimizing damage to their membership.

I use the “union as reformer” framing in contrast with a term that has become common recently in discussion of unions’ changing role in educational policy making. In our interview, Torrington described his leadership style as driven by “solutions-driven unionism.” However, the common definition of this term does not match the underlying beliefs about union political activity that emerged in my data analysis. As defined by Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, “solution-driven unionism” is “rooted in solving problems, not winning arguments” (Weingarten, 2012). Contrary to the events of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, solution-driven unionism refers to instances where unions avoid polarizing “education wars” (Weingarten, 2012) and focus instead on solving common classroom problems. While solution-driven unionism advocates for avoiding interest group conflict, the “union as reformer” framing reflects beliefs about how unions should engage in high-stakes conflict. I use the “union as reformer” framing, then, because it best captures the MTA’s role in policy making not only during the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, but also in the years leading up to the initiative.

As noted in Chapter One, the term “reform unionism” has become associated with calls for unions to participate in public infrastructure reform in order to retain some degree of influence in educational policy making (Bluestone, 2012; Kerchner et al.,

1997). According to this perspective, “the task of unionism lies not simply in sustaining the existing institution through political protection” (Kerchner et al., 1997, p. 15), but, instead, in finding ways to “uphold the rights of public sector workers while forging and sustaining innovations” (Bluestone & Kochan, 2011, p. 9) both to public spending and to educational practice. While “reform unionism” does not explicitly align with neo-liberal reform, the two perspectives share policy preferences, especially regarding teacher tenure and job security (Bluestone, 2011; Kerchner et al., 1997). Neo-liberal reform goes further than “reform unionism,” however, in calling for privatizing public services. Aligned with the literature on “reform unionism,” then, I use the “union as reformer” and “reform-oriented unionism” labels to refer to union activity that is directed towards improving public services through reform of public infrastructure. I note cases where such activity is consistent with the neo-liberal agenda for school change.

Meanwhile, critics in MTA’s rank-and-file membership promoted an alternative framing about the role of unions in a changing policy environment: the notion of the union as an advocate for broad social justice. Critics of the MTA argued, for example, that they were driven by what they described as “social justice unionism” or “social movement unionism.” Particularly relevant for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, proponents of this perspective argued that to preserve public education, unions must resist all efforts at corporate-oriented school change. Because this framing directs attention towards underlying beliefs about educational and social justice, I use the “union as advocate” term synonymously with the notion of “social justice-oriented unionism.” Below, I demonstrate the “union as reformer” and “union as advocate” perspectives

bumped up against each other in various policy struggles faced by the MTA throughout the context of influence.

National/Federal Level Politics

As described in Chapter One, Race-to-the-Top led to major changes that threatened unions' longstanding political influence, especially the rise of neo-liberal reform and the increased influence of ERAOs. It is important to note, however, that Race-to-the-Top was not the only, or even the most major, threat to union political influence during this time. In the so-called Republican wave of 2010, many states elected conservative lawmakers who campaigned to reduce public spending in part by limiting unions' ability to collectively bargain contracts for public employees. In Wisconsin, newly elected Governor Scott Walker introduced highly controversial legislation in February 2011 that would dramatically limit teachers' collective bargaining rights while also ending automatic dues collection. Then, in March 2011, Ohio passed legislation that restricted collective bargaining for all public employees, including public school teachers. Each case sparked major public protest and extensive national media coverage.

Interviews with MTA's state-level leaders revealed that, facing major battles in other states, MTA's national-level affiliate, the National Education Association (NEA), did not play a major role in the organization's political decision making in the years leading up to the ballot initiative. Prior to the Wisconsin and Ohio laws, the NEA devoted organizing efforts and financial resources in an attempt to defeat the candidates who would eventually win office. Then, after the 2010 election, national unions continued to funnel resources towards advocating against controversial policy changes. In Wisconsin, the NEA was active in leading an ultimately unsuccessful effort to recall Governor

Walker. Meanwhile, in Ohio, public sector unions of all kinds were active in promoting a ballot initiative that was successful in repealing the state's limits on collective bargaining. In a theme that runs across the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" policy trajectory, MTA leadership explained that during this time, the NEA was unable to provide funding or other kinds of support to smaller state-level policy battles, including those underway in Massachusetts.

Interestingly, proponents of the "union as reformer" and "union as advocate" perspectives would each use national-level politics to bolster their arguments about unions' role in the new policy making arena. MTA leadership argued that, given the rising tide against unions and the rising cost of opposition, unions would need to find new ways to maintain their political influence. According to proponents of the "union as reformer" framing, unions could minimize the impact of neo-liberal reform by retaining their so-called "seat at the table" of policy negotiations and participating in reform. Meanwhile, critics in MTA's membership pointed to events in Wisconsin and Ohio as a call to action in defense of core union values. These critics framed attacks on unions as a social injustice that threatened the job security of many working class professionals across the public sector. Proponents of social justice unionism, then, argued that unions could best preserve political influence by mobilizing rank-and-file membership to advocate against efforts at corporate-oriented reform.

State Level Politics

In this section, I use data from MTA leaders and from critical rank-and-file members to characterize different perceptions of the MTA's state-level decision making during this time period. As noted above, policy battles between Stand for Children and

teachers' unions in Massachusetts largely played out in the debate over the *Achievement Gap* legislation. Additionally, I discuss internal conflict at the MTA over the state's 2011 reform of municipal health insurance, as revealed by the MTA members interviewed here as well as by Timothy Manning, a key informant in the Massachusetts legislature.

Although it is unrelated to Massachusetts' Race-to-the-Top application, policy struggle over the municipal health care reform tells us a lot about the tension between reform-oriented unionism and social justice-oriented unionism.

Following the announcement of Race-to-the-Top, the MTA faced political opposition from the Race-to-the-Top Coalition, a group of neo-liberal policy advocates convened by the Boston Foundation. As described earlier, the coalition threatened to launch a ballot initiative that would remove limits on the number of charter schools allowed in the state. Key interview participants agreed that the threat of a ballot initiative helped the coalition to force union concessions on adding pro-charter school provisions to the *Achievement Gap* bill. Referring to teachers' unions, Manning, a former State House official reflected that:

Those traditional entities who are hostile to charter expansion were rather interested in having that ballot question removed. So they were willing to accept things that might, they might not traditionally be willing to accept in order to take out the political interests and support for that ballot question. In fact there was explicit interest communicated to many quarters that getting that ballot question removed was a high priority for a lot of large interest groups. So, that became a big part of the *Achievement Gap* bill.

Critics in MTA's rank-and-file membership, however, argued that the organization should have done more to counter the expansion of charter schools. Specifically, MTA's rank-and-file members wanted the union to withdraw its support for the *Achievement Gap* bill until the pro-charter school provisions were removed. Nearly identical to their decision making regarding the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative, MTA leaders asserted that polling numbers indicated they would lose a campaign against the more expansive pro-charter school ballot question. As Manning noted, "the MTA was not hostile to significant charter reform and expansion because anything they did was going to be less than this 'wild west, all the charters you want wherever you want them' that was on the ballot." A defining aspect of the "union as reformer" perspective, MTA leadership countered that they could limit damage to their members by participating in, rather than opposing, neo-liberal reform.

During this time, the MTA faced an additional state-level policy battle that fueled conflict between MTA leadership and critics in its rank-and-file membership. To address significant budget shortfalls, in July 2011, Massachusetts passed *An Act Relative to Municipal Health Insurance* (hereafter: *Municipal Health*), which allowed cities and towns to restructure the health insurance marketplace for public employees and, in part, limited employees' collective bargaining rights. Manning estimated that the *Municipal Health* bill saved over \$100 million across the state; however, MTA members criticized the bill because it led to higher co-pays and premiums for municipal employees, including public school teachers.

Several of the unions' strongest critics referred to the *Municipal Health* bill as part of a string of compromises, starting with the *Achievement Gap* bill, against the

interests of rank-and-file members. For example, Chester Morrison, a long time MTA member, reflected that, given teachers' generally low salaries, the added health care costs "really hurt a lot of teachers financially." As in the *Achievement Gap* bill, members had wanted the union to oppose changes to municipal health insurance until provisions were included that aligned with members' priorities. However, consistent with a reform-oriented approach to unionism, Terry Span, MTA's Vice President during the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign, defended the unions' action on health care reform. He reflected that "at least we still had a voice; if we had gone the other route, there wouldn't have been a voice." According to Span, the MTA was able to preserve some measure of collective bargaining rights for its members by agreeing to concessions regarding co-pays and premiums.

In the wake of a national recession, Massachusetts, like many states, struggled to deal with declining public revenue. It appears that this was a key factor in MTA's decision making. By agreeing to the pro-charter school provisions of the *Achievement Gap* bill, the MTA helped to ease passage of the law. As Manning and MTA leadership noted, the *Achievement Gap* bill would later help the state to bring in over \$250 million in federal grants through its successful Race-to-the-Top application. Similarly, by agreeing to increases in health insurance premiums, Span and Manning explained that the MTA prevented layoffs that would have only further damaged the economy.

Critics in MTA's rank-and-file membership, meanwhile, cited both bills as examples of MTA's complicity with growing social injustice. In the *Achievement Gap* bill, critics argued that the MTA helped to weaken public education by providing greater access to corporate proponents of charter schools. The *Municipal Health* bill, meanwhile,

contributed social injustice by allowing the fiscal crisis to be solved, in part, by further squeezing the middle class. In the next section, I describe resistance from MTA's local-level members in more detail, focusing on events that bear striking resemblance to Stand for Children's own conflict with its grassroots membership.

Local Level Politics

Interview analysis with MTA's critics revealed that Race-to-the-Top marked the beginning of a schism between MTA's state-level leadership and local-level membership. Parallel with pressures faced by Stand for Children, MTA members also passed a resolution urging state level leadership to withdraw its support for Massachusetts' Race-to-the-Top application. Each year, MTA members gather at the organization's Annual Meeting to vote on a wide variety of issues related to the union's political activities. Resembling the convention of a political party, a period of open debate is followed by voting of delegates who have been selected as representatives of the full rank-and-file membership. At the 2010 MTA Annual Meeting, delegates passed a resolution that called for the union to withdraw its support for Race-to-the-Top. Identical to Stand for Children members in Worcester, MTA members opposed the Obama Administration's requirement that all Race-to-the-Top applications include provisions for connecting teacher evaluations to student test scores. As described in MTA's own bylaws and mission statement, delegates have ultimate authority over the President; as a result, union leadership was beholden by the delegates' resolution to withdraw its support for Race-to-the-Top.

The MTA's state-level leadership, however, used an obscure loophole in the union's decision making protocol to reverse the delegates' vote. In addition to the central

office, led by the President and Vice President, MTA leadership is composed of an executive committee, analogous to an MTA Senate, and an executive board, similar to an MTA House of Representatives, which function to provide checks and balances against central leadership. Michelle Nolasco, a member of MTA's executive board who was critical of state-level leadership, explained that, following the approval of the anti-Race-to-the-Top resolution, MTA state-level leadership "did an end run around the body." Since delegates only meet once per year, at the Annual Meeting in May, MTA leaders are allowed to propose resolutions to their executive committees so that they do not have to wait until the delegate meeting to approve all political decisions for the upcoming year. Although delegates had clearly indicated their opposition to Race-to-the-Top, the union president re-proposed the resolution to the executive board following the 2010 Annual Meeting. Stacked with supporters of MTA leadership, the executive board vetoed delegates' resolution, thereby allowing state leadership to support Massachusetts' application to Race-to-the-Top.

Controversy around Race-to-the-Top, then, indicates that two organizations that were ostensibly political adversaries were actually aligned on key policy goals, despite opposition from their own local-level membership. Just as Stand for Children had done regarding the anti-Race-to-the-Top resolution from its Worcester members, MTA leaders found a way to ignore delegates' opposition to Race-to-the-Top. During this time, Tanya Nathan concluded that high-level political concerns prevented Stand for Children from listening to the policy preferences of its local-level membership. Following MTA's reversal of the delegates' Race-to-the-Top vote, Nolasco came to the same conclusion

about the union's leadership. She argued that Torrington and Span "just want us to put aside what we believe is best and push their agenda."

When asked about MTA's support for Race-to-the-Top at a public meeting, Torrington reiterated a key defense of reform-oriented unionism: the need for increased school revenue. He argued that Race-to-the-Top was an important opportunity both to bring more money into public education and for unions to demonstrate that they could be part of educational change and innovation. He noted additionally that, by supporting Race-to-the-Top, MTA endeared itself to others in the policy community, proving that "they are reasonable people to work with." As I discuss in subsequent chapters, many in the policy community echoed this sentiment when describing MTA's role in later negotiating compromise legislation with Stand for Children.

At the time, however, MTA's position on Race-to-the-Top spurred the development of a small coalition of MTA members who would later engage in high-stakes policy conflict with union leadership. As part of its bylaws, MTA members can create a "caucus," or group of members that meet regularly to discuss virtually any topic facing teachers or the teachers' union more generally. Michelle Nolasco and Joan Wheeler were instrumental in launching an insurgent caucus that would unite critics of Torrington, Span and others in MTA's leadership. Nolasco told me that, following MTA's reversal of the Race-to-the-Top resolution, a group of approximately 20 local union presidents gathered for breakfast to form Educators for a Democratic Union (EDU). As the name implies, EDU advocates for greater union engagement of rank-and-file membership. Wheeler, President of the Brookline local, reflected that she joined the EDU group because she felt that MTA state level leadership "was showing a failure of

imagination” in not mobilizing members to advocate against neo-liberal school reforms in the *Achievement Gap* bill and in the state’s Race-to-the-Top application.

Similar to Stand for Children, then, MTA faced internal conflict with local-level membership over its support for Race-to-the-Top. At the MTA, internal conflict would play out as a battle for the future of the union. Throughout the policy trajectory, union leaders and rank-and-file members made competing arguments, and would engage in complex political maneuvering, in attempts to gain power over union political decision making. As in the context of influence, concerns of grassroots members were often lost among high-level interest group conflict.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Influence

In the years following the announcement of Race-to-the-Top, unions faced new political challenges in the rise of neo-liberal reform and increased influence of non-profit advocacy organizations. During this time, two competing frames were evident regarding unions’ role in a changing policy arena, what I am calling: “union as reformer” and “union as advocate.” My analysis of data revealed that the reform-oriented framing is based on the following larger political discourses:

- Neo-liberal reform is a fixture in educational policy making.
- Compromise is necessary to preserve unions’ “seat at the table” of policy negotiations.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.

MTA leaders argued that changes to the state policy arena necessitated changes to unions’ political maneuvering. Running for MTA President in 2010, Torrington reflected

that he defeated a more combative candidate because union members “didn’t want the angry union leader, they wanted the reasonable, thoughtful union leader who recognized that change was coming and we needed to be part of it.” Similarly, Span, MTA’s Vice President during Torrington’s tenure as President, argued that unions needed to be more responsive to changes in “the policy world” including the increased influence of the Boston Foundation and other business organizations.

Richly indicative of the reform-oriented framing, Span argued that unions “have to have more conversations than what we’ve traditionally had in order to really sustain our role” and influence in the state. As I describe in subsequent chapters, this perspective appears to be connected to underlying discourses that take as a given the inevitability of neo-liberal reform in future educational policy making. Of course, these beliefs would shape later aspects of the policy trajectory, especially the union’s approach to community organizing as well as its decision to develop compromise legislation with Stand for Children.

MTA leadership believed that, since neo-liberal reform was inevitable, it was in unions’ best interest to work within the new policy making system as opposed to pushing against it from the outside. According to the “union as reformer” perspective, if left unchecked, ERAOs might make dramatic and harmful changes to public education. They argued that, in the new policy arena, unions can control the extent of school reform by becoming a partner in the negotiations. Indeed, in policy struggles related to the *Achievement Gap* and *Municipal Health* bills, MTA leadership argued that it was better to accept moderate changes to public infrastructure – i.e., a limited expansion of charter

schools or higher health insurance premiums – than to risk more dramatic changes – i.e., an unlimited expansion of charter schools or dramatically higher premiums.

Union leaders also believed that by participating in reform, unions could help to bring much-needed revenue to the public system. Torrington, for example, defended the MTA’s support for Race-to-the-Top on the grounds that it would bring considerable revenue to the state. Additionally, Manning, a high-level State House staff member at the time, reflected that unions were forced to concede on municipal health care reform because there were “very few ways of saving money without ruining services and laying off hundreds of thousands of people and further depressing the economy.” As indicated in the MTA’s decision making during this time, the reform-oriented perspective was dominant among the union’s state-level leadership.

Conversely critics among MTA’s rank-and-file membership promoted social justice-oriented unionism as an alternative way of framing the MTA’s role in state policy battles. In many ways the opposite of the “union as reformer” framing, my analysis revealed that the “union as advocate” framing is based on the following larger political discourses:

- Public education is under attack from corporate influence.
- Unions are advocates against social injustice.
- Unions are protectors of the public sector.
- Unions are vehicles for grassroots community organizing.

Nolasco, Wheeler and other proponents of social justice-oriented unionism argued that compromise of any kind is a slow capitulation towards ultimately revising the public system in the corporate image. These critics believe that union political activity should be

connected to broader social good, such as the preservation of public education against corporate influence. According to Wheeler, a local union president critical of MTA's state-level leadership, unions in the social justice tradition "advocate for improved living and working conditions "not just for their own members, but for the working class as a whole" as part of a broader vision for improving school and society. Although race was not mentioned commonly in interviews with members of the EDU caucus, Nolasco, Wheeler and others often described social justice unionism as a movement for the rights of working class people from all backgrounds.

Importantly, proponents of the "union as advocate" perspective call for trenchant grassroots organizing of local union members. Remarkably similar to challenges faced by Stand for Children, MTA's support for Race-to-the-Top led to conflict with local-level membership about the future direction of the union. After delegates passed an anti-Race-to-the-Top resolution at the MTA's 2010 Annual Meeting, they later found that it was reversed by MTA leadership. Frustrated that their voices were not being heard, a group of local union presidents met to form Educators for a Democratic Union (EDU). The official mission statement of the EDU caucus captures much of the tension between reform-oriented and social justice-oriented unionism:

We are MTA members concerned about the future of public education, our union, the teaching profession, and the education workplace. We want the MTA to work with parents, students, community organizations, and other unions to popularize a powerful vision for public education and public life more generally. We want to be part of a union that fights back against attacks on education and so-called "reforms" that actually undermine quality universal public education. Because

we know that what happens beyond the classroom has a profound effect on our students' ability to succeed in our schools, we want an MTA that will fight equally hard for a more just society.

As described above, a key part of EDU's mission is to conduct democratic engagement with MTA members as well as "parents, students, community organizations" and others who are concerned about social injustice. In subsequent chapters, I explore how the clash between competing beliefs about unionism affected MTA political decision making, especially regarding public outreach and democratic engagement of rank-and-file members. Ultimately, I build the argument that union decision making was indicative of the new "neo-democratic" era of educational policy making. Ostensibly an effort to preserve their political influence, union leaders adhered to a "union as reformer" approach by participating in neo-liberal reform in closed-door negotiations, largely outside of public view.

Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Democracy and Political Conflict in the Race-to-the-Top Era

In Massachusetts, Race-to-the-Top was a major contributor to each of the four pillars of the new policy making arena: the rise of neo-liberal reform, the increased influence of Education Reform Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs), the declining influence of teachers unions, and the rise of "neo-democratic" decision making. To improve their chances of winning federal grant funding, states enacted neo-liberal reform on a variety of topics previously considered untouchable in state legislatures, including teacher evaluation and tenure. Long resistant to expansion of neo-liberal policy, Massachusetts enacted a suite of reforms between 2009 and 2011. Among many changes,

the state expanded access to charter schools, developed a high-stakes accountability system for underperforming schools, and revised its teacher evaluation system to include greater consideration of student test scores.

Race-to-the-Top also contributed to the rise of ERAOs, such as Stand for Children, that would enjoy new levels of influence in state legislatures. In many states, ERAOs took on new roles advocating for neo-liberal reform in opposition to state-level teachers' unions. In Massachusetts, the state's largest teachers' union, the MTA, became engaged in policy conflict with various ERAOs, including the Race-to-the-Top Coalition and, later, with Stand for Children in particular. In these struggles, high-level, highly funded interest groups attempted to gain political power over their adversaries both through the use of complicated political maneuvering and through complex political argumentation. Additionally, groups faced challenges in a changing political landscape, where increased money from outside organizations helped to fuel ERAOs while declining state funds only further limited unions' political influence.

In an effort to resolve high-stakes political conflict, Stand for Children and the MTA engaged in policy development that clashed with their own explicit commitments to democratic engagement. Local-level membership within both organizations protested state-level support for Race-to-the-Top and for neo-liberal reform more generally. In each case, Stand for Children and the MTA made decisions aimed at silencing the interests of local members. Stand for Children reversed the anti-Race-to-the-Top vote taken by members in Worcester, ultimately allowing the chapter to dissolve entirely. Meanwhile, MTA leaders used complicated union rules to reverse a similar anti-Race-to-the-Top resolution passed by its members. These actions are particularly striking given that both

Stand for Children and the MTA are membership-driven organizations with explicit commitments to grassroots community organizing.

My analysis of multiple data sources indicated that political beliefs of state-level leaders Stand for Children and the MTA may have pulled each organization away from the concerns of its local-level members. Despite their differences, leaders each organization shared two major points of agreement: the need for reform of existing school policies, and the need for increased revenue in public schools. As revealed in analysis of the antidote framing, Stand for Children portrayed itself as a new voice in the movement to close the achievement gap via reform of existing public school infrastructure. Leaders argued that the organization was uniquely suited to make policy change because of its dual concern for revenue-oriented changes and reform of existing school policies. Meanwhile, the MTA embraced what I am calling “reform-oriented unionism,” where, instead of primarily opposing efforts at school reform, unions participated in neo-liberal reforms as long as they also brought increased revenue to public schools. Because Race-to-the-Top satisfied both concerns – i.e., revenue and reform – it was embraced by state leaders at both organizations over the objection of their local-level members.

Membership at Stand for Children and the MTA referred to Race-to-the-Top as a turning point in each organization’s approach to democratic engagement and grassroots organizing. Stand for Children’s former members argued that the organization had abandoned its grassroots mission in order to promote the anti-union interests of its national leadership and funders. Meanwhile, critics within the MTA promoted social justice-oriented unionism as a counterpoint to reform-oriented unionism. According to its

critics, union participation in neo-liberal reform, of any kind, was slow capitulation towards a great social injustice: the takeover of public schools by corporate interests. These critics formed an insurgent caucus within the MTA called Educators for a Democratic Union that aimed to increase democratic outreach to MTA's rank-and-file members.

As I demonstrate in Chapters Five and Six, conflict born in the period following Race-to-the-Top shaped political struggle throughout the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" trajectory. Stand for Children continued to struggle against critics from inside and outside the organization that claimed the group was an antagonist primarily driven by a national agenda against teachers' unions. Meanwhile, the MTA continued to face difficult challenges regarding conflict between the "union as reformer" and "union as advocate" perspectives. The organizational identities described above, then, serve as touchstones throughout the remaining chapters. In the next chapter, I build on the analysis presented here when discussing each organization's political decision making in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot campaign. Then, in Chapter Six, I explore the outcomes of each organization's decision to pursue compromise legislation. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I offer a detailed characterization of the "neo-democratic" decision making evident across the policy trajectory. I describe the political maneuvering that characterizes "neo-democratic" decision making, I explore the underlying discourses that attempt to justify the exclusion of public voice, and I offer an alternative vision for more inclusive, democratic educational policy making.

Chapter Five

Contexts of Text Production and Outcomes:

The New Age of Aggregative Democracy

In this chapter, I explore the policy struggles that Stand for Children faced en route to launching the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative for the 2012 election, comprising analysis of the context of policy text production. I focus on the time period between the conclusion of the teacher evaluation working group, in June 2011, and Stand for Children’s initial announcement of the ballot campaign, in October 2011. Because it was the sole producer of the ballot initiative text, this discussion focuses exclusively on Stand for Children. I identify the ways in which the organization struggled against political pressure from a variety of sources at the national, state and local levels. Importantly, I use this discussion to further define the “ERAO as antidote” and “ERAO as antagonist” framing introduced in Chapter Four. I explore the complex relationship between the organization’s identity and its political decision making, especially regarding efforts at democratic engagement in the development of the initiative.

I then turn attention to the context of outcomes of the ballot campaign for both Stand for Children and the MTA. I focus this discussion on the policy struggles that occurred in the period between the October 2011 announcement of the ballot initiative and the May 2012 announcement that Stand for Children and the MTA had developed a compromise law in private negotiations. As in Chapter Four, I trace policy struggles at overlapping levels of scale, using discussion of political events to trace changes in each organization’s political identity and to identify underlying discourses related to democratic engagement in political decision making.

Of course, unions faced tough questions about how they would respond to a politically viable – and well-funded – attack on seniority-based job protections. Perhaps unexpectedly, however, the ballot campaign also put Stand for Children on the defensive, requiring the organization to respond to a growing chorus of criticism. I explore the political outcomes of the ballot initiative at each organization, and I use this discussion to generate a theory of the factors that led Stand for Children and the MTA to enter the private negotiations that would eventually lead to the so-called compromise law, Massachusetts S. 2315, *An Act Providing for the Implementation of Education Evaluation Systems in School Districts*.

The first half of the chapter, then, explores the context of text production for the ballot initiative, and the second half presents analysis from the context of outcomes. Ball (1994a) defines the context of policy text production as the domain of analysis that explores the ways that broad policy discourses are translated into text (Bowe et al., 1992; Furlong et al., 2000; Minh Ngo et al., 2006; Vidovich, 2007). As described in Chapter Four, in the context of influence, groups engaged in policy struggle over the identification of broad policy problems and their solutions. In the context of policy text production, however, new struggles emerged regarding the appropriate vehicle for enacting proposed policy changes.

Meanwhile, the context of outcomes is the domain of analysis that compares policy making to a normative notion of social justice (Ball, 1994a; Lingard, 1996; Minh Ngo et al., 2006; Vidovich, 2007). Given the concerns about democratic engagement noted in Chapter One, I compare policy making in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case to notions of social justice derived from deliberative democratic theory. In

particular, I use public accountability as a touchstone throughout my analysis. I build the argument that, in the decision to pursue compromise, Stand for Children and the MTA pursued narrow forms of public accountability and avoided meaningful engagement with the local level membership that is at the center of each organization's mission.

The discussion throughout this chapter highlights two defining characteristics of the "neo-democratic" era: the influence of national-level interest group conflict on state policy making; and the use of aggregative decision making in place of more deliberative modes of democratic engagement. As I demonstrate below, pressure from national-level conflict between teachers' unions and ERAOs undoubtedly influenced the launch of the ballot initiative as well as the political response from Stand for Children and the MTA. In presenting my analysis, then, I identify the ways that high-level political pressures function to pull each organization away from meaningful engagement of its local members.

I also use the discussion below to introduce what I am calling the "new age of aggregative democracy," a concept that is richly indicative of democratic engagement in the "neo-democratic" era. As detailed in Chapter Two, aggregative democracy refers to modes of decision making that are based on the tally of individual choices in a so-called open educational marketplace. When asked about member engagement, leaders at both Stand for Children and the MTA, substituted this more individualistic notion of democratic engagement in place of the comparatively more collectivist forms of engagement associated with the grassroots community organizing. In discussing state- and local-level politics, then, I seek to identify the political pressures that led each organization away from genuine grassroots community engagement, and I describe the

discourses and political maneuvers that local-level members used to gain a greater voice in the policy making process.

Focal Policy: the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Ballot Initiative

Before discussing the political struggles that led to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative, I provide an overview of policy changes in the initiative related to four major topics: teacher tenure and seniority, in-district teacher transfer, collective bargaining rights, and miscellaneous policy changes. Because the proposed changes to seniority generated the most controversy and debate, this topic is given the greatest attention in the discussion that follows. This discussion allows us to understand what was at stake for each organization in the ballot campaign, and it helps to understand why each side decided to pursue compromise. Later, in Chapter Six, I compare the ballot initiative text to the official enacted text of the compromise law in order to provide an understanding of the specific policy changes that each side “won” and “lost” in compromise.

Teacher Tenure and Seniority. Massachusetts law does not address teacher tenure in the traditional sense. Instead, teachers in good standing after three years of service at a particular school are commonly awarded Professional Teachers Status (PTS), a close analog to tenure that provides teachers with due process job protections in addition to those associated with initial forms of licensure^v. Before earning PTS, teachers can be removed from their positions for a variety of reasons, often at the discretion of the school administrator. Additionally, there are few avenues available to non-PTS teachers to appeal dismissal decisions.

Once earning PTS, however, teachers receive due process job protections. Specifically, PTS teachers can be removed only for the following occupational offenses: “inefficiency, incompetency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher, insubordination or failure on the part of the teacher to satisfy teacher performance standards.” To formally process a dismissal, administrators must gather evidence to prove that a teacher meets one or more of the above criteria. Principals must then present evidence to the district’s school committee, and the committee members make the final decision about whether a teacher will be retained or dismissed. Teachers who disagree with the decision of the school committee are entitled to an appeal process and, if successful, the district is required to reinstate teachers in their former position and to provide back pay for any missed time.

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative would have made it harder for teachers to earn PTS, and it would have removed the job protections that come with it. Under Massachusetts law at the time, there were no performance criteria that administrators were required follow to award PTS. Instead, PTS decisions were based exclusively on an administrator’s discretion. However, the ballot initiative proposed that, in order to earn PTS, full-time teachers had to receive “proficient” or above ratings on each indicator on the new teacher evaluation system by their third year at a particular school.

More importantly, the ballot initiative aimed to eliminate many of the job protections associated with PTS. Specifically, the ballot initiative changed staffing rules in cases of a “reduction in force,” or instances in which districts had to eliminate redundant teaching positions – i.e., two high school math teachers – due to declining

enrollment or funding. In such cases, existing Massachusetts law required that teachers without PTS had to be removed before teachers with PTS. If both teachers had PTS, then existing law allowed districts to use teacher seniority, or the total number of years of service at a particular school as the primary factor in deciding who gets to keep their job.

Garnering considerable controversy, the ballot initiative proposed removing job protections related to PTS and seniority. The initiative stipulated that teachers without PTS could retain their positions over teachers with PTS if the former had higher performance evaluations. Also, the law would have prohibited districts from using seniority as the primary factor in deciding which teacher should be dismissed.

Specifically, the initiative specified that in cases of reductions in force:

[Personnel decisions] shall be primarily based on certifications, merit and ability, including results from performance evaluations, and other factors related to job performance and the best interests of the students in the school or district and secondarily on relevant experience and seniority or length of service. If 2 or more educators are of equal certifications, merit and ability, including results of performance standards, seniority shall be the deciding factor.

Among other criteria, such as certifications or the “best interests of the students,” the initiative required, then, that personnel decisions in cases of reductions in force be based on results from the state’s new teacher evaluation system. Although the ballot initiative would have prohibited administrators from considering seniority as the primary factor in personnel decisions, it stipulated that seniority had to be used as “the deciding

factor” when teachers were rated at the same level of performance. As an example, proposed changes would have allowed a principal to retain a teacher with two years of experience and a “proficient” rating on the state’s evaluation system over a teacher with PTS and ten-years of experience if the latter were rated below “proficiency” on her or his most recent annual evaluation.

These changes were intended to streamline the teacher dismissal process. As one might imagine, there was wide-ranging and at-times contentious debate about whether these changes were necessary. For example, some of the people I interviewed argued that existing law made it too difficult for administrators to remove underperforming teachers. Along these lines, Trevor Skaggs, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, argued that the ballot initiative had the “potential to blow the lid off” existing public school policy. As the director of an organization that provides professional development and training to school administrators, Skaggs told me that many school superintendents believed that “the bar is very high” for dismissal. He explained that often the time and money involved in removing teachers with PTS discouraged administrators from going through the entire process.

Other interviewees, however, felt that personnel problems in schools were the result of poor implementation, not inefficiencies in existing state policy. For example, Ryan Swarzak, President of the Boston Teachers’ Union (BTU), claimed that “a reasonably educated, intelligent principal who had 10 to 20 hours could dismiss a teacher,” even those with PTS. He explained that principals often do not process dismissals because “if the teacher appeals it, the principal has to be willing to go and testify, and some principals are afraid to testify.” Leaders at state-level offices in the

MTA and AFT-MA echoed similar concerns, noting that policy changes were unnecessary and that, instead, there should be more support and encouragement for administrators to use existing avenues for removing underperforming teachers.

In-District Teacher Transfer. The proposed ballot initiative also prohibited consideration of seniority in cases of in-district transfer, which could occur at the request of a teacher or a school administrator. The term “voluntary transfer” refers to cases where teachers with PTS request to be transferred to a comparable teaching position at another school in the same district. Known informally as “bumping,” teachers transferring into new schools could displace less-experienced colleagues, sending them to other schools in the same district. Meanwhile, “involuntary transfer” refers to cases where administrators request that teachers be transferred to other district schools. This process is known disparagingly as the “dance of the lemons,” where administrators transfer underperforming teachers to other district schools instead of going through the process of securing formal dismissal.

The proposed ballot initiative would have prevented teachers from being “bumped” from their teaching positions by colleagues with lower performance evaluations, regardless of PTS status or length of service. Interestingly, this proposal garnered much less controversy than proposed changes to dismissal rules. As many noted, it was already uncommon for districts to use seniority as the primary factor in transfer decisions, even for the state’s large, urban districts. For example, Evan Dunster, Vice President of the AFT-MA and former President of the BTU, noted that Boston had removed seniority preferences for in-district transfers many years ago. Ryan Swarzak, the

current President of the BTU, confirmed that all teachers with PTS received the same preferences in transfer, regardless of length of service.

In addition to changing the role of seniority in transfer decisions, the proposed ballot initiative would have given principals greater decision making authority over in-district transfers. Under current law, school superintendents retained final decision making authority over voluntary and involuntary transfers. If there were no other comparable positions in the district, a principal could be required to accept a new teacher – i.e., the teacher who was “bumped” – into her or his school. The ballot initiative would have changed this process by requiring that in-district transfers be subject to “pure mutual consent,” meaning that both the teacher and the school principal officially approved the new placement decision. This would have effectively have given principals veto authority over teachers coming into their schools. Stand for Children leaders explained that “pure mutual consent” was necessary to prevent the so-called “dance of the lemons.”

Union leaders, however, argued that this provision would have had the effect of “letting the principals and superintendents off the hook” for processing formal dismissals. Instead, principals would have been able to simply process transfers for underperforming teachers, knowing that the teacher would likely be vetoed by the principal at an incoming school. If administrators process formal dismissals, then teachers have a right to an arbitration process, which could allow them to be reinstated in their job with back pay. Teachers in the district transfer pool do not have the same rights. Therefore, according to union leaders, “pure mutual consent” would have allowed administrators to let teachers languish in the transfer pool without the same due process rights that come with a formal dismissal.

Although the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative was proposed as a state law, its changes to teacher dismissal and transfer policies were clearly aimed at large, urban districts, such as Boston, Springfield and Worcester. Again, although it was not mentioned explicitly by Stand for Children leaders, race and class appeared to be part of the organization’s political decision making. Because these districts have fewer per-pupil resources than their suburban counterparts, reductions in force due to declining budgets are more common in urban districts than in other parts of the state. Similarly, the proposed changes to transfer policies apply only to larger districts for the simple reason that smaller districts may feature a single middle school or high school, therefore making in-district transfer much less common than in districts that feature multiple schools at all levels of the K-12 system.

Collective Bargaining Rights. Initially, proposed changes to collective bargaining rights generated less controversy than changes to seniority policy. Later, however, the former featured prominently in the MTA’s approach to compromise negotiations. As a so-called “local control” state, existing Massachusetts law allowed teachers to engage in collective bargaining over virtually all aspects of their contracts. The proposed ballot initiative, however, would have restricted collective bargaining over nearly all aspects of teacher evaluation, except for several minor issues, such as the criteria for a second evaluator in arbitration cases. Along these lines, an MTA teacher I interviewed noted that his district was considering using peer review as part of its evaluation protocol. Under the ballot initiative, however the state would have had ultimate authority over evaluation procedures, potentially vetoing decisions like this one that were bargained at the district level.

Most notably, the ballot initiative would have required some districts to adopt a model evaluation rubric developed by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. As described in Chapter One, the state's new teacher evaluation rated teacher performance according to four "indicators": Curriculum, Planning and Assessment; Teaching All Students; Family and Community Engagement; and, Professional Culture. As originally written, the Massachusetts teacher evaluation system gave districts wide discretion to use district-level collective bargaining to determine the specific measures for each performance indicator. In practice, this would have allowed Boston, for example, to measure Family and Community Engagement differently from Springfield or Worcester. The proposed ballot initiative, however, would have effectively nullified local-level collective bargaining by giving the state veto power over evaluation protocols developed at the district level.

Miscellaneous Policy Changes. Lastly, in the ballot initiative, Stand for Children proposed a potpourri of changes related to teacher evaluation. Two proposed changes would later feature prominently in compromise negotiations. Firstly, if passed as a ballot question, the provisions noted above would have become effective roughly seven weeks later, at the start of 2013. As written, districts would have been required to incorporate new personnel policies into their collective bargaining agreements as their contracts expired. So, only those districts whose contracts expired in 2013 would have been required to incorporate provisions of the ballot initiative immediately. Meanwhile, for some districts, changes could be much further down the road. This provision is further evidence that the ballot initiative was aimed specifically at large, urban districts, such as the Boston Public Schools (BPS). At the time the ballot question was announced, BPS

was engaged in contract negotiations; as a result, they would have been among the first districts required to incorporate the policy changes of the initiative into their teachers' contracts.

Secondly, although the ballot initiative would have required the state to develop a professional development plan for school administrators, it did not provide funding for professional development and implementation of the new evaluation system. Under the Massachusetts' constitution, ballot initiatives are barred from making "a specific appropriation of money from the treasury of the commonwealth." Unlike traditional laws, then, ballot initiatives are prohibited from allocating existing funds to specific purposes, such as professional development on the new teacher evaluation system. As a result, if passed as an initiative, the state legislature would have had to provide funding to support professional development or the state department of education would have had to find resources in its existing budget. Although it was not a part of the initiative, the question of funding and professional development emerged as a major topic in compromise negotiations.

In the remainder of this chapter, I turn my attention to the interplay of organizational identity and policy discourses in each organization's political decision making regarding the ballot campaign. I first go back in time to discuss the decision making that led Stand for Children to launch the ballot initiative. Then, I present results from my analysis of the context of outcomes. In discussing the unions' response to the ballot campaign, I pay attention to the struggle between what I am calling the "union as reformer" and "union as advocate" perspectives. I demonstrate that belief in the former ultimately pushed the MTA towards compromise and away from the concerns of its own

rank-and-file members. Meanwhile, when characterizing Stand for Children’s political decision making, I trace the struggle over public perception of the organization’s role in Massachusetts policy making. I argue that Stand for Children’s decision to compromise appeared to be directed at changing the narrative about the organization’s purpose and identity. As with the MTA, I demonstrate that interest group conflict at the state level ultimately distracted Stand for Children from meaningful engagement of local-level members.

So Much, So Fast:

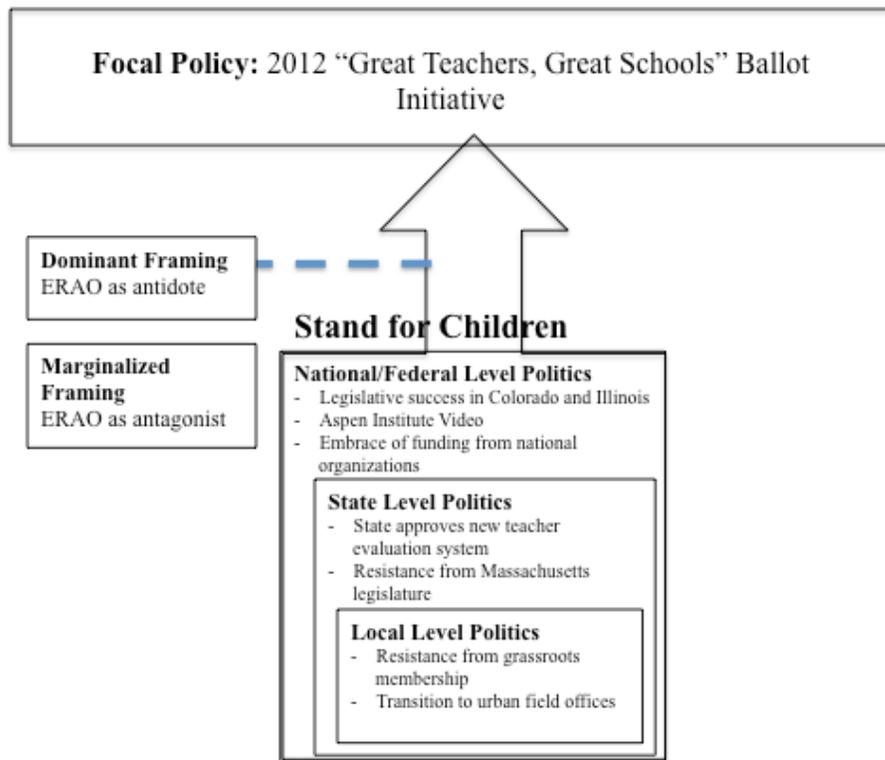
Stand for Children Launches the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Ballot Initiative

The decision to launch the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative was, by all accounts, a bold one. At the time, Stand for Children was still a relatively new player in the state policy arena. Previously, the organization’s state-level advocacy was conducted in the context of the Race-to-the-Top Coalition. The ballot initiative, however, was Stand for Children’s first major, independent foray into state-level legislative advocacy in Massachusetts. As I show below, many argued that the organization sought major policy changes without providing sufficient notice to others in the policy community. Using data from interviews with Stand for Children leadership, I pay close attention to the ways that the organization described its role in the state policy arena. Building off the “ERAO as antidote” framing introduced in Chapter Four, I demonstrate that Stand for Children embraced a self-described boldness and “independence” in justifying their decision to launch the ballot initiative.

Drawing on interviews with Stand for Children’s former staff members, and surprisingly, from its own leadership, I raise questions about the role – of lack thereof –

that local-level members played in launching the ballot initiative. I identify political pressures at the national, state, and local levels, and I point to key evidence that supports critics’ claims that the organization was driven from outside the state by the anti-union interests of its national leadership. Ultimately, I build the argument that Stand for Children’s claims to grassroots community organizing were overstated at best, and, at worst, were machinations used to give high-level decisions the imprimatur of public support. Figure 9, below, provides a guide for the discussion in this section, using the analytic framework presented in Chapter Three to depict the policy struggles influential in Stand for Children’s decision to launch the ballot initiative.

Figure 9: The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Ballot Initiative Context of Text Production



National/Federal Level Politics

My interview with a key leader at Stand for Children revealed a key piece of information that was not known publicly at the time of the campaign. According to testimony from Cynthia Pierre, Stand for Children Massachusetts' Political Director, the organization originally planned to target the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign for the 2014 election. The organization, however, decided late in 2011 to file the ballot initiative for the 2012 election instead. Leaving little room for interpretation, Pierre stated that "the original Great Teachers Great Schools campaign plan was over a three year time period" in which "the intention was to pass a law through the State House" some time during the 2014 legislative session. Pierre then clarified that the accelerated timeline was "a very Massachusetts decision"; however data from a variety of sources, including Stand for Children's former staff and closest political allies, indicate that the decision was likely driven by Stand for Children's national-level leadership.

At the conclusion of the infamous Aspen Institute video, Stand for Children's national Executive Director, Jonah Edelman, celebrated Stand for Children's success in Illinois by predicting that it would be difficult for unions in other states to oppose reforms that their Illinois counterparts had just recently accepted. Having convinced unions to fold in one state, Edelman believed he had found a playbook that might work elsewhere, explaining that "our hope and our expectation is to use this as a catalyst to very quickly make similar changes in other very entrenched states." Edelman's testimony on the Aspen Institute video even gestured towards political tactics that may have shaped the Massachusetts campaign. In particular, he reflected that political negotiations in Illinois were ultimately successful because "we started extreme and gave ourselves some room to

come back” in compromise negotiations. As noted above, the ballot initiative contained numerous, complicated proposals regarding teacher evaluation and job security. Many observers would later argue that the organization intentionally drafted the ballot initiative this way in order to give themselves room to negotiate a compromise.

Interviews with Stand for Children’s allies in the business community and their own former staff further indicates that the decision to accelerate the campaign timeline from 2014 to 2012 was likely a mandate from the national office. Given their public embrace of neo-liberal reform, business leaders were Stand for Children’s most likely allies in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative. Indeed, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), widely credited with drafting the state’s groundbreaking 1993 education reform legislation, introduced its own proposed changes to teacher job security that aligned with the provisions in the ballot initiative. Lisa Niese, MBAE’s Executive Director, then, was an essential member of any coalition of like-minded supporters that Stand for Children hoped to build to advocate for the ballot question.

In our interview, however, Niese explained that Stand for Children’s Massachusetts leadership originally approached her about pursuing a traditional piece of legislation in 2014. When she heard that the organization was moving ahead with a ballot initiative for the 2012 election, she was shocked:

It was totally opposite of what I had been told they were planning to do, so I just am stuck, I can’t believe it could have been bubbling up in Massachusetts because I had been told a totally different plan, and then I read in the State House News

Service that they filed this. So they didn't even take the time – because they must have had to make the decision pretty close to the deadline for filing – to go out and build a coalition and to even see if people who were like-minded, which we were, would be supportive of them filing it this year and their failure to do all of that indicates to me that they were being driven by some other motives.

Niese went on to explain that the campaign was likely driven by Stand for Children's national level leadership. Similarly, Charles Cistulli, a former Stand for Children community organizer, agreed that the decision to accelerate the campaign timeline “would only come from the national level.” He reflected simply that “we weren't big enough to tell national ‘here's the deal’.” He agreed that it was possible that state-level leaders proposed the 2012 timeline to national director, but that it was more likely that the decision was handed down from the national office.

Of course, the apparent influence of Stand for Children's national office raises important questions about claims that the organization was driven by grassroots community organizing, or even by its state-level leadership. Instead, the data above suggests that the Massachusetts office was carrying out mandates from the national level. At the time that the initiative was launched, however, this information was not known publicly, and it was, therefore, not a dominant part of public dialogue about Stand for Children. As one might expect, Stand for Children's leadership offered a very different perspective about the motivations driving the campaign. Consistent with the “ERA0 as antidote” framing introduced in Chapter Four, Stand for Children leaders explained that

the ballot initiative was indeed motivated by a combination of state-level advocacy and local-level organizing.

State Level Politics

Stand for Children’s leadership explained that the ballot initiative was necessary given lawmakers’ resistance to a traditional piece of legislation. As described by several interview participants, including Stand for Children’s own state-level leadership, the organization’s efforts at legislative change were met with strong resistance from the State House. Timothy Manning, formerly a high-level staff member in the office of the Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, reflected that Stand for Children visited with state lawmakers to discuss the possibility of pursuing a more traditional piece of legislation and was not able to get anyone to work with them. Indeed, Washington, the organization’s Executive Director, corroborated this account, noting that he was told by “a certain very influential person in government” that Stand for Children should “just be happy with reforms that have already been done,” including recent changes to the state’s teacher evaluation system.

Because Massachusetts had recently approved new regulations for teacher evaluation, many interview participants observed that the state legislature was eager to move on to a new topic in education or to another field of policy altogether. In interviews and public statements, many in the policy community argued similarly that it made sense to wait a few years, and to test the new evaluation system, before adding high-stakes consequences for teachers determined to be underperforming. Unable to find support of

any kind from the State House, Stand for Children staff members reported in our interviews that they felt compelled to accelerate policy change through the use of the ballot initiative.

According to Stand for Children leadership, the ballot initiative kept the legislature's attention on an important issue when it otherwise would have moved on to something else. In interviews and in public meetings, Stand for Children's Executive Director repeatedly explained that the organization decided to launch the ballot initiative "to begin the conversation" about attaching consequences to the state's new teacher evaluation system. Using direct and unequivocal language in our interview, Stand for Children's Political Director stated that "if we could get a ballot question certified and heading towards the ballot that would for all intents and purposes allow us to introduce a bill when maybe we would not have been able to get a bill introduced" in the first year of a campaign targeted at the 2012 election.

The ballot initiative, then, forced reluctant lawmakers to pay attention to issues related to teacher seniority when they otherwise would have waited at least a few years to make policy change in this area. If legislators did nothing, then many believed the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative would have been approved by voters in the 2012 election. Meanwhile, if the legislature passed a comparable piece of legislation – as in the compromise law that was ultimately approved – then Stand for Children would remove the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" question from the ballot. Either way, the ballot initiative greatly increased the chances that Stand for Children would pass a new law sooner rather than later.

Consistent with the antidote identity, Stand for Children’s leaders explained that the ballot campaign was motivated by “a fierce sense of urgency that children can’t wait.” By breaking the relative inertia of collaboration and debate, they reflected that “this is the policy that’s going to change the way that business is done.” As I describe below, arguments about changes to the policy making status quo, were a key part of Stand for Children’s response to critics who argued the organization was an antagonist primarily motivated by the anti-union agenda of its national organization and funders.

Whether it came from national-level leadership, or to some extent at least, from state-level leadership, the decision to launch the ballot initiative was made quickly and with little notice. When asked what she would do differently in a similar campaign, Pierre, the Political Director, somewhat shockingly admitted that “I would have drafted the ballot question with more time; we drafted it in no time.” Washington, Stand for Children’s Massachusetts’ Executive Director, was perhaps more measured, reflecting that he “would have like to have had more time on the front end to be able to sit down and talk in even more depth with people about the initiative,” including union leaders and elected officials. He confirmed that the decision to pursue the ballot was made only “five weeks” before the filing deadline, giving the organization very little time to meet individually with various members of the policy community. As I demonstrate below, data revealed that this timeline also left little room for meaningful grassroots organizing of Stand for Children’s local-level membership.

Local Level Politics

Stand for Children’s Massachusetts leadership claimed that the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign was determined both through a survey of Boston Public Schools (BPS) teachers – aligned the aggregative decision making – as well as through grassroots organizing of local level membership – aligned with the deliberative tradition. Interviews with Stand for Children leadership as well as a former Stand for Children community organizer indicate, however, that grassroots organizing played an extremely limited role in the organization’s political decision making. Instead, public engagement in the development of the initiative primarily aligned with the aggregative notion of democratic engagement, in which policy preferences were determined through a tally of individual choices on a survey.

Having formed a relationship with the Boston Foundation through its participation in the Race-to-the-Top Coalition, Stand for Children received funding to survey at least one teacher from every BPS school to understand their opinions about the most pressing obstacles to student achievement. According to Washington, Stand for Children’s Executive Director, the survey found that teacher evaluation was a top priority. Washington explained that Stand for Children then used survey results to guide community organizing efforts. He claimed that Stand for Children created a membership task force in each community-based chapter, which met monthly to develop a white paper suggesting guidelines for the organization’s next major campaign. Consistent with the findings from the survey of BPS teachers, Washington told me that the community-level task force effort reported that “teacher effectiveness should be a major component of our

advocacy agenda going into the next session,” especially issues related to tenure and seniority.

However, as noted in Chapter Four, starting in late 2010, the organization began to close chapters in suburban communities and to consolidate community organizers in urban neighborhoods. As a result, it is difficult to know the extent to which newly formed urban community field offices were a part of the task forces described by Washington. For example, Charles Cistulli, a community organizer assigned to the Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston, reflected that he was not able to engage his members because “I didn’t really have a chapter yet.” It seems equally unlikely, however, that the campaign would have been generated from suburban field offices. In smaller, well-resourced suburban districts, questions about teacher dismissal, the core of the ballot initiative, are much less common than in larger urban districts. Additionally, if suburban field offices were instrumental in launching the initiative, it would have been strange for the organization to actively close these same offices before the campaign even got off the ground.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Policy Text Production

My analysis above raises key questions about the factors that led Stand for Children to launch the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative for the 2012 election. Consistent with the antidote framing of Stand for Children as a bold and independent advocate for students, Stand for Children leadership argued that the ballot initiative was a solution to slow, inefficient public decision making that ultimately delays necessary changes to school policy. However, interviews with many people, including

Stand for Children’s own national leadership and its closest political allies, indicate that the initiative was driven by a political agenda against teachers’ unions as opposed to conversation with parents and teachers in Massachusetts’ public schools. Taken together, interviews with Stand for Children’s leadership and critics provide evidence of two important themes in “neo-democratic” decision making: the influence of high-level interest group conflict on the policy making process and the substitution of aggregative democratic decision making for genuine grassroots community organizing, which I detail below.

In line with the “ERAO as antidote” framing, Stand for Children’s leadership described the organization as a unique vehicle for policy change, capable of breaking through inefficiencies and inertia in the policy making status quo. The ballot initiative, a controversial vehicle for policy change, was a key part of Stand for Children’s self-portrait as bold, innovative policy makers. By filing the initiative, Stand for Children claimed to hold policy makers accountable to Massachusetts’ students, as opposed to the adults in the policy making community. My analysis in the previous chapter indicated that the following discourses were evident within the antidote framing:

- Neo-liberal reform is a vehicle for closing the achievement gap.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.
- ERAOs are unique organizations that combine state level advocacy and grassroots community organizing.

Based on my analysis in the context of text production, I identify an additional discourse evident within the antidote framing:

- The current system for education policy making is unable to make the changes necessary to improve public education for all students.

Characterizing Stand for Children as “bold,” and “independent,” the Executive Director of the Massachusetts’ office explained that the organization pursued the ballot initiative because “we’re going to be relentless in pursuing [policy change] because there’s no time to waste.” According to Stand for Children’s leadership, inefficiencies in public bureaucracy prevented lawmakers from making necessary policy changes. As described by Stand for Children’s leadership, the traditional process of policy making, which involves deliberation and consensus, does not meet students’ needs because it takes too long and it often privileges concerns of adults over students. In response, Stand for Children leaders argued that students need an advocate who is not afraid to buck policy making norms to bring about real change. Although it was not mentioned explicitly by Stand for Children staff, the ballot initiative was clearly directed towards students in the state’s low-income and minority school districts. In short, then, the argument was that underserved students needed an organization that would, indeed, stand for children when others do not.

Stand for Children leadership reinforced this perspective in our interviews and in public statements. Typical of this line of argumentation, the following excerpt from Stand for Children’s Massachusetts Executive Director, John Washington, connects the ballot initiative to concerns about public policy making:

I can appreciate when people say there is a value in working towards consensus and getting all the adults in the room comfortable before you move forward. But,

when you're talking about kids; this is an entire generation of kids going through a school system before we've gotten adults comfortable and, you know, from our perspective that wasn't acceptable and we did say we're open to talking about adjusted timelines but let's move the ball forward. And it became very clear that if we introduced the bill in the traditional way that you do it, it was going to get tied up and not go anywhere. And that's what led to the ballot initiative.

Washington argued that others in the policy making community were too concerned about being collaborative to focus on making bold, yet necessary, policy changes for public school students. He reflected that one legislator told him that it was better to "only move maybe one step" as long as "you've got everyone to agree on the one step." In their meeting Washington countered that this approach "is okay if you're talking about an issue of what color trash bags we should have on the side of the street; not when you're talking about kids." According to Stand for Children staff, it was their independence from the norms of the policy community that allowed them to rise above bureaucratic dysfunction to accomplish real change for Massachusetts' public schools.

My analysis, however, raises damaging questions about another key aspect of the antidote identity: the notion that Stand for Children was driven by a combination of state-level advocacy and grassroots community organizing. Firstly, data from a variety of sources, including Stand for Children's current and former staff as well as their closest political allies, indicate that the ballot campaign was likely directed from the highest levels of the organization. As described in Chapter One, policy observers have begun to question whether ERAOs get their policy directives from national-level leadership as

opposed to generating political campaigns from engagement with local-level membership (McDonnell, 2009; McGuinn, 2012a; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b). The interview data presented above suggest that it is reasonable to ask the same questions regarding the launch of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative.

Secondly, interviews with Stand for Children’s leadership indicate that, intentionally or otherwise, aggregative democracy had come to be used in place of genuine grassroots community organizing. Although Stand for Children’s leadership claimed that decision making was based on “what’s really resonating with our members at the grassroots level,” interview data suggest that claims of community engagement were overstated. Instead of conducting grassroots organizing in the deliberative tradition, organizational decision making adhered to an aggregative notion of democratic engagement that developed priorities through tallying the results of a survey of individual teachers. In the following section, I suggest that the same two factors – i.e., national-level interest group conflict and aggregative democratic decision making – shaped the MTA’s response to the ballot initiative.

The New Fight:

Union Opposition, Compromise and Complicity in the New Policy Making Arena

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative forced adversaries to adjust their political calculations and, in effect, changed the values that long characterized the Massachusetts’ educational policy making arena. In this section, I describe the ways that each state-level teachers’ union responded to the ballot initiative. Because it was Stand

for Children’s partner in compromise negotiations, I focus mainly on the MTA’s political response to the ballot initiative. However, unlike previous sections, I also include consideration of political decision making at the other state level teachers’ union, the American Federation of Teachers – Massachusetts (AFT-MA). While the MTA adhered to reform-oriented unionism, decision making at the AFT-MA skewed closer to social justice-oriented unionism.

Throughout this discussion, I use AFT-MA as a point of contrast to further define the underlying beliefs evident within the “union as reformer” framing. Specifically, I demonstrate that MTA leadership felt that it needed to adjust political tactics to response to the new fight presented by Education Reform Advocacy Organizations in Massachusetts and across the country. Indicative of “neo-democratic” decision making, MTA’s response to the ballot initiative shared important similarities with Stand for Children’s decision to launch the ballot campaign. Under high-stakes political pressure, both organization’s abandoned genuine grassroots organizing in favor of individualistic, aggregative modes of democratic engagement.

National/Federal Level Politics

As described in Chapter Four, national-level unions faced a variety of very serious challenges in the 2010 midterm elections that prevented them from offering support to comparatively smaller policy struggles in other states. Although the landscape had changed by the time of the 2012 election cycle, the stakes for unions were no less intense. In addition to devoting considerable support for President Obama’s re-election

bid, unions faced a variety of anti-union candidates and ballot initiatives across the country. For example, Idaho's controversial "Luna Laws," a series of ballot questions named after the state Superintendent of Public Instruction, proposed eliminating virtually all rights to job protections or collective bargaining, essentially turning teachers into at-will employees. To counter support from ERAOs around the country, unions were forced to devote substantial resources in order eventually to defeat the Idaho proposals at the ballot. In my interview with him, MTA President Phillip Torrington cited these, and other, efforts as reasons that "we were told by our national union, both national unions, AFT and NEA, that they would not be sending money" to fight the comparatively more minor "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative.

Additionally, even in Massachusetts, the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative was not the unions' top priority. As noted earlier, the 2012 election featured a high-profile US Senate race between Republican incumbent Scott Brown and Democratic challenger Elizabeth Warren in what was to be the most expensive US Senate race in history (Cilizza, 2013). As a champion for the working class, many union leaders wanted to see Warren defeat Brown, the generally anti-union incumbent. Tyson Gilford, President of the AFT-MA, reflected that "to be perfectly candid, both the MTA and the AFT and the entire labor movement did have a great investment in the US Senate election." As a result, any money coming to Massachusetts from national-level unions would be devoted to support the Warren campaign.

State Level Politics

At the state level, despite sharing some concerns, interests of the MTA and the AFT-MA began to diverge, ultimately leading each union to respond quite differently to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative. Similar to their concerns at the national level, both unions shared interest in the state-level elections that year. Although the Massachusetts legislature was overwhelmingly Democratic, Republicans had been gaining State House seats in recent years. Gilford explained that between 2008 and 2010, Republican seats in the State House doubled from 16 to 32, and many were fearful that the 2012 election would bring more Republican success. Of course, each union was concerned that spending money to defeat the ballot initiative would divert funds from state races. Torrington predicted that the MTA would have to spend roughly \$9 million to defeat the ballot initiative. Without support from national-level unions, then, a campaign against the ballot initiative would have significantly limited the unions’ spending on state legislative races.

Given these concerns, each union found relatively cost-effective ways to fight the ballot initiative at the state level. Leaders at the AFT-MA organized delegates at the 2012 Massachusetts Democratic Convention to vote unanimously in opposition to the ballot initiative. Although it was an entirely symbolic vote, Gilford commented that the effort may have put pressure on Stand for Children. He explained that leaders at Stand for Children “look upon themselves as Democrats” and potentially felt isolated from their own party after the vote. Meanwhile, the MTA filed a lawsuit in January 2012 challenging the constitutionality of the ballot initiative. Specifically, the union argued

that the initiative violated state law prohibiting ballot questions from containing multiple, unrelated parts. While some originally heard that the court decision would be issued in May, it quickly became clear that the court would delay the decision until after July 3rd, the final filing deadline for the ballot initiative. When the compromise law was enacted, then, the lawsuit became moot.

However, given important differences in the structures of their contracts, leaders at the MTA and the AFT-MA had very different assessments of how the ballot initiative would have affected their members. Massachusetts' tradition of local control allows individual school districts to engage in collective bargaining about policies governing teacher seniority and job protections. In my interview with Torrington, he explained that over two-thirds of MTA's contracts already resembled Stand for Children's proposal in their preference for performance evaluation over seniority in cases of teacher dismissal. Meanwhile, in sharp contrast with the MTA, the AFT-MA president confirmed that over 80% of AFT-MA contracts contained so-called "strict seniority" provisions that favored seniority over performance evaluation in cases of reductions in force. Importantly, although it is the smaller of the two unions, AFT-MA typically represents the state's large, urban districts, including Boston. As noted above, because these districts are typically under-resourced, dismissals necessitated by budget cuts are much more common in AFT-MA districts than in the smaller, wealthier districts more commonly affiliated with the MTA. Torrington explained that the assessment of contract differences was a major factor in his decision, ultimately, to pursue compromise. He argued that he was not giving up a lot in compromise negotiations, because the new law would only affect a relatively small percentage of his membership.

Consistent with a “policy as discourse” approach, I found that decision making based on contract details is connected to the reform-oriented identity introduced in Chapter Four, and, more generally, to underlying beliefs about the role of unions in a changing policy environment. In defining social justice unionism, Wheeler explained that “the union movement has to embrace a social justice vision for society in a macro way,” which includes transcending narrow analyses of contract details. According to this perspective, union political decision making should be guided by questions of what is good for society as a whole. Wheeler and other MTA critics described corporate influence in public education as a social injustice that should be resisted by public sector unions, even if the cost in the near term is minor. As I describe in Chapter Six, critics of the MTA argued that even small concessions to the neo-liberal agenda help to pave the way for larger concessions towards gradual, but complete, transformation of the public system.

Additionally, the MTA’s decision making is indicative of underlying beliefs about the union’s role as an advocate for low-income and minority communities. While the ballot initiative targeted urban communities, the MTA primarily represented wealthy, predominately white school districts whose contracts already resembled the changes proposed in the ballot initiative. By basing decision making on strict analysis of contract details, the MTA clearly indicated concern for their own members as opposed to consideration of larger problems facing Massachusetts public education, such as the challenges faced by majority minority school districts. Proponents of the “union as advocate” perspective would argue that the union, given its size and political influence, can indeed be an advocate for Massachusetts public education over and above the

particular districts represented by the MTA. In the next section, I describe how differences between reform-oriented unionism and social justice-oriented unionism led to very different approaches to local member engagement.

Local Level Politics

In the months following the announcement of the ballot initiative, legislative compromise seemed like a distant possibility. Given Stand for Children's political activity in other states as well as the explicit comments of its own national Executive Director, many assumed that the organization aimed to make a big statement in Massachusetts. Perhaps more importantly, Stand for Children appeared to have the funding and public support to be successful at the ballot. In my interview with Torrington, he said that Stand for Children had roughly \$10 million available for the ballot campaign. Meanwhile, an early poll conducted by the University of Massachusetts indicated that the public supported the initiative by a margin of 85% to 15%. It seemed likely, then, that both unions were headed towards a summer campaign to sway the public against the initiative.

Massachusetts' two state-level unions took very different approaches to public engagement, signaling two different directions for union community organizing in the new policy making arena. In late 2011 and early 2012, AFT-MA was laying the groundwork for a more expansive summer campaign. Local community organizers at Jobs with Justice and Citizens for Public Schools confirmed that they were working with the AFT-MA on a messaging campaign and that the union had begun to reach out to

leaders at community- and faith-based organizations. Raymond DeJesus, a community organizer at Jobs with Justice explained that the union was preparing an outreach campaign that was likely to include “paid advertising or door-to-door canvassing or going out to speak at organizational meetings.”

Meanwhile, Amy Cashner, a Political Organizer at the Boston Teachers’ Union (BTU), explained that her union began organizing at the school level. Some schools, for example, had “faculty senates” where groups of teachers met to develop plans for messaging or outreach efforts. Additionally, BTU and AFT-MA staff worked together on a variety of efforts, including creating talking points memos and online videos about the harmful effects of the ballot initiative. AFT-MA staff also worked with teachers who were interested in testifying against the ballot initiative at its official State House hearing before the Joint Education Committee. Both Cashner, and Bill Lowrie, a Political Director at the AFT-MA state office, explained that the union hoped to build a base of active members who would lead focus groups in schools and local communities in later stages of a longer campaign against the initiative.

Of course, it is impossible to know how AFT-MA’s local-level organizing would have influenced the campaign. As DeJesus explained, because of the compromise, the campaign against the initiative “didn’t get to the point where you would actually have an operation going out and talking to people.” Following compromise, organizing efforts were moot, and the AFT-MA shifted its focus to a short-lived advocacy campaign against the compromise law. Both in media coverage and in stakeholder interviews, the union was widely labeled as irrelevant for choosing opposition over compromise. Echoing this sentiment, a prominent member of the business community, observed that AFT-MA

“dealt themselves out” by not taking a more active role in negotiations over the compromise law.

Meanwhile, policy conflict with local-level MTA membership played out as the next phase in the ongoing struggle between reform-oriented unionism and social justice-oriented unionism. My analysis revealed that state-level leaders at the MTA promoted a version of public outreach that aligned more with an aggregative notion of democracy, as opposed to the more collectivist notion of engagement outlined in deliberative democratic theory. In response, local-level members within the MTA used complicated political maneuvering oriented towards gaining power over the union’s outreach to membership.

Aggregative decision making is premised on the notion that, if people are provided with appropriate data and a menu of choices, they will make a rational decision about the particular option that best serves their interests (Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007; Sleeter, 2008). Political action is, then, guided by a version of majority rule, by the choices that are most common in the general public (Sleeter, 2008). Aggregative notions of democratic decision making are perhaps most commonly visible in the current debate over charter schools. Advocates for charter schools argue for a proliferation of data, often results from standardized assessments, towards helping parents to choose between sending their children to a public or charter school. Indicative of public decision making based on aggregative democracy, Massachusetts’ newly elected Governor Charlie Baker commonly argues that the tally of students and families on waiting list for Massachusetts’ charter schools is evidence that the state should lift its current cap on charter school enrollment. According to some estimates, the charter school waiting list is as large as

45,000 students; however, the State Auditor recently claimed that this number has been miscalculated and is overly inflated (Wade, 2015).

Interviews with MTA leadership as well as rank-and-file membership indicate that union outreach resembled a version of aggregative democracy in contrast to a more collectivist organizing effort. Specifically, MTA state-level leadership reached out to members via the union newsletter and email announcements. In late 2011, the union sent email announcements notifying membership about the ballot initiative. Then, in early 2012, the union distributed talking points memos listing reasons to oppose the initiative. However, when asked if there were organizing efforts to mobilize members against the initiative, Terry Span, the MTA Vice President, reflected “I wouldn’t say there was per se a plan in place” but “discussions were taking place” regarding what it would cost to launch a full-scale campaign against the initiative.

At this point in the trajectory, in early 2012, MTA’s member outreach was focused exclusively on the ballot initiative. Although compromise negotiations had begun in December 2011, MTA leadership did not tell members about the negotiations until late March 2012. MTA leadership first notified members of the executive board, which is analogous to an MTA House of Representatives. Due to the union’s rule-making protocols, however, the executive board is not allowed to discuss the details of executive session meetings with rank-and-file members. As a result, members of the executive board who were critical of the decision to pursue compromise, including Michelle Nolasco, were not able to organize their local-level members until the conclusion of the executive session later in March. When asked about the union’s approach to compromise negotiations, Schierholtz, Director of MTA’s Center for Education Policy and Practice,

explained that they did not notify membership “because you don’t get anywhere if you bargain in public; that’s why people don’t bargain in public.” Of course, this approach clashes directly with MTA’s mission as a “member-driven driven organization, governed by democratic principles.” As I describe further below, MTA’s secrecy in compromise negotiations fueled a major backlash against union leadership that would eventually have dramatic effects on the future of the MTA.

Once negotiations were made public, outreach was limited to providing information about the compromise and then polling members about their policy preferences. Indicative of aggregative democratic decision making, union leaders frequently justified their political decision making by citing polling numbers that indicated a majority of members supported the compromise. In early May 2012, Jobs with Justice convened a meeting between Phillip Torrington and members of the Teacher Activist Group in Boston, many of whom were critical of the decision to compromise. In response, Torrington distributed results of MTA’s internal polling showing that a majority of the union’s own membership supported compromise. In my interview with Torrington, he reiterated the polling results as a major factor in his decision making.

Often from the EDU caucus, MTA’s critics argued that leadership had decided early in the campaign to seek compromise and that their efforts at outreach were aimed towards convincing members that compromise was the right decision, not towards genuinely soliciting member feedback about how the union should respond to the initiative. Some members charged that polling data were skewed towards the outcome that state-level leadership had preferred. For example, Chester Morrison, a veteran MTA teacher, reflected that “they were asking questions like, ‘Do you want to see a qualified

teacher in every classroom?” instead of asking questions about the finer, and more controversial, aspects of the compromise. Members also argued that, even if the poll was an accurate representation of teachers’ opinions, it was conducted before the MTA had launched any kind of large-scale effort to educate membership about the proposed changes.

Critics argued that by limiting outreach to newsletter articles and emails, state-level leadership prevented local-level unions from conducting more aggressive community organizing. Illustrating a stark difference between reform-oriented and social justice-oriented unionism, Nolasco explained that “grassroots organizing is not calling people together, giving you the information, and telling you to go out and spread the word,” as the MTA did via emails and newsletter articles. Instead, she countered that more members would have been mobilized against the initiative, if the MTA had conducted more “one-on-one conversations” with members to learn about their concerns and, ultimately, to educate members about broader issues facing public education, such as the influence of the neo-liberal agenda. Local-union presidents explained that state-level leadership could have helped them to conduct education and outreach with their members. Wheeler, also one of the local union presidents active in the EDU caucus, argued that “there are things that the state wide centralized leadership can do that can’t be done” at the district level, including using wider outreach mechanisms as a sort of bully pulpit to educate members about the ballot initiative and providing materials for local unions to conduct more extensive school-based organizing.

Frustrated with lack of action from state-level leaders, EDU members used complicated union rules to force leaders to engage in a wider debate about the ballot

initiative. In previous policy struggles, such as debate about MTA's support for the *Achievement Gap* legislation, leadership sought formal approval through executive session, as opposed to broader debate with rank-and-file membership. As Morrison described, because the executive board is generally "stacked" with members who are supportive of state-level leadership, it is generally an easier way for state leaders to get formal authority for major policy decisions. Many assumed that MTA leaders would pursue a similar path towards getting approval to negotiate compromise legislation with Stand for Children.

Critics of the MTA, however, began to organize members to put pressure on Torrington, Span and other MTA leaders to hold a formal debate about the ballot initiative and to seek members' approval of compromise negotiations with Stand for Children. Michelle Nolasco was a key part of this effort. She reflected that EDU members, many of whom were local union presidents, "started asking people to show up at board meetings" and to raise questions during open discussion periods. Those who were not able to attend meetings were encouraged to put pressure on MTA leadership via phone calls and emails. Many of the MTA members I interviewed indicated that, as a result of these efforts, MTA leaders were forced to hold a formal debate and vote about the initiative at MTA's 2012 Annual Meeting of delegates.

In our interviews, Nolasco and Wheeler estimated that the EDU caucus brought roughly 200 delegates, of about 600 total, to the meeting. Torrington, the MTA President, first spoke for roughly an hour, using a PowerPoint presentation to talk about the initiative and the proposed compromise. He also referred to the polling data noted above. As told by Morrison, Nolasco, and Wheeler, an open debate followed Torrington's

presentation in which he used complicated union rules to give floor time to his supporters. Following debate, the union held a formal delegate vote regarding whether to allow the executive board to make the final decision regarding whether to allow the compromise negotiations. Since the board had already signaled it would approve the negotiations, the delegate vote at the Annual Meeting was essentially the last obstacle to formal approval. Morrison reported that longtime members said it was “one of the closest votes we’ve ever had on an issue,” with delegates ultimately approving compromise negotiations by a margin of somewhere between 50 and 60 votes. According to MTA leadership, however, the vote passed with more support. Torrington reported that the final vote was “something like 340 to 200,” and Schierholtz reflected that “at the Annual Meeting there wasn’t any big pushback.” Because the vote was held in a “closed session,” media access was prohibited and there is no formal record of the exact vote count.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Outcomes

In responding to the ballot initiative, the MTA and AFT-MA represented very different directions for union political activity in the new policy making arena. The MTA chose compromise instead of opposition. While they preserved their seat at the table, their complicity with neo-liberal school reform fueled staunch resistance from rank-and-file membership. Meanwhile, the AFT-MA opposed the ballot initiative and was labeled irrelevant for even trying. AFT-MA devoted time and resources to preparing for a campaign that never happened and, in the meantime, their interests were not directly represented in the negotiations that led to the compromise law.

Considered together, unions' responses to the ballot initiative tell a troubling story about union community organizing in the "neo-democratic" era. MTA's decision making indicates that reform-oriented unionism is more aligned with aggregative democratic decision making than with notions of democratic engagement associated with deliberative democratic theory and with grassroots community organizing more specifically. All MTA state-level staff that I interviewed agreed that extensive community organizing would not have made much of a difference in the campaign. Instead of organizing and mobilizing members against the initiative, MTA leadership pursued compromise negotiations in private and then used results from internal polling to justify their decision making.

The data presented above provide further evidence that the "union as reformer" framing is related to the underlying discourses about unions that were introduced in Chapter Four:

- Neo-liberal reform is a fixture in educational policy making.
- Compromise is necessary to preserve unions' "seat at the table" of policy negotiations.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.

Additionally, my analysis of the MTA's response to the ballot initiative points towards an additional discourse evident within the "union as reformer" framing:

- Community organizing is largely irrelevant in the neo-liberal era.

Indicative of beliefs about community organizing informing reform-oriented unionism, in the following excerpt, Torrington defends his decision making against MTA's critics:

They expect me to fight something that had a polling against us at 70 to 30 percent. Against somebody who had 10 million dollars available to them to go on air with a bumper sticker like "Don't you think we should have a great teacher in every school?" And I'm supposed to go on TV and newspapers and argue the technicality of all these collective bargaining of Chapter 71 and 38, etc., etc.

In this excerpt, Torrington lists a number of reasons that grassroots organizing would have been ineffective, including the public's apparent support for the ballot initiative as well as Stand for Children's money and messaging. Citing the same rationale, all of the MTA leaders that I interviewed agreed that the initiative would have passed if it went to ballot. Clearly, this belief is related to the discourse that neo-liberal reform is inevitable. According to proponents of reform-oriented unionism, neo-liberal reforms, and the groups that promote them, are fixtures in American educational policy making. In a new environment and facing a new fight, unions can only hope to contain, but not to defeat, these efforts.

MTA's critics, however, argued that the union's beliefs about community organizing became a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: that unions contributed to neo-liberal reform by refusing to try to fight it more aggressively. In stark contrast with interview data from MTA leaders, all of the MTA rank-and-file members that I

interviewed agreed that the MTA would have been stronger if it fought the initiative to the ballot and lost. Echoing much of this critique, Nolasco explained that, by mobilizing members against the ballot campaign, “you become ready for the next fight, and you may not win the next fight but you’ll be even stronger so that by the time you get to the third fight, you’re really ready.” As described in Chapter Four, this belief about grassroots organizing is a key aspect of the “union as advocate” perspective.

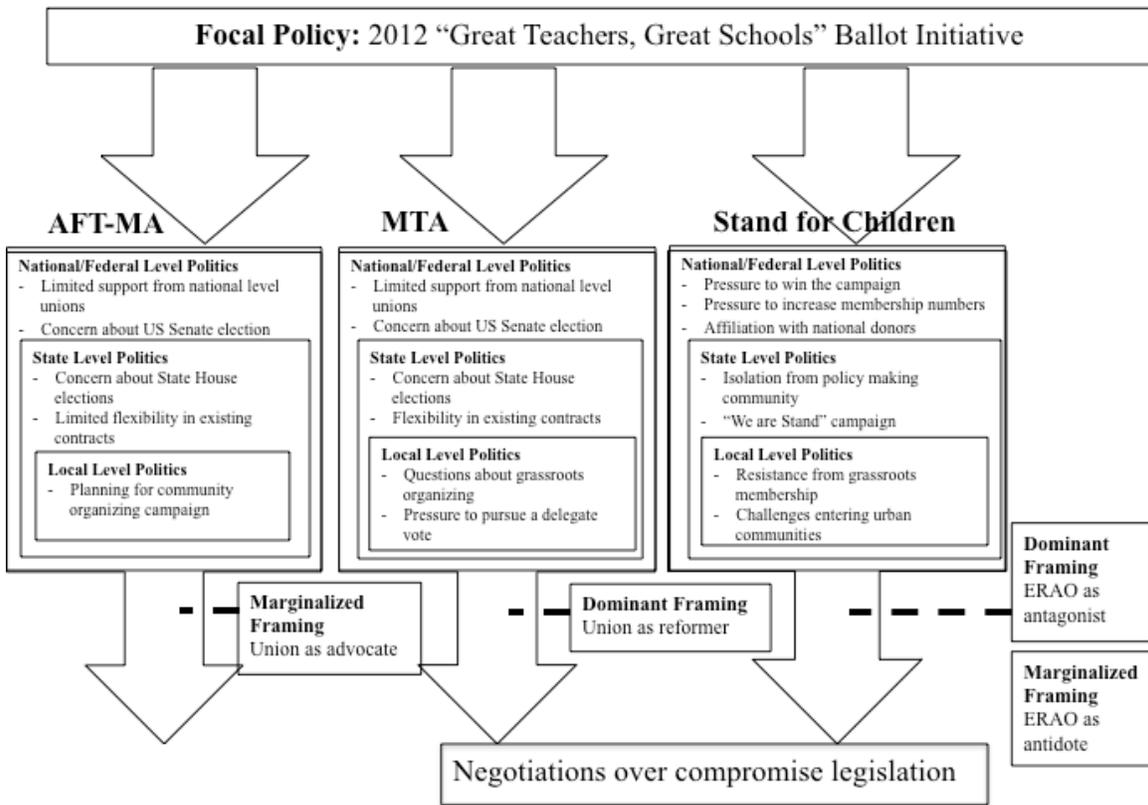
AFT- MA’s response to the ballot initiative, however, may offer a point of caution regarding social justice-oriented unionism. Resembling the kind of response favored by MTA’s critics, the AFT-MA began to plan an expansive advocacy campaign that featured community organizing at district schools as well as in partnership with leaders of community-based and faith-based organizations. When the compromise was announced, AFT-MA’s efforts became moot, and their perspectives were not represented in compromise negotiations with Stand for Children. Following the campaign, AFT-MA was widely labeled as an irrelevant member of the policy making arena. The political outcomes for AFT-MTA, then, provide an indication of the high price that unions face when remaining true to their commitments to grassroots democratic engagement. When discussing the political outcomes of the compromise law in Chapter Six, I describe this theme in more detail, highlighting the consequences of union opposition and compromise in the “neo-democratic” era.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the announcement of the ballot initiative also changed the political landscape for Stand for Children. In the next section, I examine the political pressures that the organization faced at various levels of scale, pressures that Stand for Children largely inflicted on itself in the launch of the ballot initiative. I demonstrate that,

following the announcement of the ballot initiative, perceptions of Stand for Children shifted dramatically. Ultimately, I show that the compromise was an effort to restore Stand for Children's relationship with the Massachusetts policy making community and to respond to political pressures that prevented the organization from conducting genuine grassroots community organizing.

Figure 10 combines the analysis of outcomes for teachers' unions and Stand for Children to depict the policy struggles and political discourses influential in analysis of the context of outcomes. I use the analytic framework described in Chapter Three to display the political pressures at the national, state and local levels that were influential in each organization's political decision making. In order to offer a complete account of the context of outcomes for the ballot initiative, I present political pressures faced by Stand for Children alongside those, described above, that shaped decision making at the AFT-MA and the MTA. Additionally, I characterize the political identities that were associated with each organization's decision to pursue compromise or, in the case of the AFT-MA, to organize a long-term campaign to oppose the ballot initiative.

Figure 10: The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Ballot Initiative Context of Outcomes



Shifts in Political and Discursive Power:

The Outcomes of the Ballot Initiative and the Decision to Compromise

Following the launch of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, perceptions of Stand for Children’s organizational identity shifted in important ways. As one might expect, stakeholders on various sides of the debate had strong opinions about whether the use of the initiative process was appropriate or necessary in this case. In particular, the ballot initiative only further fueled claims that Stand for Children was

driven from outside the state by the anti-union, pro-corporate agenda of its national leadership. As the “ERAO as antagonist” framing became more prevalent in public conversation, it became much harder for the organization to assert an alternative argument for its purpose in Massachusetts’ educational policy making. Additionally, the organization faced mounting challenges in its relationship with its national office and in its effort to build community-based chapters in urban neighborhoods.

National/Federal Level Politics

My interview with Charles Cistulli, a former community organizer with Stand for Children, revealed that Stand for Children’s national office continued to play a major role in the organization’s decision making following the launch of the ballot initiative. Cistulli explained that the Massachusetts office was under high-stakes pressure from national leadership to emerge as successful in the ballot campaign. During a visit from national leadership in the winter of 2012, staff in Massachusetts were “told explicitly that we need to win the campaign or essentially the Massachusetts chapter is going to cease to exist.” Referring to the National Organizing Director, Cistulli remembered that it was “clear that she was under pressure when she was saying that because she was saying it in a fairly emotional way, and again, she wasn’t being intimidating she was just like ‘guys this is the reality.’”

It was also during this meeting that Stand for Children’s community organizers came under pressure to increase membership numbers. Cistulli reported that national leadership wanted the Massachusetts’ office “to hit 300 members,” when, at the time,

“we had probably legitimately 30 folks that we were talking to.” Making matters worse, organizers in the Massachusetts office had only “six weeks or so,” to increase membership ten-fold. As a result, community organizing staff devoted attention to adding new members via signing “Great Teachers, Great Schools” cards at supermarkets, attending recruitment events or signing up new members online. According to Cistulli, pressure both to “win” the ballot campaign while dramatically increasing membership prevented Stand for Children from conducting genuine grassroots community organizing. When discussing local-level politics, below, I rely on data from Stand for Children leadership to offer a more detailed characterization of the ways in which national-level pressures impeded community organizing efforts. Ultimately, I use this discussion to characterize impediments democratic engagement in the new policy making arena.

In the public realm, meanwhile, the antagonist framing of Stand for Children became nearly ubiquitous in political discussion. As mentioned above, critique of Stand for Children was previously limited to individuals, like Tanya Nathan, who had some affiliation with the organization and were opposed to its new direction. The ballot initiative, however, may have had the unintended consequence of shining a spotlight on the organization and its out-of-state affiliations.

Indicative of this trend, the media’s portrait of Stand for Children changed dramatically following the announcement of the ballot campaign. Previously, Stand for Children was framed as a local, community-based organization seeking common sense policy changes. However, in articles published following the announcement of the ballot initiative, it was much more common for Stand for Children to be framed as “a national organization based in Portland, Oregon with a presence in nine states” (e.g., Lowell Sun,

2012). Many media articles, additionally, mentioned Stand for Children alongside major corporate donors, commonly noting that “its advisory board includes officials from Bain Capital, Fischer Lynch Capital and other businesses” (e.g., Cheney, 2012; Lowell Sun, 2012; WCVB, 2012). Similarly, community-based organizations, such as Jobs with Justice, began to organize public meetings to advocate against the ballot initiative. Their flyer likewise emphasized Stand for Children’s corporate ties, with a headline that read “Don’t let Wal-Mart tell us how to run our public schools.”

As the “ERAO as antagonist” framing became more a part of public conversation, it also became sharper. Previously, Stand for Children was described as an antagonist due to openly anti-union stance of its national director. Following the ballot initiative, critics of Stand for Children promoted the image of Stand for Children as proponent of school privatization. A local Worcester paper, for example, described Stand for Children as “a ‘bait and switch’ operation that works to win the confidences of a local community only to eventually resort to its own agenda, which most often is one that promotes privatization of public education and the neutering teachers unions” (McFarlane, 2012). Echoing much of this critique, one BPS teacher explained that “when you undermine union power, and I do think that that’s part of what the bill proposed, just undermining union power, you take away that ability of an organized voice,” making it easier for neo-liberal reformers to close public schools and, eventually, replace them with for-profit service providers.

As one might expect, Stand for Children’s leadership resisted the antagonist identity, and, in particular, the implication that Stand for Children was directed towards the privatization of public education. Addressing questions about Stand for Children’s

national mission, Washington clarified that the Aspen Institute video was not a fair representation of the organization's interests or motivations, explaining that "it was just a poor choice of words" that "wasn't really capturing properly the way in which things really took place." Washington repeatedly described the political debate as "unfortunate" because it tended towards attack on the organization and veered away from debate about the substance or merits of the proposed policy change. He argued, instead, that the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative was aimed at "reforming the school system...not because I want to see the end of it," but "because I actually want us to preserve it and make sure that it works for all kids."

State Level Politics

In addition to public and private pressures from their association with national leadership and donors, Stand for Children was forced to navigate an increasingly more inhospitable political environment at the state level. The decision to pursue a ballot initiative for the 2012 election took many by surprise and had strongly negative consequences for how others perceived the organization. Interviews with a variety of differently positioned stakeholders revealed, rather conclusively, that following the announcement of the ballot initiative, Stand for Children found itself isolated from virtually every other key actor in the Massachusetts' policy making community, including business leaders, key personnel in the state government and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as well as their own former members.

As noted above, given their embrace of neo-liberal reforms, leaders at business organizations are Stand for Children's most likely allies in the policy arena. Lisa Niese, Executive Director of a prominent business organization, explained that when she and other business leaders heard about the ballot initiative, they were immediately opposed. According to Niese, Stand for Children's leaders "were maybe expecting more support than they got, from not just our group but from a lot of groups" in the business community. She explained simply that "as an organization, we have never supported a ballot question and don't support ballot questions as a way to make policy." Instead, business leaders stated that they would have preferred that Stand for Children had stuck to their original plan of collaboratively developing a more traditional piece of legislation for the 2014 legislative session.

Additionally, stakeholders throughout the Massachusetts policy community were nearly unanimous in their concern that the ballot initiative was "premature" given the state's recent development of a new teacher evaluation system. There were many remaining questions about the new system, especially regarding how administrators should interpret the new rubric and about the appropriate means for connecting teacher evaluation to student performance. Many argued that state stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, and officials at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), needed to come together to implement the new system effectively. Echoing the concerns of many, the Massachusetts Secretary of Education and the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education each issued public statements expressing concern that the ballot initiative would lead to a divisive battle between teachers and administrators. Typical of each letter, the DESE Commissioner stated

plainly that he was “concerned about the potential of the Stand for Children-sponsored ballot initiative to undermine the collective commitment of the various statewide stakeholder groups to actualizing the spirit of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education evaluation regulations.”

Following the ballot initiative, criticism from former Stand for Children members also found a larger audience. As described in Chapter Four, the Worcester chapter dissolved after members grew frustrated with the organization’s support for Race-to-the-Top. At approximately the same time, Tanya Nathan won a seat on the Worcester school committee and became active in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), an organization that offers professional development and other resources for committee members across the state. At MASC, Nathan met other committee members who used to be active Stand for Children volunteers, but who “all lost faith in Stand for Children at the same time.” Through informal conversations with this group, Nathan was tapped to write an open letter denouncing the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative.

Published originally on the website of Citizens for Public Schools, a community-based organization devoted to advocating against corporate influence in public schools, the open letter was reprinted in several news outlets in early May 2012. Although it is short, the letter covers a variety of topics related to Stand for Children’s organizational transformation and to the ballot initiative more specifically. In particular, the letter charges that “Stand for Children abandoned its own local members – us – to follow the lure of millions of dollars from Bain Capital, the Walton Foundation, Bill Gates, and other who had an agenda in conflict with our previous efforts” (Citizens for Public

Schools, 2012). When discussing the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, the authors stated baldly that “this ballot measure fits the ideology of its corporate sponsors, but it is not what we want for those who teach our children” (Citizens for Public Schools, 2012). Mentioned often in my interviews with stakeholders across the Massachusetts policy arena, the letter helped to change the narrative about Stand for Children, contributing to a wider embrace of the antagonist identity across the policy community.

For its part, Stand for Children was not unaware of its fading reputation in the state. Pierre, the organization’s Political Director, reflected that “as the person who is largely responsible for the coalition building, I made every good faith effort to meet with people” to discuss the ballot initiative, but that “most people did not even want to have the conversation.” Ostensibly an effort to repair its image, in March 2012 Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office launched a state-wide public relations campaign called “We Are Stand.” Pierre explained that “there was already a bit of misinformation about Stand [for Children] being propagated around the state and so we both tactically decided that it made sense to talk about Stand [for Children]” as opposed to focusing more specifically on the ballot initiative. As part of this campaign, Stand for Children released a video that ran for five weeks on broadcast and cable television and bought advertising space on local radio and newspapers. While it is difficult to tell whether these efforts were effective, what is more important is that they indicate leaders were becoming increasingly concerned about the organization’s image.

Local Level Politics

At the local level, pressure to win the ballot campaign and increase membership became a major obstacle to genuine grassroots community organizing. Charles Cistulli, who was hired by Stand for Children to organize the Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston, explained that he faced significant obstacles in getting access to teachers in urban schools. Cistulli commented that the “standard line from principals” was that “I don’t want you coming into my school and getting my teachers’ union [representative] riled up, getting my teachers riled up, that’s antithetical to what I want a community organizing group to do in my school.” While a few principals allowed Cistulli to visit their schools and make a presentation during school staff meetings, he said it was much more common that he would get no return call from principals. Community organizers with the Boston Teachers’ Union confirmed that Stand for Children was not active inside Boston schools. One organizer even mentioned that parents “were a little bit disturbed” that “somebody had let them in the door” without really knowing much about their organization or goals.

Cistulli explained that it was similarly difficult to build relationships with community members, including parents and teachers, while also “selling them on the campaign.” According to him, conversations boiled down to two short and conflicting interactions: “it was like ‘hey, how you doing? Let’s go fight’.” He eventually realized that Stand for Children leadership wanted him to find “folks that would be predisposed to arguing in favor of this anyways whether they had something substantive to say or not and get them on board” as opposed to “[building] a sustainable chapter” composed of

active member leaders. Cistulli reported that organizing efforts were then reduced to “giving a 30-second pitch to somebody at Stop & Shop” who “wouldn’t have a good idea of what Stand for Children is all about, but they would be a member” by virtue of signing an apple-shaped card supporting both Stand for Children and “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative more specifically.

Similarly, a BPS teacher, Angelina Weiss, explained that Stand for Children struggled to establish credibility with the activist community in Boston. Interested in the organization’s mission, Weiss attended several Stand for Children events in Boston’s Grove Hall neighborhood. Consistent with Cistulli’s description, Weiss explained that meetings were aimed at both “launching Stand [for Children] in Boston and launching this whole conversation about teacher evaluations.” An active member of community-based advocacy organizations, including Boston’s chapter of the Teacher Activist Group, Weiss reported that key members of the activist community quickly gained the “sense that Stand [for Children] was latching on to organizations that were doing real work in the community, but it never really felt like they were actually a part of that.” Instead, according to Weiss, Stand for Children appeared to be trying to solicit support from other community organizations without having built relationships with other activists.

According to Cistulli, the shortcomings in Stand for Children’s urban community organizing were the result of trying to do too much all at once, not for lack of interest in grassroots organizing. In interviews, Cistulli repeatedly asserted that Stand for Children’s Massachusetts leadership was genuinely committing to improving public schools through community-based advocacy. For example, when talking with parents in Boston, Cistulli and other organizers learned that many were concerned about the city’s proposed changes

to the school assignment process. Community organizers then created a timeline for how they would launch an organizing campaign around school assignment. When their plan was presented to Stand for Children leadership, organizers were encouraged to “do both at the same time”: to lead a campaign around school assignment while also mobilizing members to support the ballot initiative. Eventually, Cistulli reported that the needs of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign got in the way of other organizing efforts. Convinced that he would be unable to engage in the kind of organizing he wanted to do, Cistulli ultimately left the organization in the spring of 2012, several months before compromise legislation was announced.

Interview data from Jaime Lind, a parent volunteer with Stand for Children, offers an important point of contrast to Cistulli’s account of the organization’s grassroots organizing efforts. Lind, who described herself as the “mom face of Stand for Children,” argued that the organization worked “relentlessly” to advocate on behalf of parents in Boston. Additionally, her testimony reinforced the image of Stand for Children as an advocate for low-income and minority students that are typically on the lower end of the state achievement gap. She reported that “what [Stand for Children] didn’t do was take it upon themselves to decide what we needed as African-American people in our community...they actually went out there and asked questions.” I treat her account as evidence that, in some cases, Stand for Children aimed to live up to the ideals of the antidote identity. However, the preponderance of interview data, including accounts from Cistulli, Nathan and Weiss, suggests that Stand for Children was not engaged in meaningful grassroots organizing during the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign and was largely disconnected from urban schools and communities.

Interestingly, despite offering a different account of Stand for Children's grassroots organizing, data from Lind's interview confirms a key part of Cistulli's critique of the organization. Cistulli claimed that community organizers were under pressure to find "folks that would be predisposed to arguing in favor" of the initiative and to get them involved in the campaign. Lind, who was recommended to me by Stand for Children leadership, fit this description exactly. After being told by one Boston school that her daughter would need to be held back due to her reading scores, Lind had her daughter transferred to a new school, where her daughter's scores excelled past grade level. Lind attributed the improvement to the quality of the teaching at her daughter's new school. When she contacted multiple organizations to "tell [her] daughter's story," only Stand for Children would listen. Although she joined the organization after the launch of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign, Lind became a vocal advocate for the ballot initiative, especially for provisions that would make it easier for principals to dismiss underperforming teachers.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Outcomes

Fischer (2003) notes that a "frame shift" can occur over time as individuals in a policy community "may simply find oneself as having come to think about things in a different way" (p. 145; Rein & Schoen, 1993). This appears to describe the transformation in perceptions about Stand for Children following the announcement of the ballot initiative. In my analysis of the context of outcomes, the "ERAO as antagonist" was much more common than the "ERAO as antidote" identity. Outreach materials against the initiative commonly framed Stand for Children's Massachusetts office as a vehicle for corporate influence in public education. Meanwhile, virtually every interview

participant, including Stand for Children's allies in the business community, mentioned the Aspen Institute as evidence of the organization's true leadership and purpose.

Additionally, Stand for Children's image in media coverage changed dramatically.

Previously, media coverage praised Stand for Children as a genuine community-based organization. By mid-May 2012, only weeks before the compromise deal was announced, Stand for Children's image had morphed into its opposite. No longer a ground-up organization, representing the interests of Massachusetts' parents and teachers, Stand for Children was framed as a brash political insurgent, motivated by an anti-union national agenda. Because news coverage often operates "strictly within the limits of public understanding and tolerance to maintain large circulations and high advertising revenues" (Haas & Fischman, 2010, p. 537; Allan, 1999; Fairclough, 1995), changes in media coverage indicate that, over the course of the ballot campaign, the antagonist framing had become much more prominent in the public's understanding of Stand for Children and its political objectives^{vi}.

Data analysis in the context of outcomes, then, provides further evidence that the antagonist framing is linked to the underlying discourses about Education Reform Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs) that were introduced in Chapter Four:

- ERAOs are anti-union organizations
- ERAOs are driven by their national leadership and funders

Amidst more widespread critique of the organization, Stand for Children became more commonly associated with the privatization agenda. I identify this assumption as an additional underlying discourse evident within the "ERAOs as antagonist" framing:

- ERAOs are agents of the privatization agenda

Based on the analysis presented above, I argue that the organization's decision to compromise was, in part, an attempt to change the conversation about Stand for Children and its role in Massachusetts, and, in part, a response to concrete policy struggle. Given wider perception of Stand for Children as an antagonist, it seems reasonable to think that, in compromise, the organization aimed to promulgate a new, more favorable image of its purpose and political mission. Additionally, the decision to pursue compromise also appeared to be aimed at solving policy conflicts at overlapping levels of scale: it satisfied the national mandate to win the campaign, while ostensibly giving state-level leaders time to restore relationships with the policy making community and to focus on building its urban community organizing network.

As described above, referring to teacher evaluation reform in Illinois, Stand for Children's national Executive Director stated that the organization aimed "to very quickly make similar changes in other very entrenched states." Ostensibly, the decision to compromise was directed towards achieving this goal. Throughout interviews and public observations, there was considerable debate over whether Stand for Children would have taken the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative to the ballot or, instead, whether the organization intended all along to use the initiative to force compromise. However, statements from the national office, as revealed in my interview with Charles Cistulli, indicate that the organization's highest priority was getting a quick win regardless of the vehicle. And, as promised in the Aspen Institute video, the compromise law allowed Stand for Children to claim success in passing reform of teacher job security in a highly unionized state.

Meanwhile, at the state level, the decision to pursue compromise appeared to be directed towards demonstrating that Stand for Children could be a collaborative partner with others in the policy arena. As noted above, many were surprised when Stand for Children announced plans to file a ballot initiative for the 2012 election. Very quickly, the organization found itself isolated from virtually every major player in the policy making community. In our interviews, Stand for Children leadership described the compromise as an effort to repair these relationships. Washington, for example, explained that the decision to pursue compromise was motivated by the notion that the process of implementing the compromise law would be “far more effective and far more positive if you’re able to go into it with all of the key stakeholders agreeing to the new law.” The embrace of collaboration, of course, represents a marked reversal from Stand for Children’s approach to the ballot initiative in which the organization emphasized its boldness and independence as a key part of its contribution to state policy making.

Lastly, the compromise law appeared to be directed towards restoring Stand for Children’s community organizing network. Data from Cistulli, Weiss and Nathan raised serious questions about the health of the organization’s community presence. Their interviews indicated that Stand for Children encountered a number of obstacles in their efforts to transition to urban communities. In particular, Cistulli explained that the campaign prevented him from building relationships with principals, parents and teachers in his Boston neighborhood. Despite offering sharp critique of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, Cistulli insisted that the organization’s leadership was committed to conducting grassroots community organizing. Interview data from Jaime Lind confirmed

that, in some neighborhoods at least, organizing efforts were indeed led by Stand for Children's local-level membership.

By pursuing compromise, then, the organization ostensibly removed the biggest obstacle to its community organizing efforts. Without the pressure to find "folks that would be predisposed to arguing in favor" of the initiative, Stand for Children would be freed to conduct more genuine community organizing, based on the interests and concerns of local members. These data reveal an important finding regarding policy making in the "neo-democratic" era, suggesting that high-level interest group conflict interferes with democratic engagement for all policy actors, even those who caused it. Although Stand for Children Massachusetts was apparently committed to conducting grassroots community engagement, it was prevented from doing so by the political conflict created by its own national organization.

Interest Group Conflict and Public Engagement in the "Neo-Democratic" Era

The launch and immediate response to "Great Teachers, Great Schools" ballot initiative provides strong indication of the relationship between organizational identity, political discourse and political decision making at Stand for Children and the MTA. Consistent with the "ERAO as antidote" identity, Stand for Children described the ballot initiative as a necessary intervention in a policy making process that often privileges consensus over expediency. Although they did not take the initiative to the ballot box, they were able to claim a sort of victory in using the ballot question to force negotiations that would eventually lead to the compromise law. Meanwhile, MTA's leadership argued repeatedly that, in the current political environment, compromise is the best way for unions to retain a role in the policy making process. Their decision to pursue compromise

was clearly shaped by concerns that the union would have experienced greater losses if the ballot question had made it to the 2012 election.

Political decision making at Stand for Children and the MTA provides evidence of two important characteristics of the “neo-democratic” era: the influence of national level interest group conflict and the substitution of aggregative democracy for the more collectivist notions of deliberative democracy associated with grassroots community organizing. As detailed in Chapter Four, Race-to-the-Top catalyzed a new era of political conflict between teachers’ unions and ERAOs. The data presented above strongly suggest that high-level political conflict continued to shape the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” trajectory in the contexts of text production and outcomes. Although Stand for Children resisted the notion that it was driven by its national leadership, evidence supports the claim that national leadership did indeed play a role both in the decision to launch to ballot initiative and in the decision to pursue compromise. Meanwhile, high-stakes conflict between unions and ERAOs likely prevented national unions from providing support to the MTA and AFT-MA. Data from MTA leaders indicated that the lack of support from the national level was a part of the political calculation that eventually led the union to pursue compromise negotiations.

Additionally, despite mission statements oriented towards more collectivist notions of democratic engagement, MTA and Stand for Children both conducted democratic decision making that aligned with the more individualistic notion of aggregative democracy. As described in Chapter Two, aggregative democracy relies on the tally of individual choices to make decisions about public policy (Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007). As others have observed, aggregative decision making has recently

become confused as a “deceptive double” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 143) of a more active democracy because it covers over public engagement with a sense of majority rule. I use the notion of a new age of aggregative democracy to refer specifically to cases where high-level interest group conflict leads groups to use aggregative decision making to stand in for more deliberative forms of engagement.

Indicative of this so-called deceptive doubling (Sleeter, 2008), when asked about their public outreach efforts leadership at each organization pointed specifically to tallies of individual choices through online surveys or internal polling. This substitution of aggregative democracy for deliberative democracy is an important element of “neo-democratic” decision making. As seen in the analysis above, it allows high-level political actors to claim that they have the support of the public without having to engage in the complicated and difficult process of genuine grassroots organizing.

In Chapter Six, I look at the outcomes of “neo-democratic” policy making in the form of the compromise law that was enacted by the Massachusetts legislature. As above, I pay attention to struggles over democratic engagement at each organization following the enactment of the compromise law. In particular, I explore the extent to which the law was successful in helping Stand for Children to restore relationships with others in the policy arena and to expand its urban field offices. I also explore the political consequences of the MTA’s decision to pursue compromise. I demonstrate that, frustrated with a string of political compromises, MTA’s rank-and-file membership used complex political maneuvering to gain more influence in the future direction of the union. As in previous chapters, I note the relationship between political struggle and political

discourse in each organization's decision making, and I make observations about the role of ERAOs and unions in the new educational policy making arena.

Chapter Six

Context of Outcomes:

A Future Uncertain

In the so-called “compromise law,” Massachusetts S. 2315, MTA and Stand for Children worked together to limit the political damage that each organization might have incurred if the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative had gone to a vote on the 2012 election. The MTA was concerned that the more extreme ballot question would have dramatically negative consequences for teacher job security in the commonwealth. Further, to defeat the initiative at the ballot box would have cost the MTA a lot of money, forcing the union to divert funds from US Senate and State House races. Meanwhile, the ballot campaign jeopardized Stand for Children’s relationship with other state-level policy makers while preventing the organization from conducting genuine grassroots community organizing. As a result, perhaps, of the organization’s flagging reputation, Stand for Children Massachusetts was under high-stakes pressure from its national office to emerge as victorious in the campaign.

The resolution of political conflict between Stand for Children and the MTA left Massachusetts with a new education law. Developed primarily by two men and their lawyers, Massachusetts S. 2315, which will take effect in September 2016, has the potential to impact the learning experiences of the nearly one million children in Massachusetts’ K-12 public education system. Its provisions regarding teacher tenure and job security will very likely influence the careers of the state’s roughly 70,000 K-12 teachers. This chapter explores the context of outcomes for the compromise law, especially consequences regarding the prospects for democratic engagement in the “neo-

democratic” era. I build the argument that, following the compromise, each organization suffered political consequences that now shed doubt on their ability to help point a productive path towards more inclusive, democratic educational policy making.

As in previous chapters, I first provide a brief overview of the policy text of Massachusetts S. 2315, the enacted legislation known as the “compromise law” developed by Stand for Children and the MTA. I pay close attention to the key policy changes that each side agreed to when transitioning from the proposed ballot initiative to the compromise law. This discussion is important for later assessing arguments that each side made about who “won” and “lost” in the compromise. Given the highly secretive nature of the negotiations, leaders at each organization were reluctant to offer details about how the law was developed. Unlike previous chapters, then, I am unable to offer details regarding the context of text production for the compromise law.

I then explore the political outcomes of the compromise law for each organization. I locate the context of outcomes for the compromise law in the time period following the enactment of the compromise law, in June 2012, through to the key events currently shaping the political activity at each organization. According to Ball (1994a), the context of outcomes is the domain of analysis that compares policy making to a normative notion of social justice (see also: Lingard, 1996; Minh Ngo et al., 2006; Vidovich, 2007). I compare the outcomes evident during this time period to a normative notion of democratic engagement as drawn from deliberative democratic theory. Using the same format as previous chapters, I explore relevant political struggles at the national, state and local levels, and I characterize the relationship between discourse and political decision making at each organization.

This chapter builds the argument that the struggle between competing perspectives on teachers' unions and ERAOs only intensified following compromise, raising important questions about the prospects for public engagement in the "neo-democratic" era. As described in Chapter Four, teachers' unions and non-profit organizations have enormous potential for helping to increase democratic engagement in school policy making. Following compromise, however, the political fortune of each organization took a major hit. Stand for Children and the MTA now face an uncertain future in Massachusetts educational policy making. Meanwhile, the public is left with even fewer avenues for influencing future policy debates.

Focal Policy: Massachusetts S. 2315, *An Act Providing for the Implementation of Education Evaluation Systems in School Districts*

To analyze the text of the compromise law, I used a methodology that mirrors my analysis of the ballot initiative. I first conducted open coding of the text to identify the specific policy mechanisms of the compromise law. I relied primarily on analysis of the official enacted legislation, and where relevant, I drew from summaries created by Stand for Children and the MTA to describe the new law to the general public. In order to compare the compromise law to the ballot initiative, I used the same list of policy mechanism codes: "teacher tenure and seniority," "in-district teacher transfer," "collective bargaining rights," and "miscellaneous policy changes." I also remained open to policy mechanisms that were not a part of the ballot initiative, but came to be included in the compromise law.

Within each code, I then compared the ballot initiative to the compromise law, and I organized policy mechanisms into two categories: “provisions of the compromise law,” and “proposals removed in compromise negotiations.” The discussion below is organized according to these two overarching categories. I first detail the most important provisions of the new law, describing key differences between the ballot initiative and the enacted legislation. I then list the ballot initiative proposals that were removed entirely in compromise negotiations. As in my discussion of the ballot initiative, I give the most attention to policy mechanisms that garnered the most controversy: changes to teacher tenure and job security.

Provisions of the compromise law. Two major policy mechanisms were modified in the transition from the ballot initiative to the compromise law: teacher tenure and job security, and rules regarding in-district teacher transfer. Additionally, two other mechanisms were not included in the ballot initiative but became part of the compromise law: the provision of funding for professional development related to teacher evaluation and the creation of a state-wide data system to track evaluation results.

Teacher tenure and seniority. Attracting considerable controversy, the ballot initiative aimed to prohibit the use of Professional Teacher Status (PTS) and seniority as the primary criteria in cases of “reductions in force,” or instances where administrators are forced to cut a teaching position due to declining funding or enrollment. As a reminder, PTS is a close analog to tenure that is typically awarded to teachers in good standing after three years of service at a particular school. Under existing Massachusetts law, districts were required to retain teachers with PTS over non-PTS teachers in cases of a reduction in force. Additionally, when deciding between two teachers who both have

PTS, districts were allowed to use seniority as the primary factor in determining who got to keep their job. Instead of PTS and/or seniority, the ballot initiative proposed that all dismissal decisions would be determined primarily by the results of teachers' performance evaluations.

The compromise law preserved existing job protections associated with PTS while changing the role of seniority in cases where administrators must choose between two teachers who both have PTS. Under the compromise, districts were required to keep teachers with PTS over non-PTS teachers, regardless of their performance evaluations. Additionally, while the ballot initiative aimed to raise the standards for earning PTS, the compromise law retained existing law allowing administrators full discretion in determining PTS awards. As I describe below, the preservation of job protections related to PTS was a major aspect of MTA's claims to success in compromise.

In exchange for concessions on PTS, perhaps, the union gave ground on the role of seniority in teacher dismissal. The compromise law included many of the restrictions on seniority that were originally proposed in the ballot initiative. Most importantly, districts are prohibited from using seniority as the primary criterion in dismissal decisions necessitated by a reduction in force. Additionally, under the ballot initiative, districts would have been required to use seniority as a tie breaker in cases where performance evaluations were equal. The compromise law, meanwhile, allowed districts to negotiate regarding whether they wanted seniority to count even that much, essentially leaving the door open for districts to negotiate seniority out of their contracts entirely.

Along with the changes to seniority rules, both sides agreed to important changes in how performance evaluations would be used in dismissal decisions. Under the ballot

initiative, differences in performance ratings would have mattered at each of the four ratings of the evaluation system – i.e., “exemplary,” “proficient,” “needs improvement,” and “unsatisfactory.” According to this system, districts would have been required to keep, for example, a four-year veteran with an “exemplary” rating over a 20-year veteran with a “proficient” rating. Under the compromise law, however, dismissal rules are only triggered for teachers who are judged to be below proficiency – i.e., “unsatisfactory” or “needs improvement.” This effectively made “exemplary” and “proficient” the same rating for the purpose of dismissal decisions. In other words, a teacher who received a “proficient” rating could still retain her or his position over a colleague with an “exemplary” rating.

The compromise law, therefore, moderated a key aspect of the original ballot initiative. The initiative aimed to make performance evaluations the most important factor in all dismissal decisions necessitated by a reduction in force. Under the compromise, however, performance evaluations are used only in cases where principals had to decide between two teachers who (a) both had PTS and (b) had considerably different performance evaluations – i.e., one who was “proficient” or above, and one who is below proficiency. These changes would later feature prominently in debate about who “won” and “lost” in compromise. Stand for Children staff would argue that restrictions on the use of seniority accomplished one of the organization’s “key objectives” in the compromise negotiations. Others, however, would raise questions about “loopholes” in the law that water down its impact.

In-District Teacher transfer. The compromise law also restricted the use of seniority as the primary criterion in teacher transfers between two schools in the same

district. Specifically, the compromise law prohibited consideration of seniority in virtually all types of teacher personnel decisions, including recall, voluntary transfer and involuntary transfer. By way of brief background, “recall” refers to cases where teachers who are laid off due to a reduction in force retain rights to be recalled back to their position if district funding and/or student enrollment increases. Meanwhile, “voluntary transfers” are cases where teachers request to be transferred to a comparable teaching position at another school in the district, and “involuntary transfer” refers to cases where principals request that teachers are transferred to another school.

The compromise law prohibited the use of seniority as the primary criterion in each type of personnel decision. For example, when deciding between two teachers in a recall case, districts must consider prior performance evaluations before considering length of service. Similarly, when making decisions about voluntary and involuntary transfers, teachers receive priority according to their performance evaluations. As in cases of dismissal, seniority is reserved as a potential tie breaker in cases where two teachers have comparable performance evaluations. Changes to transfer rules, however, garnered much less controversy than changes regarding teacher dismissal. As noted in Chapter Five, it was already uncommon, even in large, urban districts, for seniority to be the primary criterion in recall or transfer decisions.

The ballot initiative sought another major change to in-district transfer decisions. Specifically, the initiative would have required “pure mutual consent” between principals and superintendents when making decisions about teacher transfer. This provision was intended to prevent the so-called “dance of the lemons,” where administrators transfer underperforming teachers to another school in the district instead of processing an

outright dismissal. Under existing law, principals could be required to comply with the final decision of the district superintendent. The provision of “pure mutual consent,” however, would have given the final word to school principals who would have gained veto authority over a superintendent’s decision, effectively allowing school leaders to prevent underperforming teachers from transferring into their building.

The compromise law relaxed the “pure mutual consent” provision proposed in the ballot initiative, requiring instead that principals and superintendents negotiate “in good faith” over transfer decisions. Applicable to labor-management negotiations far beyond the field of education, the term “good faith” carries legal weight as defined in Massachusetts law. This provision, then, requires that principals and superintendents meet to negotiate transfer decisions in a way that is consistent with the legal definition of “good faith” negotiations. Ultimately, however, the compromise law preserved existing rules that give superintendents the final authority over in-district transfers.

As described in Chapter Five, the MTA argued that “pure mutual consent” might have created an incentive for principals to place underperforming teachers in the transfer pool instead of removing them through the more lengthy process of a formal dismissal. By preserving the final authority of the superintendent, the union argued that it would then be incumbent on principals to process dismissals to ensure that underperforming teachers do not end up in another district school. Torrington noted that, even though it was not required by existing Massachusetts law, “good faith negotiation” was already common practice in many school districts.

Professional development funding. As noted in Chapter Five, the Massachusetts constitution prohibits ballot initiatives from making “a specific appropriation” of state

funding. The ballot initiative, then, would have required that districts implement professional development for evaluators; however it could not provide funds to cover the cost of training, and it would not have required districts to offer training for teachers. The compromise law, meanwhile, provided \$3.5 million of an estimated \$5 million to provide professional development for administrators as well as teachers. Additionally, the law required that districts allocate some of their foundational budget to professional development on teacher evaluation, and it allowed districts to use additional funds from their Title IIA allocation to cover any remaining cost. As I describe below, these provisions, which were not possible via the ballot initiative process, were central to union leaders' claims that the compromise law was a victory for its members and for the state more generally.

Data tracking system. Lastly, the compromise law created a state-wide system for data collection related to teacher evaluations. Specifically, the law stipulated that data tracking will be used “for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of district evaluation systems in assuring effective teaching and administrative leadership.” Results will be made available to the public, however, provisions in existing Massachusetts law will protect the identity of individual teachers. The law also established a “data advisory committee” that will make recommendations to the state regarding the types of data to be collected and the methods for disseminating information to schools and to the general public. Examples of potential data sources include surveys of teachers and administrators, and district reports of the percentage of teachers at each of the four levels of the state’s evaluation rating scale. Both sides claimed that the new data systems were a sign of the strength of the compromise.

Provisions removed from the ballot initiative. Two major proposed changes were removed from the original text of the ballot initiative: restrictions on collective bargaining, and the 2013 start date. As one might expect, the union and its supporters cited each provision as evidence that the MTA was victorious in compromise negotiations. Stand for Children, meanwhile, argued that each provision was peripheral to its central policy goal: restrictions on seniority-based job protections.

Collective bargaining rights. The ballot initiative proposed a variety of restrictions to collective bargaining related to teacher evaluation; however, none of these changes made it into the compromise law. Most importantly, the ballot initiative aimed to give the state veto power over district-level evaluation protocols, effectively nullifying any collective bargaining done at the local level. The compromise law, however, preserved districts' ability to collectively bargain over the parameters of their teacher evaluation system without fear of state veto. Additionally, the ballot initiative would have eliminated collective bargaining regarding all topics related to teacher evaluation, with exceptions for a few minor issues. The compromise law preserved collective bargaining rights in all aspects of teacher evaluation, as currently written under Massachusetts law

2013 start date. If passed as a ballot initiative, proposed changes would have become effective in some districts roughly seven weeks later, at the start of 2013. Specifically, the ballot initiative would have required that the new provisions were incorporated into teacher contracts as they expired. Some districts, then, would have been required to implement changes in the ballot initiative immediately. Other districts, meanwhile, would have been able to wait until their contracts expired, which could have been several years in the future. The compromise law, however, required that all districts

incorporate new provisions by September 1st, 2016, regardless of the expiration date of their contract. The union and its supporters argued that these changes ensured that all districts would have enough time to pilot the new teacher evaluation system before adding high-stakes consequences for teacher job security. Stand for Children, meanwhile, explained that this was a victory for them because it set a uniform date for implementing the new law.

Strength No More?

Struggles over the Meaning of Compromise and Union Political Influence

Instead of fighting the initiative, the MTA decided to join hands with Stand for Children to develop compromise legislation. In this section, I demonstrate that the compromise only inflamed tensions between the union's state-level leadership and its rank-and-file membership. Following the compromise, state level leaders defended reform-oriented unionism, noting that their decision making was widely supported by others in the Massachusetts policy making community. Meanwhile, rank-and-file membership held fast to social justice-oriented unionism and expanded their organizing efforts against state-level leaders. Below, I trace the contours of policy struggle within the MTA following the compromise, and I highlight key changes in union political activity and democratic outreach.

As in Chapter Five, I include discussion of political outcomes for the AFT-MA in order to highlight differences between the "union as reformer" and "union as advocate" perspectives. As illustrated in consequences for the MTA, reform-oriented unionism may earn respect of others in the state policy community while risking conflict with rank-and-file membership. Meanwhile, as evident in outcomes for the AFT-MA, unions that

remain committed to local-level community organizing may lose influence in the state policy community. I use this discussion to raise questions about the meaning of union strength in the current policy era. Ultimately, I argue that, indicative of the “neo-democratic” era, unions face a complex array of pressures that weaken their political influence and/or distract from meaningful engagement of local-level membership.

National/Federal Level Politics

My analysis of interviews with leaders at MTA and AFT-MA indicates that national-level unions were likely supportive of the MTA’s decision making. Because the MTA struck compromise with Stand for Children, the union did not have to spend money to launch a public outreach campaign against the ballot initiative. Union leaders, then, were able to direct funding towards defeating more extreme anti-union legislation in other parts of the country. As a result, perhaps, unions were successful in their campaign against Idaho’s so-called “Luna Laws,” a series of ballot questions that proposed eliminating virtually all existing job protections and collective bargaining rights for public school teachers.

Meanwhile, in Massachusetts, union support helped to propel working class champion Elizabeth Warren to victory in her US Senate race against Republican Scott Brown. In our interviews, union leaders at the MTA did not mention whether they received support from national-level leadership over the decision to compromise. Consistent with data presented in earlier chapters, it appears that national-level leaders

were too consumed with larger struggles to play a role in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign and compromise.

State Level Politics

Following the compromise, the MTA published a list of 32 items that were originally included in the ballot initiative and argued that it was able to convince Stand for Children to remove 29 of them in the course of compromise negotiations. The remaining three provisions were the state-wide ban on the use of seniority in dismissal and transfer decisions, respectively, and the requirement that superintendents and principals negotiate “in good faith” over in-district transfers. Across my full portfolio of interviews, there was staunch disagreement about whether the MTA was as successful as it claimed. At the state level, the MTA’s compromise was lauded as evidence of union strength in a changing political environment. Meanwhile, the MTA’s own membership argued the exact opposite, framing the compromise as a sign of the union’s declining strength in the face of neo-liberal reform. In this section, I explore the response to compromise among the state-level policy making community. Then, in the following section, I explore major changes originating at the local level that will shape the union’s future influence in the state.

Many of the state-level policy stakeholders I interviewed argued that the MTA had successfully wrangled key concessions from Stand for Children. According to this argument, the MTA was able to preserve job security provisions and collective bargaining rights for its members, without giving up much on its side of the negotiation.

Typical of these responses, a local business leader reflected that “the real winner on substance was [the MTA President] because he got a pretty favorable settlement,” referring, specifically, to the preservation of collective bargaining. He continued to explain that the MTA president “came out looking good to a lot of people, statesman-like.” Perhaps most importantly, the MTA was able to preserve supportive working relationships with state lawmakers. Referring to MTA leadership, Timothy Manning, a high-level State House staff member, reflected that lawmakers were “happy that they were able to make [the ballot initiative] go away” by pursuing compromise.

By contrast, analysis of outcomes for the AFT-MA offers an indication of the potential political collateral of social justice-oriented unionism. When the compromise was announced, AFT-MA released a public statement in opposition, disparaging the compromise deal as “extreme legislation” that undervalues teacher expertise and experience. In the media and interviews, however, the AFT-MA was widely criticized as irrelevant to political debate and policy development at the state level. With many media articles noting both the governor’s and the legislature’s support for the compromise law, AFT-MA was easily framed as being on the wrong side of the momentum, “eternally out-of-touch” (Boston Herald, 2012) and irrationally committed to defense of the status quo.

Interview data revealed that the MTA’s flexibility endeared them to others in the policy community, potentially making compromise possible. An AFT-MA affiliate, the Boston Teachers’ Union (BTU) took an oppositional stance against both the ballot initiative and compromise law, as advocated by many of MTA’s critics. Contrasting Torrington with Ryan Swartzak, the BTU president, an influential business leader stated blankly that “if it had been Stand [for Children] versus the Boston Teachers’ Union,

everybody would've been with Stand [for Children] militantly," referring to the business community specifically. He noted that there is a lot of animosity for BTU's combative leader because "they're really unreasonable," while the MTA President "knows that things have to change in the schools" and is willing to work with others to make that change happen.

Interestingly, MTA's conflict with its own members may have also played a role in wider support for the union's leadership. Alex McCarthy, a Senior Advisor to a prominent state-level business organization, told me that "because [Torrington] was under threat within his union for reelection, there was a certain desire to help him out and support him because he's an important, positive player." In the following section, I explore the ways that the compromise law shaped the struggle between reform-oriented and social justice-oriented unionism, leading to major changes in the future of the state's largest teachers' union.

Local Level Politics

In stark contrast to the response from the state policy making community, MTA's critics argued that compromise made the union weaker. Despite the concessions that the MTA was able to achieve in compromise, the union's critics argued that Stand for Children emerged having achieved its primary goal: to chip away at teachers' seniority rights. Michelle Nolasco, an early leader of the EDU caucus, argued that giving away seniority protections of any kind is a loss for the union, because "once we touch seniority at all, all we can do is keep giving up a little more, a little bit more, until there's none."

Similarly, Joan Wheeler, also a member of EDU, explained that many teachers found it “demoralizing” that the MTA was not a more aggressive defender of seniority rights and job protections.

MTA’s critics stated that they would have preferred that the union launch a full-scale campaign to fight the initiative at the ballot, no matter the cost. Ryan Kershaw, a Boston teacher, argued that it could have been “a healthy loss” as it would have forced the union to organize its membership base and to form relationships with community-based organizations, efforts that would help them in the next fight. Similarly, during a breakout session at meeting of the EDU caucus, many agreed with an MTA member who reflected that “it’s not as bad to hear ‘I lost’ as it is to say ‘I gave up’.” As revealed in the following excerpt from my interview with Nolasco, MTA critics framed the compromise law as part of a steady capitulation towards corporate interests that began with the health care bill:

because we haven’t fought for single payer, because we didn’t fight for pension, because we didn’t fight for health insurance, and because we didn’t fight Race-to-the-Top and because we didn’t fight Stand [for Children]. That’s five fights we haven’t fought. So, it’s five fights less prepared than we are, and honestly if we had fought and lost I don’t think we would have lost as much.

Consistent with the “union as reformer” framing introduced in Chapter Four, union leaders countered that the reforms in the compromise law were defensible because they were also accompanied by increased revenue. Kristen Schierholtz, Director of

MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice, argued that increased funding for teacher professional development made the compromise law a "100% win for us." When asked how she would respond to an EDU member critical of the compromise, she emphasized the funding, which was not part of the ballot initiative, saying to critics "we gave you money, and now if you can't find any other source of money, use the money that we gave you." Of course, this argument closely resembles MTA's arguments in support of Race-to-the-Top as well as the other policy battles listed by Nolasco in the above excerpt.

Importantly, MTA's critics tied reform-oriented unionism to the union's secrecy in each policy battle. As noted by union's supporters and critics alike, MTA leadership was reluctant to frame the Stand for Children ballot initiative as part of the corporate agenda for school reform. Raymond DeJesus, a community organizer at Jobs with Justice, suggested to union leaders that critique of Stand for Children's ties to big business was a potentially effective messaging strategy because "people are fed up with corporate domination"; nonetheless, leaders at both unions resisted. At a public meeting convened by Jobs with Justice following compromise, Torrington explained that he did not like the corporate messaging because it did not resonate well in informal conversations with teachers in his hometown of Cambridge. He said that many spouses and children of teachers work for large corporations, and that, as a result, teachers believed that corporate investment could lead to positive change in public schools.

Union leaders preferred instead to promote Massachusetts' status as a leader in public education. According this argument, since Massachusetts ranks first in many national comparisons, there is no need for dramatic school reform as proposed by the

ballot initiative. For example, in our interview, Torrington remarked that “here in Massachusetts it’s rather difficult to find a lot of fault with the system when you’re number one in the nation.” He elaborated that unions can best prevent corporate influence in public education by talking more proactively about what is already going well in public schools. He reflected that “if parents had a sense that they were getting the best, we wouldn’t have this need for this influx of charter schools in particular” and for other policy solutions generally associated with the neo-liberal agenda.

It is important to note that, in emphasizing the state’s academic ranking, union leaders appeared, again, to overlook outcomes for the low-income and minority students who are typically on the lower end of the state’s achievement gap. As noted in Chapter Five, the MTA justified its decision to compromise based, in part, on a cost-benefit analysis of the outcomes for its membership, which is composed primarily of teachers from wealthy, predominantly white school districts. MTA’s arguments about Massachusetts’ overall achievement offers another data point to suggest that concerns for economic and/or racial disparities did not seem to factor into the union’s decision making.

The MTA’s critics, meanwhile, argued that the union’s resistance to corporate messaging was tied to its reluctance to engage in grassroots community organizing. Referring to the privatization agenda, Nolasco explained that “if [MTA leaders] don’t talk about it, it means they don’t have to organize around it.” According to Nolasco and other MTA critics, promoting the privatization argument would make it more difficult for union leaders to negotiate compromises largely outside of public view, as they did in

debate over the *Achievement Gap* legislation and, of course, in the development of the compromise law.

Frustrated with union compromises, EDU leaders became engaged in more aggressive community organizing against MTA leadership. Nolasco explained that she hoped “to shift the tide of the MTA away from capitulation towards really organizing, really listening, and really setting your agenda based on what you heard the rank-and-file want.” In particular, Nolasco, Wheeler and other EDU leaders launched wider outreach to local union presidents to solicit their concerns regarding the union’s political activity. EDU then planned a state-wide meeting held in December of 2012, several months following the official enactment of the compromise law. While the overarching purpose of the meeting was to convene a conversation among MTA’s critics in rank-and-file membership, the conference did engage one very specific goal: to unseat MTA’s current leadership.

In May 2014, Terry Span, MTA’s vice president, would run to replace Torrington, who had reached the end of his term limits as president. MTA’s leadership is elected by a vote of delegates who meet each May for the union’s Annual Meeting. Because it is common for the sitting MTA vice president to replace a term-limited president, many expected Span to become president when delegates voted at the MTA’s 2014 Annual Meeting. Similarly, in our interviews, all three state level leaders at the MTA disparaged the future political influence of the EDU caucus. Span, in particular, described EDU as “a bump in the road,” predicting that the group’s influence would only extend as far as gaining a few seats on MTA’s executive board, at most.

Starting at their December 2012 meeting, however, the EDU caucus began planning an effort to nominate a controversial figure, Barbara Madeloni, who ran against Span on a platform that emphasized a return to social justice-oriented unionism. To call Madeloni's candidacy a long-shot was a vast understatement. Formerly a University of Massachusetts professor of teacher education, Madeloni had never held union office of any kind and was long removed from her short tenure as a public K-12 teacher. Additionally, Madeloni had just been dismissed from her position at the University of Massachusetts amidst near-national levels of controversy.

Madeloni became something of a regional icon for the fight against corporate influence in public education due to her protest of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). A partnership between Stanford University and the Pearson publishing company, the TPA required that teacher candidates in participating states submit videos of their teaching performance that would be reviewed by Pearson representatives in order to determine if candidates were qualified for licensure. Given the increased role of a for-profit company in teacher development, the TPA became a cause celebre for opponents of neo-liberal reform. Aided by a feature in the *New York Times* (Winerip, 2012), Madeloni quickly became the firebrand face of the movement against the TPA. When Madeloni lost her job at the university later that fall, many suspected that it was tied to the controversy generated regarding the TPA.

Given her limited experience in union leadership and her polarizing reputation, union leaders and casual observers alike were shocked when Madeloni defeated Span by a margin of over one hundred votes at the MTA's 2014 Annual Meeting. Ultimately, Madeloni ran a successful campaign by criticizing the reform-oriented approach favored

by Torrington and Span. As illustrated in the following excerpt, the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative figured prominently in Madeloni’s campaign. In a statement to supporters, she asked:

When Stand for Children comes back for its next bite out of our union rights, or [when] our political "allies" come after our pensions, and you know they will, do we once again cut an insider deal and declare "it could have been worse"? I don't think so. We need new leadership with experience--not with things as they have been, but with things as they might be.

Although she has only been in office for several months, Madeloni’s leadership has already signaled a new direction for union political activity. In late 2014, the Massachusetts’ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education proposed rewriting state regulations in order to tie teacher re-licensure to performance evaluations. According to the proposal, teachers rated below “proficiency” on the new evaluation system would lose their teaching license, effectively ending their career in Massachusetts’ public schools.

Under Madeloni’s leadership, the MTA organized members to protest the proposed changes. Media outlets reported that a shocking 45 thousand members, nearly half of MTA’s total membership, sent emails to the department of education to express their opposition (see Vaznis, 2014). Additionally, state-level leadership rented buses to send members to testify at public hearings. Before the meetings were even held, however, the department rescinded the proposal citing that the controversy was distracting from a

broader effort to streamline the re-licensure process. The effort caught the attention of high-profile voices in the larger education policy arena. On her widely read blog, Diane Ravitch (2014) called the re-licensure battle an “astonishing victory” for the MTA. Alluding to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” compromise, Ravitch (2014) noted that “this time, the teachers of Massachusetts under bold leadership were militant and well organized, and they won. That is the only way to stop destructive reformers. Not by meeting them half way.”

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Outcomes

As described in Chapter Four, teachers’ unions may be a key part of any effort to move beyond the narrow notions of public accountability that have been dominant in the neo-liberal era. The data presented above, however, indicate that unions face major consequences for compromise and opposition alike, threatening their role promoting democratic engagement in school policy. The MTA’s compromise was widely applauded by others in the state policy making community, yet was roundly rejected by the union’s own membership who felt their voices were not being heard. After a string of political compromises, MTA’s rank-and-file membership organized to unseat reform-oriented leadership with a controversial new president whose leadership firmly aligns with social justice-oriented unionism. Data from key members of the state policy community raise questions about how the MTA’s new leadership will work with others in the state.

Comparing the compromise law to the ballot initiative, Torrington was widely quoted saying that “its better to get shot in the foot than in the head.” He argued that the union is stronger because it both preserved protections for its members while maintaining productive relationships with others in the policy community. The union was still alive, when opposition might have killed it, according to Torrington’s metaphor. In contrast, proponents of the “union as advocate” perspective argued that the union was weaker because it did not organize rank-and-file membership to more aggressively oppose efforts at corporate-oriented reform. MTA’s critics argued that, by negotiating compromises out of public view, leadership conceded to the steady, but inevitable, transformation of public schools in the corporate image.

Interestingly, MTA’s critics tied union secrecy in compromise negotiations to the leadership’s reluctance to frame political conflict as a struggle over corporate influence in public education. As noted above, Raymond DeJesus, a community organizer at Jobs with Justice, reported that MTA leaders shied away from framing the ballot initiative as a vehicle for corporate influence in public education. Instead, leadership preferred to promote Massachusetts’ ranking as a leading state in national comparisons of student academic achievement. Critics charged that resistance to the corporate messaging aided union secrecy. According to this perspective, if union leaders did not acknowledge the corporate agenda, they did not have to organize a long-term fight against it. Whether intentional or otherwise, critique of the corporate influence in public education clearly was not a part of reform-oriented political decision making.

My analysis across Chapters Four and Five indicated that the following discourses were evident within the “union as reformer” framing:

- Neo-liberal reform is a fixture in educational policy making.
- Compromise is necessary to preserve unions' "seat at the table" of policy negotiations.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.
- Community organizing is largely irrelevant in the neo-liberal era.

The union's aversion to corporate messaging appeared to be related to each underlying discourse. By not taking an oppositional stance against corporate influence, the union aimed to demonstrate that it could be a partner in school reform. According to MTA leadership, this helped the union to preserve its seat at the policy table and, as a result, to gain increased revenue for Massachusetts public schools. It is troubling, of course, that union leadership did not find meaningful ways to engage rank-and-file members in this process. It seems, at best, that leadership believed community organizing would not have made much of a difference in the campaign. Meanwhile, as indicated in interview data from Schierholtz, it seems that MTA leadership may have viewed transparency and democratic outreach as an impediment to the compromise negotiations that would have prevented union leaders from getting the settlement that they preferred.

Frustrated with the reform-oriented approach, MTA's critics helped to elect an insurgent candidate for president who ran on a platform promoting social justice-oriented unionism. Although it is early, new leadership has already shifted the organization away from private negotiation and compromise, towards greater grassroots organizing of local-level membership. It remains to be seen, however, whether or to what extent the MTA's new leadership will enjoy productive working relationships with others in the state. As

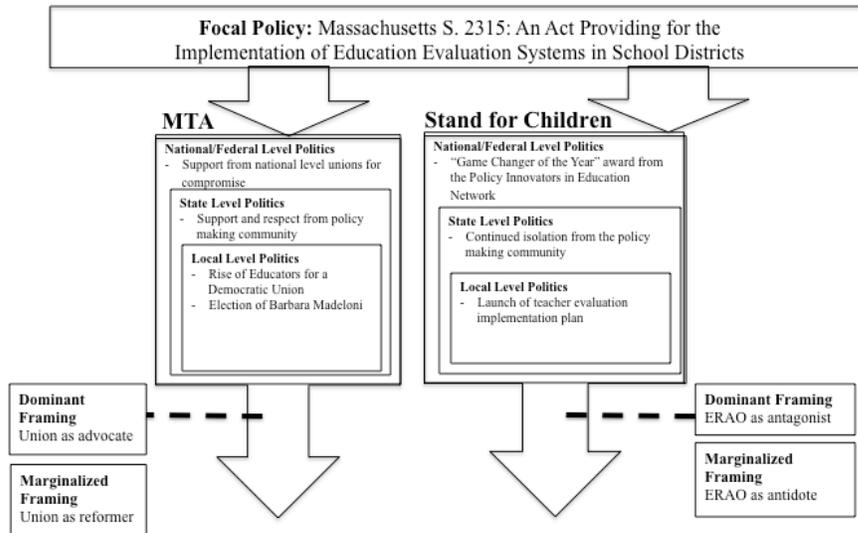
noted above, Alex McCarthy, a prominent business leader reflected that he and others in the business community may have more aggressively supported Stand for Children if MTA leadership had been more combative in its response to the ballot initiative. By all accounts, the new MTA president shares the same oppositional leadership style that McCarthy described as “really unreasonable.” His characterization of BTU leadership, then, may provide an indication of how Madeloni may be received by others in the state.

The difference between reform-oriented unionism and social justice-oriented unionism may be characteristic of union political influence in the “neo-democratic” era. While reform-oriented leadership may preserve positive working relationships with others in the state-level policy community, it is based on a narrow conception of democratic engagement that privileges private negotiation over trenchant, long-term community organizing. Meanwhile, the social justice-oriented approach may pay a high price for staying true to unions’ commitment to grassroots community organizing. By engaging members in political struggle against neo-liberal reform, union leaders are quickly labeled as combative or “unreasonable” by others in the state policy community. Characteristic of the “neo-democratic” era, then, outcomes for MTA and AFT-MA are evidence that unions face major pressures pushing them away from engagement of local-level members, leading some, at least, to abandon those commitments.

In the section below, I turn to the political consequences for Stand for Children in the fallout from the compromise. Ostensibly an effort to preserve its political influence, the compromise left the organization with more questions than answers. With Stand for Children and the MTA facing uncertain futures in the state, there appears to be a shrinking number of avenues for increasing public accountability in educational policy

making. Figure 11 uses the analytic framework presented in Chapter Three to present analysis of outcomes for teachers' unions and Stand for Children.

Figure 11: The Context of Outcomes for Massachusetts S. 2315



Persona Non Grata:

Stand for Children’s Unclear Place in the Massachusetts Policy Making Arena

Struggling to build coalitions at the state and community levels, the compromise was Stand for Children’s best effort to retain influence in the state and, perhaps, to return to community-based democratic engagement. In this section, I use collected data to understand the political outcomes of compromise at the national, state and local levels. Importantly, data indicated that, following compromise, Stand for Children became persona non grata in Massachusetts policy making. As a result, the organization currently remains isolated from others in the state policy community. Also, despite increasing its

community outreach efforts, the organization continues to embrace narrow forms of engagement that fall short of standards for deliberative democratic participation.

National/Federal Level Politics

As detailed in Chapter Five, a former community organizer with Stand for Children reported that the Massachusetts office faced closure if it were to emerge as unsuccessful in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign. Perhaps the best indication of its success, then, is the simple fact that the Massachusetts affiliate continues to operate in the state. Importantly, the compromise was also viewed as successful by advocates for neo-liberal reform. In October 2012, Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office received the “Game Changer of the Year” award from the Policy Innovators in Education (PIE), a coalition of approximately 49 education reform advocacy organizations in 31 states.

As described on the PIE network website, “Eddie!” Awards recognize the “year’s best work of the network” as voted by members of the coalition. In addition to the “Game Changer of the Year” award, Eddies are also given in categories such as “Most Actionable Research” and “Best Ensemble Cast.” Winning organizations are honored in “an Oscars-style awards show” at the coalition’s annual summit. The webpage for the 2012 awards includes a photo of Stand for Children’s Massachusetts leadership who are smiling widely upon accepting their trophy. Underneath the photo, a short caption applauds the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” initiative for “[prompting] negotiations between interested parties on teacher evaluation and placement in Massachusetts.” It is

hard to overstate the extent to which this perspective was out of touch with the response to the compromise at the state level. Instead of receiving recognition at a flashy awards show, Stand for Children was largely shunned by others in the state. Meanwhile, conflict at the state level inhibited efforts at local-level grassroots organizing.

State Level Politics

Interviews with various stakeholders in the Massachusetts policy arena revealed that the compromise cemented Stand for Children's image as an antagonist, operating in opposition to teachers' unions, the state legislature and even those in the business community who share the organization's policy preferences. As detailed in Chapter Five, the organization angered many in pursuit of the ballot initiative. It appears that the compromise was not enough to repair these relationships, as Stand for Children currently remains isolated from virtually all major stakeholders in the policy making community. As a result, the organization now faces major questions about its future influence in the state.

I asked all interview participants if they felt that Stand for Children was able to save face by coming to compromise, and responses were generally lukewarm. This reply, from James Cingrani, a prominent business leader, was typical: "I think prior to this thing they were well respected, and I don't know if they still are; they might be." Similarly, when asked if they are more or less likely to work with Stand for Children in the future, multiple interview participants seemed indifferent. For example, Trevor Skaggs, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents,

remarked that because of its leadership he “would much rather be able to get in the same boat with [the MTA]” in developing policy. Richly indicative of Stand for Children’s image as an outsider, he characterized the organization as composed of “people who don’t live every day doing the work” in schools.

Several interview participants predicted that potential partners may not want to risk their own reputation at the State House by virtue of association with Stand for Children. Typical of a wide array of interview responses, Lisa Niese, Executive Director of the influential Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), reflected that “I was at the State House a couple of days ago and a member of the House leadership told me they were toxic.” Although Stand for Children may have spared the legislature some discomfort by going to compromise, many interview participants agreed with Niese, who explained that the organization “really overstepped” in going to a ballot initiative in the first place, thus drawing disapproval from elected lawmakers. Indicative of Stand for Children’s image at the State House, the Senate Vice Chair of Joint Committee on Education was widely quoted criticizing the compromise law as “the best possible outcome in a hostage situation,” where lawmakers were forced to accept a law that they did not support in order to avoid the more extreme ballot initiative.

If Stand for Children is able to repair its image, the organization will likely need the support of its closest political allies, members of state business organizations who similarly promote neo-liberal reforms for public schools. Interview data indicated, however, that Stand for Children largely remains isolated from the business community. Some business leaders felt that Stand for Children gave up too much in compromise. Because the compromise law preserved job protections for teachers with PTS and

because it changed rules regarding the use of performance evaluations, Niese argued that “there’s so many loopholes you can drive a truck through it.” As noted in Chapter Five, following the launch of the ballot campaign, Niese’s organization, MBAE, released a report calling for dramatic changes to teacher evaluation and job security, including requiring that 50% of teacher evaluations are determined by their students’ results on standardized assessments. Niese and other business leaders who were supportive of MBAE’s perspective were angered, therefore, that the compromise distracted the legislature’s attention from their proposal. Expressing frustration with Stand for Children, they noted that the compromise and the controversy it generated made it highly unlikely that the legislature would return to consideration of teacher evaluation and job security any time soon.

Particularly important for my analysis, Stand for Children further isolated itself from the policy community by abandoning grassroots organizing in favor of controversial state-level policy change. Business leaders agreed with Cingrani, who suggested that Stand for Children “needs to rehabilitate its image” and “build their esteem” in part by returning to community organizing. Alex McCarthy, another business leader, reflected that before the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, Stand for Children “would be helpful in mobilizing people for an issue” and “that endeared them to people.” He expressed desire that Stand for Children return to its “grassroots network” because “that will make people want to work with them.”

For its part, Stand for Children staff members were aware of the fallout from the ballot campaign and the compromise law. Cynthia Pierre, the organization’s Political Director, reflected that “we were like the 1,000 pound gorilla last year in the room.” She

and Washington agreed that “we have some work to do to be a resource” for lawmakers and others in the state. As suggested by business leaders, Stand for Children staff planned to repair the organization’s image through expanded efforts at grassroots organizing. For example, Pierre expressed commitment to working with legislators in part by engaging Stand for Children’s “grassroots presence” to “help figure out what’s next and what [we] can be helpful on.” In the next section, I explore the organization’s primary political effort following compromise: its plans to mobilize its local-level membership to help implement the teacher evaluation system at the centerpiece of the new law.

Local Level Politics

A review of Stand for Children’s implementation plan reveals that the organization’s approach to democratic outreach continues to fall short of standards for multi-voiced, deliberative democratic debate. Instead of generating policy preferences from the ground up, the implementation plan primarily uses local-level membership to conduct surveillance of districts’ efforts to implement the new teacher evaluation system. Further, it is unclear whether Stand for Children is engaged in community organizing beyond the outreach associated with its implementation plan. As detailed in Chapter Five, Stand for Children leaders and even some of its harshest critics noted that the organization is committed to genuine grassroots organizing. Interviews with Stand for Children members, however, raised some questions about the extent to which the organization is engaged in local-level organizing.

Importantly, Stand for Children's implementation plan is directed towards addressing state policy goals, as opposed to organizing around topics of local-level interest. In particular, the organization plans to use members to help guard against inefficiencies in school's implementation of the new teacher evaluation system. Washington explained that local parents and community members can be helpful as "a watchdog" to ensure that the law is being implemented effectively. Towards this effort, Stand for Children will provide members with a list of questions they can ask their children's teachers or school administrators about deadlines for training and implementation of the new system.

Rita Gee, the Government Affairs Director at Stand for Children Massachusetts, is primarily responsible for coordinating the implementation effort. She explained that "if someone says, well I live out in, you know, in fictional town Massachusetts and I know that evaluations aren't happening," they can report this to leaders at Stand for Children or the state department of education. Similarly, Washington explained that he hoped members would "[create] a dynamic of awareness" that might help to identify problems and "to target where it might be helpful for a group like us to apply pressure if necessary to get something moving." Of course, marshaling members to be watchdogs for the new evaluation system is a far cry from genuine community organizing around an issue of local interest. As in the launch of the ballot initiative, then, Stand for Children's implementation plan is informed by a narrow conception of democratic engagement.

Interviews with two Stand for Children members revealed limited evidence of community organizing efforts that more closely align with deliberative notions of democratic engagement. When asked about future community organizing efforts, Nancy

Clippard, a teacher in Winchester, explained that she would be helping to develop the implementation plan described above. Meanwhile, Jaime Lind, a parent and board member of Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office, listed potential organizing campaigns around early education and extended school time. Lind also explained that she plans to work with parents in Boston to “teach people how to vote properly when it comes to our community and education.” This effort involves educating parents about important educational issues and working with them to review the voting records of candidates for public office. At the time of our interview, however, planning had just begun on each campaign, and Lind was not able to offer details about what each might look like.

Discourse and Political Decision Making in the Context of Outcomes

Not unlike its negotiating partner, Stand for Children faced major political consequences following the enactment of the compromise legislation. Lisa Niese explained that, given the resistance to the ballot initiative in the wider policy community, “[Stand for Children] needed an exit strategy” to preserve its reputation in the state. It is unclear whether the compromise achieved its intended goals. Although Stand for Children was successful in passing legislation, the organization further alienated itself from the policy making community. Before compromise, Stand for Children was perceived by some as an antagonist due to high-profile conflicts with teachers’ unions. Following compromise, however, the “ERAO as antagonist” framing became more widespread, as the organization was perceived to be working at odds with teachers’

unions, the state legislature and even its own likely partners in the business community. As a result, the organization now faces an uncertain future with few obvious political allies.

Since the compromise, Stand for Children has largely been inactive in Massachusetts politics. In its most notable news story, John Connolly, a candidate in Boston's 2012 mayoral race, returned a half-million dollar donation from Stand for Children. Suggesting that the organization has a long way to go to gain legitimacy in the state, Connolly publicly stated that he did not want to be perceived as accepting donations from an outside special interest group (Lowery, 2013).

Conflict at the state level appears to have influenced Stand for Children's engagement of local-level members, inhibiting efforts at genuine grassroots community organizing. Stand for Children's most likely allies recommended that the organization rebuild its image by returning to its community-based mission. Stand for Children's implementation plan gestures in this direction, as the organization aims to use community-based membership to help with a common state-wide goal: successful implementation of the new teacher evaluation system. In this effort, however, Stand for Children appears to be using state policy goals to guide local-level engagement; this is perhaps an inversion of a more deliberative approach to public engagement in which local-level goals might inform political advocacy at the state level.

Further, Stand for Children's approach to community outreach it is based on a narrow conception of public engagement. The organization plans to mobilize members to conduct surveillance of school-based teacher evaluation, as opposed to engaging them in open debate about school policy. As indicated in interviews with Stand for Children

leadership, this approach to public engagement is closely related to the “ERAO as antidote” identity. Rita Gee, the Stand for Children staff member in charge of the implementation plan, noted for example that the organization will provide avenues for concerned members of the public to “tell us little things that are going on or not going on or what schools are doing well, what things needs to be improved upon.”

My analysis in Chapters Four and Five indicated that the following discourses were evident within the antidote framing:

- Neo-liberal reform is a vehicle for closing the achievement gap.
- Educational improvement requires a combination of revenue-oriented and reform-oriented policy changes.
- ERAOs are unique organizations that combine state level advocacy and grassroots community organizing.

Based on my analysis in the context of outcomes, I identify an additional discourse evident within this framing:

- Surveillance is an important vehicle for improvement of school-based practices.

It is unclear whether or to what extent the organization is engaged in grassroots organizing that is more aligned with deliberative notions of engagement. Pierre and Washington both reported that membership doubled during the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign to approximately 1,200 members. As noted in Chapter Five, however, this number may be inflated by “members” who signed a pledge supporting Stand for Children, but who are not otherwise involved with the organization. Interview data from Jaime Lind indicated that plans were underway for community organizing around early

childhood education and extended school time; however, at the time of our interview, Lind was not able to offer details about what these efforts might look like. Currently, Stand for Children’s website lists “early education” as an action item, alongside other topics such as “school site councils” and “common core.” While the website includes important information about each topic, it is difficult to get a sense of community organizing efforts associated with issue.

Stand for Children’s political activity following compromise further illustrates the notion of “neo-democratic” decision making, where high-level political conflict distracts from efforts at genuine local-level engagement. Following the announcement of the ballot initiative, Stand for Children became more widely viewed as an antagonist in Massachusetts educational policy making. In compromise, and in its subsequent implementation plan, the organization attempted to rebuild its political relationships by demonstrating that it can be a helpful partner in policy making and school improvement. In these efforts, however, the organization has eschewed deliberative democratic engagement in favor of more shallow forms of outreach associated with aggregative democracy and/or public surveillance.

Prospects for Public Accountability in the “Neo-Democratic” Era

The secrecy of the compromise negotiations should be a matter of concern for advocates of democratic engagement in educational policy making. Interviews with leaders at Stand for Children and the MTA confirmed that the compromise law was written exclusively by leaders at each organization and their lawyers. According to Timothy Manning, a high-level State House staff member, elected leaders were largely

uninvolved in the compromise negotiations. While Stand for Children and the MTA sent lobbyists to the State House to provide updates on the negotiations, Manning reported that State House officials or lawmakers never “tried to influence where they ended up” in the negotiations.

Given the private nature of the negotiations, I was not able to uncover many details about what, exactly, happened in process of writing the new law. When I asked Washington, Stand for Children’s Executive Director, about the compromise negotiations, he described the process as “a genuine give and take where we actually gained some stronger positions in the compromise than we had in the ballot initiative,” including increased funding for professional development on the new teacher evaluation system. Meanwhile, Torrington, the MTA President, described compromise negotiations much differently. He characterized Stand for Children as doing “an awful lot of backpedaling on their part from the original language.” According to his account, Stand for Children “wrote the bill in a fashion that they wanted it, not ever understanding what it was that they were writing.”

It is reasonable to ask why the public should trust this patently undemocratic process of policy development. Indicative of decision making in the “neo-democratic” era, both organizations avoided meaningful engagement of local-level membership and of the public more generally. Outside of public view, each group had the freedom necessary to make strategic political concessions that aimed, ultimately, to resolve high-stakes political conflict in their favor. In contrast with the preferences of some members, for example, MTA agreed to limits on seniority-based teacher job security protections. Meanwhile, Stand for Children walked back from a number of its original proposals,

including more expansive restrictions on teacher job protections and collective bargaining rights. Given the near-nationwide presence of high-level conflict between teachers' unions and ERAOs, this mode of educational policy making may become more common in the years to come. It goes without saying that this does not bode well for democratic engagement in school policy making.

Perhaps most troubling of all is that, after all the controversy and all the complicated political maneuvering, each organization was left with more questions than answers. Both Stand for Children and the MTA face uncertain futures regarding collaboration with state-level policy actors and in their efforts at grassroots community organizing. The election of a social justice-oriented leader at the MTA is a strong indication that the union will make good on its explicit commitment to operating as “a member-driven organization, governed by democratic principles,” as detailed in its own mission statement. However, given the likely reception of the new union leader, it is reasonable to wonder whether the voices of MTA members will be heard in state-level policy debates. Meanwhile, even after compromise, Stand for Children has cemented its image as an antagonist in the Massachusetts policy arena. In response, its teacher evaluation implementation plan aims to demonstrate that the organization can be useful to others in the state. The plan, however, relies on a narrow notion of public engagement for the purpose of surveillance, as opposed to generating thoughtful public debate about issues of local concern.

Understanding changing political dynamics is especially important because teachers' unions and ERAOs have enormous potential as vehicles for democratic engagement in school policy. As detailed in Chapter Two, modern educational policy

making has relied on modes of democratic engagement that fall far short of standards for broad public accountability. Organizations like the Stand for Children and the MTA can play a major role in reversing this trend and promoting educational policy making that is deserving of the public's trust. However, in compromise, each organization suffered political consequences that shed doubt on their own future political influence, let alone their ability to help point a productive path towards more inclusive, democratic educational policy making. In my concluding chapter, then, I look beyond teachers' unions and ERAOs to identify diverse strategies for increasing democratic engagement in educational policy making.

Chapter Seven

Context of Political Strategy:

An Alternative Common Sense

Regardless of one's perspective on the policy that was enacted in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, it is difficult to view the policy development process as anything other than troublingly undemocratic. This concluding chapter presents analysis and reflections oriented towards finding more space for democratic engagement in educational policy making. I start by providing an overview of the main themes of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" policy trajectory. As drawn from the analysis presented in Chapters Four through Six, I offer a detailed definition of what I am calling the "neo-democratic" era of educational policy making, where interest group conflict has created barriers to democratic engagement in policy debate and development. I argue that these barriers have become part of an accepted common sense about how policy is developed in the new policy arena, and I offer an alternative vision that questions whether policy making can be more inclusive and democratic.

As described in Chapter Three, critics of Ball's (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1994a, 1994b) notion of a "policy cycle" charged that it led to analyses that were ultimately unable to offer concrete suggestions for addressing social inequity or injustice (Bacchi, 2000; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Henry, 1993; Lingard, 1993). In response, Ball (1994a) added the "context of political strategy" to his original conception of the policy cycle. Specifically, the context of political strategy is the analytic domain concerned with "identifying strategies to tackle the inequalities" (Vidovich, 2007, p. 289) revealed through analysis across the policy trajectory (see also Lingard, 1996; Minh Ngo et al.,

2006; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). Along these lines, this chapter presents political strategies oriented towards responding to social injustice evident in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, most notably: the exclusion of the public from decision making about public schools. I use this discussion to address my overarching research questions: What does the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case tell us about policy making in the new arena? Is this the policy making system we want in a democratic society? If not, how can we do better?

In describing the context of political strategy for the case, I draw from research and conceptual literature to explore alternative models for democratic engagement. I offer these as building blocks for an approach to educational policy making that aspires to higher notions of public accountability, or debate in which policy makers and concerned members of the public develop “shared accounts” of educational problems and potential political solutions (Dunshire, 1978; Giddens, 1984; Ranson, 2007, 2012). Although, I highlight efforts that could shape political activity at teachers’ unions and Education Reform Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs), I do not limit my discussion to these two types of organizations. High-stakes conflict between non-state actors is likely to be a part of educational policy making for at least the near future. I build the argument that, to counter the negative consequences of interest group conflict, the state should step in to ensure that there are meaningful avenues for the consideration of public voice.

Ultimately, the discussion in this chapter is a small part of a much larger effort to promote “an alternative common sense” (Dumas & Anderson, 2014, p. 16) about democratic engagement in educational policy making. Dumas and Anderson (2014) observe that qualitative policy research has become pigeonholed into generating “policy

prescription,” or evidence of “what works” or what does not work in school-based practices. They argue that research should shift towards the generation of “policy knowledge,” or “information and ideas useful in framing, deepening our understanding of, and/or enriching our conceptualization of policy problems” (p. 8). While prescription can be a useful form of policy research, policy knowledge often goes a level deeper, helping to understand the culture of educational policy making: the beliefs, assumptions and underlying social structures that make certain policies possible while limiting the possibility of others. Importantly, cultural conditions can become accepted as fixed common sense, even though, like all aspects of public policy, they can be revised and restructured as new beliefs gain salience. By reconstructing the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, I aim to generate policy knowledge about the barriers to democratic engagement in the new policy making arena.

It is ironic that perhaps the best model for this effort is Milton Friedman, who is widely regarded as a founding father of neo-liberalism. As its title states clearly, Friedman’s (1995) paper “Public schools: Make them private,” is a seminal part of the movement to privatize public education. Friedman’s earlier work largely helped to chart a path beyond social welfare policies and into the current era of neo-liberal reform. In his 1982 preface to “Capitalism and Freedom,” Friedman explains that a major goal of his work is “to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable” (p. ix, as cited in Dumas & Anderson, 2014, p. 16). My research aspires to the same lofty goal. Where Friedman sought alternative visions for policy, however, I seek more inclusive and democratic alternatives to existing modes of policy making.

Political Expediency and Public Engagement in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” Case

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case presents an unquestionably discouraging vision for the current era of educational policy making. Before Race-to-the-Top and the advent of the new policy making arena in Massachusetts, Stand for Children and the MTA were major vehicles for public engagement in school policy. Starting around 2009, national-level conflict between unions and ERAOs began to shape political battles in Massachusetts, ultimately leading to the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative. With much at stake in the ballot campaign, Stand for Children and the MTA largely abandoned explicit commitments to democratic engagement and grassroots organizing, choosing instead to engage in a highly undemocratic policy making process that was more directed towards winning a political battle than it was about making good and necessary policy change. Both organizations emerged politically weaker and each now face major questions about their future role in the state. At the end of a contentious and complex policy making process, two organizations that used to be powerful vehicles for democratic engagement can no longer be relied upon as such.

Across various contexts of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” policy trajectory, I traced changes in each organization’s “situated identities,” or in the “cultural models – or storylines – that people carry with them about their various social roles” (Rogers, 2004b, p. 52). I demonstrated that Stand for Children and the MTA each found themselves caught between two very different ways of framing their respective social roles in Massachusetts. Further, I noted underlying discourses about ERAOs and

teachers' unions evident in common frames about Stand for Children and the MTA. My analysis revealed that there was a complex and iterative relationship between organizational identity, political discourse, and concrete political decision making, especially regarding efforts at public outreach and democratic engagement.

In this section, I offer a brief summary of the organizational identities about Stand for Children and the MTA as well as key underlying discourses that were evident across the policy trajectory. I pay particularly close attention to the relationship between organizational identity and grassroots democratic engagement. Ultimately, I argue that each organization viewed the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign as a sort of life-or-death battle for political influence in the state. As one might expect from policy making that was approached this way, decision making reflected the urgency of victory – and survival – as opposed to the deliberative and thoughtful process that the public deserves.

Worst Case Scenario? Stand for Children and the Future Political Influence of ERAOs

As I made clear in Chapter Five, Stand for Children put everything on the line for the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot campaign. Consistent with the “ERAO as antidote” framing, Stand for Children staff members and supporters argued that the organization was acting as a bold advocate for students. In their view, the ballot initiative was an antidote to perceived inefficiencies in public policy making, especially the slow process that privileges consensus over urgent changes to existing school policies. Meanwhile, consistent with the “ERAO as antagonist” framing, Stand for Children’s

critics argued that the organization mainly intended to pass a law that would weaken the political influence of the state's teachers' unions. According to this perspective, Stand for Children was motivated by the anti-union agenda of political elites, not the interests of local-level members.

Regardless of one's perspective on Stand for Children's true motivations, it is clear that genuine grassroots community organizing was not a major factor in the launch of the ballot campaign. Indeed, a substantial amount of evidence supports the "ERAO as antagonist" framing, including the explicit statements of Stand for Children's own national-level Executive Director. Meanwhile, even those who promoted the "ERAO as antidote" identity did not offer evidence that the organization was driven by grassroots community engagement. When asked to describe the role that local-level members played in the ballot campaign, Stand for Children's Massachusetts Executive Director primarily referenced a series of polls conducted with Boston Public Schools teachers and with Stand for Children members, as opposed to more collective forms of grassroots organizing. In its most favorable interpretation, then, member engagement in the ballot campaign was limited to a narrow notion of democratic engagement, where decisions were based on the tally of individual choices as opposed to open, multi-voiced public debate.

Almost immediately after launching the ballot initiative, Stand for Children found itself isolated from virtually every major player in the state policy arena. Viewed as an antagonist to others in the policy community, the organization was unable to build a network of community-based field offices in urban neighborhoods. Longtime community activists became skeptical of the organization's intentions, and school principals rarely

returned their phone calls. Perhaps as a result, the Massachusetts office came under high-stakes pressure from national leadership to “win the campaign” in order to preserve its very existence in Massachusetts. Characteristic of “neo-democratic” decision making, high-stakes pressure from interest group conflict prevented the organization from engaging in the meaningful grassroots organizing that was supposedly at the core of its mission. Community organizers were encouraged to simultaneously work on the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign while also organizing around issues of local concern. However, pressure to win the state campaign limited community organizers to superficial forms of local outreach, such as registering campaign supporters in short conversations outside of local grocery stores.

Following the compromise, leaders at Stand for Children signaled interest in returning to its grassroots mission. In at least one case, a Stand for Children field office in a Boston neighborhood began to organize around issues of local concern. However, this case appears to be an outlier in the organization’s overall approach to member engagement. In particular, the organization’s current teacher evaluation implementation plan is directed towards improving Stand for Children’s image with state-level policy makers. Stand for Children’s leaders explained that, during the ballot campaign, they were the “1,000 pound gorilla” in the room and that the implementation plan was oriented towards demonstrating that the organization can be “a resource to [legislators] moving forward.” Instead of conducting genuine grassroots organizing, then, Stand for Children described plans to use local-level members to conduct surveillance of school-level implementation of the state’s new teacher evaluation system. Stand for Children’s political activity following compromise indicates that, even despite the organization’s

best intentions, ongoing political conflict at the state level continued to get in the way of genuine local-level engagement.

This haphazard effort to preserve Stand for Children’s political influence after the compromise ultimately left the organization with more questions than answers. Threatening Stand for Children’s future in the state, the “ERAO as antagonist” framing has only become more widely accepted. State House leaders described Stand for Children as “toxic,” because the organization had forced lawmakers to approve the compromise law against their own political interests. Key stakeholders, including Stand for Children’s allies in the business community, recommended that the organization return to grassroots community organizing in order to rebuild its esteem with lawmakers and others in the state policy making arena. It currently remains to be seen whether the organization will continue to pursue political conflict with teachers’ unions or if it will indeed return to more meaningful grassroots organizing around topics of local concern. At the end of one long road, then, Stand for Children has only found an uncertain role in the state.

The outcomes for Stand for Children may be a sort of worst case scenario for ERAOs, many of which remain dominant in education policy making. A recent report from the Brookings Institution (2015) used surveys of legislators and “policy insiders” in three states to measure the influence of non-profit advocacy organizations on state-level policy development. This research found that, because each state presents unique challenges for advocacy groups, an approach that worked in one state may not work in another (Brookings Institution, 2015). This may help to explain Stand for Children’s poor fortune in Massachusetts. In the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, Stand for Children was labeled by critics as antagonist, driven by the anti-union agenda of its

national leadership and funders. In other states, the “ERAO as antagonist” identity might not have led to the outcomes that it did in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case.

Massachusetts is widely regarded as one of the most strongly unionized states in the country. As indicated in the response to the compromise among others in the state policy arena, many stakeholders viewed the union as a major player in state policy making. Even for those in the business community, who typically disagree with the union’s policy preferences, the anti-union label was a stain on Stand for Children’s image. As described by Lisa Niese, a prominent business leader, influence from Stand for Children’s national leadership indicated that the organization was primarily interested in “their own organizational benefit” as opposed to working productively with others in the commonwealth. Further, as the birthplace of public education, Massachusetts has long been viewed as a bastion of the public system. Many other states have gone much further in reforming public education in the corporate image. In these states, the underlying beliefs regarding corporate-oriented reform may have more political cache.

Additionally, in justifying the use of the ballot initiative, Stand for Children argued that it was pushing back against inefficiencies in traditional modes of educational policy making that have, in their opinion, delayed positive changes for public school students. In other states, this argument may not have clashed so sharply with the beliefs of others in the state policy making arena. As noted in Chapter Five, even those in the business community who shared Stand for Children’s policy preferences were critical of the organization’s decision to pursue a ballot initiative for the 2012 election. Business leaders stated that they would have joined Stand for Children if it had stuck to its original plan to pursue a traditional piece of legislation for the 2014 election. As revealed in

interview analysis, then, the clash between conflicting beliefs about policy making even transcended agreements about policy content, contributing to Stand for Children's isolation from the policy making community. In a different state, where stakeholders have different beliefs about policy making, Stand for Children's reception might have been much more favorable.

The outcomes for Stand for Children in the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, then, may not be indicative of the risks faced by ERAOs in other parts of the country. Instead, the most salient or broadly applicable finding about Stand for Children may be the most troubling one: that the organization was clearly, repeatedly and heavy-handedly directed by its national leadership. After the 2009 launch of Race-to-the-Top, Stand for Children transitioned from a community-based organization focused primarily on local-level revenue campaigns to a state-level advocate for neo-liberal reform. The Executive Director of Stand for Children Massachusetts claimed that this change was directed by "difficult" and "messy conversations" with local-level membership. It is hard to believe, however, that the national leadership did not play a role in the organization's new direction.

Throughout my analysis, data revealed that national leadership drove major decisions about the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" campaign. Interview data with Stand for Children staff revealed that although the organization originally planned to target the campaign for the 2014 election, leadership decided "only five weeks" before the filing deadline to pursue a ballot initiative for the 2012 election. When the organization's political allies in the business community found out about the new timeline, they concluded that "there was a real push from some of their national funders and their

national imperative to go to Massachusetts.” A former Stand for Children staff member also confirmed that this decision was likely handed down from the national leadership because “we weren’t big enough to tell national ‘here’s the deal’.” Most troublingly, when the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign was not going well, national leadership threatened to close the Massachusetts chapter if it was not ultimately successful. Under high-stakes pressure, community organizers felt compelled to “find folks that would be predisposed to arguing in favor” of the proposals in the initiative, as opposed to generating advocacy efforts from members’ interests. Clearly, high-level pressure affected the organization’s decision making, and clearly, this was not a community-based effort driven by local-level concerns.

It is critically important to note that, despite all that was against them, Stand for Children was still able to pass a law that limits seniority-based job protections in a strongly unionized state. Their success in this regard suggests that, even in the most inhospitable environment, ERAOs can still have some degree of influence over state policy. With more favorable conditions, perhaps, Stand for Children may have been able to pass more expansive reform. If ERAOs are to be fixtures in, at least, the near future of educational policy making, it is deeply important that we learn more about them. My research is one step in this direction, and the results are not encouraging, especially for advocates of public engagement in public schools. In particular, the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case suggests that, whether it is intentional or otherwise, ERAOs are deeply caught up in the high-level interest group conflict that is characteristic of the “neo-democratic” era. Despite claims to grassroots community organizing, these organizations may actually be an impediment to democratic engagement in educational policy making,

especially in cases like this one, where they use public voice to support the political decision making of national-level elites.

No Good Options? MTA and the Role of Teachers' Unions in a Changing Policy Arena

While Stand for Children chose to engage in high-stakes political struggle, the MTA found itself embroiled in a conflict it could not avoid. MTA leadership and membership each had very different beliefs about how the union should respond to the ballot initiative. Their responses tell us a lot about questions regarding unions' changing and uncertain place in the new policy arena. As described in Chapter Five, the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" initiative threatened far-reaching changes to teacher job security. In addition to the initiative's proposed restrictions on seniority-based job protections, it would have largely removed protections associated with professional licensure, a very close analog to teacher tenure. A core union issue, the loss of tenure rights in Massachusetts would have gone a long way towards pushing the union into political irrelevance.

In response, MTA leadership promoted what I have called a "reform-oriented unionism," in which union leaders accepted some degree of neo-liberal reform in order to preserve their "seat at the table" of policy negotiations. Leaders argued that this approach allowed the union to limit the reach of public infrastructure reform while securing political victories, often in the form of increased revenue for public schools. Meanwhile, MTA's critics argued that compromise only slowed the progression of neo-liberal reform, but did not prevent it. In contrast to the "union as reformer" perspective, critics promoted

the “union as advocate” identity, in which the union works aggressively to mobilize members to fight perceived social injustice, including the influence of private corporations in public schools. Following a series of several important union compromises, MTA’s critics successfully unseated existing leadership by running an insurgent candidate who pledged a return to social justice-oriented unionism.

Importantly, reform-oriented unionism and social justice-oriented unionism are based on very different underlying beliefs about grassroots community organizing. Convinced that community organizing would not have made much of a difference in the ballot campaign, MTA leadership did not reach out to membership to fight the initiative. Instead, the union engaged Stand for Children in private negotiations that would eventually lead to the compromise law. Despite the union’s explicit commitment to “member-driven” decision making, MTA leaders hid negotiations from its members for a period of several months. When the compromise law was announced, leaders justified their decision making based on internal polling that similarly eschewed collective, multi-voiced debate regarding the pros and cons of the compromise. Troublingly similar to Stand for Children, union leaders used member voice to justify political decisions made at much higher levels of the organization.

Advocates of social justice-oriented unionism, meanwhile, viewed community organizing as central to union political activity and political strength. MTA’s critics located the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” ballot initiative as part of a series of policies that ultimately threatened public education in Massachusetts. They argued that the MTA would be stronger if it fought these initiatives, even if it lost a few campaigns along the way. According to this perspective, running a ground campaign of any kind would have

helped the union to educate members about corporate influence in public education, to understand the struggles that teachers face at the school level, and to connect members' concerns to larger social or educational issues; all of which would improve the union's chances of successfully defeating the next attack on public education. Meanwhile, by folding in compromise, critics argued that the union largely conceded to its political adversaries and, more importantly, to the inevitable expansion of neo-liberal reform.

Clearly, the reform-oriented approach garnered much more support among the state-level policy community. The MTA's compromise was widely viewed as an indication that some unions are retaining influence by adapting political tactics to fit a new and more complicated policy environment. Additionally, state stakeholders lampooned the AFT-MA for attempting the community-based organizing preferred by MTA's critics. Many described the AFT-MA and its largest affiliate, the BTU, as unreasonable political actors. Providing an indication of how MTA's new president will be received by others in the policy arena, state stakeholders argued that, because they oppose most reform efforts, the AFT-MA has largely been excluded from the state policy making community. The outcomes for AFT-MA indicate the high cost that unions might pay when they remain true to their commitment to member-driven, democratic engagement in policy debate and development.

The "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, then, paints a bleak picture of unions' changing role in the new policy making arena. Characteristic of the "neo-democratic" era, high-level pressure has forced unions into making a very difficult political calculus. Race-to-the-Top provided unprecedented political momentum to neo-liberal reforms, especially regarding teacher evaluation and tenure, as well as to the advocacy

organizations that promote such reforms (McGuinn, 2012c). In Massachusetts, Race-to-the-Top presented the MTA with a difficult choice that may be indicative of unions' current place in educational policy making. As described in Chapter Four, delegates at MTA's Annual Meeting passed a resolution opposing Race-to-the-Top. According to MTA's bylaws, union leadership was beholden to the delegates' vote. The MTA, however, faced a variety of political pressures that ultimately led the union away from its membership.

MTA's opposition to Race-to-the-Top could have greatly jeopardized the state's chances of winning a federal grant and the \$250 million that came with it. Additionally, opposition may have poisoned MTA's relationship with the governor, state legislators and others in the policy making community who were supportive of Race-to-the-Top. Under high-stakes pressure, MTA leaders used complicated union rules to gain the legal authority to ignore the anti-Race-to-the-Top resolution passed by MTA delegates. Of course, the union was able to preserve some measure of political influence and to bring increase revenue to the state, two goals that are central to reform-oriented unionism. It is troubling, however, that in the process, union leadership chose to silence the dues-paying members that it was elected to support.

Throughout the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" policy trajectory, the MTA faced difficult political decisions that similarly pitted union leadership between state-level stakeholders and its own rank-and-file members. Unfortunately, these kinds of decisions are likely to characterize educational policy making for the foreseeable future. In the new policy making arena, then, unions may be faced with a question about which is better: support from state-level policy makers whose cooperation may be necessary to retain

political influence or support from rank-and-file members whose perspectives may clash irreconcilably with those in power at the state. In different ways, both options may contribute to the dominance of “neo-democratic” decision making. As indicated in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, unions that choose to find league with the state policy making community may do so at the expense of meaningful member engagement. Meanwhile, unions that engage rank-and-file membership may lose voice and influence at the state level. Albeit for different reasons, unions, like ERAOs, may therefore be unreliable vehicles for increasing public engagement in educational policy making.

Political Pressures of the “Neo-Democratic” Era

For both Stand for Children and the MTA, the compromise law that was hammered out behind closed doors was an exit strategy, designed to minimize political damage. The provisions included in the compromise were driven primarily by what was politically expedient for each organization, and by what gave each group the best chance for survival. I would argue that the compromise law is part of a series of policies that sadly herald the “neo-democratic” era of educational policy making. Like many other states, starting with Race-to-the-Top, Massachusetts policy making became characterized by high-level interest group conflict between teachers’ unions and non-profit advocacy organizations (McGuinn, 2012a). Changes to the policy making arena led to “changes on patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice” (Ball, 1993, p. 16). As described above, when interest groups become engaged in high-level, high-stakes policy battles, they ignored or, in some cases, systematically excluded the voices and

perspectives of those who should matter most: the communities, families and students of America's public education system.

This new pattern of social access – or, indeed, social exclusion – is characteristic of what I am calling “neo-democratic” decision making, where high-level decision makers manipulate public voice in ways that best serve their own political interests. I locate the “neo-democratic” era as part of the shift from so-called minimalist democracy of the social welfare era to the aggregative forms of democratic engagement common in the neo-liberal era. In particular, I view “neo-democratic” decision making as an offshoot of aggregative democracy that is specific to changes in the new policy making arena, such as the rapid increase of neo-liberal policy making, the rise of ERAOs, and the corresponding decline of teachers’ unions.

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case reveals a defining characteristic of the “neo-democratic” era: that high-level interest group conflict leads to narrow forms of democratic engagement. Clearly, pressure from national-level interest group conflict shaped the decision making in Stand for Children’s Massachusetts office. Although national-level unions did not direct the MTA in the same way, expensive and high-profile conflicts in other states limited the resources available to the MTA, helping to push the union towards compromise. Embroiled in high-level conflict, each organization used superficial methods to try to give the impression that their decision making was shaped by genuine community engagement. Indicative of the “neo-democratic” era, public engagement in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case was, at best, an afterthought in an otherwise chaotic policy environment and, at worst, a front for policy priorities

developed at the national level. Either way, amidst high-level political maneuvering between high-powered political actors, public voice was lost.

It is undoubtedly troubling that “neo-democratic” decision making has become a kind of accepted common sense. Even the organizations like Stand for Children and the MTA who were established, in part, to promote democratic engagement, have turned their backs on the public. In addition, the conditions that have fueled interest group conflict are unlikely to change any time soon. Among its many negative consequences, high-level conflict threatens to overshadow the many and diverse efforts underway to conduct genuine grassroots community organizing towards the improvement of public education. With non-state actors, such as teachers’ unions and ERAOs, embroiled in high-level conflict, I argue that there is a role for the state to play in bringing its public constituents into the policy making process. In the section below, then, I conclude with a discussion of the political strategies best suited for pushing back against “neo-democratic” common sense by promoting broader, more meaningful democratic engagement in educational policy making.

Alternative Models of Democratic Governance

Any path beyond “neo-democratic” decision making must treat public deliberation as a hedge against the tyranny of interest group conflict. In this concluding section, I point “the way into the unexplored and unattained future” (Dewey, 1991, p. 232) where policy making is more inclusive and democratic. Like the policy analysis framework I have used throughout this dissertation, my suggestions for educational policy making are located “on the cusp” of modern and post-structural perspectives on

social change. In particular, I rely on analysis of local-level complexity from the case to generate a social theory that is applicable beyond the context studied here.

Aligned with the post-structural tradition, I advocate for the proliferation of “subjugated knowledges,” or the voices and perspectives of those who are systematically excluded from public decision making (Ball, 1994b; Foucault, 1972). According to the post-structuralist perspective, the best way to make social change is to “facilitate an insurrection” (Ball, 1994b, p. 176) in which marginalized discourses become dominant and, thus, begin to remake social institutions accordingly. As described in Chapter Three, scholars have disparaged this perspective as a sort of “Foucaultian pessimism” (Hatcher & Troyna, 1994, p. 168) in which the marginalized have no real avenues for enacting social change. According to critics of post-structuralism, merely telling one’s story is an ineffective form of social change if it is not connected somehow to centralized political decision makers. I argue, similarly, that emphasis on voice is only part of the solution. I believe that concrete, non-discursive action, such as state programs that expand public engagement, can go a long way towards changing the social relationships that characterize the “neo-democratic” era (see Dale, 1989; Hatcher & Troyna, 1994; Vidovich, 2001, 2007). In particular, I view state power as a critical part of any effort to create the social structures and opportunities necessary to promulgate the very “subjugated knowledges” that are central to post-structural conceptions of resistance.

Ball (1994a, 2005, 2010) explains that, in the neo-liberal era, the state has embraced an indirect role in educational policy making. Instead of providing services directly, as in the social welfare era, government has transitioned to setting accountability targets and creating the conditions for diverse, non-state service providers to compete for

access to public schools. This so-called “steering from a distance” (Ball, 2005) has contributed to the rise of non-state actors, such as ERAOs, who use complicated political maneuvering to jockey for influence over educational policy making and school practice. Perhaps most importantly, the new state role has fomented the interest group conflict that has shaped policy development across the country and contributed to the rise of “neo-democratic” educational policy making.

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case indicates that when interest group conflict is the engine of policy making, the public is left out. Further, the case studied here suggests that the battle against each other may ultimately leave both groups politically weaker. Stand for Children found itself isolated from the state policy making community, and the MTA unseated reform-oriented leadership with a new president who similarly may find herself excluded from the state policy making arena. At the end of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” campaign, then, Stand for Children and the MTA face major questions about their future role in the state. As a result, it is perhaps unreasonable to rely on these organizations to help repair the public engagement deficit that they helped to create in the first place.

By taking a more direct role in policy development, however, the state could help to lead the way towards a new and more inclusive era of educational policy making. I use deliberative democratic theory as a sort of roadmap for this effort. As described in Chapter Two, deliberative democratic theory provides an alternative model for decision making about public schools, one that calls for broad public engagement in school policy, thoughtful inclusion of marginalized voices, and local-level advocacy. Of course, this approach is similar to the kinds of public engagement at the center of social justice-

oriented unionism. Several key principles distinguish deliberative democracy from the “neo-democratic” forms of engagement evident in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. In particular, deliberative democratic theory calls for decision making that is shaped by: reason-giving, equal participation, and equal respect (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Jenlink & Jenlink, 2009; Koopman, 2006; Menand, 2002; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Warren, 2009).

The reason-giving requirement is centrally important to my analysis of the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case. Resembling the broad public accountability that is largely absent from the “neo-democratic” era, the reason-giving requirement is the notion that members of a democratic society are accountable to each other for defending their opinions in a thoughtful manner that is tolerant of others’ perspectives (Dunshire, 1978; Fischer, 2003; Giddens, 1984; Ranson, 2007, 2012). Meanwhile, the standard of equal participation states that all relevant perspectives should be included in the debate, and the principal of equal respect holds that all members of a democratic community receive comparable levels of respect and consideration (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gutmann, 1999; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008).

Combining the three guiding principals, Gould (1988) explains that “the deliberative process of democratic decision-making requires that each participant not only permit the others to express their views and offer their judgments but take others’ views seriously into account in arriving at his or her own judgment” (p. 88). To be considered “deliberative,” then, debate must include space for individuals to present and argue multiple sides of an issue, to take others’ arguments into consideration and to change or modify political preferences in light of the debate. In this way, deliberative

engagement is based on the notion of “responsible citizenship” (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 1), which “trusts in the people to rule themselves, based on their collective judgment” (Howe & Meens, 2012, p. 3; Koopman, 2006; Olssen et al., 2004; Ranson, 2007).

Scholars in deliberative democratic theory suggest “self-conscious institutional design efforts” (Fung & Wright, 2001; p. 24) that can help to ensure that public debate reaches the ideals outlined in deliberative theory. For example, Thompson (2008) notes that deliberative theorists “agree that the more the deliberation is influenced by unequal economic resources and social status, the more deficient it is” (p. 506). In response, Jenlink and Jenlink (2009) posit critical pragmatism as an approach to social change that “incorporates critical theory” to “help redefine the sociocultural contexts to more clearly align with democratic ideals” (p. 241). While deliberative theory values polyphony of voices and broad public debate as essential to democracy, critical pragmatism is more explicit about incorporating those whose perspectives are typically disenfranchised in public debate. Additionally, scholars call for experts to act as facilitators of public discussion (see Ranson, 2012) who supplement informational gaps at citizens’ request, as opposed to leading policy making without public input (Fischer, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2001).

In the remainder of this section, I describe concrete political strategies that translate deliberative democratic theory into community-level practice. Of course, there are many, diverse avenues for expanding public engagement in school policy making. Below, I highlight three models that have particular promise: grassroots community organizing, Empowered Participatory Governance, and Local School Councils. In the interest of space, I am unable to offer a detailed account of the conceptual and empirical

literature on each topic. Instead, I rely on key sources to make the case for each model and to illustrate what each looks like in practice. Given the increasing diversification of the education policy making arena, I highlight ways that state actors as well as non-state actors, including teachers' unions and ERAOs, can use these models to shape public policy with public voice.

Grassroots Community Organizing

Of course, one major vehicle for deliberative engagement is the grassroots community organizing that was largely overlooked by Stand for Children and the MTA. Grassroots community organizations represent the inversion of “neo-democratic” decision making. Many community-based groups conduct rich engagement with local-level stakeholders, yet lack political power at the state and national levels. As policy development ascends to higher levels of decision making, it is important that community voice rises accordingly. Scholarship in community organizing for school change outlines factors that may help grassroots organizing to find a space “between movement and establishment” (McLaughlin, Deschenes, Scott & Hopkins, 2009) by becoming more firmly entrenched in social infrastructure (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 2001). In particular, state intervention can help promote grassroots community organizing through: support for “field building,” or structures that connect local groups to one another; and the creation of avenues that allow local-level knowledge to inform decision making at the state and national levels.

McLaughlin and colleagues (2009) studied three community-based organizations in the San Francisco-Oakland area and found that youth advocacy made a “substantive

and significant” (p. 173) difference in the lives of Bay Area youth. Importantly, McLaughlin (2009) explains that these organizations were effective because they combined the efforts of a variety of local-level leaders. In a process known as “field building” (p. 142), advocacy groups “construct shared meanings” (p. 142) that help various organizations “see themselves as sharing ideological commitments” (p. 141) and, ultimately, engage in joint action. Because “field building” unites diverse groups under a common banner, it can raise the profile of each group and the issues they promote. As a result, the process helps to attract the attention of high-profile school decision makers, ultimately providing community members with more avenues to shape educational policy making and school practice (McLaughlin et al., 2009; Shirley, 2002).

In his analysis of reform efforts at three schools initiated by Valley Interfaith, a community organization in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, Shirley (2002) provides indication of what “field building” looks like on the ground. Similar to McLaughlin’s (2009) description of “field building,” Shirley (2002) explains that Valley Interfaith organizers at Sam Houston Elementary School “helped the parents and the teachers to comprehend that they could develop the political clout to redirect city and school district revenues to improve their school” (p. 69). By generating “bridging social capital,” organizers were able to “establish strong horizontal ties across institutional lines” (Shirley, 2002, p. 89) and to put community members in conversation with school-based decision makers. In particular, faith-based institutions and public schools coalesced around common goals, such as creating inspired learners and fostering safe, healthy neighborhoods. These changes led to dramatic school improvements, helping a high-poverty school to achieve “exemplary test scores” (Shirley, 2002, p. 81).

McLaughlin and colleagues (2009) called on the education community, including government officials, to institutionalize the structures that support “field building” across various community-based organizations. They refer to this process as the transition “from the streets to the suites” (McLaughlin et al., 2009, p. 25), in which disparate advocacy groups become fixed players in the public policy making arena. Importantly, McLaughlin’s research (2001) notes that non-state actors can elevate the profile of community organizations, in part, by highlighting notable individuals who champion the cause or by engaging in frequent and influential national conferences that allow groups the space to compare agendas and combine efforts.

Interestingly, these efforts are nearly identical to those that have helped ERAOs to rise to prominence. Led by major figures, such as Jeb Bush and Condoleezza Rice, ERAOs have captured public attention in a relatively short period of time. Additionally, coordinating organizations, such as the Policy Innovators in Education network, have provided a venue for diverse ERAOs to learn from one another and to collaborate on common policy goals. Given the concerns raised above, about the role the ERAOs have played in promoting “neo-democratic” decision making, it is perhaps time that community-based organizations push back by using similar methods to raise their profile, combine common efforts and, ultimately, provide a larger platform for public voice. Especially because court rulings, such as those in the *Citizens United* case, are unlikely to be overturned any time soon, it may benefit the social justice advocacy community to work within the existing system by soliciting greater philanthropic investment to build these kinds of high-profile national networks.

McLaughlin's research (2009) notes that a major factor in the effectiveness of grassroots organizing is the "local knowledge, contacts and reputation" (p. 174) of community organizers; indeed, without their knowledge and credibility, "field building" would not be possible. Because they are locally based, organizers "can become expert on the people, problems, and politics of a given community" (McLaughlin et al., 2009, p. 149; Shirley, 2002). Despite their critical importance, organizers' local knowledge is rarely taken into consideration at the state and federal levels. As result, McLaughlin and colleagues (2009) call for institutionalizing structures that encourage connections between local-level organizing and state-level policy making. In the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, this might have occurred by providing community organizers with a greater role on state-level policy committees, such as the working group that developed the state's new teacher evaluation system.

Additionally, McLaughlin and colleagues (2009) note that the state can also play a role in promoting public voice. In particular, state- and national-level government can contribute to "field building" by creating national and regional centers to perform research and disseminate information about community organizing efforts. They note that regional centers could also play a role in establishing consistent metrics for gathering and sharing data about outcomes of community organizing efforts (McLaughlin et al., 2009). In addition to serving as touchstones for the national emergence of a platform for youth development and education, these measures may help to institutionalize a youth advocacy agenda within existing governmental infrastructure (McLaughlin et al., 2009). The "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case suggests that, without these, and other, systems in place,

efforts of community-based advocacy organizations may become overshadowed by high-level interest group conflict.

Empowered Participatory Governance

While “field building” promotes a higher profile for existing community groups, the notion of “Empowered Participatory Governance” (EPG) provides avenues that “deepen the ways in which ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies that directly affect their lives” (Fung & Wright, 2001, p. 7). EPG features “local action units” or “mini-publics” with functional ties to state-level decision making (Calvert & Warren, 2012; Fung & Wright, 2001; Ranson, 2012; Warren, 2009). Unlike the policy making process evident in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, local units engage in “broad and deep participation” which provides average citizens with avenues to learn more about the issues affecting them and to exercise voice in shaping school policy (Fung & Wright, 2001; Ranson, 2012). Warren (2009) defines a mini-public as

a deliberative forum typically consisting of 20-500 participants, focused on a particular issue, selected as a reasonably representative sample of the public affected by the issue, and convened for a period of time sufficient for participants to form considered opinions and judgments (p. 3; see also Calvert & Warren, 2012)

Research has demonstrated that, through the use of mini-publics, “ordinary citizens are capable of sophisticated political judgments” (Warren, 2009, p. 3; see also Fishkin & Luskin, 2005) that can help identify innovative policy solutions. Additionally, mini-publics can serve as valuable “information proxies” by providing the public with background information about new or emerging issues that have not been studied extensively. Of course, mini-publics and local action units are not common in public policy making, and, as a result, there are many questions about what these forums should look like and how they should be designed (see Calvert & Warren, 2012). Below, I identify two specific types of mini-publics that have potential for increasing public engagement in educational policy making: deliberative polling and consensus conferences.

Deliberative polling®. Pioneered by James Fishkin of Stanford University’s Center for Deliberative Democracy, deliberative polling is an alternative to conventional polling that “helps us to understand what public opinion would be like on a given issue if the public was well-informed, and had subjected their beliefs to deliberative scrutiny” (Warren, 2009, p. 3; see also Fishkin, 1997, 2009; Fishkin & Luskin, 2005). A relatively new form of public engagement, deliberative polling has been conducted roughly 22 times covering a wide variety of issues, including everything from Korean unification to the curriculum of schools in Northern Ireland.

Specifically, deliberative polling is a sequenced process that begins with a traditional poll administered to a representative, random sample of the public. Then, an additional random sample of poll participants is selected to be part of a two-day deliberative polling event. Prior to the event, participants receive background information

about the topic of the poll. Then, at the event, participants work with trained moderators to pose questions to a panel of experts and policy makers. In order to capture changes in individual opinions, participants re-take the initial poll at the conclusion of the event. Changes in opinion between the pre and post poll are considered to “represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues” (Center for Deliberative Democracy, 2015). Major findings are then distributed to the media and to policy makers.

As described in Chapter Five, in the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, traditional polling came to be used as a substitute for more deliberative forms of community engagement. Stand for Children used polling results to justify its decision to launch the ballot initiative. Meanwhile, the MTA cited the results of internal polling as a primary factor that led to the union’s decision to pursue compromise. Critics of each organization wondered if polling results would have been the same if the participants were more informed about the issues in each poll. The deliberative polling method, meanwhile, ensures that polling results are based on thoughtful consideration and collaborative debate about a particular policy issue or proposal. This process holds promise for connecting unions and ERAOs to their local members without creating an undue burden on their existing infrastructure. It seems plausible, for example, that Stand for Children’s community-based chapters or district-level “union locals” could function as a sort of mini-public that conducts the deliberative polling process in the context of a group meeting or professional development event.

Consensus Conferences. Other scholars have promoted the use of mini-publics that are more directly connected to state decision makers. Fischer (2003), for example,

proffers the use of so-called “consensus conferences” in which decisions are made via local decision making networks connected to higher levels of government. Administered by a steering committee appointed by the state, the consensus conference charges groups of 10-25 citizens with developing policy recommendations regarding common policy problems. Participants are selected from written replies to newspaper ads and, in several months leading up to the conference, the citizen panel researches the topic in detail and develops questions for expert guidance. Not unlike the deliberative polling event, the conferences last three-to-four days, in which participants have the opportunity to cross-examine experts and to refine their opinions about the topic in question. Other scholars have promoted the use of consensus conferences composed exclusively of practitioners, as opposed to ordinary members of the public (Smith-Merry, 2012). At the end of each type of conference, the panel releases a "consensus report" which is then considered alongside other technical reports in drafting a policy proposal (Fischer, 2003; Smith-Merry, 2012). While funding often comes from the state, this may be another area where philanthropic investment could be used to drive democratic engagement in school policy.

Fischer (2003) cites Danish Citizen Assemblies as an example of a consensus conference that is directly tied to governmental decision making. Convened by the Danish Board of Technology, assemblies meet to review proposed infrastructure projects and their reports factor directly into the policy making process. Because these assemblies are connected to the state, they provide an indication of how mini-public could become a more fixed or institutionalized part of policy development. For example, the Massachusetts legislature is currently considering a bill that would raise the legal age at which a student can drop out of school and would provide resources to help school

prevent students from dropping out. Although it is unconventional, it might not be unreasonable to consider convening a mini-public that met regularly to discuss proposals in the current legislation and to offer suggestions how to improve the law as currently written.

Local School Councils

Created by an Illinois law passed in 1987, Local School Councils (LSCs) are a concrete example of the role that state government can play in stimulating public engagement in school practice. LSCs function as a school board that has jurisdiction over a single city school in the Chicago Public School (CPS) system. They are composed of six parents, two non-parent community members, two teachers, one non-teaching staff member and the school principal. High school LSCs also include one non-voting student representative. Importantly, parents and community members win seats on their LSC through local public elections. Meanwhile, school-based personnel on each LSC, including the teachers and non-teaching staff, are appointed by the district's leadership. Currently, there are approximately 6,000 LSC members across all Chicago public schools.

As outlined in state law, councils are responsible for selecting new principals, conducting annual evaluation of principals and dismissing principals as well as developing school improvement plans and approving the school budget. Among many changes implemented in the decades since LSCs were created, councils have replaced school principals who were determined to be inattentive to school needs, used discretionary school funds to preserve fine arts programs, develop computer labs, and

renovate old school buildings. Additionally, councils have been instrumental in creating parent engagement programs that increase local involvement in school practice.

Research indicates that LSCs have been effective in achieving a variety of positive outcomes for schools. Their discretion over school leadership has led to increased racial and gender diversity among principals at CPS schools. These changes have been associated with improvements in school climate (Bossert et al., 1982) as well as more distributive and democratic school governance (Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993). Additionally, because committee members are elected by their peers, Williamson and Fung (2004) found that LSCs increase public accountability between elected officials on the school council and local community members. Relatedly, a survey conducted by the Chicago Consortium for School Research (1997) found that parents felt they “developed more as competent citizens” and became “more knowledgeable about schools” (p. 39) as a result of their participating in their school’s council, voting for LSC members or running for office themselves.

Most importantly, LSCs have been linked to improvements in student achievement. Recent research found that schools run by LSCs outperformed other CPS schools that did not have established councils, as measured by reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Designs for Change, 2012). Chicago schools with LSCs also outperformed schools that had been taken over in turnaround efforts managed by the central district office and/or a private turnaround company (Designs for Change, 2012). In particular, a recent survey found that among schools with at least 95% low-income students, schools with LSCs had higher reading scores on the state assessment than those

that were part of the district's turnaround program and had therefore been stripped of their council.

Given their success in increasing both parent engagement and student achievement, observers have described LSCs as a potentially powerful response to the high-level interest group conflict that characterizes the current policy making arena (Superville, 2014). Of course, it would not be easy for Massachusetts, or any other state, to pass a law similar to the Illinois legislation that created LSCs. Indeed, the Illinois law was a response to major public outrage about city schools during a time when the US Secretary of Education described Chicago's schools as the worst in the nation. Since its enactment, the law has been the subject of a variety of complicated efforts to dilute councils' decision making authority and/or to eliminate them entirely. However, although implementation of LSCs may be challenging, the currently dominant model of "neo-democratic" decision making certainly does not offer a better alternative. In an era dominated by top-down political decision making, LSCs stand as a proven method for using democratic engagement to counteract elite influence and to bring positive change to troubled schools.

Conclusion: Is There a Better Way?

Historically, education policy making has avoided meaningful forms of democratic engagement in favor of shallow notions of public accountability that ultimately undermine public trust. Policies of the social welfare era were based on a minimalist democracy that trusted local officials to make decisions about public schools (Fung, 2007; Ranson, 2007). *A Nation at Risk*, however, raised damaging questions about

the era's low-accountability redistributive social programs and localized school control that had supposedly led to "unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Following *A Nation at Risk*, common standards and top-down accountability replaced local control over curriculum and instruction. Most importantly, policy making came to embrace the neo-liberal agenda for school change, in which public goods – such as high quality schools and teachers – are distributed through a market-oriented system that values competition, choice and high-stakes accountability (Friedman, 1995; Hursh, 2007; Olssen et al., 2004; Ranson, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Tabb, 2002). According to the neo-liberal model, individuals are consumers of education who operate, ideally, in an open educational marketplace. In the style of aggregative democracy, the tally of individual choices in this marketplace determines the policy options available to the public (Fung, 2007; Gutmann, 1999; Hursh, 2009; Ranson, 2007; Rogers, 2006).

The new educational policy making arena represents a new phase in the neo-liberal era. As others have noted, this new arena is shaped by three defining characteristics: the rapid increase of neo-liberal policies at state legislatures, the rise of ERAO groups that promote neo-liberal reforms, and the declining political influence of teachers' unions (Buras, 2011; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; McGuinn, 2012a, 2012c; Mehta, 2013; Sawchuk, 2012a, 2012b). Based on my analysis of the "Great Teachers, Great Schools" case, I add a fourth defining element of the new policy making arena, what I am calling "neo-democratic" decision making. Specifically, I use the term "neo-democracy" to refer to cases where high-level interest group conflict has led, intentionally or otherwise, to shallow forms of democratic engagement. I locate "neo-

democracy” as part of a troubling trajectory from minimalist to aggregative democracy, in which the public has only become further separated from major decisions about public schools.

The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case is a cautionary tale about the outcomes of “neo-democratic” decision making. Locked in conflict, Stand for Children and the MTA largely abandoned organizational commitments to democratic engagement of local-level members and of the public more generally. Leaders at each organization used narrow, individualistic forms of democratic engagement to justify political decisions made under high-stakes pressure. In the end, both organizations emerged politically weaker from the conflict. Massachusetts students and teachers, meanwhile, were left with law built on political expedience without meaningful public input.

I draw from deliberative democratic theory to offer alternative models for educational policy making (Chambers, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2001; Koopman, 2006; Ranson, 2007; Thompson, 2008; Warren, 2009). I note that the state can and should intervene in the high-stakes conflict between non-state actors in order to ensure that there is greater space for the consideration of public voice. Of course, the values of deliberative democratic theory clash with policy discourses and modes of democratic decision making dominant in the current policy making arena. Deliberative models, however, have the potential to succeed where previous modes of policy making have failed: in earning the public’s trust. After *A Nation at Risk*, the public lost trust in dominant approaches to educational policy making and practice. As the “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case illustrates, the public has perhaps even less reason to trust currently dominant modes of decision making, in which policies are directed by political gamesmanship between high-

level elites. The “Great Teachers, Great Schools” case, then, provides reason to ask if there is a better way to make policy, one that shapes public education according to the needs and concerns of those most affected, one that recognizes the value of local-level knowledge, and one that aspires to higher democratic ideals.

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ⁱ As of February 2015, four states have enacted legislation to repeal the common core (Indiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and South Carolina) and two states have enacted legislation to delay implementation (Missouri and North Carolina). Many other states have introduced legislation to repeal or delay implementation of the common core.

ⁱⁱ Because I focus analysis on the contexts of influence, policy text production, outcomes and political strategy, I have omitted guiding questions for the context of practice.

ⁱⁱⁱ The names of all interview participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

^{iv} The names of all interview participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

^v In Massachusetts, this includes Preliminary, Temporary and Initial Licenses.

^{vi} Interestingly, following the compromise, media coverage of Stand for Children conflicted sharply with the perspective evident in stakeholder interviews. For a more detailed analysis of media discourse in the case, please see Piazza (2014).