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PRINCIPALS’ PERSPECTIVES ON AUTONOMY IN NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

School principals across the nation are asked, each year, to implement policy changes in schools that are meant to improve student performance on standardized tests and increase student achievement. Principals, however, face numerous obstacles that prevent them from implementing policies with fidelity to the policy designs. In New York City (NYC) schools, for example, principals were given autonomy to make decisions over operational functions like budgeting, staffing, and curriculum, in exchange for increased accountability. The principals in this study reported that their ability to activate their autonomy was constrained by numerous factors. This case study of NYC schools explores the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy in addition to the factors associated with limited principal autonomy by examining, specifically, the process of policy design in the NYC school district and the actual policies created under mayoral control of schools that hinder principals’ abilities to implement the autonomy policy.

The findings from this study shed light on the complex nature of mayoral control and centralization of urban school districts. First, while mayoral control was a tool to remove unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles, like the elected school boards, it inadequately addressed the looming social issues facing schools and principals daily. Moreover, because the language surrounding the Children First policy was vague policy and the NYC DOE did not provide clear messages for practitioners, implementers developed their own understandings of what autonomy would look like in schools and pursued actions, like firing teachers, which was beyond their sphere of power.

Second, top-down policy making impedes policy makers’ ability to understand the local context of NYC schools that impacts implementation. The policy process is intricately connected
from top to bottom. Without backward mapping from the final stage of implementation to policy design, policy makers were unaware of the low capacity issues that impeded principals’ abilities to implement policies with fidelity.

Collectively, the findings in this study suggest that policy makers should, first, be clear about what they expect from implementers. The clearer policy makers are about policy goals, the more certain implementers can be about what is expected from them. Second, policy makers should backward map from implementation to policy design in an effort to understand the behaviors that act to cause policy problems and the resources needed to help achieve policy goals.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This is a case study of educational policy implementation in the New York City (NYC) public school system. Like the majority of school districts around the county, NYC schools are under immense pressure from federal and state authorities to improve performance, especially for disadvantaged and marginalized students who have historically been “left behind” in the American education system. As a response to the demand to increase performance, districts around the country have asked, and tried to answer: what best practices are the most effective at increasing performance in large complex school systems?

One of the answers to increasing performance has been to abandon decentralized school districts (i.e. ones run by elected school boards) in exchange for centralized systems of authority and increased accountability (Elmore, 1993; Weinbaum, 2005). The theory of action behind many centralized school reform efforts is that centralization brings coherence to dysfunctional and disjointed school districts (Honig & Hatch, 2004). For example, nearly 20 large urban school districts around the country, including Chicago, Boston, and NYC are currently under or have experimented with mayoral control of schools (Wong & Shen, 2013). Since the 1990s, mayoral control has been viewed as a tool to increase accountability and centralize decision-making. While many believe mayoral control is an effective governance structure (Hess, 2008; Wong & Shen, 2013), others suggest that mayoral control negatively impacts important aspects of school reform, including the inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making (Henig, 2009).

Given the proliferation of mayoral control as a tool for improving troubled urban school districts, this study seeks to understand, from principals’ perspectives, the relationship between mayoral control of NYC schools and principals’ implementation of school reform policies. What literature has been clear about is that centralization impacts the sort of policies adopted to address performance issues in a school system. For example, in Chicago, centralization via
mayoral control led to increased business involvement in schools. Mayor Daley, of Chicago was considered “the businessman’s educator” because of his relationship with the business community and his affinity for market-like solutions to educational issues (Shipps, 2003). Other research has found that leaders and school districts create policies to centralize curriculum, finance, and bring coherence to instructional techniques, or standardized testing (Fuller & Johnson, 2001; Fusarelli, 2002; Smith & O’Day, 1991). The belief underscoring research on district led reforms is that coherence, via centralization, is a salient characteristic of successful schools.

The literature, however, has failed to explain how mayoral control impacts practitioners’ abilities to implement reforms. Newmann, King, and Rigdon (1997) suggest that external accountability tools, like centralization, are not associated with increased capacity or performance at the school level. They posit that external accountability, like that of mayoral control, is associated with implementation issues and low internal capacity. This current study seeks to explore the relationship between NYC’s version of mayoral control and policy implementation at the ground level in the NYC school system and asks, broadly, how does mayoral control impact implementation of reforms at the school level?

In order to explore the relationship between mayoral control and implementation of reform, I have chosen to examine, primarily from principals’ perspectives, mayoral control of the NYC public schools. Since billionaire businessman Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor NYC schools have experienced a litany of policy changes, collectively referred to as Children First. The Children First initiative was intended to restructure the system of authority and increase academic achievement. Two highly publicized changes under Children First involved dismantling the 32 community school districts and handing decision-making power, or
“autonomy,” over to principals. Principals were authorized to choose personnel, determine budgets, and select supportive external services tailored to suit their schools’ needs. The autonomy principals received was based on an assumption, as articulated by the NYC Department of Education (NYC DOE), that principals, rather than locally elected community school boards or the central office, were better positioned to make decisions that would positively affect teachers and students.

However, principals report that their ability to implement the autonomy policy was shaped by a number of factors including the way the autonomy policy was designed, and the mismatch between what principals were being asked to do and what principals were actually capable of doing at the school level. One of this case study’s aims is to explore the relationship between mayoral control and implementation of reform, obstacles NYC school principals faced implementing the autonomy policy, and to contribute to research on the numerous factors that can interfere with policy implementation at the ground level.

**Significance**

This study’s findings are significant because expectations for principals and schools have changed drastically in the past three decades (Cuban, 2007). Triggered by national reports like *A Nation at Risk* and federal statutes like the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), along with calls from national political leaders to “hold schools accountable for results” (emphasis added; Bush, 2007), federal, state, and local educational agencies have increasingly placed immense pressure on individual schools to prove their effectiveness by measuring students performance on standardized tests (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; United States Department of Education, 2002). Schools and school leaders that fail to improve student performance on standardized tests face a number of punitive consequences including, but not
limited to, being fired and removed from their school or being taken over by their state (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). This emphasis on accountability has caused school districts across the country to put high-stakes policies in place that change school governance structures in a way that fundamentally alters the role principals play, diminishes the power principals have in and over their schools, and also shapes the actions principals take to improve their schools (Trujillo, 2012).

For example, in her study of the impact of NCLB on an urban school board’s decision-making in California, Trujillo (2012) found that principals’ abilities to make decisions for their schools was limited because of high-stakes accountability policies, like NCLB. She found that principals’ effectiveness was judged almost solely by their ability to increase academic performance index (API) scores. API scores are used in California to reflect the amount of the academic progress in a school or district (California Department of Education website, 2013).

The state of California has set a target score and any districts or schools that fall below that target face the state’s execution of NCLB corrective action measures like closure and firing staff (Trujillo, 2012). In Trujillo’s (2012) study, principals faced incredible pressure to increase API scores, which aligned with federal adequate yearly progress criteria. In one example, board members even suggested principals’ contracts be renewed based on their ability to increase API scores. As a result, principals reported feeling fearful about their job security, which caused them to have contentious relationships with school board members and superintendents (Trujillo, 2012). Principals also reported feeling limited in their ability to voice a difference of opinion because of the power the superintendent had to fire principals (Trujillo, 2012). Rather than building a collaborative work environment, the high-stakes accountability tools used in the district pitted principals against superintendents and the school board, and caused principals to be
reactive rather than deliberative in their practice (Trujillo, 2012). My study, like Trujillo’s study, suggests that a number of factors, including the type of policy messages delivered, have a significant impact on how principals implement reforms and practice to improve their schools.

My study, in particular, focuses on the New York City school district. NYC’s Children First, reforms are part of the larger accountability context, which places intense pressure on individual schools and their principals to increase student performance. NYC relies on accountability tools, like mayoral control, progress reports to assess and grade a school’s ability to make progress, and quality reviews, which are meant to rate a school’s use of data in improving learning outcomes, to coerce action and meet educational goals. The use of such accountability tools in NYC has shaped principals’ practices by giving principals the lion’s share of responsibility to manage operations in their schools, by holding principals responsible for better student performance results, and by penalizing principals and their schools for failing to improve student performance on standardized tests. Although the NYC school district is unique because of its large size, severe stratification of wealth, and the extent and depth of segregation in its school district, it joins districts like the one Trujillo (2012) studied in California in its approach to increasing performance and meeting federal, state, or local standards by designing and implementing high-stakes reforms.

One argument made through this study is that even though mayoral control is assumed to be somewhat controversial because of its association with high-stakes reforms, principals associated mayoral control with relief from bureaucratic oversight of overbearing school boards. Elimination of the community school boards meant principals, rather than distant school board members, would be empowered to make operational decisions for their schools, which principals believed was an advantage to their practice. At the same time, Mayor Bloomberg’s autonomy
policy was poorly suited to address the social issues principals faced in their schools. Principals felt limited by the effects of concentrated poverty on their students’ families and autonomy was not the tool they needed to deal with those issues head on.

A second argument I make in this study is that implementation was hindered because policy makers failed to “backward map”, or study reform at the implementation level. Under the leadership of businessman mayor Michael Bloomberg and his handpicked attorney-turned-school-chancellor, Joel Klein, the NYC DOE had no clear understanding of what implementers had the capacity to do and what they were unable to carry out. The DOE policy simply required principals to take on new tasks and implement autonomy, without having a full understanding of what principals would be willing and able to do. NYC’s autonomy policy did not provide clear enough directives or guidelines for implementation. Instead, principals were left to use their own discretion, which created uncertainty and variation in how the NYC autonomy policy was implemented.

Recent research about NYC public schools has focused on very specific aspects of the NYC DOE’s reforms like NYC’s instructional reforms or NYC DOE’s use of data in improving schools (Childress, Higgins, Ishimaru, Takahashi, 2011; O’Day & Bitter, 2011), NYC’s reliance on the business model as an organizational style (Ravitch, 2010), and other researchers simply focus on the lessons learned from reform in NYC schools (Nadelstern, 2013). Each of these studies takes the top-down perspective without fully accounting for practitioners’ point of view. For example, Nadelstern (2013) served as the Deputy Chancellor for the Division of School Support and Instruction in NYC DOE for two years before he retired in 2011 and prior to that served in numerous capacities in the Department such as principal and superintendent. His book, titled *10 Lessons from New York City Schools: What Really Works to Improve Education*, is
solely Nadelstern’s recollection of what happened in NYC schools. The book is completely void of any additional sources, especially those of practicing principals, teachers, parents, or students.

O’Day, Bitter, and Gomez’s (2011) edited book is slightly more comprehensive in that it makes use of qualitative and quantitative studies and is a compilation of numerous researchers who have examined various aspects of NYC’s education reform efforts over time. However, the book’s main focus is on the Department’s specific policies, which the majority of authors in the book conclude were more effective than ineffective. For example a chapter in the O’Day, Bitter, and Gomez (2011) book written by Childress, Higgins, Ishimaru, Takahashi (2011) suggests that the Department successfully supported and provided adequate resources to principals and schools in their use of data to “solve performance problems” (p. 92). The problem with the Childress, Higgins, Ishiamru, and Takahashi article (2011) and the majority of the O’Day, Bitter, and Gomez’s (2011) book is that there is little evidence to suggest that practitioners’ perspectives were examined as counter points to their conclusions. The researchers rely on the recollections of top-level policy makers as well as quantitative data, which only provides one part of the story on NYC education reforms.

My study, however, is different in that it examines specifically how implementers view the reforms and takes the perspectives of implementers in understanding the policy process. My findings suggest that previous research, like that of O’Day, Bitter, and Gomez (2011) is incomplete because it lacks the multilayered perspectives of practitioners, the ones actually implementing reforms. Using principals as the key source of data, I find that centralization, or mayoral control, was useful for removing some barriers but inadequate for addressing deeply embedded social issues that make teaching and learning difficult and that in order for reform to
be effective policy makers must backward map to be clear about what practitioners have the capacity to implement.

**Research Questions**

The central questions guiding this study are meant to explore the factors shaping principals’ abilities to implement the New York City Department of Education autonomy policy. The research questions that guide this study are,

1) What does the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy?
2) What obstacles, if any, did principals face implementing the autonomy policy?

**Identifying the Actors**

There are a number of actors discussed in this story that have impacted the Children First reforms and shaped principals’ implementation of autonomy. The actors play numerous roles and are engaged in professional activities across and throughout the NYC schools system. I will sometimes use interchangeable names to identify these actors (Table 1.1)

First, there are the school principals. In this study, they are sometimes referred to as school leaders or educators in addition to principals. Then there is Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein. I will often interchange their names with their titles “the mayor” or “the chancellor”, and they will often sometimes be grouped with central office administrators or policy makers because of their roles in the central office and the central role they play influencing and leading policy development. Along with the mayor and the chancellor is the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE). On occasion, I will refer to the NYC DOE as the Department, the central office, or Tweed. Tweed refers to the new location of the NYC DOE in the Tweed Courthouse, a building synonymous with 19th century controversial NYC politician William Magear “Boss” Tweed. Within Tweed there are a number of actors
whom I will refer to as central office personnel or administrators as well as policy makers. Policy makers are individuals, like the mayor, the chancellor, and senior level central office administrators who worked to design and adopt the Children First reforms in the Department. There were also those involved on the periphery with policy making. For example, one participant in this study once acted as a consultant to senior policy makers in this study. He is referred to as a DOE policy consultant. Then there are the network leaders who are responsible for providing principals and school with much needed professional development support. Network leaders are important because they help principals when their schools are in need. Parent coordinators were also interviewed in this study because they played a critical role in implementation of the Children First reforms. They are sometimes referred to as coordinators. Finally, there is the leader of the community group involved in implementing some of the NYCs Children First reforms. Together these individuals play an important role in the policy process from inception to implementation.
Table 1.1  Identifying the Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal Title</th>
<th>Also Referred to As</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>School Leaders, Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor Michael Bloomberg</td>
<td>The Mayor, Central Office Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chancellor Joel Klein</td>
<td>The Chancellor, Central Office Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City Department of Education</td>
<td>The Department, The Central Office, Tweed</td>
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<td>Locally Elected Community School Boards</td>
<td>The Boards, The Districts</td>
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<td>Central Office</td>
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<td>Parent Coordinators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Leader</td>
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Background of Children First Reforms

Sweeping Reform

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 depict a timeline that reflect activities and decisions made by the Bloomberg/Klein administration to develop, adapt, and implement the Children First reforms from 2001-2010 in NYC schools. The depicted timeline focuses specifically on the reforms most relevant to principals’ autonomy and the elimination of the 32 community school districts. This section helps to explain several of the activities undertaken by the Bloomberg/Klein administration and provides background on the Children First reforms.

Phase I: 2001-2006

When Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor of NYC in 2002, he was emphatic about his desire to seize control of the school board in order to alleviate what he believed were two
major issues: bureaucracy and wasteful spending. Bureaucracy, he believed, was an obstacle to academic achievement and parent involvement; wasteful spending directly impacted the ability of principals and schools to provide necessary resources for their students (Herszenhorn, 2003a). In order to be successful he had to gain legislative permission to eliminate the local community school boards, which he received from the state legislature in less than six months, and a chancellor who had a record of success to support and see his ideas through. He chose Joel Klein, a former assistant attorney general in charge of the Department of Justice’s antitrust division under President Bill Clinton. Klein had successfully taken on Microsoft in an antitrust case but had absolutely no experience in education (Brinkley, 2000). Together, Klein and Bloomberg proceeded to reform the school system each year until Klein’s resignation in the fall of 2010.

Approximately three months after his appointment in 2002, Klein announced the city’s plan to thoroughly examine and reform the school system. The first phase of, what the NYC DOE referred to as, a multiphase plan formally titled: *Children First: A New Agenda For Public Education in New York City* (hereafter referred to as Children First), included an investigation by the NYC Department of Education that would take place over 100 days and cost an estimated $4 million (Goodnough, 2002a; Goodnough, 2002b). Klein’s goal was to gain useful information on how to improve the organizational structure, curriculum and instruction, and increase community involvement in NYC schools (Goodnough, 2002a).
One of the first orders of business for the Mayor and Chancellor was to assemble a team of people who would assist in the investigation. Klein believed the investigation should be “…an open and inclusive process” (NYC DOE, 2002). He added, “Input from the community is absolutely critical. We look forward to speaking with parents and community members – to everyone with a stake in our City’s schools – and to listening to their ideas. Together, we will ensure that our school system is focused on student learning and achievement,” (NYC DOE, 2002).

The Department engaged in a number of steps in order to advance their policy goals. First, the Department of Education (DOE) hired consultants, including McKinsey and Company, who helped with the investigation (DOE policy consultant, personal communication, 2012). The list of consultants who contributed to the design of Children First included, but was not limited to, the New Vision for Public Schools, the Annenberg Institute; Beth Lief, former president of New Visions; and Peter Negroni, senior vice president at the College Board (Goodnough, 2002a).
This group comprised Klein’s close-knit leadership team and would often face accusations of insularity (Senior policy maker A, personal communication, 2012).

Next, the DOE convened five focus groups comprised of parents and educators and 10 working groups, whose identities the DOE would not reveal, (Haimson, 2009) to work on the Children First investigation. The groups were supposed to collaborate on the investigation in order to examine all the “instructional, operational, and organizational” problems at every level of the schools. Although the study was meant to guide the reform efforts pursued by the DOE, the group never actually published any findings so it is difficult to tell whether the investigation actually provided any guidance for reform (Senior policy maker A, personal communication, 2012; Senior policy maker B, personal communication, 2011).

After the completion of the investigation, the DOE announced what they considered to be the “centerpiece of the Children First reform agenda” (NYC Government website, 2003). The “centerpiece” was an institute, called the Leadership Academy, designed to train new principals for NYC schools. It was supported by a $15 million start up grant from the Wallace Foundation and eventually the DOE partnered with several business leaders to raise an additional $30 million to fund the Leadership Academy, what they believed was the “heart” of the Children First reform efforts (NYC DOE, 2003b; NYC Government website, 2003; Wallace Foundation, 2007).

According to the NYC DOE, the institute was intended to strengthen the pool of experienced school leaders who could “effect fundamental change” in the city’s schools (NYC Government website, 2003). According to one senior policy maker, the Department started the Leadership Academy because it fully believed the new breed of school leaders would help “prepare principals for the school system of the future” (Senior policy maker B, 2011). The Department blamed stagnant graduation rates and low performance on veteran school leaders who were
trained by traditional leadership programs at universities. The Department’s hope was that the new principals would have the capacity to support and enhance reform efforts at their schools while simultaneously working to meet overall city goals and state standards.

One way for the mayor and chancellor to ensure all schools met city and state standards was to unify the curriculum across city schools. In 2003, the DOE announced its plan to transform the city’s math and reading program for all but 200 high-performing schools (Goodnough, 2003a). Klein chose “Everyday Mathematics”, a math program originating at the University of Chicago in the late 1980’s, and “Month by Month Phonics” for reading. He claimed the curriculum was “…an effort guided by prudent strategies, to bring coherence and academic excellence to a school system that heretofore has offered a grab bag of curricula with only small pockets of success” (Goodnough, 2003a). Along with the curriculum, the DOE established reading and math coaches for every school in order to ensure the curricula were implemented with fidelity. Both the principal institute and the math and reading curricula were seen by the DOE as “high-quality” programs meant to provide all NYC students with “the quality education they need and deserve” (NYC DOE, 2003a).

In addition to the Leadership Academy and the implementation of the common curriculum, the Children First reforms included several other major changes between the introduction of Children First in 2002 and the resignation of Klein in 2010. For example, in the fall of 2003, the NYC DOE partnered with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support the funding and opening of 67 new small high schools. The foundation gave the NYC DOE $51.2 million towards the development of small schools in order to increase graduation rates, particularly for African American and Latino students across the city (Herszenhorn, 2003c; NYC DOE, 2003c). Klein announced, simultaneously, that the NYC DOE ultimately envisioned
opening nearly 200 small high schools all over the city as part of its Children First agenda (NYC, DOE, 2003c). The 200 small high schools replaced larger more comprehensive high schools the city deemed failing city students. Included in the 200 small high schools would be charter schools. Charter schools, Bloomberg believed, embodied the autonomy and independence necessary to improve education. In a press release, Bloomberg stated that Charter schools, … Reflect the vision underlying the Children First reforms— that strong leadership, autonomy at the school level, and accountability for performance are key to giving our children the quality education they need and deserve (NYC Government, 2003).

Bloomberg believed in charter schools so much that almost immediately after taking office he began supporting their development. In the fall of 2004, the city opened 91 schools: 53 high schools, 24 middle schools, 5 elementary, and 9 charter schools (NYC DOE, 2004).

Another major change included the introduction of letter grade evaluations of public schools. At the end of the school year in 2006, Bloomberg and Klein announced that each school would receive a progress report with an A, B, C, D, or F letter grade as part of a new accountability plan (NYC DOE, 2006a). Klein and Bloomberg saw the letter grades as a way to empower principals and educators, under Children First, with more information about how to improve their practice and school performance (NYC DOE, 2006a; Gootman, 2006a). Klein was convinced the progress reports were unlike other evaluations that simply looked at one measurement of performance. NYC’s letter grades allowed for a “…look at a moving picture” by following students’ performance from year to year rather than a “snapshot” of their performance at one point in time (Gootman, 2006a). As a result of the letter grades, which primarily looked at
performance on standardized tests, principals of schools that showed no improvement were subject to removal (Gootman, 2006a).

**Figure 1.2 New York City reform implementation timeline Phase 2 2006-2010: Autonomy/accountability exchange begins**

*Source: Modified from O’Day, Bitter, & Talbert (2011). Education Reform in New York City: Ambitious Change in the Nation’s Most Complex School System p. 4*

**Phase II: 2006-2009**

Principals continued to be the focus of Bloomberg and Klein during the second phase of Children First reforms. During the second phase of Children First, the mayor and chancellor enhanced the reform by designating nearly 330 schools, out of 350 that applied, as “Empowerment Schools” during the 2006-2007 school year. The Department changed the name of the Autonomy Zone to the Empowerment Schools Program and drastically scaled up the number of participating schools. Principals in Empowerment Schools would have to sign a four-year “performance agreement” to pledge their commitment to meeting “specific achievement and progress targets” (NYC DOE, 2006b). In order for a school to become an Empowerment School, they had to submit an application and be selected. According to one policy maker interviewed in this study, schools were chosen based on their potential to meet progress targets (Senior policy
maker B, personal communication, 2011). He said, “Schools that were scheduled to be closed, or those whose principals were being disciplined or removed, were ineligible. We didn't want principals to be able to avoid accountability by joining.” Each Empowerment School received $150,000 of discretionary funds and an additional $100,000 in unrestricted funds for the development of various programs (Gootman, 2006b, NYC DOE, 2006c). One year after the announcement of the Empowerment Schools program, during the 2007-2008 school year, it was announced that all schools in NYC would receive the autonomy that Empowerment Schools received to have more power over essential educational functions (NYC DOE, 2007a).

Once the Empowerment Zone was expanded to all schools regions, which replaced community school boards between 2003-2007, disbanded and principals were given the choice to affiliate with one of three different School Support Organizations (SSOs). Although the disbanding of the regions appears to be just another confusing change to the governance structure, Chancellor Klein said that the SSOs were meant to provide principals an opportunity to choose the kinds of supports they wanted for their schools, rather than being forced to receive support and guidance from the central office (NYC DOE, 2009). Principals could choose a Learning Support Organization (LSO), which were support organizations led by internal NYC DOE employees. Many of the employees were former community school district superintendents. Principals could also partner with external Partnership Support Organizations (PSO) (NYC DOE, 2007a). PSOs were led by colleges and universities or non-profit groups, like New Visions for New Schools, an organization that provides professional development to schools and school leaders. PSOs were interviewed by the NYC DOE and approved prior to collaborations with schools. Principals could also choose Empowerment Support Organization (ESO), an additional support network, but unique because these schools were self-managed and beholden to
performance agreements (Childress, Higgins, Ishiamaru, & Takahashi, 2011). Amid the increase in principal autonomy, the DOE preserved their commitment to establishing academic standards, advancing the common curriculum they advocated for in 2003, and holding all schools accountable for results.

Children First reforms also encompassed teachers and their labor issues. During the 2007-2008 school year, Bloomberg, Klein, and NYC teachers union president, Randi Weingarten, announced a performance pay plan that would give teachers and union members pay above and beyond their salary to increase student achievement (NYC DOE, 2007b). Both the DOE and the union believed the performance pay would stimulate results and serve as an incentive for teamwork in the system (Gootman, 2007a). Weingarten claimed NYC’s performance pay program was different from those promoted by the NCLB Act proposed because entire schools could decide whether or not to join and teachers were not evaluated individually (Gootman, 2007a). Weingarten said, “I think this is a concept that promotes collaboration on a school level. This shuts the door on individual merit pay plans I abhor” (Gootman, 2007a).

Between 2007 and 2010, the Bloomberg and Klein administration continued to make top-down style policy changes to the NYC school system. For example, during the 2008-2009 school year, progress reports were altered to reflect not only student performance on standardized tests but environmental factors and rate of student academic improvement as well (Medina & Gebeloff, 2008). The mayor and chancellor used the 2009-2010 school year to concentrate on the development of small and charter schools, graduation rates, and performance on standardized tests as a measure of Children First’s success (NYC DOE, 2008; NYC DOE, 2009; NYC DOE, 2010), many changes that occurred without the consideration or the participation of the implementers meant to implement the reforms.
Yet, in the midst of the Children First changes, the mayor and chancellor faced complications they did not anticipate. Primarily complications included large-scale opposition to the new governance structure and educator dissatisfaction with new accountability measures proposed by the DOE. The next section will describe the unintended consequences of the Children First reforms in the NYC school district.

**Problems with Planning and Implementing Children First**

Central office administrators experienced their fair share of problems implementing the Children First reforms in NYC schools. While this study could be dedicated strictly to the problems with implementing all of Children First reforms, I use this section to provide brief detail of the most salient issues as they relate to the question posed in this study. I first begin with the lack of public participation in the planning of Children First.

*Excluding educators and parents*

Very early in the development of the Children First reforms, it appeared that Klein and Bloomberg took steps that eroded the involvement of the public when the mayor eliminated elected school boards. In January of 2003, Bloomberg proposed consolidating the 32 community school districts in order to prevent “gridlock” and political divisiveness in the education system (Goodnough, 2003a). Randi Weingarten believed the consolidation would help to unify the curriculum across the city’s schools and create a more equitable approach to instruction. Weingarten said, “It makes sense that what's taught in Bed-Stuy should be the same as what's taught in Bay Ridge" (Goodnough, 2003c).

Parents’ beliefs, however, diverged from the union’s standpoint. Parents believed the consolidation undermined the democratic process (Goodnough, 2003c). One parent interviewed by *The New York Times* said, “Their mentality is, 'We, the mayor and the chancellor, will take
care of you, don't worry. But of course, we're going to worry. This is daddy knows best, and it's a deep distrust of democratic discourse" (Goodnough, 2003b). The community school district officials were elected by community members and, ideally, represented the interest of their constituents. Bloomberg’s board, called the Panel for Education Policy, would become a city agency and consist of 13 handpicked members, eight of whom are selected by the mayor and five chosen by the borough presidents (Sullivan, 2009). Klein and Bloomberg believed the new structure would increase parent involvement primarily because NYC school board elections drew few voters in the first place and the boards were stripped of all their hiring authority in 1996 anyway (Purnick, 1996; Dao, 1996). The new policies created under Children First would allow parents to appeal directly to “parent coordinators” at each school. Parent coordinators were to act as liaisons between the school and parents (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). Yet, parents saw the new position as too expensive because it would cost nearly $43 million and they were afraid that parent coordinators would serve only as a puppet to the principal, who often had contentious relationships with parents (Goodnough, 2003d).

To compound the problems with consolidation, in May 2003, the New York City’s teachers union, once an advocate for Children First, withdrew their support. The contentious relationship began when the mayor announced NYC’s unified curriculum. The union was skeptical that the mayor wouldn’t “stay the course” with the curricula and questioned whether teachers would be trained in time for classes to begin in the fall of 2003 (Goodnough, 2003d). Second the union became increasingly angry when it was announced that nearly 3,200 school employees were being laid off to help with budget shortfalls (Medina, 2003). Weingarten felt the mayor and chancellor were being “disrespectful” because they had withheld important information regarding the number and type of employees targeted for lay off (Medina, 2003).
Weingarten was quoted as saying “We do not understand why the mayor has basically slapped our face” (Herszenhorn, 2003b).

A combination of factors, including the introduction of the curricula, the proposed layoffs, and the overall limited communication between the chancellor, mayor, and teachers union caused Weingarten to publicly denounce Children First in May of 2003. According to Weingarten, the union had been a primary consultant for educational matters under previous chancellors Rudy Crew and Harold O. Levy (Goodnough, 2003d). Klein, however, relied on his cabinet and group of consultants to help with large decisions (Goodnough, 2003b). Given the impact of the mayor’s reforms on classroom teaching and teachers’ labor issues, losing the union as an ally was a critical blow for the Bloomberg-Klein regime because the union was essential in advancing reforms on the school level.

Moreover, in October of 2003, Chancellor Klein announced during a press conference that planning for Children First would be an “…open and inclusive process” (NYC DOE, 2003a). One complication arose when important stakeholders, however, were left out of planning and had very little impact on the actual development of many of the policy decisions (Haimson, 2009). A Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request in December of 2003 revealed that neither parents nor educators were represented in the ten private working groups assembled by the DOE in the early days of planning Children First (Haimson, 2009). The five focus groups assembled by the DOE, only contributed to decision-making on the school level and had little to no impact at the district level on issues like the elimination of the school boards (DOE policy consultant, personal communication, 2012; Haimson, 2009). Others, who were tapped to be part of the original team of Children First policy makers, also confirmed that the planning process excluded the public. One policy consultant who left the team of Children First policy makers early in the
planning process said, “Well, they took away the role of the community school boards. With that went the forums for citizen participation. They really didn’t believe, neither of them [Bloomberg and Klein], that [citizen participation] was a useful thing to have” (DOE Policy consultant, personal communication, 2012). The process of constructing the team of policy makers created a natural problem for public participation since the group was so exclusive, insular, and primarily focused on the involvement of business and corporate leaders (Hill, 2011).

**Opposition to Accountability Tools**

Another obstacle to implementation arose when Klein and Bloomberg introduced new accountability measures in schools. In April of 2006, the mayor and chancellor announced a plan to use progress reports to assign letter grades to schools. In order to determine a school’s grade, evaluators looked primarily at performance on standardized tests. Schools would be judged against citywide averages and other schools with similar a demographic makeup. For principals, the progress reports meant possibly losing their job if scores did not improve (Gootman & Medina, 2007). Vocal opposition from schools, principals, and community members intensified when the city began to close a number of city schools as a result of their progress report grades (Gootman, 2007b). Plus the city faced some unexpected complications with grades. For example, schools that were considered high performing received low grades when high-performing students’ grades on standardized state tests decreased from year to year and schools that traditionally worked with populations of struggling students received little recognition for improvement (Gootman, 2007b). The progress reports ultimately added to the stress principals and teachers felt when carrying out reforms and were unexpected consequences in a district that intended to create programs and policies that would improve schools.
What is perhaps the most alarming about all the changes that occurred under Children First is that the groups formed to investigate the NYC school district never produced any written report to justify the DOE’s decisions (Braams, 2002; Haimson, 2009). The DOE provides no explanation as to why an investigation that initially cost the city $4 million did not produce any written record of their findings. The public is left to assume all policy decisions were made based on the preferences of top-level policy makers and their consultants. What we might also assume is that policy makers believed reforms in NYC schools would just happen in a rational manner. In other words, policy makers design and adopt policy; implementers then implement those policies with fidelity. However, this study complicates that assumption. Principals in this study suggest that their ability to implement reforms was complicated by a few factors. This study attempts to understand the factors by looking at principals’ abilities to implement reforms when reform is so ambitious and swift moving as New York City’s has been.

Organization of study

This study is divided into six chapters. I will, first, introduce the study, provide my research questions, identify the important actors, and provide a general description of the Children First reforms. In chapter two, I will review the literature that this study speaks to and explain how my study contributes to, affirms, or challenges this literature. In chapter three, I provide a brief description of the social and political contexts shaping NYC schools by examining the demographics of NYC schools, the presence and persistence of issues like segregation and poverty, as well as NYC’s relationship with centralization and decentralization. I will also detail my methodology and study design, and data collection. Chapter four will provide the findings for research question number one and chapter five will provide the findings for
research question number two. Finally, in chapter six, I provide a discussion for the study including the major findings, significance, and my recommendations for policy and research.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study builds on three areas of research related to the way policy implementation is impacted by policy design, school governance structures, and the capacity of educational practitioners to implement policy with fidelity. Findings in this study suggest that principals’ abilities to activate their autonomy, which principals received as a provision of the NYC Children First reforms, was constrained by the poor manner in which the policy was designed under the current school governance structure and the mismatch between what principals were being asked to do and what they were actually capable of doing in their schools. In order to understand how policy design, school governance, and principal capacity impacted principal implementation, I first begin by exploring literature on policy design and implementation. I focus on policy design and implementation literature to clarify the processes that lead to policy creation as well as to provide insight into the contexts, or policies, people, and places, that impact implementation. I then move to discuss what literature tells us about mayoral control as a way define the type of school governance structure that shaped principals’ abilities to implement policy in this study. I conclude my review of the literature by examining the research on principals as the leader of reform particularly because it helps to underscore the importance of principals as key actors in school reform but also because principals were targeted as the centerpiece of reform and policy directives in the NYC school district.

**Policy Design and Implementation**

Implementation research became prevalent between the 1960s and 1980s when federal and state policies and legislation called for changes to the core, or “grammar” of schooling (Honig, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). When federal statutes, like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, and publications like *A Nation At*
Risk in 1983, called for direct changes to central tenets like funding strategies and curriculum and instruction decisions (Honig, 2006), researchers became interested in how implementers were able to ensure they carried out these reforms as they were intended to be carried out, with fidelity to the policy design (Murphy 1971; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). A second, equally important aspect of implementation research is related to context, or the policies, people, and places that matter for implementation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976).

Current research on implementation has continued to focus on the context, i.e., the policies, people, and places, that impact implementation, but researchers have also placed a sharper focus on the design of policies or the tools used for implementation (McDonell & Elmore, 1987; O’Day, 2002). This study is situated within recent policy research which focuses on both policy design as well as the context that impacted implementation of policy in NYC schools (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, 2011; Honig, 2006).

Understanding Policy Design

It is difficult to study policy implementation without having some knowledge about how a policy has been designed or why it was designed in a particular manner (Linder & Peters; 1984; Schneider & Ingram, 1988). Traditionally, policy design begins with the identification of a problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1988; Stokey & Zechkhauser, 1978). According to Weimer (1993), problem definition encompasses three activities: investigating the causes of the problem, framing the problem as a public policy problem that can be alleviated with public involvement, and evaluating some initial policy solutions. However, defining the problem can be complicated by the beliefs and values held by the policy makers.

Findings from this study suggest that problem definition can be value laden. In other words, policy makers define problems based on their own positionality and identity. For example,
Useem (2009) studied the reforms of former Philadelphia and Chicago school leader, Paul Vallas, and found that Vallas relied on his managerial skills and experience as the budget director for the city of Chicago to enact a number of changes in urban districts. For example, while in Chicago, Vallas used his expertise to address labor issues with the teachers union and, in Philadelphia, Vallas embraced the development of charter schools. His worldview and philosophy on school reform was certainly shaped by his tenure as a politician and a budget director.

The policy design process also includes a conscious consideration of policy solutions and the prediction of policy outcomes (Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1978). Weimer (1993) refers to the solution stage as "tinkering and borrowing." The implication is that policy makers make connections to similar organizations and situations, observe how those organizations approached the policy problem, and then tinker with the policy solution to apply it to the current policy problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1988). Policy solutions, then, are less a matter of innovation than a matter of experience with similar policy problems and selection of policy solutions that have been effective in other arenas. The tinkering and borrowing aspect to policy design provides information about the values and beliefs of policy makers and how this might influence the shape policies take. This study adds to this literature and finds that borrowing and tinkering with policy solutions can have considerable consequences when policy is borrowed from arenas that are drastically different from one another.

During the policy design process policy makers also evaluate the potential outcomes of a selected policy design. Evaluation involves measuring the degree to which the policy goal can be achieved (Linder & Peters, 1984). Ideally, evaluation involves examining all the possible outcomes, the potential for successful implementation, and the consequences (Weimer, 1993). During this stage, then, policy makers should forward map from the top-down in order to
“identify all the elements that must be assembled for the policy to yield its intended consequences…” (Weimer, 1993, p. 118) as well as backward-map in order to anticipate “what behaviors give rise to the undesirable social condition” policy seeks to eradicate (Weimer, 1993, p. 114).

Current policy design literature also suggests that governance structures have changed the process of policy design dramatically. The current process of defining the policy problem, finding a policy solution, as well as evaluating potential outcomes incorporates the perspectives of traditional public actors as well as non-traditional private actors, like corporations (Howlett & Lejano, 2013). Cities like Chicago and NYC have been primary examples of how the intermingling of the private and public sector, for example, have changed the way public policy is designed (Ravitch, 2010; Shipps, 2002). This shift in the way educational policy is created means that new constituent concerns have to be considered and that new values and beliefs are being injected into the American schools system via policy designs. This study suggests that when private actors have a more central role in policy design and policy makers do not “backward map” from implementers to policy design, they run the risk of designing policies that cannot be implemented with fidelity because they lack full knowledge of the resources available for implementation and the obstacles that might prevent actors from enhancing policy goals.

The concept of policy design is central to this study. In particular, this study places emphasis on how policy makers define the problems faced by NYC schools in the early stages of their design process. Policy makers and principal union representatives in this study indicated that the Children First policy process did not involve the public, which includes practicing principals and teachers. As a result, important stakeholders, like principals and teachers, could not lend their voice to the process of defining the problem or evaluating possible solutions,
which resulted in the development of policies that could not be implemented with fidelity at the
ground level. In subsequent chapters, I will describe, specifically, the relationship between the
policy design process and principals’ inabilitys to implement policies with fidelity.

**Understanding Policy Solutions: Policy Instruments**

In order to understand why policy makers sought to give principals autonomy, we must
explore the instruments used to empower (or disempower) implementers. Policy instruments, or
policy tools are tools that transform policy goals, like increasing student performance on state
math and reading tests, to tangible actions (Honig, 2006; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). When
policy makers employ a particular policy instrument in their policy design, they signal that they
hold particular assumptions about the obstacles preventing change and the most effective
techniques to create change. For example, when mandates are used, policy makers assume that
implementers will not change without being compelled to do so (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).
When capacity building tools are used, the assumption is that implementers simply lack the
ability to create change so resources and training are provided to enable implementers to act
(McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Policy instruments, then, are not simply tools used to achieve
policy goals, they provide information about policy makers’ perception of implementers as well
as the opinions and the interests of the policy makers (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007).

Research suggests that in this current era of accountability, federal and state policy
makers have expanded the kinds of policy instruments they employ to encourage action from
implementers at the district and school level. While in the past, policy makers have relied heavily
on mandates as a policy instrument to coerce action, like those associated with ESEA’s Title I,
current instruments run the gamut between capacity building, like the Technical Assistance for
Student Assignment Plans federal grant program (Debray, McDermott, Frankenberg, &
Blankenship, Under Review; United States Department of Education website, 2009a) to system-changing, like the school turnaround measures associated with the reauthorization of ESEA (RAND, 2011; United States Department of Education, 2009b). Even though policy makers have expanded their policy tool arsenals, research has yet to explore what kinds of policy tools in education systems work best under which school governance conditions. For example, are mandates more effective when school districts are centralized? Are inducements more effective when a locally elected school board governs? These are questions yet to be asked and answered by research. This research will begin to provide some insight into the effectiveness of system-changing tools in implementation when mayors eliminate school boards and take over school districts, as was the case in NYC.

Current literature does explore the benefits and negative consequences of different policy instruments. For example, in the case of inducements, which provide short-term money in exchange for a particular behavior, policy makers assume that implementers only need money in order to make positive changes and adhere to policy guidelines (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Schneider & Ingram, 1991). However, inducements require a great deal of oversight, which can be expensive and require a great deal of human resources (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Schneider & Ingram, 1991). Salamon (2000) argues that mandates are among the most effective tools because they are highly coercive, clear, and direct in their purpose. However, mandates, too, require extensive supervision and often face opposition from the public because they restrict the will of the public (Salamon, 2000).

In the case of system-changing, the tool used in NYC, policy-makers often believe implementers will be more effective because the new system of authority will enable their effectiveness in a way that the former system of authority did not. However, system-changing
tools are among the most controversial of policy tools because they seek to make sweeping changes to the current system and require strong political partnerships that have the capacity to push changes through in the face of widespread opposition (Bales, 2006; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). The literature fails to acknowledge, however, that system-changing policies also require a significant amount of knowledge and capacity on behalf of the newly empowered authority. If newly minted systems of authority lack knowledge about the past policies, people, or places that impact reform and implementation, they may lose credibility, suffer setbacks, and face the opposition or resistance of implementers.

In summary, research on policy instruments suggests that when policy makers choose a particular policy instrument, they provide a great deal of information about how they have defined the problem, their perception about the will and capacity of the implementers (McLaughlin, 1987) and the consequences associated with particular policy instruments. What research still has yet to explore, and this study begins to address, is what kinds of instruments work best under what circumstances in education systems. In this study, I explore the way policies are implemented when a system is taken over by a mayor and power is shifted to principals, ultimately changing the system of authority.

Understanding Implementers

Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007) suggest that policy makers are rarely the targets of policy and are seldom asked to act to solve policy problems. Instead, policy makers “…depend on the very people and organizations that have or are the problem to solve it” (p. 522). Target populations are the “persons or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy” (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Policy makers use particular rationales for identifying target populations (Coburn, Toure, Yamashita, 2009). For instance, if a problem is framed as one
related to student performance, policy might be directed at the individuals or institutions that matter most for improving student performance like teachers or parents (Wood & Vedlitz, 2007). If the problem is framed as one related to the poor teacher quality, policies may be aimed at schools and institutions that train teachers. The way a problem is defined will also have implications for how a policy is framed.

Research on target populations indicates that policy makers may also identify target populations based on their social identities (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Wood & Vedlitz, 2007). According to Schneider & Ingram (1993), target populations’ identities are socially constructed. Social constructions are ideas that exist because a group has given meaning to those ideas (Hacking, 1999). For example, individuals, groups, and institutions socially construct ideas about what it means to be a woman based on their own beliefs and values. These ideas can become widely shared beliefs and normalized within a group or society and lead to ideas about what a population is like and how they behave (Hacking, 1999).

Schneider and Ingram (1993) created four categories to help describe the social construction of target populations—advantaged, contenders, dependents, and deviants. Individuals in the advantaged and contender categories are often oversubscribed benefits in the policy process and have power to influence policy. Individuals in the dependent and deviant categories rarely receive benefits, are oversubscribed burdens, and are generally unable to have much influence over policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Although policy makers may not subscribe, overtly, to these categories, these general groupings help to clarify how target populations might respond to policy, adapt policy, and then implement policy at the local level.

Research indicates that assumptions about a target population’s behavior and capabilities have the ability to shape implementation and, consequently, implementation success (Malen,
2006). For example, Cohen, Moffit, and Goldin (2007) suggest that a group’s capability, or capacity, is a resource for implementation. In other words, if a group is highly capable they are likely to bring with them useful ideas, skill, valuable knowledge, and money, which are all necessary for successful implementation of policy (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007).

Capability, however, is dependent on a number of factors including the instruments chosen by policy makers and the environment surrounding the reform (Cohen, Moffit & Goldin, 2007). In other words, if policy makers use mandates as an instrument, implementers may only have information about what is required of them, but no capacity to actually carry out the required tasks. This study adds that capability is determined by the policy. Policies that require implementers to take on new or more extensive tasks may expose lesser capacity than those policies that ask implementers to make small changes to practice or to carry out tasks they are familiar with. When policies ask target populations to change their practice or to take on new, unfamiliar tasks, they have the potential to create low capacity and reduce the likelihood for successful policy implementation (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007).

The above research is important in helping us understand why policy makers identify particular target populations for policy and how those populations might respond given their socially constructed identities and capacity. The above research, however, does not reflect an understanding on the way school governance structures, in this case mayoral control, shape actors ability to implement policies with fidelity. In this study, NYC policy makers have targeted principals for policy implementation. While a number of studies indicate that principals are important for reform and have a lot of power to shape reform in their schools (Coburn, 2003; Fullan, 2002; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2001), few studies have shown how principals respond to reform once targeted for policy by policy makers. This study indicates that principals’
abilities to implement policy is shaped by more than their professional identities, but also by the policies, people, and places or context surrounding their schools. While policy makers in NYC may have seen principals as an easy entry point to implement reforms in the schools, principals’ varied abilities and experiences meant policy implementation would vary immensely.

**Mayoral Control**

Current literature on mayoral control of schools does not provide evidence of the impact of mayoral control on school leaders’ capacity to implement reforms. As noted above, policy implementation is influenced by past and present policy, places, and people—like mayors (Honig, 2006). This is especially true in NYC where Mayor Bloomberg has not only changed the structure of school governance, but has also been directly involved in shaping educational policy and the people involved in educational practice (O’Day, Bitter, & Gomez, 2011). The mayor’s presence in NYC is a central part of policy implementation and a central part of this study.

Within the current climate of accountability at the federal, state, and local levels of educational governance, mayoral control has taken on new meaning as an avenue for coercing change in many urban districts that seem unable to improve education for all children and principals are a central part of that reform, especially in cities like Chicago and NYC (Chicago Public Schools website, 2013; NYC Department of Education website, 2013). Recent literature provides information about the prevalence of mayoral control in American school districts, the benefits of mayoral control, as well as the drawbacks. However, this literature is limited in the way it explains how mayoral control of school districts impacts implementation of policies at the school level. My study addresses these limitations in the mayoral control literature by providing an initial set of findings about the way autonomy, a Children First reform, was implemented by school leaders in NYC schools and how, if at all, principal capacity to implement was impacted.
by policy design and the mayoral control school governance structure. First, I provide a brief background of mayoral control literature.

**What is Mayoral Control?**

Mayoral control exists when the mayor is the “primary institutional actor in education policy” (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000). That is, mayoral control exists when the mayor is recognized as the foremost authority on education policy. Research suggests that mayors may gain control through three legislative processes. They may be authorized by the state legislature, by referendum, or altering the city charter to grant the mayor the ability to appoint the school board (Wong & Shen, 2007). In the case of NYC, mayoral control is also characterized by the ability of the mayor to, not only appoint a school board, but also select the chancellor or superintendent of schools and influence educational policy (Henig, 2009; Wong & Shen, 2007).

Historically, the mayor has played a mixed role in education policy. Richard J. Daley of Chicago selected all members of the school board from 1955 to 1976 (Viteritti, 2009). Between the late 19th century and the late 1990s, the mayor of Baltimore shared authority to appoint the school board with the governor (Kirst, 2003; Henig, 2009). Control of all school operations, however, was out of reach until the early 1990’s (Kirst, 2003).

Research suggests that the current manifestation of mayoral control, which includes complete control of all school operations, has been gaining popularity in large urban cities since the early 1990s (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000). Boston public schools were among the first to be controlled by a mayor in 1991; followed by Chicago in 1995, Cleveland in 1998, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 2000 (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000; Henig, 2008, Henig, 2009). Although NYC dabbled with a form of mayoral control in 1873 (Ravitch, 2009), NYC did not begin its current experiment with mayoral control until 2002 when increased pressure from the national
accountability movement made centralization a popular preference for many school districts nationwide. This upsurge in mayoral control suggests that educators around the country, particularly those in urban districts, face changing school governance structures that have the potential to alter their practice at the local level. This study provides an initial set of findings to explore, specifically, principal capacity to implement reforms when mayors take charge of school governance.

**Supporting and Opposing Mayoral Control**

The theoretical assumptions underpinning the support for mayoral control stem from beliefs about the abilities of public administration to effectively see reform through and the inabilities of elected school boards to effectively advance reform goals (Henig, 2009). Research suggests that supporters of mayoral takeover believe mayors are better equipped to gather a diverse set of resources to support schools, compel institutions with expertise on family and children to collaborate with the school system, and can call up the skills of other local government arms to work in education (Henig, 2009). For example, my study shows that in NYC, Mayor Michael Bloomberg restored the Fund for Public Schools, which was established in 1982 by the NYC Board of Education (currently known as the NYC Department of Education) to manage donations made to the school system (Stiefel & Schwartz, 2011). Bloomberg strengthened the Fund, when he took office, and tasked it with increasing the “public-private partnership as a critical means to supporting schools.” The Fund was essential in raising millions of dollars to help support a number of NYC reform efforts, including the Leadership Academy (Fund for Public Schools website, 2012). As a public official, mayors are also empowered to link the success of schools to the corporate world and development (Henig, 2009), thus beginning a partnership between schools and businesses.
While the literature effectively explores the ways mayors are successful at soliciting resources and bringing money to otherwise cash strapped systems, it fails to explore what impact mayoral control has on the implementation of policies, like the autonomy policy in NYC schools, at the school level. Understanding the impact of mayoral control on policy implementation is important because mayoral control fundamentally changes the structure of school governance (Ravitch, 2010). Traditionally, elected school boards and superintendents have the final say on which policies are created, adopted, and implemented. However, when mayors take control of schools, like Mayor Bloomberg in NYC, they can circumvent the election process, create and hire a panel of policy makers who will see their visions to fruition, and exclude important stakeholders, like teachers and parents, who have a vested interest in the educational process. This study seeks to address this limitation by looking specifically at the implementation of one policy and the impact of, mayoral control, via policy design, on principals’ capacity to implement policy.

Literature on mayoral control also indicates that supporters of mayoral control believe school boards are less empowered and less reliable than mayors in their ability to piece together resources and advance policy goals (Henig, 2009; Kirst, 2009). Members of the school board in cities that are not controlled by mayors are often elected by the populous. Ideally, school boards would represent the interests of their constituents while also considering the collective goals of the city and state. At the end of the 20th century, however, supporters of mayoral control did not see school board members as public servants because they were susceptible to co-optation by special interests groups (Viteritti, 2009). Instead, school boards were viewed as overly political, bureaucratic obstacles, and liabilities (Cibulka, 2001; Kirst & Bulkley, 2000). With school
boards framed as overly political and bureaucratic failures, mayors were able to gain control of
districts and directly influence policy design and practice.

Research suggests that an additional reason mayors seek to gain control of school
systems is because they believe centralization will increase accountability and improve
achievement in ways that schools boards cannot (Henig; 2009; Kirst & Bulkley, 2001; Wong,
2007; Wong & Shen, 2003). Viteretti (2009), however, points out that research on the
relationship between mayoral control and achievement is mixed.

Part of the reason results related to the impact of mayoral control on achievement are
inconsistent is because it is remarkably difficult to isolate the direct impact mayoral control has
on classroom practice and performance (Viteretti, 2009). As an alternative, authors seek to show
whether mayoral control is positively correlated to test performance. Wong (2009), found test
scores in reading and math to be positively correlated with mayoral control. However, when
Wong (2009) compared test scores of high-performing and low-performing schools, he found
that mayoral control is associated with an increase of the achievement gap between blacks and
whites. Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), one central goal was for schools to push all
students toward proficiency and to close the achievement gap between minority students and
white students. Wong’s research, however, indicates that there is still some question about the
impact of mayoral control on achievement for all students.

This study also questions the fact that mayoral control, via policy design, has the capacity
to bring coherence to large and complex school systems, like the NYC school district. In later
chapters, this study will examine the way policies designed under mayoral jurisdiction enabled,
or disabled coherence. This study finds that with weak policy designs and unclear policy
messages, mayoral control may have created low capacity among practitioners and increased variation in implementation rather than consistency in implementation.

Although researchers question the relationship between mayoral control, achievement for students, and coherence (Viteretti, 2009), some researchers still believe that mayoral control is a viable option for turning around chronically low-performing schools (Wong & Shen, 2013). Yet, mayoral control is not a foolproof solution to low-performance. Shipps (2009) points out that mayors are by nature very political figures. If a mayor places their chances for re-election on the success of schools, they may be more inclined to limit the negative information revealed to the public and minimize the significance of substandard performance. For example, in 2008, Mayor Bloomberg testified before Congress that “…We have done everything possible to reduce our achievement gap, and we have in some cases by as much as half” (testimony of Michael Bloomberg, 2008). He associated this increase in test scores with the new policies enacted by the city, including the autonomy given to principals. However, a closer look suggests that his testimony was disingenuous. In an article in The New York Times, Arnold Goldstein, a statistician from the National Center for Education Statistics, the organization which administers the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test, suggested that the “city made no statistically significant progress in closing the racial achievement gap in that time” (Otterman & Gebeloff, 2010). The United States Department of Education defines the NAEP as the “largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas” (United States Department of Education website, 2012). In the summer of 2010, state officials discovered that the results on state tests suggested the achievement gap was still wide. Forty percent of black and 46% of Hispanic students passed state math tests, while 75% of white and 82% of Asian students passed state math tests. The gap
was actually remaining steady, not closing as Bloomberg had suggested. Klein responded in a *New York Times* article and stated, “Do I wish we had closed the achievement gap? Sure” (Otterman & Gebeloff, 2012).

The research above suggests that mayoral leadership has a mixed impact on student achievement and, perhaps, no impact on closing the achievement gap. In her analysis of the NYC school system, Ravitch (2009) suggests that mayoral control “is not a guaranteed path to school improvement” because “clearly many factors affect educational performance other than the governance structure” (p. 91). This study suggests that Ravitch is correct but she misses a key point. There are a number of factors that impact performance other than the governance structure. However, the governance structure is critical, especially when it is a mayoral control governance structure that is connected to, not only policy, but the people, like principals, who have an impact on educational performance. Mayoral control is invasive and impacts many other factors that may have an impact on educational performance. Although Ravitch does not explore this relationship between governance and policy implementation, this study does.

Twenty of the largest American cities across the nation have experimented, at some point, with mayoral control in an effort to increase accountability and at least two of those cities, New York City and Chicago, have experimented with giving principals more autonomy over some aspect of a school’s operations (Chicago Public Schools, 2013; NYC DOE, 2005). Because we are in the crux of the accountability movement, cities, particularly those serving large populations of minority students, are experimenting more and more with strategies like mayoral control and autonomous schools to increase student performance on standardized tests. However, the lack of literature about the impact of mayoral control on the capacity of principals and school
leaders to implement necessary changes to address these gaps is perturbing. This study seeks to help fill that gap.

The next section examines principals and the role they play in school reform. In the first phase of the Children First reforms, principals were identified as a key lever for change and became an even larger focus during the second phase of the reforms when Bloomberg and Klein focused much of their reforms efforts on the “autonomy/accountability” exchange (O’Day, Bitter, Gomez, 2011). The next section is dedicated to understanding how previous literature has explored the role of principals in reform.

**Principal’s Role in Reform**

Although research acknowledges that principals are critical for school reform (Fullan, 2002; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982), few studies have explored the factors that impact a principals’ capacity to effectively implement reforms and meet policy goals. As indicated in the policy implementation literature above, implementation is dependent on the interconnectedness of policy, people, and places. Thus, principals, because of their proximity to schools, are intricately connected to policy implementation and have the responsibility to meet reform goals sufficiently. Few studies, however, explain what if any factors impact a principal’s capacity to carry out reform at the school level. This study fills that gap by providing a preliminary set of descriptive findings on the impact of policy design and school governance (i.e. mayoral control) on principal capacity to implement reforms with fidelity.

Like the federal No Child Left Behind Act, mayoral control in New York City places a great deal of responsibility for school change on individual schools (Orr, Byrne-Jiminez, McFarlane, & Brown, 2005; Weiss, 1995). Principals must manage their schools effectively in order to achieve positive achievement results and avoid negative consequences. Because districts
across the country increasingly face system-changing policies that require school leaders to change their practice and implement new, and sometimes unfamiliar, reforms (like mayoral control; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) we must have a better understanding of principals’ roles as the leaders and facilitators of reform as well as the factors impacting their ability to facilitate reform.

Research suggests that principals are critical components for school reform (Fullan, 2002; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Successful reform depends on experienced leaders who have the capacity to sustain and support reform in an effective and meaningful way (Coburn, 2003; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2001). In 2007, the Wallace Foundation published a report that suggested, “Leadership is an essential ingredient for ensuring that every child in America gets the education they need to succeed” (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 2). While teachers provide critical frontline services with classroom instruction, principals shape the school environment, set school level expectations for classroom teaching and learning, determine the goals for teaching and learning, and provide the structure for students and teachers in the system to meet those goals (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, McFarlane, & Brown, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2007).

School leaders also play a specific role in gathering resources to carry out policy directives. In a study conducted by Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier (2008), the authors found that school leaders played an essential role in combining local, state, and national resources to improve consistently low-performing schools. Principals used their skills to “piece together” the resources and help translate the policy goals to actions by distributing leadership and collaborating with school staff, trusting the capacity of school staff to translate goals into action, and acting as honest instructional leaders (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meir, 2008).
Principals can both endorse reform and encourage teachers to take part in it or reject reform and create a culture of opposition. In a study about the impact principals had on reform, Anderson and Shirley (1995) found that principals who supported reform clearly articulated their ideas, were dedicated to the reform, provided support in order to ensure the reforms were carried out, and took responsibility when projects were not successful. Successful school leaders also play a specific role in communicating policy goals to the school community. In particular, research suggests that principals help provide guidance about reform and pave paths for the school community, are able to help other teammates (like teachers and assistant principals) improve by providing professional development, serve as an example for teachers to follow, and alter the organizational structure so that the school culture is one of partnership and communal growth (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007). However, a number of obstacles prevent principals from embodying all those characteristics simultaneously.

An earlier study conducted by Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, McFarlane, & Brown (2005) acknowledged that the district environment had a significant impact on a principal’s capacity to implement reforms with fidelity. The authors found that “leadership effectiveness is dependent on context and the nature of change (Orr, Byrne-Jimenez, McFarlane, & Brown, 2005, p. 26). That is, a principal’s ability to translate policy goals into action depends on the kinds of changes the policy seeks to create. This study adds to this finding by describing how specific changes, like mayoral control, impact the capacity of school leaders to implement reform.

Another study that suggests district environment shapes principals’ capacity to implement reforms with fidelity was conducted by Shipps & White (2009) and sampled six NYC school principals. Their study suggested that the accountability movement drives principals abilities to act on reform. The authors suggest that accountability policies alter how principals understand
their ability to enact change by placing demands on principals to prioritize what is important to act on and what is not (Shipps & White, 2009). The findings from this study also suggest that principals’ capacity, or knowledge about how to implement the reforms plays a more significant role when the stakes are high and accountability implies one may lose their job if they are unable to implement reform and prove their success.

While literature has done a good job establishing the importance of school leaders in reform, few studies have highlighted the obstacles principals face translating policy goals into action. At the time of this writing, no known studies have explored what or how principals act as agents for reform when they are faced with obstacles related to mayoral control, poor policy design, and low capacity or knowledge about how to implement reforms. My study suggests that principals face a plethora of obstacles that impact their implementation of policies with fidelity. This study begins to broach this topic and helps to provide a glimpse at the structures impeding effective policy implementation.

The gaps in the literature reviewed in this study establish the need for a deeper exploration of the relationship between policy design and implementation, mayoral control, and the role of the principal in reform. Literature on mayoral control does not explore the impact of centralized governance on policy implementation, two central elements to the NYC schools reform. Although these literatures have not been studied together, it is clear that the proliferation of mayoral control and the shift of autonomy to schools and school leaders in districts across the nation merits study of these phenomena in order to advance our understanding of each. The study presented here brings together what we know about these areas of literature and expands by asking, 1) what does the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy? and 2) what challenges did principals face while implementing the autonomy policy in NYC.
schools? In the next section, I discuss the social and political context of NYC schools and the methodology and techniques used to conduct this case study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Before beginning this study, it was important for me to understand the social and political environment in which the autonomy policy exists because it informed how practitioners and policy makers understood their role in the NYC school system and it informed how I selected principals and collected data. While many of the experiences expressed by practitioners in this study are familiar to practitioners in school districts across the country, many of their experiences were so embedded in the NYC school district context and it was important to, first, provide a snapshot of what the context actually encompassed. As a result, I use this chapter to provide a brief background of the social and political contexts of NYC schools as a way to clarify the social and political environment in which the principal autonomy policy exists and is implemented. I also use this chapter to describe the sample and the methods I used to identify participants, my tools for data collection, and the methods used to analyze data, as well as limitation of this study. I start this chapter with the brief background of the social and political context of NYC schools.

Social and Political Context of New York City Schools

In this study I define social context to mean the factors related to race, ethnicity, and social class of New York City students and their families. By political context, I am referring to NYC’s history with elected school boards, policies, and political actors (some of whom may not be politicians like the teachers union representatives or Chancellor Joel Klein) that help to shape practice in NYC schools. This section is meant to help set the stage for the findings and to provide some background information on the events and phenomena that define the relationship between mayoral control and principals’ autonomy as well as the social issues that impact principals’ abilities to implement policies with fidelity in and around NYC schools. Rather than
providing a comprehensive description of the social and political contexts, I focus on the issues pertinent to principal implementation of the autonomy policy.

**Social Context- NYC Students Opportunity to Learn**

Access to high quality education is a critical issue for many children living in the most impoverished communities in the United States. Research shows that children living in poor communities often have significantly less access to the high quality teachers and schools that may help them prepare for life, careers, and education beyond high school than children living in middle class and wealthy communities (Kozol, 2005; Schott Foundation, 2012). This section helps to describe the access children in NYC have to high quality education and begins to shed light on some of the complex characteristics of NYC schools that may impact policy implementation.

The New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) is the largest school district in the country with more than 1 million students and 1700 schools (NYC DOE website, 2012). Students represent various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups making it one of the most diverse districts in the country. 78% of NYC school students are eligible for free or reduced lunch while only 22% are ineligible. Forty percent of all NYC public school students are Hispanic, 32% are Black, 14.9% are White, and 13.7% are Asian (Kleinfield, 2012).

General enrollment numbers, however, do not reflect that NYC schools are among the most racially segregated schools in the country. In 2012, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles to chronicle the changing racial and ethnic dispersal of students in NYC schools. The article explained that 650 schools in NYC had enrollments that were 70% or more of one race and at least half of NYC schools were at least 90% Black and Hispanic (Kleinfield, 2012).
The racial isolation in NYC schools has resounding effects on access to high quality schools and teachers. In a report conducted by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, researchers found that a student’s “opportunity to learn,” or access to high quality education and schools in the top quartiles of performance, was directly related to neighborhood, race, and ethnicity (Schott Foundation, 2012). NYC students are assigned to elementary and middle schools based on their proximity to a school (NYC Department of Education Regulation A-185, 2005). Black, Hispanic, poor Whites, and Asians are less likely to live in communities with public schools that provide them the best opportunity to gain the skills necessary to pass state and national tests, gain access to the City’s high performing selective schools, or to graduate from high school ready to enter college (Schott Foundation, 2012). A New York Times series illustrated this fact when they shadowed one black high school student from the South Bronx who was admitted to Stuyvesant High School, arguably the city’s most elite public high school. The article reported that students living and attending schools in the South Bronx, a community that includes one of the city’s poorest Census tracts, were rarely afforded the opportunity to attend Stuyvesant (Census, 2011). Yet, students attending schools in neighborhoods like Bensonhurst, a predominantly Asian and middle class neighborhood in Brooklyn, were gaining spots at Stuyvesant in the dozens each year (Santos, 2012). This reflects an academic achievement gap and stirs questions about why some groups of students cannot gain access to the best schools NYC has to offer.

Like Black and Hispanic students attending schools in other major cities, researchers also found that Black and Hispanic students in NYC schools were more likely to have less qualified teachers and are more likely to have teachers who leave their position within 2-3 years, which increases instability in schools (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Schott
Highly qualified teachers are defined as teachers who have a Masters degree and 30 hours or more of further education (Schott Foundation, 2012). In NYC schools with highly qualified teachers, 6% of Black and Hispanic students perform at Level 4, the highest level of mastery, on state and national exams (Schott Foundation, 2012). Even in districts with highly qualified teachers, Black and Hispanic students’ performances on state and national exams is still far lower than the 11% of Asian and 10% of White students in NYC that perform at Level 4. In districts where there is high teacher turnover and few highly qualified teachers, only 1% of Black and Hispanic students perform at Level 4 on state and national exams (Schott Foundation, 2012).

The Schott Foundation study mentioned above also found that there were some socioeconomic issues that persisted and made it difficult for students to access high quality education. The study found, “Districts testing the lowest percentage of their students [for gifted and talented courses] were those with the highest percentage of students living in poverty” (Schott Foundation, 2011; p. 13). Within the districts with high concentrations of students living in poverty, only 1% of the students were deemed eligible to enter gifted and talented courses (Schott Foundation, 2012). Even though gifted and talented programs have been highly scrutinized for their admission policies and their propensity for segregating students, they are still regarded as an avenue for students to gain access to high quality teachers and curriculum in the early years of their education.

These findings represent disturbing trends related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and neighborhoods in NYC schools and have serious implications for policy implementation. Principals in schools with large populations of Black and Hispanics students are immediately faced with historical and uncontrollable obstacles related to racial segregation,
disenfranchisement of Black and Hispanic students from quality educational systems, and, especially, they struggle to hire and retain high quality teachers who have a direct impact on classroom learning in these schools. As the policy implementation literature above suggests policies, people, and places impact implementation. If principals’ abilities to hire and retain high quality teachers are inherently complicated by social factors like race and socioeconomic status of students, then this means principals’ abilities to activate their autonomy to select the most appropriate staff is hindered by an uncontrollable social context.

**Political Context of NYC Schools- School Governance**

This section is meant to draw attention to the politics and political actors shaping the NYC school district. The current political atmosphere in which principals implement policies has been shaded by historical tensions between political leaders, schools, and community members. Since the late 1800s, the NYC school district has moved between decentralization and centralization in hopes of distributing decision-making power to the most appropriate group (Ravitch, 2009). By 1969, the state legislature created and passed a school decentralization law, which placed elementary and middle schools into 31 (eventually 32) separate community school districts, leaving high schools to be controlled by the central board. The district would not experience centralization again until 2002.

The purpose of the law was two-fold. First, the law was supposed to ease tensions between community members who felt the central board did little to address concerns of African American families and children by giving communities the right to select their community school board members via election (Rogers, 2006). Second, the law, sometimes referred to as “Shanker’s Law,” because of the influence of teachers union president Albert Shanker on the law’s passage, was also meant to provide the teachers union with leverage and access to board
elections themselves (Rogers, 2006). Many school board members were parents of children attending local NYC schools, but others were members of the United Federation of Teachers\(^1\) (UFT), the local teachers union, and teachers. The school boards were responsible for hiring teachers, principals, purchasing textbooks, choosing curriculum, and deciding how to spend the budgets assigned to them by the central board of education (Fiske, 1980; Rogers, 2006). The elected officials were also meant to increase participation of parents in decision making as a way to directly address the concerns of African American and Latino parents that were left over from the 1960’s. However, a number of claims against school boards about their capacity to increase public participation or improve schools surfaced that began the community school boards’ downfalls.

School boards were believed to be ineffective at increasing public involvement in educational decision-making. Although a court decision in 1971 mandated that parents be involved in interviewing and selecting principals and assistant principals (Chance v. The Board of Examiners and the Board of Education of the City of New York et al., 1971; Fiske, 1980), UFT members still dominated seats on boards. At one point, UFT members represented the majority of school board members in all but six of the 32 community school districts and accounted for 75 percent of the voter turnout during school board elections (Chambers, 1980). For the UFT, decentralization provided teachers with a tool to promote their ideas on school policy and protect and endorse their constituents. It also fortified the union’s strength as a political powerhouse over educational issues, both labor and academic, in the NYC policy arena. The presence of UFT members on community school boards also suggested that the UFT had a

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1 The UFT is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT has 1.5 million members with 3000 local affiliates across the country.
2 See appendix A for sample interview questions.
3 See “phase 2 of analysis” column in table 3.3.
4 See Appendix B for sample memo.
high concentration of control over things like jobs (which the board gained control over as part of the 1969 decentralization law) and classroom practice. During an interview with the *New York Times* in 1980, Mayor of NYC Ed Koch stated, “To say that the selection process is democratic is a lot of baloney” (Fiske, 1980). Koch accused UFT members of dominating the school board elections in order to have “jurisdiction over the school system” (Fiske, 1980).

Others claimed decentralization was a failure because of rampant corruption. By 1987, at least six school boards had been brought under review for “misappropriation of funds, misconduct, and improper hiring procedures” (Perlez, 1987). One Harlem superintendent was fired for using funds to pay for personal expenses (Lewis, 1988) and one community school board suspended after officials tape recorded board members premeditating the complete control of a district in Queens through hiring and blocking parent associations from participating in boards (Berger, 1989). There were numerous cases like these associated with conduct among school board members and school leaders in NYC media. School boards continued to face countless claims of corruption, which only helped to support claims that decentralization was not a useful tool for helping schools but a mechanism to serve adults. Although Robert F. Wagner Jr., the Board of Education president, said the district could never go back to centralized schools, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani tried, unsuccessfully, throughout his mayoral tenure in the 1990’s to gain full control of the NYC schools (Barry, 1999; Dao, 1995). The district did eventually centralize in 2002 under Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

This brief background on school boards in NYC helps us understand more about how the NYC school district went from decentralized with community school boards to centralized with mayoral control. As indicated above, the school boards faced much more critique than praise for their work or contribution to the district and upon his nomination Bloomberg moved swiftly to
eliminate what he believed was a bureaucratic burden to improving NYC schools. Between 2002 and 2011, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein made drastic changes to the NYC school district including controversially eliminating the 32 community school districts, mandating a core curriculum, shifting decision-making power to principals, and ramping up accountability efforts. The shifts in policy, however, did not eliminate politics from reform, as the mayor believed it would. Instead, the shifts strengthened the mayor’s reputation as a political powerhouse, weakened democratic participation in policymaking, and had a significant influence on principals and other practitioners at the school level. As the mayoral control literature suggests, mayors have a talent for bringing resources to schools, but they also have a knack for decreasing the kinds of bottom up participation necessary to design effective policies. In the next chapter, I provide findings to explain the relationship between NYC’s version of mayoral control and principal autonomy.

New York City schools exist in a system that is predicated on constant reform, organizational dysfunction, and deeply embedded power struggles that are historically related to race, ethnicity, and wealth. Taken together, the political and social contexts have a cumulative impact on principals’ abilities to implement reforms. However, this study will focus on the impact the political context has on principal execution of autonomy in NYC schools. In the next section, I will explain the design choices I made to answer the research questions 1) what does the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy? and 2) what obstacles, if any, did principals face implementing the autonomy policy?

**Methods**

My primary reason for choosing New York City as the site for my study is related to the City’s unique combination of giving principals autonomy within a district that is controlled by
the mayor. My secondary reason for choosing NYC as a case is related to how Children First uniquely seeks to build capacity in the principal. Cities like Boston or Washington, D.C., where mayoral control currently or once existed, focus on strengthening teachers and instruction. New York City invests in teaching and instruction through professional development and other instructional reforms, but uniquely believes principals are the “centerpiece” of reform and gives them autonomy as a tool for improving schools, rather than as an reward for improving schools (O’Day, Bitter, Gomez, 2011; Senior policymaker C, personal communication, 2012). NYC, thus, is a unique case that can teach us more about policies that claim to invest the lion share of resources in the principal.

Participants

This section will provide details about the participants in order to provide more context for the findings chapters. There are more than 1700 schools in NYC and I determined that pursuing rich sources, rather than a representative number of sources would enhance my study. As a result, this study involved 19 participants. I conducted 12 of the interviews on site in New York City between January 2012 and May 2012. The remaining 7 interviews were conducted via telephone between October 2011 and May 2012. Since the purpose of my study was to understand how principals experienced autonomy, I used a purposeful sampling approach to select principals (Patton, 2001, Yin, 2011) and initially selected my participants based on their participation in the Empowerment Schools program during the 2006-2007 school year. The expressed intent of the Empowerment Schools program was to give principals, who had not previously possessed autonomy, increased autonomy over operations in their schools, including budgeting, staffing, and curriculum. By selecting principals who had participated in the
Empowerment program, I believed it would solidify the chances that these principals had actually experienced some level of autonomy during their tenure.

I identified principals in the Empowerment Schools program through the New York City Department of Education’s listing of Empowerment Schools on the Department of Education website. Although there were more than 300 schools participating in the Empowerment Schools program all over NYC, I made the decision to only contact elementary school principals in Brooklyn who had been at their schools at least since 2005. I excluded principals who had recently entered their positions because I wanted principals to be able to make important comparisons between their time before the Empowerment Program and after joining the program in the 2006-2007 school year. I also excluded high schools from the study because the Children First policy had a differential impact on high schools. For example, high schools were not mandated to implement the core curriculum nor were high schools required, at any point, to hire parent coordinators. I wanted my sample to reflect the perspectives of principals who were, potentially, experiencing the same kinds of reforms across the board. Plus, both the curriculum and parent coordinator reforms had critical impacts on a principal’s autonomy. Since high school principals did not experience those reforms, I made the decision to exclude them from this study. I also, initially, excluded principals in boroughs outside of Brooklyn. However, after I exhausted my contacts in Brooklyn, I eventually had to explore principals in other boroughs. I chose Queens because of its proximity to Brooklyn. Future studies will need to examine and make comparisons between principals in other boroughs.

My very first point of contact was with a senior policy maker in the NYC DOE in October 2011. After reading several articles and official NYC DOE press releases about the Empowerment Schools program, it was obvious that his role in the district and his contribution to
several important educational policies and initiatives, like the Leadership Academy, made him a key informant for this study. At the time of the interview, the policy maker was no longer with the Department and working as a professor of practice at a prestigious private university in the northeast. I contacted the participant via email, describing my study and asking for voluntary participation. Our phone interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and, after asking him about the kinds of principals I should solicit for my study, he confirmed that the Empowerment principals would be a good place to start.

In order to solicit the participation of the Empowerment principals, I combined extensive Internet searches with direct phone calls to the schools to procure principals’ email addresses. After securing the email addresses, I sent a series of email to 27 principals, who fit my criteria, in Brooklyn beginning in November 2011. In the email, I provided a brief explanation of my study and requested the principal’s voluntary participation. If principals did not respond to the email, I then called schools to speak directly to principals to ask for their participation. I repeated these steps two additional times and was able to solicit the participation of 6 Empowerment principals working in Brooklyn. Because my hope was to interview at least 12 principals who had participated in the Empowerment Schools program I decided to solicit principals working in Empowerment Programs in Queens, NY after numerous unsuccessful attempts at securing 12 Empowerment principals in Brooklyn. In order to solicit the participation of principals in Queens, I followed the same steps used to solicit Brooklyn principals and contacted 8 principals in Queens. I successfully interviewed two principals from Queens, NY.
After interviewing 8 Empowerment principals, I became interested in comparing their experience with autonomy to principals who did not participate in the program. I engaged in a process of identifying principals in the same geographic districts as the Empowerment principals interviewed, to ensure similarity and hold steady the demographics and community profiles. I

### Table 3.1: 2010-2011 Demographic Information of Empowerment Principals’ Schools in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>% White</th>
<th>% Black or African American</th>
<th>% Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</th>
<th>* Student Stability</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Carmone</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>1700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Clarke</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Bogle</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Evers</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Bernard</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Rossi</td>
<td>PK-5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Kagan</td>
<td>Pk-5</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Adelman</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**District %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% White</th>
<th>13.9%</th>
<th>32%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>13.7%</th>
<th>--</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Source: New York City Department of Education (2013)*

*Student stability unavailable at district level*
then emailed 16 additional principals from the same geographic districts as the Empowerment principals in Brooklyn. I was able to secure interviews with 2 additional principals. After interviewing the 2 non-Empowerment principals, I noticed that principals expressed similar experiences with autonomy across the board and noticed definite patterns in their responses, which indicated data saturation. I decided to end data collection with principals. In total 10 principals were interviewed.

**Table 3.2: 2010-2011 Demographic Information for Non-Empowerment Principals’ Schools in Study**

| Principal       | Grade Level | Eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch | % White | % Black or African American | % Hispanic or Latino | % Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander | * Student Stability | Total Enrollment |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Principal Cole  | 6-8         | 66%                                 | 30%     | 1%                         | 3%                  | 66%                                             | 100%              | 1000           |
| Principal Rhodium| PK-5        | 94%                                 | 3%      | 76%                        | 12%                 | 8%                                              | 79%               | 240            |
| District %      |             | 78%                                 | 13.9%   | 32%                        | 40%                 | 13.7%                                           | --                | 1,100,000      |

*Source: New York City Department of Education (2013).*  
*Student stability unavailable at district level*

In order to gain access to network leaders and parent coordinators, I used a snowball sample approach. I used snowball sampling because network leaders information was not accessible through the NYC DOE website and parent coordinators, ultimately, needed to receive permission from principals to participate. Eight of the ten principals interviewed provided email addresses for their network leaders (in several cases principals were in the same networks). Five principals provided contact information for their network leaders, so I contacted each of the five network leaders, but only successfully interviewed one network leader. After interviewing all
principals, I sent follow-up emails to thank principals for their participation and asked them for permission to interview their parent coordinators, which three provided. I interviewed two parent coordinators, one from Principal Clarke’s school and one from Principal Evers’ school on site in NYC in May 2012.

In order to gain access to senior policy makers from the Department of Education, I relied on publically available information. For example, the *New York Times*, served as a major source because it named several individuals responsible for specific NYC DOE reforms and initiatives and provided real-time information on the progress of the initiatives. Using the *New York Times* articles as a springboard of information, I used public search engines, like Google, to try to gain the contact information of the individuals designing and adopting policies. After several unsuccessful attempts at finding the information of senior policy makers, I used personal contacts to gain access to the people listed in *New York Times* articles. I then sent a solicitation letter and informed consent form via email directly to the individuals, and interviewed two of the listed individuals (1 via telephone, 1 in-person in NYC). One was currently president of a nonprofit organization but was tapped by Klein at the initiation of Children First to help begin and support the department’s efforts to develop small schools. The other is a senior researcher for a policy-research and reform organization at a prestigious university in the northeast. He was tapped to be involved, participated in just a few of the early meetings, but decided not to participate after he determined the group would not have any real decision making power.

I continued targeted Internet searches of the Children First policy to gain more information about how it was established and identified one additional policy maker essential for the study. I used personal contacts to gain access and solicited her participation via email in which I described my study and requested her voluntary participation (interview conducted via
telephone). This final policy maker was identified by her peers as one of the most essential people to talk to about the development and implementation of Children First. She was directly involved, since Klein’s appointment, in conceptualizing, planning, and executing the policy at the most senior level of the Department of Education. At the end of each interview with policy makers, I asked the participants to identify others they believed would be important to talk to for the study in an attempt to conduct a bit of snowball sampling. Coincidentally, each policy person identified one or two other people who had already been interviewed in this study.

I also interviewed, on site in NYC, a senior administrator with the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (e.g. the principal’s union) as a way to get an understanding of how principals as a group understood the Children First policy and how union officials conceptualized the policy as well. The union official was one of the senior administrators of the union who also served as a principal in NYC for the past two decades (he was currently on leave to serve with the union). I solicited his participation after emailing 2 principals union officials. Finally, I conducted a phone interview with an executive director of a non-profit organization involved in creating a small high school in NYC to assess community involvement in policy implementation and development. The executive director was directly involved with a number of senior policy makers, including one interviewed in this study, to develop a new small school in Brooklyn. I have a personal relationship with the director after working with her for several years and knowing her for more than a decade.

I also made attempts to interview teachers union officials and Joel Klein. However, my email requests to the teachers union went unanswered and I was never able to obtain contact information for Chancellor Klein. In place of interviews with the teachers union and Klein, I relied on official press releases, websites, and newspaper reports.
Data Collection

I combined semi-structured interviews, extensive document and newspaper analysis, and researcher memos and field notes for data collection. I conducted 19 interviews from 45 to 60 minutes each. Three of the interviews, two principals and one parent coordinator, were not recorded at the participant’s request. For the interviews that were not recorded, I relied on extensive field notes. All other interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. 12 interviews were transcribed using a transcription service, which I then checked, thoroughly, to ensure accuracy. I transcribed the remaining four interviews myself.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol, which allowed for flexibility in questioning different actors\(^2\). Semi-structured interviews seek to combine unstructured and structured interviews. Merriam (1998) states that unstructured interviews call for a great deal of skill and practice, which many novice researchers do not possess. Conversely, highly structured interviews require a high level of structure that may not allow for flexibility and openness (Merriam, 1998). In a semi-structured interview there is fundamental information sought from all respondents and a list of question that may be used as a guide. However, there is enough flexibility to allow new questions to develop and to allow room for the opinion and perspective of the interviewee (Merriam, 1998).

Interview questions changed during the interview process. Even though I began with a list of interview questions, there were numerous opportunities to ask critical follow-up questions and to probe deeper into a participants comments, which is typical of semi-structured interview approaches. For example, when I began data collection, I started with an interview of one former senior policy maker in the NYC DOE. As he responded to questions, it became apparent that he

\(^2\) See appendix A for sample interview questions.
held the belief that it was unnecessary to include many stakeholders in the process of designing the Children First reforms as long as those closest to the students, i.e. principals, received autonomy to make appropriate decisions for their schools in the end. Because I used a semi-structured interview approach, I was able to go deeper into his response. I asked why, then, did it seem as if the public was frustrated with reforms if they were meant to redirect power and authority away from central office staff back to principals and schools? As a result of the questioning, he revealed that he believed that parents used school board elections and subsequent school board seats as an opportunity to access political offices. In other words, parents were not interested in serving on school boards because they wanted to serve schools. Rather, parents were interested in school boards to serve their own interests and, thus, should not have a seat at the decision-making table. This was an important finding because it helped lead to additional questions about who was empowered in the policy process and who was disempowered.

Interviews with principals were initially focused on their understanding of autonomy and the Children First reforms. I asked principals to recall their experiences with the autonomy policy and to discuss what their current experiences with autonomy looked like. After interviewing two principals, I realized quickly that principals’ responses honed in on the way the district and their school environments shaped their capacity to carry out reforms. I then made the decision to be more targeted in my interviews with principals than my original interview protocol allowed for. I encouraged principals to tell me about their students, their students’ families, and the community in which their school was situated. I also sought to understand principals’ definition of autonomy and how principals perceived the way poverty impacted their school since more than half of the principals in this study worked in schools with high percentages of children receiving free or reduced lunch. Other questions were related to a participants’
understandings of the Children First policy in general, their understandings about how Children First was being created and adopted by the NYC DOE, their understandings of autonomy, and their perceptions of how the autonomy policy and their implementation of autonomy impacted the school community.

While in the field, I also wrote extensive field notes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), field notes are a written description of what a researcher encountered in the field. While waiting for interviews with principals to begin, I jotted down notes on the physical appearance of a school, the community in which the school was located in and the happenings between students and staff in main offices. After completing interviews with principals and returning home, I wrote extensive notes on what I saw, heard, or experienced while at the school site. For instance, I took note that one school was located directly across from a large public housing project and was surrounded by large blue prison-like gates. I asked myself if there was a relationship between the school’s location across from a large housing project in a community that is notorious for violence and the large prison-like gates surrounding the school. In another instance, as I walked with a principal to a quiet location for our interview, I took note that none of the staff spoke to her in the hallway as we passed. I noted that this might indicate some tensions between the principal and the staff. During analysis (which is described below), I would return to notes like these in order to glean more information about the school and the principals.

Gathering data from documents is an additional way to amass evidence in a case study design (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The information gained from documents may be obtained through “letters, memoranda, agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports; administrative documents, formal studies or evaluations of the same ‘site’ under study; newspaper clippings” (Yin, 2003), and archival records (Merriam, 1998). I used
documents in two ways. First, I used documents to supplement information that could not be yielded through interviews. For example, many of the principals in this study were unfamiliar with the technical language used to describe Children First. As a result, I searched public documents available through the NYC DOE website to 1) determine what language was actually used in the policy, 2) understand what policy directives applied to principal autonomy, and 3) examine official press releases from the NYC DOE to understand the environment of the district.

Second, I used documents to support what I found out through interviews. When participants in the study made a claim, I used documents as a way to verify the accuracy of their statements whenever possible. For example, when one policy maker stated that all schools that applied for the Empowerment Schools Program had been accepted, I found, through review of newspaper articles on the topic of the Empowerment Schools Program, that this was inaccurate. I then emailed him to clarify his statement to find that more than two dozen schools had been rejected because of consistent low-performance. The types of documents I collected included official press releases from the Department of Education, official press releases from the City of New York and Mayor’s Office, and newspaper articles that were relevant to the study (I searched for articles related to, among many things, Children First, mayoral control, school boards, Joel Klein, principal autonomy, the Empowerment Schools program, the Autonomy Zone, the teachers union as it related to Children First, parent coordinators, and network leaders). In order to situate the study in a larger context, I also read newspaper articles that were related to similar issues outside of NYC and in the federal context.

Data Analysis

Yin (2011) explains that data analysis for qualitative research consists of five phases. The first process I engaged in was compiling my data, which involved organizing my data
thoughtfully. The second phase involved disassembling my data. During the third phase, I reassembled the data while taking notice of emerging patterns. My fourth phase involved interpreting the data and during the fifth phase I drew conclusions about the data (Yin, 2011).

During the first phase of compiling my data, I used simple schemas to organize and keep track of interview protocols, field notes, and documents. For example, interviews with principals were all kept together, while interviews with policy makers were kept together, so on and so forth. Documents pertaining, specifically, to the announcement of Children First were kept together, while documents related to teachers union involvement with the reform were kept separately. I also organized field notes simplistically as they related to whom I interviewed or the documents I read. Field notes that were related to principals were grouped with principals just as field notes written during interviews with policy makers were kept together.

During the second phase of data collection, I engaged in a process of disassembling the simplified schemes and placing data into more specific and smaller groups based on my research questions, what did the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy? And, what obstacles, if any, did principals face implementing the autonomy policy? During the disassembling phase, I also began to develop initial codes as a way to take a more in-depth look at the emerging patterns. Some of the initial codes were titled “principal speaks about autonomy” or “policy maker discusses Children First”, which were superficial and not very descriptive. I, simultaneously, kept detailed memos to document some of my initial thoughts about what was emerging in interviews and documents, which proved to be crucial because memos maintained

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3 See “phase 2 of analysis” column in table 3.3.
my early thoughts on findings that later were instrumental in helping me to develop analytic codes.

Table 3.3 Examples of Phase Two and Phase Three Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview excerpts</th>
<th>Phase two of analysis</th>
<th>Phase three of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “We have total discretion over our budget, which is true, but the hiring and the firing is not true. To fire somebody, you have to go through a very rigorous process which takes you away from a lot of things.”</td>
<td>Principal describes problem in autonomy policy</td>
<td>Staffing Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “We can choose any curriculum we want. But the only curriculum we are going to receive for free is the Core Curriculum.”</td>
<td>Principal describes problem in autonomy policy</td>
<td>Curriculum Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “And I knew I wasn’t strong with budget and I would need extra support…”</td>
<td>Principal describes her own capacity to implement portion of reform</td>
<td>Budgeting Problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the patterns became more evident, I reassembled the data into meaningful groupings of analytic themes. During the reassembling process, I borrowed from the grounded theory approach to developing core categories, which helped me to develop central themes that connect the codes and categories (Birks & Mills, 2011). For example, in interviews, patterns emerged regarding principals’ understandings of autonomy. I began to develop lists and deeper analytic codes, in an Excel document, which were comprised of the different definitions of autonomy principals had or how principals explained their understanding of the Department’s goals for

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4 See Appendix B for sample memo.
reform. This translated into two specific typologies of definitions of autonomy, which were titled “tactile definitions” and “abstract definitions.” I used both deductive and inductive approaches to decide which codes would move forward to more analytic themes, how to combine codes developed in phase two, and which codes would be left out of the final analysis.

In the fourth phase, I interpreted the data by engaging in a process of rereading the data, the codes, and the analytic themes to develop a new story about principals’ perspectives of autonomy in NYC schools. The data explain how the autonomy policy was interpreted and implemented by principals and how the surrounding contexts and obstacles presented impacted principals’ interpretations and implementation. The data suggest that principals experienced a number of obstacles as they implemented the Children First policies and autonomy in their schools (see figure 3.1).

Finally, during the fifth, and final, phase of analysis, I began to draw conclusions based on my interpretations of the narrative developed during phase four. For example, based on a rereading of the data, I concluded that principals experienced obstacles to activating their autonomy, which prevented them from implementing the autonomy policy with fidelity.

**Figure 3.1- Example of Phase Four Analysis**
Limitations and Threats to Validity

There are a number of limitations to this study. However, I have designed the study in a way that helps to minimize the threats to validity and limitations as much as possible. In order to ensure that the findings are an accurate reflection of the real events and experiences of participants and a minimal threat to validity, I relied, primarily, on a purposeful sampling approach. All principals and policy makers were interviewed because they provided a rich description of the events and their experiences and because they participated in important programs or played critical roles in the development and implementation of the Children First policy. Participants’ descriptions often mirrored, closely, the descriptions of other participants and reflect a level of data saturation that helps to minimize threats to validity.

In addition, I used memos and multiple sources as a way to minimize validity threats related to researcher positionality and researcher bias. I was intentionally reflexive about my own experience attending NYC public schools, my experience working with teachers and principals in classrooms as a professional, and my identity as a black woman from a doctoral program in Central Pennsylvania interviewing predominantly black female principals in NYC schools. I was reflexive about how I interviewed the principals and also closely examined the kinds of questions I asked as a result of my identity. I also paid attention to my reactions and the way I interpreted the findings as a result of my identity and experiences. In order to account for my own interpretations or bias, I used memos to look over time at what my own expectations were and misinterpretations of the data. Interviews were conducted with key participants, and in the instances possible, clarification email were sent to participants to help me get a clearer sense of their articulations. Plus, I was able to revisit two of the key informants’ schools to talk with additional staff that helped to corroborate findings and clarify articulations. As a supplement to
interviews and in an effort to minimize validity threats, I conducted extensive reading of press
releases and newspaper articles to ensure that data was consistent across all data sources.

One of the limitations to my study is related to the NYC school system and the DOE's
way of managing principals in consistently low-performing schools. In my initial selection
process, I hoped to identify Empowerment Schools that received consistently low or failing
grades on their progress reports. I was unable to find principals in Empowerment Schools, in
Brooklyn or Queens, who worked in schools that consistently received Ds or Fs on their school
report cards. This reflected a common practice among the NYC DOE to fire principals or remove
them from low-performing schools if they could not show progress. On one occasion, I identified
one non-empowerment principal whose school had consistently received low and failing
progress reports grades and was in the same geographic district as one of my Empowerment
Schools. However, my attempts to schedule interviews with her were unsuccessful5.

NYC is a large and complex school system with more than 1 million students and 1700
schools. The city itself, although not extremely large, is approximately 470 square miles of urban
landscape. Because my time was limited, I was only able to study schools in Brooklyn, and
eventually, Queens. I did, however, attempt selecting a broad range of schools with different
levels of socioeconomic status, various racial and ethnic demographics of students in attendance,
and varying levels of performance (to the extent possible). I was satisfied and reached data
saturation, however, by studying schools only in Brooklyn and Queens.

The methods I used to collect data were essential in helping me to answer my research
questions. Principals and policy makers, alike, shared deep and rich stories about the NYC

5 Between November 2011, which was the point of initial contact, and May 2012 (after at least 6
tries to contact her) the principal had been fired and replaced by another, new, principal. Her
school was subsequently selected for phase out in Fall 2012.
school district and the policy process. Over the next two chapters, I will present my findings and provide a glimpse into the world of principals as facilitators of reform in the nation’s largest, and arguably, one of the most complex school districts in the country.
CHAPTER FOUR: MAYORAL CONTROL AND PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

My assumption upon beginning this study was that principals would overwhelmingly agree that the Children First policy was unhelpful or harmful to their schools or that principal autonomy was a sham to give the appearance of democratic participation in policy making from the central office. My assumptions were grounded in circumstantial evidence from media outlets and the sporadic conversations I had with colleagues about educational policies in NYC schools. However, principals in this study reported that their relationship with mayoral control and autonomy was much more complicated than it seemed it on the outside. Principals harbored positive feelings toward principal autonomy and mayoral control while they simultaneously struggled with several obstacles to implement the autonomy policy with fidelity. Researchers like O’Day, Bitter, and Gomez (2011) focus on policies in NYC schools and describe them as complex but well intentioned. Their research misses the deeper, less obvious complexities that exist in the district between schools and educational policy. However, this study draws attention to the multifaceted perspectives of principals on educational reform in NYC schools. In this chapter, I, first, provide details about what the autonomy policy actually was. Next I tackle my first research question and analyze principals’ perspectives on the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy in NYC schools. I highlight the complicated relationship by detailing the ways in which principals saw the policy positively as well as principals’ perspectives on the challenges to implementing the autonomy policy with fidelity.

What is the autonomy policy?

Before providing the findings to my research questions it is important to, first, understand the actual autonomy policy. During the 2007-2008 school year, all principals received increased autonomy to make decisions for their schools. However, data in this study reveal that the DOE
did not provide clear guidance regarding certain aspects of principal autonomy. There are several documents, including ones titled, “Children First Statement of Performance Terms,” or “Children First: A Bold, Common-Sense Plan to Create Great Schools for All New York City Children”, a document which was viewed as the “core narrative” of the Children First reforms, on the NYC DOE website which provided educators and the public with information on what principal autonomy actually would look like in NYC schools. However, none of the documents provide a comprehensive and clear understanding of what principal autonomy would encompass.

To begin with, the NYC DOE stipulated that principals would, specifically, have access to choosing “instructional and professional supports” that would help the school meet its academic mission and performance objectives (NYC DOE, 2009). According to the core narrative, principals had the autonomy to choose among three types of support organizations including Leadership Support Organizations (LSO), which comprised organizations led by former NYC school superintendents; Partnership Support Organizations (PSO), which were organizations led by nonprofit groups; and Empowerment Support Organizations, which included networks of schools that operated independently from support organizations but relied on the instructional and business staff of networks to support their academic needs.

Autonomy to select support organizations may have been one of the only autonomy stipulations that principals in this study were certain about. Principals in this study did feel empowered to choose the support organization that best met their needs and felt empowered to make changes if the support organization no longer helped them advance their educational goals (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012). Part of the reason principals may not have been confused about their ability to choose support organizations is because principals used simple rationale for what organization to align
with. For example, Principal Clarke chose her support organization based on a previous relationship she had with the finance director in the organization (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012). Principal Bogle chose her support organization because the organization professed to provide critical support with budgeting and finance. Principals had no need to wait for instruction or directives from the NYC DOE. Rather, it seemed principals simply used their own sense making to decide what to do.

The NYC DOE also stipulated that principals would, officially, have discretion over a their budget. One document stated, “…we do not want to spend money on your behalf, but rather, we want you to determine how your school’s budget should be spent” (NYC DOE Empowerment Schools Brochure, 2005 p. 2). However, only one document, the Empowerment Programs brochure, actually detailed what principals would have budget autonomy over. According to the brochure, budget autonomy would allow principals to decide their school’s purchasing needs, including how much funds to allocate for human resources, academic resources, and principals would have the added authority to apply for the grants they believed would meet the needs of their school (NYC DOE, 2005). Other documents, including the Children First Statement of Performance Terms, which was effectively an official agreement or contract between principals and the NYC DOE, simply stated that the central office would no longer spend money “on behalf” of schools, rather money would be spent “by” schools (NYC DOE Children First Statement of Performance Terms, 2008). This vagueness in official documents and absence of detailed and clear directions about budget meant that principals could interpret the policy based on their analyses.

By far, principals were most unclear about their autonomy to hire and fire teachers. Several documents, including the Children First Statement of Performance Terms, were completely
devoid of any mention of staffing autonomy. One NYC DOE document, the core narrative (2008), stated “…principals and their teams have much broader discretion over what happens in their schools, including which teachers and assistant principals to hire and retain…” (NYC DOE Children First Core Narrative, 2008). It is unclear as to whether or not the principals in this study read the core narrative and interpreted this line, or others in the document, to mean that they would have the ability to hire and fire teachers at their discretion. One clearly conflicting example comes from Klein’s comments in 2007 when he was presenting the second phase of the Children First policy to the Partnership for New York City, a group who’s mission it is to engage the business community in “efforts to advance the economy of New York City and maintain the city’s position as the center of world commerce, finance and innovation” (Partnership for New York City, 2013) He said, “All employment decisions, including whether to hire or terminate principals, remain with the DOE, and all collective bargaining agreements continue to apply” (NYC DOE, 2007a). This meant that the teachers union contract would still set precedent for hiring and firing procedures in NYC schools. Not principal autonomy policies. However, in the same press release, Klein said,

We know how important good teachers are. Research convincingly shows that effective teaching is the single most important factor separating student success and failure. If school leaders are truly to be empowered – and held accountable for results -- they must be given broad flexibility to recruit and keep the best teachers possible.

These conflicting messages, in the same document, do not provide clarity. Rather they imply that there was uncertainty, even at the Department level, about how much autonomy over staffing principals would and/or should receive.

As evidence will show in chapter five, principals in this study indicated that they believed
autonomy would allow them to hire and fire teachers as they saw fit. The NYC DOE did begin an official open transfer-market system which allowed principals to select the teachers they believed fit with the vision of their schools (O, Day, Bitter, Talbert, 2011). However the DOE never gave a clear or direct indication to the notion that principals would have official power to fire teachers at their discretion, rather the DOE sent conflicting and vague messages about the role principals played in hiring and firing teachers at their discretion.

The Children First reforms also provided that principals would have discretion over curriculum. One document stipulated that principals would have “broader authority over curriculum” (NYC DOE Empowerment Schools Brochure, 2005, p. 2). The core narrative only vaguely implies that principals would receive more autonomy over curriculum by simply stating, “principals will have discretion over instructional strategies” (NYC DOE Children First Core Narrative, 2008, p. 6). However, in a meeting with the Partnership for New York City, Klein said, “The Department of Education will continue to set and enforce academic standards, develop rigorous curricula, and hold schools to a common and demanding set of accountabilities” (NYC DOE, 2007a). Klein’s comments suggest that the DOE still wanted to determine which curriculum could be used in schools. The conflicting messages however, did not provide principals with a full understanding on what, if any, curriculum they could choose on their own.

As the policy implementation literature suggests above, policy designs are critical to policy implementation. When policies are vague or do not provide clear directives, it creates ambiguity among implementers as well as variation in implementation (Bergek, Jacobsson, Hekkert, & Smith, 2007). For example, some principals in this study were able to activate autonomy as it related to curriculum effectively, but many floundered as it related to staffing autonomy. Because the NYC DOE failed to provide clear critical guidance about what staffing
autonomy would actually look like in schools, principals sometimes pursued actions that were unreasonable or ineffective.

One reason the autonomy policies may have been vague is because the policies were new. There was no institutional memory, which could have provided some guidance and past examples on how to design the policy or how practitioners would have received the policy. Another reason the policy design may have been weak is due to the inexperience of the newly minted system of governance in NYC schools. Mayor Bloomberg is not a professional educator and is, thus, new to creating educational policy. The policy implementation literature above suggests that during the policy design process, policy makers make connections to similar organizations and situations they have been involved in, observe how previous organizations approached the policy problem, and then make small changes with policy solutions to apply to a current policy problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1988). In the case of NYC, policy makers hailed from corporate backgrounds with little professional experience in education. Without previous experience designing educational policies, Bloomberg’s ability to design policies for NYC schools was subpar.

Another reason the policy design process may have been weak is due to the top down style of design. This study finds that practitioners were not involved in the policymaking process and that many, if not all policies were designed by an insular group of individuals including the mayor, chancellor, and corporate professionals. The policy implementation literature above suggests that policy makers should combine top-down approaches to design with bottom up approaches in order to account for the behaviors, including how implementers might interpret policies, at the ground level (Weimer, 1993). The mayoral control literature above suggests that when mayors take over schools, they do so because they believe a centralized form of
governance will create coherence and compel groups to act according to the mayor’s plans (Henig, 2009). Mayors may not have any intention on sharing decision-making or enacting a shared leadership approach with practitioners. The voice of implementers was excluded from the process of designing policy thus creating weak points in the design process that enabled fragile and vague designs.

Although this study finds that the autonomy policy was vague and failed to provide clear directives for principals, the NYC DOE believed it was a “cornerstone” to their reforms and expected principals to rely on their autonomy as a tool for improving schools. In the context of vague policy messages, the next section of this study answers, directly, what did the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy in NYC schools?

**The Relationship Between Mayoral Control and Principal Autonomy**

**Embracing Eliminations- Removal of Unnecessary Administrative Obstacles**

_Dismantling Community School Boards_

Principals in this study presented a complicated picture of the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy. As mentioned above, the NYC DOE has been shaped by controversy over school governance and who should have the right to run NYC schools. Since the late 1960s, NYC schools were run by 32 community school boards, comprised mostly of teachers union members. In theory the boards were suppose to represent the best interest of those in the district. However, principals in this study reported their deep displeasure with the community school boards and corruption that belied the authority of the community boards. Principals in this study, as well as policy makers, saw the elimination of the boards by Mayor
Bloomberg as a positive elimination because it allowed them to circumvent a level of bureaucracy they saw as an obstacle to practice.

Principals believed school boards were unnecessary administrative obstacles because the boards did not, in fact, operate democratically. Rather, principals believed community school boards imposed policies and practices on them in a way that prevented principals from shaping the vision and environment of their own schools. Principal Clarke expressed frustration as she explained how she would have to ask for money from the community school boards. In reference to a question about how her practice has changed since becoming an Empowerment School, Clarke said, “…Before [Empowerment] I was going to the [community] district office saying please could I get extra money for this extra money for that?” The school board, because it was charged with the responsibility of handling the budget, then, acted as a gatekeeper to funds in a way that frustrated principals who wanted to have more autonomy over their budget.

Principal Adelman shared this sentiment. In her case, the district dictated when she could spend her money. She said,

They dictated what they wanted to do or not do. I also had some problems sometimes that I couldn't do anything with the funds. I had their person in charge of business to come here so that I could show him that I wasn't lying. Somebody was road blocking the Internet or the website or something, the Webmaster. He had to call and say please open up so that she can do this and do that. When Joel Klein took over and the [community school district] disappeared, it was so much better (Principal Adelman, personal communication, 2012).

As Adelman describes it, elimination of the school boards became an opportunity for principals to find relief and move forward with making important financial decisions for their
schools. This was important because removing one obstacle, to Adelman, became a means for achieving other goals, like buying laptop computers for her school.

School boards also created obstacles for principals’ abilities to hire the staff they wanted. Principal Carmone described the level of scrutiny she had to endure under the community school boards before making hiring decisions. Principal Carmone rolled her eyes as she described the seemingly bureaucratic process. She said,

At that time too you had to, now I’m recalling now, that if you needed teachers you had to go through the district office, the human resource person, and then you would say I have these many vacancies. They would send people to you, you would interview, and then they would then interview too. Then the superintendent would give the final yes or no (Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012).

In this way, the community school board took important operational decision-making power from principals. Even though principals did have an opportunity to interview candidates, the final decision lied with the superintendent of the school district, rather than the principal who could, potentially, select a different candidate. Hiring was an important factor to principals in this study. Although many admit to having made hiring mistakes, their ability to hire the teachers they chose was a straightforward example of autonomy.

Principals also pointed to the way community school districts handled curriculum selection as an obstacle. For example, prior to the elimination of community school districts, Principal Bogle was told what sort of curriculum she could use with students. She wanted to select a high quality curriculum that her teachers believed in but did not
have the flexibility until joining the Empowerment Schools program. In this exchange, she explains the way the community school districts imposed their curriculum selections on her school.

Interviewer: what was it like before [Empowerment]?

Bogle: Oh they’d tell you what programs! You were imposed. They would send you this or this, based on your scores or based on data. They would say this is what you should use or whatever.

I: they restricted the things you were able to offer the students?

B: of course.

I: what were some examples of that?

B: I am thinking about the programs. Oh. Teachers College. However, it worked well in my upper grades. But, my lower grade teachers felt we needed something more. We had to hold out until we had the opportunity to change.

I: ok. So you had to hold out on changes until you had more flexibility?

B: and Empowerment allowed us with that.

Bogle’s comment reflects the principal’s sense that community school boards did not facilitate decision-making about curriculum based on a ground level view of the school, but rather based strictly on test scores and data, a much more positivist view of the school. However, Bogle suggests that teachers’ experiences implementing the curriculum were a better, more accurate, reflection of the necessary changes that needed to be made. Bogle’s comments suggest that the old community school boards were too far removed from the schools to make decisions about operations so important as curriculum decisions are for schools like Bogle’s.
Principals’ beliefs that the community school districts were too far removed from schools to make effective operational decisions derived from their countless negative experiences interacting with the community school district. There was no sense of camaraderie between principals, superintendents, and community school boards members. Community school boards were often associated with punishment and consequences rather than rewards or support. For example, Principal Clarke said community school district visits to her school were filled with anxiety and frustration. She was never pleased with their visits because it often resulted in criticism of the work she and her staff were doing. She said,

Because I think they felt like they were, you know, they have got clean house or they going to strong-arm you into this and strong-arm you into that. So I used to come to work with ulcers. That’s how I felt every morning. I was like, they are coming to visit us today and you were just like, ‘Oh, God.’ So it was that I really didn’t like that. So when that Empowerment idea came up, I was glad to apply for it. And I was shocked when we got it but I was happy. So I have enjoyed it (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012).

Clarke’s comment implies that the relationship between her school and the community school district was so contentious it caused her, not only emotional anxiety, but physical illness. Clarke explained that when she worked under community school board guidance, she moved back and forth with the idea of retiring because the community school boards acted too much as an obstacle and really damaged her spirits. Elimination of the community school boards, then, provided hope and more potential to change the school. Another example from Clarke supports this notion. When principal Clarke’s school was accepted into the
Empowerment Schools program, she said she spent time reinvigorating her staff and encouraging them. She said,

I think too at that time my staff were really- I didn’t like the direction in which their school was going in terms of- I'm not a mean person, vindictive person. I tried to more build up people because I think if I don't build them up their kids are not going to learn and I think other times it was like how to get rid of them, force them out kind of thing. And to me it created like a tension around the school and I think once I went Empowerment we were able to release some of that tension and begin to become more of a unified force and developing that kind of team spirit in terms of working together. So I think it changed the climate of our school when we went Empowerment that people felt a little bit more comfortable.

To Clarke, elimination of the school boards and joining the Empowerment Schools program was a significant step for “building up” her team. The contentious relationship that existed between Clarke’s school and the community school board prior to Empowerment damaged the in-school camaraderie and interfered with the relationship between teachers and their students’ abilities to learn as well as their school community acting as a “unified force” to shape the academic and social climate of Clarke’s school. Elimination of the community school boards, then, acted as a mechanism for also removing some internal school obstacles related to teaching and learning.

Principal Evers viewed the community school boards with frustration, as well, because she believed they acted in their own best interest. When her school decided to join the Empowerment Schools program, she received backlash from community school district staff related to the change in authority. In response to a question about what the
process was like to join the Empowerment Schools program Evers described the discussion she had with her staff.

Evers: …And so I said to them, I said okay, guys, this is going to get tough on us because you know what this means. This means that we’re saying to those [district] people that tell us what to do, that we don't need them to tell us what to do. I said so this is going to have a backlash, you know. You got to have some strong thick skin for this backlash that's going to come. I said are we, you know, is everybody up for it? Well, everybody except one person was up for it and so we applied and the backlash came and it was tough. But I’ll tell you what it did for us-

Interviewer: Where was the backlash from? From families?

Evers: No. From those [district] people that used to tell us what to do because they lost their jobs. So you know, they were concerned with you know, how am I going to continue if you take this level of administration away? You know, what do I do now? You’re not thinking about me. But I’ve always been in this business for one reason, to help kids. So I never make decisions in my school, ever, based on what an adult needs. It’s always about what kids need so that meant nothing to me. I’m sorry you’re going to lose your job, but I’m thinking about kids now because I know what I can do for kids. And was able to do more for kids. So I think out of all the things that transitions that the board of ed has gone through the [Empowerment Schools] is probably the best thing that has happened to small schools of my nature.
Evers’ comment reflects that having autonomy and joining the Empowerment Schools program was an opportunity to make a qualitative change in what she could do for students in her school. Rather than prioritizing the needs of adults, the elimination of the community school boards provided that Evers, along with other principals in this study, could focus on the most important task at hand and that was serving students.

Closeness was also a concern for the network leader interviewed in this study. The network leader previously served as a principal for ten years and suggested that the current system of NYC schools with networks and sans community school boards was an improvement because the old structure lacked the closeness necessary to work with schools. She said,

Well, we’re much more personal, networks are much more personal. We’ve been in those schools we know those schools, you know, we give them operational and instructional, we’re there all the time. We talk to our principals all the time, we’re in contact, you know, they feel free to come to us with anything because we’re not their rating officers so they’re not afraid to tell us stuff, you know, so I think it’s a much more -- it is much better and its sort of having the kind of direct support now (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012).

The network leader’s perspective that the current system of governance was better because it provided some sense of closeness is interesting because it is connected to the NYC DOE’s original theory of action, which was to give those closer to the schools more decision-making power. Mayor Bloomberg emphasized the need to shift decision-making power away from, what he saw as, inept community school boards, to the principals and their schools because principals, the mayor reasoned, were better positioned to make critical decisions for their schools.
In one brochure sent to principals in NYC during the 2005 school year, encouraging principals to participate in the Empowerment Schools Program, the Department described the program as a way for principals to have “authority over the educational decisions that will help your students achieve at higher levels. Instructional practices, budgeting, professional development, scheduling, summer programming and more – as the school leader, you’re in the best position to know what will work best for your students” (NYC DOE Empowerment Schools Brochure, 2005). The phrasing indicates that the principal is the sole expert, and should, therefore be the sole decision-maker of their school. Not community school districts and not the central office.

The policy implementation literature above suggests that target populations are chosen based on how policy makers define a problem (Wood & Vedlitz, 2007). In this case, the problem with NYC schools was defined as one related to bureaucracy and patronage by Mayor Bloomberg in 2003 (Herszenhorn, 2003a). Rather than addressing the school boards and trying to modify school boards’ practice, however, the NYC DOE decided to eliminate school boards, institute mayoral control, and employ a systems changing approach to school reform which meant some new group of individuals would be responsible for leading reform (i.e. the mayor; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987).

Senior policy makers interviewed in this study believed principals were given autonomy because the chancellor did not believe boards knew what it would take to improve schools. He said,

The rest of the organization didn’t understand school-based autonomy. They wanted to continue to pull principals out of school during the regular school day and preoccupy them with their bullshit. They wanted the principals to do [the central office] work. They wanted the principals to be held in compliance. They
wanted this and they wanted that. None of which created any accountability for them for what actually happened to kids in those schools. The central office and the school district itself was the biggest obstacle to reform (Senior policy maker A, personal communication, 2011).

Prior to autonomy, and, perhaps, somewhat since autonomy, principals were beholden to tasks that took them away from schools often at the behest of the central office. The tasks seemed superfluous, because as this senior policy maker said, they were unrelated to improving student performance.

The NYC DOEs belief was that the community school districts acted as a sufficient obstacle to school reform because they were constantly engaged in misconduct. One senior policy maker said,

In NY, there were 32 school boards and the corruption is well documented.

School boards that were selling principalships, principals were dealing cocaine out of their office, board members who stole an 80 grand piano from a school. But the biggest level of corruption was that [this] was the system in place for 60 years from 1968 through the start of Children First… I guess that’s only 42 years, and student achievement had not improved. The focus of those school boards was not improving student achievement. It was patronage. Plain and simple. So in order for [schools to improve], the mayor had to again ask the state legislature for control of the schools (Senior policy maker A, personal communication, 2011).

His statement echoes a deep frustration with school boards due to extreme examples of misconduct, which he believed interfered with student achievement. This senior policy maker, who served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, superintendent in NYC
schools, and eventually held a senior position at Tweed, was furious about how school boards were managing schools and held the belief that boards were the roadblock. He not only believed in the reforms being developed by central office administrators, he was certain about the success of principal autonomy, for he was central in the development of the Empowerment Schools program.

Another senior policy maker did not believe the school boards were capable of improving schools because he witnessed school boards breaking state education laws. He stated,

I started in public education in 1990 working as a lawyer… and it is hard to describe the chaos that existed in the community school system. So to be sure there were real lighthouse districts, district 22 in Brooklyn, district 15 in Brooklyn, district 2 in Manhattan. But for each of those terrific districts, there were at least three or four really lousy community school districts. So when I started work and kind of got off the bus and dusted the hayseed off, I ended up going to the Bronx and spent lot of time in district 9. To give you an idea of how crazy that was I was asked to serve on the school zoning committee by the superintendent, I went, you know, fresh lawyer much younger, idealistic, and you know, sat down with the community school district president. He came in and I said we have to resolve the school’s zoning issues. Parents were complaining that the school was under utilized and had available seats, but the district president claimed the school was over utilized by 225 students. He erupted in anger and it was clear ‘we’re going to do it my way’. I said but this is the law that governs it, I am supposed to do my job. He picked it up, he said ‘see, [the law] says 1980!’ I visited in 1990. I said
well, yeah, that's the year it was enacted. I said well, think about the constitution it
was enacted in 1781 and is still viable law. He was so angry with me we
ultimately sued them. We brought the deputy Chancellor up, we walked into the
rooms and that he had 14 empty classrooms in the school (Senior policy maker B,
personal communication, 2012).

There is also a possibility that the NYC DOE did not trust the boards because they
believed parents and others used the boards to access political positions and gain political favors,
rather than using boards as a mechanism to support schools and serve children. In response to a
question about why there was backlash when the elected school boards were eliminated and
principals were, subsequently, given autonomy over their schools, one senior policy maker said,

Because a lot of people have a lot of vested interest in how $23 Billion is spent.
For the first time in years the politicians, who are school board members, couldn’t
call someone up and say could you get the constituent’s kid into that school, could
you find a job for this constituent? Which they used to do regularly. So they were
pissed off. The elected parent leaders, which is really an entry level political
position, was told go out and support the schools but you are not going to be at the
policy table (Senior policy maker A, personal communication, 2011).

The elected school board has traditionally been an avenue for parents and community members
to use democracy as a means to have a say in schools (Ravitch, 2009). However, according to
this senior policy maker, this process was flawed because individuals who wanted access to
political positions had perverted it. The policy implementation literature above suggests that in
order for policy to be designed effectively, it must allow for participation of implementers who
can explain what behaviors may act as obstacles, what available resources will enable effective
implementation, and what challenges may hinder implementation with fidelity (Elmore, 1979; Weimer, 1993). Although from the principals’ and the policy makers’ perspectives eliminating the community school boards effectively removed the boards as an obstacle, it also had the impact of removing the public, including principals, from the process of school reform, creating different problems for principals and implementation. Still, principals believed school boards did more harm than good. Principal Kagan’s perspective sums it up nicely. She says,

I think it should be this way, I think principals want to have the empowerment, I don't believe anybody, well I haven’t met any principals that want to have it back the old way where they don't have control over their budget, I don't believe that (Principal Kagan, personal communication, 2012).

Principals believed in autonomy and certainly were unlikely to campaign for the return of any governance structure that robbed principals of the new power they felt they needed.

**Troubling Inadequacies - Superficial Nature of Autonomy**

The second reason the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy was so complex was because the Children First policy lacked luster in its attention to the social obstacles facing principals at the school level. Principals in this study reported, overwhelmingly, that their schools faced a number of issues, related directly to poverty and parent involvement that required them to shift some focus away from important operational decisions like budgeting, staffing, and curriculum. In theory, the autonomy policy was intended to allow principals to make important decisions that would allow them to address pressing poverty issues or engage parents at their school level. In actual practice, principals lacked choice and felt restricted by the harshness of poverty in their schools causing the autonomy policy to seem insufficient at helping principals turn their schools around. In this
section, I will provide an analysis of principals’ perspectives on the inadequacies of Children First and the autonomy policy.

*The pervasive obstacles of poor attendance and homelessness*

In interviews, principals showed that their decision-making was sometimes constrained by mitigating social and economic conditions, like socioeconomic status and family engagement, in their schools and school communities. These issues had an immense impact on principals’ practices and principals’ abilities to use autonomy to increase the performance of their students and staff. One such example of extreme poverty and its impact on schools is Principal Rhodium’s school. Principal Rhodium’s school shares building space with the Bedford Stuyvesant Multi-Service Center, a place where local families living in Bedford Stuyvesant and surrounding neighborhoods can visit if they are searching for employment opportunities, looking for a safe haven away from domestic violence situations, or simply looking to host a community meeting or celebration. Many of the students in Principal Rhodium’s school have parents who visit the Bedford Stuyvesant Multi-Center hoping to receive assistance including GED classes and health services (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). Principal Rhodium sees the programs as a hidden gem for her school because of the extreme level of poverty facing her students and their families. She said,

> We have a high rate of homelessness in our school, foster care. We have a lot of students that whose parents are in prison. We share space with the Bedford-Stuyvesant Multi-Service Center, which was once empty space in our building. We’re not a DOE building. And we were able to create job training, housing programs. So while our school is running, most of our parents and members of the community are in school at the same time or receiving some type of service. And
knowing that we have foster care agencies, we have housing programs, entrepreneurship programs, job training and seeing parents graduate from those programs successfully, [that] is something that I don't think any kind of progress report would ever show about our school (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012).

It is clear that Rhodium sees her school’s location and population as a salient characteristic of her school. However, she believed progress reports that were introduced with Mayor Bloomberg did not actually capture the strides her school made with shaping social conditions for students and their families. The autonomy policy, in theory, gives her the flexibility to decide how to serve students and families but Rhodium’s school is still graded based on the district’s standards like the amount of progress students make each year on mandatory standardized test, followed by student performance on standardized tests, school environment, and closing the achievement gap. Rhodium’s school lagged severely in student progress, receiving only 6.9 out of a possible 60 points, and in student performance receiving 4.8 out of a possible 25 points. Her school also received 10.7 out of 15 for environment, and a 1 out of 15 for closing the achievement gap. Autonomy does not actually allow principals to choose how they want to be evaluated or to what standards they should be held. Rather, principals like Rhodium are still held accountable to the district and state standards. Her school does not receive credit for helping students and families, many of whom live in extreme poverty, address social concerns. Rhodium said,

And I think that that's not giving the school a fair shake, because we might be looked at as one year we do very well, next year we don't. Our population changes
as much as the parents stay with the kids who are foster parents, whether or not they receive permanent housing. So we have a challenging group of students when it comes to their home life, which we know impacts. And we work hard to compensate that but when we're not judged by that, it's frustrating (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012).

Rhodium’s school’s enrollment is comprised of students living in immense poverty. 92% of Rhodium’s students qualify for free or reduced lunch, which is not surprising given that the median income in her school’s community is $26,000 per year, which is well below the city’s median income of $49,461 (Census, 2011). Facing the stark reality of the socioeconomic status of her students, Principal Rhodium is left with no choice but to address the most pressing issues like, providing uniforms, for example, before she considers what type of curriculum to use in the classrooms. She sometimes uses her own money to purchase items for her students or applies for grants to pay for afterschool programming so that students living in shelters or crowded multi-family homes can have a place to study (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). Rhodium also asks her teachers to “supplement the learning” and “stretch themselves thin” to assist the students by providing afterschool tutoring or “resiliency” classes,” which provide extra support for children living in temporary housing (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). In order to get teachers to stay afterschool, Rhodium is forced to use some of the grant money she receives to help pay teachers per session for providing additional homework help and tutoring.

Principals are also challenged to deal with the transiency of their students. Students may begin one school in September, but do not complete the school year due to
unstable housing or transferring to a different school. While autonomy, again, allows principals to think of creating ways to address these issues, many principals still struggle to increase their attendance or prevent children from leaving school halfway through the year. For example, the NYS DOE provided attendance improvement and dropout prevention funds to prevent students from leaving school before completing. Schools with low attendance (i.e. students that are absent 10% of the school year or 2 to 3 times a month; United Way of New York City, 2013), were targeted for intervention and principals could select from a list of external non-profit providers that would help a school reverse chronic attendance issues. Principals, like Principal Kagan, have chronic issues with students leaving halfway through the school year. In a phone interview, Principal Kagan reported that 18% of the 497 students in her school did not finish the year at her school. At first, when asked how the inconsistent attendance affects her school, Kagan doesn’t immediately associate any challenges. But, after considering it, Kagan says,

I think sometimes it’s just a challenge because the population is mobile okay, so therefore the students that we start out with in the beginning of the year may not be the ones we end up with in June. So we don't have as much of an opportunity to teach them, that's probably our biggest challenge, we do have a high mobility rate… They’re not going to be here for six years, I mean that they’re not here for a whole 12-month year, a calendar of 12 months (Principal Kagan, personal communication, 2012).

Kagan explains that teaching students at her school is complicated by students’ tendency to leave before the school year is complete. Part of the issue is that parents choose to
remove their students for various reasons, of which Kagan is not sure. She simply says, “Nothing we can do about that, we teach the children that are here on any given day. Nothing we can do about people moving.” Students also transfer into Kagan’s school in the same way. Because reaching these students is difficult, teaching and learning become difficult, impacting the progress report grade the school may receive. While autonomy allows for flexibility with program, there is certainly no flexibility with evaluation. Either a school has done well and receives a passing grade on their progress report or they have not and they need to improve or face the threat and consequences associated with consistently failing.

Part of the reason students end up transferring in and out of schools like Kagan’s is due to the conditional placement policy of the NYC shelter system. When a family enters the shelter system, they are often placed at a temporary location while the city determines whether the family is actually homeless or not. When the city has made a determination about the family’s needs, the family is relocated to another location with the intent of providing them with services to help them gain permanent housing. However, the process is imperfect. A family can be moved around numerous times before permanent housing is found and this causes children to bounce around to schools throughout the city (Homes for the Homeless NYC website, 2005). In a short span of time, students and their families can be placed in a shelter in Brooklyn but based on availability and spacing the family can be relocated to a shelter in Queens or the Bronx, which can be dozens of miles away from their schools. Schools have absolutely no leverage or say in the shelter system (Principal Kagan, personal communication, 2012).
Principals and teachers are simply forced to accommodate all students in temporary housing and do the best they can while the student is in their care.

The temporary housing situation does not only dislocate students from schools. It also causes students to constantly arrive hours late to their classes. For example, Principals Clarke stated,

Attendance is somewhat- we have a group of students who’s just chronically late or chronically absent… getting them in at 10 o’clock when school starts at 8. So I have that traveling problem. Why are you still here, you’re in Bronx and you come in here at 10’clock? But it’s like loyalty to the school, loyalty to the neighborhood and you know if they are going into the shelter it’s… you've given up so much already that they have to do whatever they feel to be stable in the community (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012)

Principal Bogle had a similar experience with her students. She shared,

We are in the heart of the historic Bedford Stuyvesant. As you can see we are surrounded with the projects, the Polk projects. However, my school does house children from 5 shelters. So our population is transient. Even though the parents, once their children are enrolled, and a home is found for them, they still want to bring them back. Sometimes it’s a long way. We really have to encourage them not to. Just in the child’s best interest. But we do house children from 5 shelters and the projects (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012).

Collectively, Kagan, Clarke’s, Bogles, and even Rhodium’s comments are pointing to a larger issue with the autonomy policy, which is the disconnect between what the policy gives principals the power to do and what is should give principals the power to do given
the local context of their schools. There is no connection between the New York City Department of Homelessness Services and teachers nor principals have any jurisdiction to ensure a tight coupling between the two organizations. Yet, principals like Bogle, who can easily see 15 or more students missing on any given day (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012), are still evaluated on their rate of progress and performance in schools where chronic lateness and absence are serious cause for alarm. Unlike charter schools, NYC traditional public schools are unable to expel students for poor attendance and the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, an act which states that homeless youth are entitled to an education at their school of origin regardless of their current residence, forbid schools from removing those student from their roster (New York State Department of Education website, 2009). Schools must also provide those students with free transportation (United States Department of Education, 2004). This means that Rhodium, Kagan, Clarke, and Bogle must not only allow those students to continue at their schools, they must also provide chronically late or absent students with yellow bus service or MetroCards, which is a method of payment for public transportation in NYC, a cost schools much bare if a student stops attending or transfers schools. Examples like the ones identified by Rhodium, Kagan, Clarke, and Bogle underscore the idea that autonomy inadequately addressed some major concerns for principals in NYC schools.

Principals’ senses that the autonomy policy was insufficient at addressing major issues were reiterated by senior officials in the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (CSA), the union NYC school principals belong to. One CSA official believed that the socioeconomic status of students in NYC schools was a major obstacle
for principals to affect change. The official, Mr. Walsh, who was once an elementary
school principal in Brooklyn, said the conditions created by poverty were so salient in his
school that he began developing a number of programs to address the hunger, health, and
hygiene of his students. Walsh said, “But I still think that this is a highly segregated
system by economics, by grade point average, by engaged parents, by poverty and all
those things we were talking about…” (Mr. Walsh, personal communication, 2012).
Walsh believed the “segregated system” prevented principals from making progress, even
after receiving increased autonomy from the district. He continued,

I don't think autonomy was the thing to get us there. I think there were some
things that the system should have done. Mayoral control in my mind allowed the
Mayor to put all the city’s resources into the schools as is so needed. Health,
transportation resources – I’ll start the biggest one, health. There should never be
a kid who has to go anywhere to be immunized. Because if the city controls the
money to immunize the kid, [principals] never miss him in school (Mr. Walsh,
personal communication, 2012).

Mayoral control, then, was intended to afford principals the chance to adequately address
the many apparent social issues impacting schools and their practice. While giving
principals an opportunity select programming was important, connecting critical city
institutions, like the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene or the
New York City Department of Homelessness, to schools would have enhanced the
quality and thoroughness of programs at addressing issues like homelessness and poor
health.
These principals’ reflections show that homelessness and poverty were central issues for principals. Second to that, principals in this study also reported that autonomy only somewhat addressed their capacity to engage parents in schools, a practice that they each agreed were of critical importance. The following section discusses how principals understood the NYC DOEs attempt at increasing parent engagement.

*Parent Engagement*

In addition to building a brigade of capable principals to turn schools around, the Department also had a goal of increasing parent engagement. By eliminating the 32 community school districts, Bloomberg believed parents would be able to avoid the bureaucracy that was associated with the community school boards in those districts and increase parent participation where it really mattered—in schools. In order to connect parents with schools, the Department created the position of parent coordinator in 2003. Nearly 1,200 parents were hired in the first year and were tasked with the responsibility to be the liaison between schools and parents (Gootman, 2003). Parent coordinators are full-time year round employees of the Department (Ms. James, personal communication, 2012). In the former system, parent liaisons worked in district offices and served multiple schools. In a meeting with newly hired parent coordinators, Klein said, “We don't need all sorts of parent offices in every single part of the world. We need a parent coordinator inside each school for the parents of those kids in that school, so we stay focused” (Gootman, 2003).

Policy makers believed parent engagement in schools was an important component for student success (Senior policy maker B, personal communication, 2012). Among many things, parent engagement involved getting parents to help their children with homework, getting parents to attend Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, encouraging parents to be present
at parent-teacher conferences, and asking parents to support school programs and extra-curricular activities (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). One official directly responsible for creating the parent coordinator position said, “If we were going to create a system of good schools, parent engagement had to be a big piece of that...” (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). Since the Department gave principals more autonomy over things like the budget and staff, then the District would also have to endow principals with specialized resources, human resources that would help manage the parts of a school that might be the weakest. One particular weakness for many schools was parent engagement.

According to a former DOE official, the Department was inspired to create the parent coordinator position by psychiatrist James Comer (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). Comer developed the Comer School Development Program, which holds as one of its “core belief” that “parents, staff and community members, regardless of social or economic status, have an important contribution to make in improving students' education and their preparation for life” (Comer School Development Program website, 2012). Comer and his colleagues believed the gap between home life and school life was a major weakness for student achievement, particularly in children from low-income backgrounds (Comer & Haynes, 1991). By creating a platform for parents to become more involved, Comer and his colleagues were able to support parent engagement and institutionalize its importance. NYC policy makers believed the parent coordinator position would decrease the gap Comer and his colleagues saw.

Although Comer’s approach to parent engagement created a mutual relationship between parents and schools, and included parents into every facet of the school including decisions making and shaping the vision, the NYC DOE translation of that was to create the parent coordinator whose job it was to “welcome parents and to translate the school to the parents”
Welcoming parents and translating the school meant that parent coordinators were going to find a way to welcome a population of parents who were unfamiliar with the functioning of their child’s school and also synthesizing technical information. Parent coordinators were also given the responsibility of helping “[parents] understand what their kids needed and help the principal” (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). Parent coordinators were not simply an advocate for parents. They also helped principals reach parents and advocated for the school to parents and the community.

Hiring parent coordinators was one of the first exercises of autonomy for principals (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012). The Department believed principals would know the quality of the coordinator they hired and could have a better hand in getting more parents involved in everyday school life if principals hired the coordinator directly (Senior Policy Maker C, personal communication, official, 2012). Principals and parent coordinators in this study overwhelmingly reported that the parent coordinator was a positive contribution developed under Bloomberg and Klein. Principals expressed that they felt overwhelmed by all the new responsibilities that came with autonomy, so, parent coordinators relieved them of some of the responsibility of handling parent concerns. One principal said,

In terms of listening for us when I don't have enough time or you are tied up with curriculum, we’ve been lucky with the person we have had. She has been with us from the beginning almost like a right hand person for me... She is really smart, very intelligent and she knows and understands. We do a lot of things around curriculum and she can convey that to the parents. We do a lot of workshops here for parents not only on ELA [English Language Arts] and Math but you know
hands on things. Living skills, parenting journey, things that give parents some skills to help themselves. So I think she has been able to kind of bridge that gap and to really have meetings and just getting parents in that kind of -- almost like educating them but you’re doing it in a social way (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012).

Principal Carmone was one of the principals in this study who seemed to figure out how to get parents engaged in school. Many students from Carmone’s school were children of first generation Chinese immigrants with very little English language skills. On any given parent night, however, nearly 300-400 parents would attend information sessions at Carmone’s school. She attributed it to the success of her parent coordinator who spoke Chinese and was well connected to the culture of the community (Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012). Carmone explained that choosing a qualified and culturally connected coordinator, rather than one who was disconnected from the community and parents’ needs made all the difference.

Although Carmone was very happy with her parent coordinators, other principals reported that they still experienced extremely low levels of parent engagement in their schools. Parents did not participate in programs and activities at schools, although principals reported programs and activities were readily available. For example, Principal Evers’ parent coordinator, Ms. James, said she organized a number of social outings to get parents excited about being part of the school community. She arranged for parents and their children to go bowling at a local bowling alley, but only seven parents actually attended (Ms. James, personal communication, 2012). James also organized in-school activities, like a Japanese tea ceremony, with the assumption that parents would be more willing to attend since they did not have to travel to unfamiliar locations like the bowling alley across town. However, only 14 parents attended the
ceremony (Ms. James, personal communication, 2012). If parent coordinators were readily available and effectively developing interesting or useful programming, then the question becomes why were parents still not involved? It is possible that principals’ selections of parent coordinators did not effectively address the real cause for low parent engagement.

Principal Evers’ sense was that some of the issues were related to social conditions. She postulated that many of the students at her school came from working class and poor families who have inflexible jobs or homes where parents maintain multiple positions. Research suggests that these conditions make school engagement nearly impossible (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Evers confirms the research and says,  

We get very little support at home. Parents don't come in for our PTA meetings. We have anywhere from 10 parents on average for our PTA meetings, volunteers we have about 10. So all of that stuff is real, okay, my parents are overwhelmed, they want to be here, they want to help but they can’t (Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012).

Evers’ comment suggests that even with parent coordinators, engaging parent was a serious point of contention. Even as the NYC DOE attempted to build capacity by providing schools funds for programming, having autonomy to choose programming and hire parent coordinators did not effectively address low parent engagement.

Perhaps one reason parent engagement remained low after hiring of parent coordinators was because parent coordinators were not working at the optimal level. A report conducted by the Office of the Public Advocate of New York City, indicated that there were serious problems with the Coordinator position. The report suggested that 78% of parent coordinators did not answer their phones, 71% did not respond to phone
messages, and that 13% of coordinators could not receive messages because they had full voicemail boxes (Office of the Public Advocate, 2008). Despite the Districts efforts to use parents as a tool to support achievement in schools, principals in this study reported no such gains.

Another observation about the problem with the parent coordinator position is that parent coordinators were given no real power to impact any policies that prevented parents from becoming engaged in the first place (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011). Parent coordinators were not involved in district level policy making and had no real training to address many of the obstacles they faced. The parent coordinator at Principal Clarke’s school, Ms. Bennett, who has served in her position since the position was created, indicated that parent coordinators often did not have any experience for the position. She, herself, worked as a corporate accountant before taking the job. Ms. James, parent coordinator at Principal Evers’ school, had just entered the position at the time of the interview and had received no professional development at all. Much of what she learned to do, she learned on the job. She reported that she felt at odds with the position and could not put her finger on the pulse of the parent community.

Since 2003, the State of New York and the New York City Department of Education have added a few initiatives aimed at increasing parent engagement in school leadership. In 2003, in a response to the elimination of the 32 community school districts, the State introduced Community Education Councils (CEC). The CECs were designed to increase parent participation in schools (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011). In addition, School Leadership Teams (SLT), which are composed of parents and school staff who are elected, were required by state law to assist in school level decision making.
However, it has been reported that the majority of CECs and SLTs are defunct. Research has shown that nearly 32 of 34 CECs were no longer operating and that more than half of SLTs were not functioning (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011; Wisloski, 2008).

The principals in this study experienced mixed emotions in their relationship with the mayoral reforms and implementing autonomy. On one hand they appreciated the removal of administrative obstacles that prevented them from doing their best work. However, on the other hand they noted that autonomy was insufficient at addressing a number of complicated social issues that principals had to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Collectively these principals’ perspectives point to a complicated relationship between mayoral control policies and principal autonomy. The next chapter will describe the challenges principals faced by specifically examining the major aspects of autonomy stipulated by the NYC DOE; which were budgeting, staffing, and curriculum; and exploring the specific obstacles principals in this study faced activating their autonomy in each area.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Challenges Implementing the Autonomy Policy

There is no better way to tell this story than to tell it from the perspectives of the practitioners. Principals in this study divulged useful information that will help policymakers, especially mayors who lead school districts, understand how principals experience the policy process. This chapter, then, is meant to look more specifically at the policy itself and to detail the challenges current principals faced implementing autonomy. I focus specifically on budget, staffing, and curriculum because in data analysis, they emerged as central to principals’ experiences with autonomy. I argue that the vagueness of the autonomy policy and the low capacity of principals to implement different aspects of autonomy created serious obstacles for principals to implement the autonomy policy with fidelity.

Implementation of Budget Autonomy

Principals lacked capacity to manage budgets

The elimination of the community school boards had an immediate impact on principals and their school budgets. As mentioned above, prior to their elimination in 2003, community school boards managed all aspects of an individual school’s budgets and had authority to approve and reject requests from principals for resources (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012; Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012). However, principals in this study reported that community school board supervision of the budget made them feel imposed upon and created feelings of frustration and anxiety (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012). When principals finally received increased autonomy over the budget, either when their school participated in the Empowerment Program in the 2006-2007 school year or because the DOE gave all principals
autonomy over budget in the 2007-2008 school year, principals finally received the power to shape and use their budgets in a way that had the most meaningful impact on their school.

According to the network leader interviewed in this study, principals wanted autonomy, in general, because they were the most knowledgeable about how to address students’ needs. She said,

So originally, when this first was created they wanted to give more autonomy to principals, and as a former principal I agreed with that because many times you would have superintendents who came into your school you know, maybe once or twice for the whole year and they would have a district policy or they would have a curriculum that they wanted all the schools in the district to follow and they would, as your supervisor, tell you what to do or how to do it when they really didn’t know your school and your school community. So as the principal we felt very strongly that we know what’s best for our school and that we really want to make our own decisions (Network Leader, personal communication, 2013).

Autonomy, then, was not simply bestowed upon principals. Principals desired autonomy because it had the potential to free principals from a system that restrained decision-making and imposed a top-down style of leadership, which principals found prohibitive and frustrating (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012; Principal Bogle, 2012).

Even though principals wanted autonomy and wanted control over their budgets (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012), the principals in this study reported that they actually lacked the capacity to make budgetary decisions without support (Principal Bernard, personal communication, 2012; Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012; Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012;
Principals often had to solicit help from other experienced staff within their school or partner with external organizations, like the network, that had budgeting expertise (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012). The external support organizations principals partnered with did not make decisions about the budget. That was a task still left for the principal. But, the organizations played a strategic role in carrying out technical tasks like balancing the budget and giving principals a sense of what was within and outside of their financial reach.

However, principals still reported that they experienced unexpected setbacks balancing their budgets. In some cases, the reliance on others for budget support caused principals to be disconnected and unaware of important financial transactions. For example, Principal Adelman was so detached from her school’s budget that it took her several months to realize a part-time assistant principal was receiving the salary of a full-time assistant principal. She explained,

I will give you an instance. I had a part-time AP here for two years like three days. It was a Band-Aid. Like one assistant principal came on Monday, another one came on Wednesdays and Thursdays, another one came on Friday and then one day, we had nobody. So that was fine. I became the coordinator of assistant principals. At the same time that I was training them, which was okay. I didn't mind. However, by the second year instead of the ten months AP, which is cheaper, somebody decided to make her full time without telling me. And that was back in, let's say her salary went back in January or February but I didn't catch on to this because there's not much change in the budget between January and March. So by March, you have to start checking already what's left and what's not left to start spending. In March I open my Galaxy and I see, "What? Where is
this money? And how come this person is making like a full time? When did I authorize this? I didn’t do this!"

Adelman had not authorized the full-time salary because the higher salary put a strain on the school’s budget during a time of fiscal strife. When Principal Adelman finally did realize what was happening, she “exceeded” or transferred the assistant principal and relocated her to another school. The fact that Adelman did not directly check her budget for three months does not seem typical and reflects capacity issues. If Adelman had the capacity to manage her own budget and had done so regularly, she may have noticed the additional expense. However, because she relied on external support organizations to help manage and keep track of financial transactions in her budget, she was unaware of the unauthorized expense. This example, then, suggests that the autonomy policy may have created low internal organizational capacity. In other words, by giving principals the opportunity to find budget support externally, they lost or never gained the capacity to manage their budgets effectively on their own.

Principal Evers was more closely connected to her budget than Adelman but still needed someone more knowledgeable to actually function as a budget manager. When asked, who was responsible for managing her budget, she responded, “I have a budget person and she and I, we do it together. But you know, she’ll push all the buttons I just kind of say this is what I need, this is what I need. She makes it happen and that's like that” (Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012). Although Evers did not report any disasters with unauthorized expenditures, her reliance on a budget manager means that she is not developing the skills to manage the budget directly and she does not indicate that she will be able manage the budget without help any time soon. Rather, the relationship seems permanent and comfortable and does not actually build Evers’ capacity to manage the budget herself.
Principal Clarke also lacked the ability to manage her budget. When her school joined the Empowerment Schools program during the 2006-2007 school year she was relieved because her previous experience with the Regions; the intermediary office that replaced the community school boards and district superintendents between the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years; caused her great anxiety and frustration. She was happy that becoming an Empowerment School would mean no relationship with community school boards or regions. However, she never managed her own budget before. She said, “I felt I really didn’t know much about budget and all that kind of stuff and that's not my thing” (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012). In order to keep her budget in order, she relied on an assistant principal in her school that had experience in finance and, during the 2009-2010 school year, Clarke chose a network because the network leader was formerly her school’s “budget person.” She said,

And I knew I wasn’t strong with budget and I would need extra support and I knew he was an expert in that and that's why I really went with this network. At that time I wasn’t looking for professional development support, which some networks, that was going to be their highlight or their selling point. So I went with him. I mean since then he moved on but I still kind of stayed with that network because of the budget people I knew who could offer us support (Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012).

Part of the purpose of the network staff is to provide professional development and support to schools so it makes sense that the schools would rely on them for budgeting support like Clarke describes. But, in instances when networks act as extensions of the Department or mimick the obstacles created by the community school boards, which is what Principal Adelman describes above, principals can feel out of control and without much autonomy.
Instances like these indicate that principals’ implementation of autonomy was complicated by the fact that principals really needed more capacity to implement certain mayoral reforms, like budgeting. However, the NYC DOE may have had an inclination that principals needed more autonomy if they had included principals in the process of designing Children First and different aspects of the autonomy policy. Because most practicing educators were intentionally excluded from the process of designing the polices, there is little hope the Department would have had a good understanding of what average principals were reasonably able to do and what they would have needed critical support around. Policy implementation literature suggests that one of the most important parts of the policy design process is backward mapping (Elmore, 1979). Backward mapping is an action that involves engaging in research about a system, like a school system, from the ground level perspective (Elmore, 1979). Implementation literature suggests that backward mapping helps when large-scale reforms need to be grounded in the local factors that shape implementation. In other words, understanding the local context, or the policies, people, and places at the local level that help to shape policy implementation (Miles, 2005). Because the DOE had not engaged in backward mapping and actively sought to exclude the public, including principals, from the policy making process, principals struggled to activate their autonomy to manage their budgets.

Principal Bogle also believed she lacked the capacity to manage her budget and claimed that the network she chose actually didn’t meet her budgeting needs. It took her several networks and several tries before finding a network that could support her in that area. She said,

Empowerment was excellent. However, some of my supports, they were just not there. I was very frank with [the Department of Education]. I was using one of the network groups to help me in terms of budgeting. They couldn’t do that.
Eventually, I decided to go full time with a different network (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012).

To Bogle, having a network that could help her with budgeting was important because, like other principals, Bogle believed “budget drives everything.” She felt it was central to her ability to “choose and to purchase what we think is best for the school and not what’s imposed on us” (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012). Lacking the capacity to manage her own budget, then, really impeded her ability to make those important decisions for her school.

Literature on policy implementation indicates that “local capacity and will” are essential for the execution of reforms (McLaughlin, 1990). That is, a group’s ability or enthusiasm to undertake policy has the power to generate success or failure of a reform. NYC principals in this study lacked the capacity and may have struggled to use their budgets in a way that could maximize their impact on student achievement. In the case of Principal Adelman, if she had been more capable to manage her schools budget, it is likely she would have been able to avoid the unauthorized expenditure and use the funding, instead, for other resources.

Principals’ inabilities to manage their own budgets also implies that there is a gap between what the Department envisioned for the autonomy policy and what principals were actually able to do. Principals in this study did not actually possess the necessary skills to manage their own budget. However, the elimination of the local boards only impeded principals’ abilities to make independent and effective decisions about their budget. In her research on policy implementation, McLaughlin (1990) suggests that removing obstacles to “effective practice” does not guarantee that practitioners will become more efficient. In other words, simply removing the community school boards did not miraculously make principals masters at budgets.
or, what we will learn about later in this study, staffing (McLaughlin, 1990). It only caused principals to be disconnected and unaware of what was happening with their budgets, which produced unexpected problems for some and added a layer of responsibility to principals who reported feeling already overwhelmed by the changes (Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012).

Given the number of new tasks principals faced since mayoral takeover, including managing their own budgets, there is also a question as to whether principals possessed the will to make and manage their own budgets (McLaughlin, 1990). In eliminating the local school boards, principals were forced to become accustomed to a new system and new administrative roles. Prior to the change, principals had come to rely on the their local school boards for many tasks including managing budgets, choosing curriculum, writing requests to the central office for more resources, and writing evaluation reports that provided the Department with much needed information about a school's progress. After the elimination of the local boards, principals had to take on those tasks themselves. Since taking on new tasks, principals reported feeling overwhelmed with responsibilities and unable to fulfill other critical roles for their schools. In response to a question about why principals' job satisfaction was decreasing, Principal Carmone said, “It’s the paperwork… a lot of it was handled by the [local] district. So they would just report, see the statistics and everything, and they would write it up. Now you write everything up…it takes so much time…” (Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012). Principals not only had to manage their own budgets, they had to do so while also taking on the responsibility of reporting to the district and managing data at the school level (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012). Principal Carmone’s suggestion implies that principals were becoming dissatisfied with their jobs because they did not have the time to complete all their
tasks. The lack of time may also have interfered with principals’ *desires* to complete all the tasks, including the task of managing their own budget, which then made principals more likely to rely on others for support rather than gain the skill to implement budget autonomy on their own. Carmone’s comments do not reflect the belief that the locally elected community school boards should return. As mentioned in chapter four, none of the principals in this study believed the boards were effective and wanted them to return. Rather, the comments reflect the point that insufficient time in combination with low capacity made it difficult to implement budgeting autonomy with fidelity. Perhaps these findings suggest that the DOE’s elimination of the school board had unintended consequences and an adverse effect on budget autonomy for principals and schools.

**Implementation of Staffing Autonomy**

**Staffing autonomy was impeded by vague policy messages, power struggles, and contractual obligations**

In this study, principals reported that budget autonomy was intricately connected to their ability to staff their schools with the right personnel. In this study, as is noted in the literature, principals believed having competent and dedicated teachers and support staff was critical to the success of their schools (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Levin & Quinn, 2003; Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). Before Bloomberg and Klein gave principals the ability to choose their staff, principals were beholden to the community school boards for hiring teachers. The Mayor and Klein believed the community school boards were too corrupt and relied too much on patronage to do a good job at hiring the best and brightest to teach in NYC schools (Senior policy maker B, personal communication, 2012). So when the Department had the chance, they first allowed Empowerment principals to try their hand at choosing their staff
during the 2006-2007 school year, before giving all principals in the 2007-2008 school year staffing autonomy (Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012; Mr. Walsh, personal communication, 2012).

Through this study, it became apparent that staffing autonomy was one of the most complex aspects of autonomy to implement. Principals reported that they actually did enjoy some flexibility to choose and select the teachers they wanted for their schools. However, a number reported that after a year or so of staffing autonomy, they were faced with the consequences of making “bad hiring decisions” or “hiring mistakes” (Principal Adelman, personal communication, 2012; Principal Bernard, personal communication, 2012; Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012; Principal Carmone, personal communication, 2012; Principal Clarke, personal communication, 2012; Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012). Seven principals in this study reported hiring teachers that they believed were not suited for the position they held and referred to the teachers as “struggling,” “ineffective,” “inadequate,” and two principals complained that some teachers simply did not fit the vision of the schools. When principals deemed a teacher unworthy, however, there was little they could do about it. Part of the reason principals had little leverage to fire is because the autonomy policy only vaguely addressed staffing autonomy or sent mixed messages that indicated principals would not possess this level of autonomy.

Vague policy messages

Analysis of interview data suggests that principals’ general frustration with staffing autonomy was attributed to their sense that they only felt true autonomy over hiring. They reported that firing tenured teachers was a much more difficult task and not as straightforward as simply following protocol to fire a teacher, whom principals deemed incapable, and subsequently
firing them. Once teachers receive tenure, they are afforded a number of job protections, most notably the protection from unlawful firing (UFT Website, 2013). Tenured teachers cannot be fired without being officially charged and having a hearing. In order to remove a tenured teacher, principals reported that they had to go through a long process, which, sometimes, involved lawyers, arbitrators, and time away from the school building (Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012; Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). Principal Rhodium was particularly frustrated with the process of firing. She reported, “To fire somebody, you have to go through a very rigorous process which takes you away from a lot of things. Yes, it's worth it, because this person is out. But how much of the other parts of the job has it impacted” (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012)?

Analysis of documents and interview data suggests that the DOE was vague about what staffing autonomy would actually mean and this created a false sense that principals would have the autonomy they needed to hire and fire teachers at their discretion. The DOE reported principals would have “considerably more voice” in “hiring decisions” (NYC DOE, 2006a; NYC DOE, 2006B), which principals in this study interpreted as the ability to hire and fire the staff they chose. Initial analysis of the interview with Mr. Walsh, senior official of the principals union, also suggested that he expected principals to have the discretion to hire and fire the staff they chose. However, analysis of documents suggests that hiring and firing teachers was not an explicit goal of the reform. Spillane (2000) suggests that vague, policies increase the likelihood that implementers will rely on their own preferences during implementation. Without direct language about who the principals would actually have “considerably more voice” over hiring, principals applied their own meaning and believed their staffing autonomy would apply most directly to teachers.
Part of the reason principals may have interpreted staffing autonomy as the ability to hire and fire teachers was because they believed having the ability to choose their own staff was essential for improving their schools. Mr. Walsh said,

One of the things [principals] love is the idea they can pick and choose their staff when they have a vacancy, did they tell you that? But then they told you how they could not get rid of the people when they wanted to. Did they tell you that? ‘I’m empowered to hire people. But damn it, I don't get any support if I need to fire them. Even though I said this person is bad, the powers that be don't help me get rid of them.’ And see so you hear the frustration (Mr. Walsh, personal communication, 2012).

Although the policy was vague about principal autonomy to fire teachers, principal, nonetheless, felt constrained in their ability to assert that level of autonomy. The network leader believed that the inability to fire tenured teachers who were unsatisfactory over several years was a critical blow to true autonomy for principals. She said,

If there’s a teacher who does not get a good rating in two or three years in a row and after being supported with professional development I don't think it should be random, someone should just be thrown to the wolves, I think that they should be worked with. I think they should be given support. But after two or three years if they’re not making an improvement and they can’t find another job then I don't think that we should have to keep them. So that's the only thing that I think stands in the way of true autonomy for principals (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012).
Principals also reported that they lacked any support from “the powers that be” to actually engage in the process of removing bad teachers. As a result, principals felt discouraged to even pursue the process of firing. Principal Rhodium said.

So every year what message are you giving when you say I'm hiring 45 new investigators to investigate what principals -- how principals are? Anytime you tell us that XY and Z is going to be the framework and we're going to have this standard and teachers have to be kept to that standard, know that we have the low graduation rate that we have, and we have the achievement gap that we have, because we haven't had the cream of the crop [teaching] in the classrooms

(Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012).

Rhodium is making a connection between the low graduation rate and achievement gap to what she perceives as poor quality teachers who must stay employed at her school because she fears being investigated. While other principals did not express any outright fear of being investigated, other principals were simply discouraged by the amount of time and energy it would take to remove tenured teachers.

NYC DOE V. United Federation of Teachers- Power struggle complicated staffing autonomy

The other issue that arose with staffing autonomy was power struggles between teachers union representatives and the principals. In this study, Principal Evers, Principal Clarke, and Principal Rhodium reported having problems when trying to staff programs they created with the intention of improving the education experience for their students. Priding herself on having a strong vision and ideas for improving her school, Principal Clarke attempted to provide single sex classes in her school. Clarke believed the course would provide male students with behavior problems an opportunity to bond with a male teacher over issues they were facing. Although the
single-sex class was originally a teacher’s idea, the union representative at Clarke’s school quickly opposed it. The parent coordinator at Clarke’s school, Ms. Bennett, described the potential backlash Principal Clarke would receive if she decided to go through with the single-sex class.

She could draft a lot of ideas, like this one, but if there were one or two teachers who felt like no, this is a violation of their contract, then it would automatically be a grievance. And then, she had to fight the grievance and now that took away from developing on this vision that she had. So it's a fine line that she had to walk. Like okay, well can I have this all boys classroom? Who's really going to back against that? Am I going to have a grievance about that? (Ms. Bennett, personal communication, 2012)

Another idea Principal Clarke introduced was placing more teachers in the cafeteria to provide more crowd control. Ms. Bennett said,

Or you know like – or for example she wanted to have teachers in the cafeteria to supervise. You know, we have school aides but it would be, it would make it better if we had teachers in the cafeteria that, you know, for supervision. So she presented [the idea] to the UFT and year after year, they have shut it down like, no we don't… and it's just because the votes are so, so ridiculously close like some teachers are for it and some teachers are against it but it's like 51 to 49, you know. [Laughter] So because she can't just say, ‘You go down in to the cafeteria!’ -- So the autonomy is limited (Ms. Bennett, personal communication, 2012)

Ms. Bennett’s account shows how implementation can be shaped by political context.

Bennett was referring to the teachers union contractual stipulations which conflict with
the activities Principal Clarke hoped to develop. The NYC teachers union did not play a role in developing the Children First reforms and certainly no role in developing the autonomy policy. However, the UFT was directly implicated in the policy because, at the school level, principals would be taking steps to activate autonomy over all operations and this would shape the roles teachers played in schools. Without taking into account that all the stakeholders needed to help push certain aspects of the autonomy policy through, the NYC DOE complicated principals’ abilities to implement the autonomy policies with fidelity.

Another obstacle to staffing autonomy was associated with the DOE’s Absent Teacher Reserve (ATR), a system that is comprised of teachers on the NYC payroll but without permanent teaching positions. As of 2009, there has been a freeze on hiring new teachers. New teachers were described as ones who had not previously worked in the NYC school system. Principals may only hire teachers who are in the ATR and may not hire new teachers or any teachers from the alternative certification programs like Teach for America or New York City Teaching Fellows (Cramer and Green, 2009), with the exception of new teachers who are certified to teach special education or gifted classes (Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012; Network Leader, personal communication, 2012). All other teachers, common branch teachers, must be hired from the ATR.

The hiring freeze and the subsequent reliance on the ATR system came about as the NYC DOE prepared for the Race to the Top competition. In 2010, before the New York City Council, Chancellor Klein testified that the hiring freeze on new teachers would allow teachers in the ATR, who were still receiving pay, to find permanent positions. He claimed the number of
teachers waiting in the ATR, nearly 2000 at one point, was costing the city nearly $110 million a year (Klein, 2010). In the same speech, he made it clear that streamlining costs was meant to send a message to the federal government that the State was doing all it could to use their available funds and prevent waste. By using the teachers in the ATR, NYS was hoping to “maximize their competitive advantage” (Klein, 2010). Klein said, “We simply cannot afford to leave this money on the table—we need Albany to show the federal government that we are serious about improving our schools and being a model for the nation.”

Principals in this study cited the hiring freeze as another slight to their autonomy. One principal, Principal Bernard felt the freeze was particularly damaging to her. She experienced serious staffing issues, including public shouting matches with some of her teachers and, what she described as, insubordination. Even though she had openings in the common branches, she was unable to fill them because the hiring freeze in the district prevents her from hiring new teachers. Bernard refused to hire teachers in the ATR because she believed they might be difficult to mold to fit the vision she had for her school. She was particularly interested in hiring Teach for America and NYC Teaching Fellow teachers because she believed they were easy to train (Principal Bernard, personal communication, 2012).

Budgetary constraints did not only impact the teachers a principal could hire. Hundreds of school aides were also laid off in 2011 when the teachers union made an agreement that prevented cuts to teachers. Michael Mulgrew, the UFT president said that the aides were part of a village of people necessary to raise the children in NYC schools and that, somehow, the money should be found to maintain the positions (Santos, 2011). However, the Bloomberg administration claimed that the only way to save teachers from layoff was to cut aides, parent
coordinators, and family workers (Santos, 2011). Principals in this study suggested that aides were critical staff that filled important roles in schools. For example, in response to a question about staffing and keeping good teachers, Principal Evers said,

“We took a lot of that stress off [teachers] but of course with the budget cuts we’re losing all of these extra personnel. So [principals are] doing lunch duty, we’re doing everything. So my job is really changing in a face of just dealing with instruction” (Principals Evers, personal communication, 2012).

Even if Principal Evers wanted to make decisions about how to use her staff, she was unable to because of the DOE’s initiatives and its commitment to the teachers union contract.

The hiring freeze acted as a prohibitive factor in staffing autonomy for principals. Although the DOE was vague in its policy message about hiring autonomy, creating a clear obstacle did nothing to help clarify how, if at all, principals would be autonomous over staffing their schools.

Staffing autonomy was extremely important to principals, but over the years of the Bloomberg administration, principals’ abilities to make staffing decisions became more restricted. Principals were left to hire, but only if they chose from the ATR; and to fire, but only if they were willing to go through an exhausting process. Issues like these are highly political because they directly implicate the public and cause educators to be at the whim of political figures like the mayor and teachers union representatives. Principals, although directly implicated, have little power to make decisions, especially beyond their schools, about how to resolve the entrenched power struggles of the political elite and labor unions.
Principals have less say about policies partially because they forfeited their own negotiating power when they decided to forgo tenure in exchange for more pay in 1999 (Wyatt, 1999), but also because their own union, the CSA has a much smaller membership (which one principal equated to power; Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). A current example stems from the January 2013 disagreement between the teachers union and the NYC DOE over teacher evaluations. The Department wants to add a provision that allows principals and the city to remove a teacher after two years if the teacher does not improve after being rated “needs improvement” by an assistant principal or principal. However, the teachers union wants to insert a provision that causes the Department’s provision to expire before it would actually take effect (Cramer, 2012). Teachers union officials are worried the new evaluations system will subject teachers to removal without due process and that other provisions, including a system of observations, will create an atmosphere of fear among teachers throughout the city (Cramer, 2012). While it is unclear, yet, how this particular battle will be won, it is pretty clear each party will blame the other for not bargaining in good faith and even outright “lying” to the public (Mulgrew, 2013). Principals, however, must observe from a distance and be ready for whatever is decided.

Implementation of Curriculum Autonomy

Curriculum Autonomy Was weakened by Lack of Connection to Other Forms of Autonomy

Along with budget autonomy and staffing autonomy, principals were given the chance to decide what curriculum to use in their schools and how it would be used. In 2002, Bloomberg and Klein introduced a core curriculum that every school, K-9th grade would implement. The
Department insisted that the curriculum was “proven” and that the addition of “intensive professional development through math and reading coaches in every school and classroom library for grades Kindergarten-9” would bring coherence to a rather disjointed and fractured system of instruction (NYC DOE, 2003a). Implementation of a new curriculum was part and parcel to improving the NYC school system. One senior DOE official interviewed said, …if we were going to create a system of good schools, parent engagement had to be a big piece of that, as well as a capable principal, a rigorous academically demanding curriculum, capable teachers who could form professional communities, a whole range of things (Senior policy maker C, personal communication, 2012).

The Department did not see curriculum as secondary to other policies. In fact, curriculum was so important to the Department that it was one of the first policies announced under the Children First reforms in January of 2003, just a month after it announced that principals would be the centerpiece of the Department’s reform (NYC DOE, 2003a). Klein announced that the Department would be adopting Everyday Mathematics and “Balanced Literacy,” a reading curriculum that placed emphasis on “reading to children, reading with children, and reading by children. Classroom libraries would be supplemented by “Month to Month phonics” (NYC DOE, 2003a). Every elementary and middle school had to implement the new core curriculum, except for those schools that were exempt because of high performance. Principal Cole was the only principal interviewed in this study that led a high performing, selective middle school in Brooklyn, and was exempt from implementing the core curriculum. But, the remaining principals in
this study were mandated to implement the core curriculum, even before they were empowered with autonomy.

Receiving autonomy over curriculum, however, did not always mean that principals abandoned the city’s core curriculum. In fact, principals Evers, Clarke, and Carmone talked about experimenting with other curriculum vendors besides *Everyday Math* and *Balanced Literacy* when their schools were admitted to the Empowerment Schools program. Data in this study indicate that principals Evers, Clarke, and Carmone, like other principals in this study, based their decisions on which curriculum to use by evaluating their budget, teacher capacity to implement the curriculum, and student ability to grasp the curriculum.

Although it was not mentioned in official press releases or public statements made by the Department, one principal in this study explained that schools were given the city’s preferred curriculum free of cost (Principal Rhodium, personal communication, 2012). If a principal did not choose to use the core curriculum, potential costs to the school could have been purchasing textbooks, training, and professional development for teachers. Principal Rhodium chose the core curriculum mainly because of the costs. She said,

> We can choose any curriculum we want. But the only curriculum we are going to receive for free is the Core Curriculum. So if you have $250,000 to invest on a new curriculum including teacher training, teacher per session, everything that needs to be done ... textbooks, resources, then you have that $250,000 or you go with Everyday Math and get it for free.
Rhodium’s autonomy to choose her curriculum was highly dependent on her budget. But her concerns about having enough money to spend on curriculum were partnered with her concerns for her teachers’ abilities to implement the curriculum with fidelity. When Rhodium arrived to the school, it was on the list of Schools Under Registration Review (SURR), which is a list of schools that are identified as “persistently lowest-achieving” (New York State Department of Education Website, 2013a). Rhodium cited her school’s placement on the SURR list as a challenge, especially because the teachers were not able to implement the curriculum at high levels. She said,

We were a SURR list school. We got off the SURR list. Although we received the D on our progress report this year, our state accountability has always met…And now that the school has moved and is calm and things are going well since I became, you know, part of the administrative team, because the former principal had put a lot of structures in place, I just kept them up. So once the school became a calm place and off the SURR list many [teachers] don't want to leave. And when you have such a small school and you have a staff that's developing and not proficient nor effective nor highly effective, it becomes a struggle.

Rhodium’s ability to implement the curriculum was shaped by her ability to choose the staff she wanted in addition to having a competent staff. Principal Rhodium later explained that she spent “a lot” of money on teacher training and professional development in order to improve her students’ performances on standardized tests. However, Rhodium, generally, believed that some teachers were simply lacking the capacity. She said,
So what I get from [the teachers] is developing to, you know, the beginning of
effective work. When you know that you're going to retire within the next five
years but every class, every student in your class is so pivotal, then how much are
you putting in? So that's the challenge. You know, you give and you give and you
provide all this professional development and the reality is I have a whole bunch
of people that are willing and not able. And it's difficult.

Rhodium’s comments reflect how intricately connected curriculum autonomy was to
staffing autonomy. For Rhodium, having little autonomy to choose the staff she believed
was effective truly hampered her ability to choose and implement the curriculum she
believed would work best for her students.

Principal Kagan supported the idea that capable teachers were important for
implementing curriculum. She said, “collaboration amongst teachers, working together to
implement effective curriculum programs” was an “important quality” (Principal Kagan, personal
communication, 2012). Kagan also believed she enjoyed “a great deal” of autonomy
over her curriculum and felt empowered by the ability to “use data to be able to drive
instructions, and plan a solid curriculum” with her staff (Principal Kagan, personal
communication, 2012). However, Kagan’s ability to plan a solid curriculum was impacted by
time restraints and enough capable personnel. When I asked her if using data to plan a solid
curriculum was a challenge for her, she said, “…I think that the challenge is having enough time
to be able to do that and the personnel” (Principal Kagan, personal communication, 2012).

Rhodium’s and Kagan’s comments suggest that curriculum autonomy was
complicated to implement because DOE policy makers did not acknowledge how related
the different aspects of autonomy were. If principals did not have a flexible budget and
willing and capable staff, they struggled to take risks and choose curricula for their
schools. The three areas of autonomy, budget, curriculum, and staffing, together created
an ecosystem of sorts because they depended on the success of each other or were fraught
by the weakness or non-existence of each other. The complete interconnectedness of the
three areas of autonomy made it difficult for principals to act on any one aspect without
ensuring others were well in place. The DOE may have had a sense of how
interconnected the operational areas were if they had engaged in a bit of backward
mapping as is suggested in the policy implementation literature (Elmore, 1979).
Backward mapping would have given implementers, like principals, access to policy
making decisions and would have provided policy makers with an adequate
understanding of the obstacles and behaviors necessary for effective implementation.

Principals’ curriculum autonomy is also currently being shaped by New York State’s
decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS was an initiative started
by the National Governors Association for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School
Officers. In 2011, the state of NY adopted the CCSS for math and English language arts and
Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (New York State Education
Department website, 2013b). With the adoption of the CCSS, principals are faced with another
change to the way they implement their curriculum. The network leader said,

I think one of the struggles right now that all schools are facing is now with the
new Common Core learning standards. I mean, you know, there’s a lot of changes
that have to happen at the school level as far as increasing, you know, rigor and
instructional expectations for students so they are prepared for the new
performance based assessments that are going to be given in 2014. So right now
all schools are looking at their curriculum and they need to upgrade it. And they need to include what they are not currently including to be able to meet what their new standards are asking for (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012).

The network leader’s experience has been that schools will need to upgrade their curriculum. However, principals in this study reported that they began making changes to their curriculum as soon as the CCSS were adopted. Principal Kagan said,

Well, we started working on [the CCSS] a couple of years ago, as soon as it was introduced. So we tried to work on it like slowly, little by little. Just trying to, so that the teachers could plan with it. So at this point I think my teachers have a pretty good understanding of the Common Core because we’ve been planning for the past two years (Principal Kagan, personal communication, 2012).

Principal Adelman reported,

Our kids write, you know, like our teachers do a lot of instruction in writing so other than making a change here or there to adjust to the state requirements with the Common Core, as a matter of fact we started working with the Common Core back in June of [2011] (Principal Adelman, personal communication, 2012).

The New York State Education Department has also provided schools with a large number of resources to begin making changes to their curriculum. Even though many have already begun to make changes, others reported feeling confused and frustrated by the pace of change. Principal Rossi reported that even though his staff began implementing some of the changes to their curriculum in 2011, he believed the changes were happening so quickly and it took him and his staff some time to adjust. Principal Kagan agreed with this sentiment. Her staff began working on the CCSS as well, but reported, “It’s not the task, it’s the amount of time.”
The three major areas of autonomy—budget, curriculum, and staffing were clearly connected and dependent on each other. Yet principals still seemed to express a deeper value for, first, staffing autonomy and, next, budget autonomy. Curriculum autonomy was also important for a school’s success, but perhaps because standards are actively changing, curriculum autonomy seemed peripheral to their overall experience and perspective on autonomy.

The findings in this chapter show that principals’ abilities to implement the autonomy policy with fidelity was impacted by a number of factors. For example, principals lacked actual capacity to make some changes on their own. Principals could not manage their own budgets and had to rely on others for budget support. The DOE provided vague policy messages that failed to detail what autonomy would actually look like for principals. Principals believed, probably falsely, that they were able to fire teachers and pursued this action to their detriment. Also, a number of complex political relationships, some created by central office administrators (i.e. between the Department and the teachers union structures), acted as obstacles to autonomy. Finally, a severe lack of knowledge on behalf of policy makers about the ground level practice that shaped implementation, i.e. the interconnectedness of budget, staffing, and curriculum, meant policies were designed poorly and without the actual flexibility principals would need to activate their autonomy over school operations.

Taken together, these factors are directly related to a mayoral control school governance structure, which places emphasis on accountability and coherence, without actually acknowledging the context, i.e. the policies, people, and places, that shape implementation. Bloomberg is no professional educator nor is Klein and the way the autonomy policy was designed indicates that there was a plain lack of understanding of what is important to education practitioners, like having total discretion over hiring and firing, and lack of understanding about
the intricacies of implementing policies in a district as large and complex as the NYC school district.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Prior to the completion of this study, I was not aware of any research describing the relationship between mayoral control and principals’ practice in schools. Researchers have explained the importance of principals in school reform and the role of principals in shaping the trajectory of achievement in schools. However, there has been no study conducted, to date, that examines what principals’ practice actually looks like when school districts are centralized and mayors are in charge of educational matters. This study is among the first of its kind and leads to important findings regarding the relationship between mayoral control and principals’ practices.

In order to understand the relationship, I examined one policy in New York City (NYC) schools, the Children First policy, which, among many things, aimed to give principals in NYC schools autonomy to make important decisions regarding budgeting, staffing, and curriculum. A number of interesting findings emerged when I asked, 1) what does the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy and 2) what obstacles, if any, did principals face implementing the autonomy policy? In regard to the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy, results suggest that mayoral control was not always a negative thing for principals. Rather, principals embraced the mayor’s elimination of the community school boards, who principals believed acted as bureaucratic obstacles to their practice. On the other hand, principals believed mayoral educational policies insufficiently addressed social issues in their schools, which consumed their focus on a daily basis. As it relates to the obstacles principals faced, this study found that the way the autonomy policy was designed created inherent obstacles to implementation. Below, I discuss each of these findings and consider their significance as it relates to policy and practice. I then conclude with recommendations for future research.
Discussion of Key Findings

Research Question One: What does the relationship look like between mayoral control and principal autonomy?

Answer: **Mayoral control removed an important administrative obstacle for principal practice but inadequately addressed the social issues that constrained principal practice.**

Despite my assumptions that principals would solely feel frustrated toward mayoral control and wish for a return to decentralized control of NYC schools, this study finds that the relationship between mayoral control and principal autonomy was multifaceted. The literature on mayoral control in this study suggested that mayoral control had the impact of decreasing democratic participation in decision making for schools (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011). While this study somewhat supports that notion, it provides one caveat, which is that principals in this study did not actually believe community school boards advanced their democratic participation, either. Rather, principals saw community school boards as an imposing force that prevented principals from making budgeting, curriculum, or staffing decisions that met the needs of their schools and students. This supports what literature has said about school boards being another level or bureaucracy for schools (Kirst & Bulkley, 2000; Cibulka, 2001), and adds that school boards may be no better than centralized governance structures if they impose policies that are created without practitioners’ voices.

For principals in this study, mayoral control was a means to remove community school boards, which they saw as burdensome and intrusive in many ways. Mayoral control was not an enemy to the principals in this study, although principals saw the mayor’s autonomy policy as
inadequate in one critical way. That is, autonomy did not provide principals with enough power to address the numerous social issues impacting the daily lives of students and staff in their schools. Principals were happy to know that community school boards would be gone, but did not see mayoral control or autonomy as the sole answer for figuring out how to get homeless students to school on time or how to engage the parents of those students in school-led activities.

Research suggests that mayoral control is a means for developing and strengthening the relationship between schools and institutions designed to help families and children (Henig, 2009). This study, however, shows that there were serious disconnects between these institutions and schools. Principals reported that homeless families were bounced around the city before being placed permanently in homes and this impacted their students’ abilities to arrive at school on time or remain in one school for the entire year. Without developing the relationship between institutions, like the Department of Homeless Services in meaningful and effective ways principals are left without much recourse for addressing students’ needs successfully.

One of the conclusions this study comes to is that in order for principals to effectively activate their autonomy, they need adequate and accurate information and access to institutions, beyond their schools, for addressing their schools’ needs. One of the major problems with mayoral control and the principal autonomy policy was that it was vague and did not provide enough information to practitioners. The messages delivered through the Department’s documents and website did not appear to be detailed enough to provide principals with a clear sense of their responsibilities as it related to autonomy. Because the documents lacked detail, they seemed ambiguous and weak leaving principals to figure out on their own how much autonomy they actually had and how to implement particular portions of the autonomy policy. As the policy implementation literature suggests, if policies are vague and provide little direction
on what implementers should do, it creates ambiguity and allows significant room for adaptation (McLaughlin, 1987).

The NYC DOE did not provide strong and clear messages to principals about what the autonomy policy would encompass in their schools. One of the reasons the policies may have been vague is due to the newly empowered governance structure. Chun & Rainey (2005) suggest that when political leaders lack expertise in the area in which they create policy, policies tend to be vague. Although Mayor Bloomberg was highly skilled at gathering external financial resources for NYC schools, he was highly inexperienced as it related to educational policy making. While he believed his presence, i.e. mayoral control, would bring coherence to the school system and improve NYC schools, many of the policies that resulted from mayoral control helped to agitate an already complex system and made implementation more varied and inconsistent across schools in the NYC school district.

Research Question Two: What obstacles, if any, did principals face implementing the autonomy policy?

Answer: As principals attempted to execute their autonomy, they faced obstacles that derived from vague policy design and low capacity to implement reforms with fidelity.

It is worth noting, again, that principals wanted autonomy. Principals were certain, that they, rather than central office staff or community school boards had the best knowledge about what it would take to change schools. Principals’ proximity to the schools and their qualitative experiences with students, teachers, and families shaped their expertise and informed their
practice at the ground level. They saw this as an advantage and wanted to optimize their advantage. However, this study shows that principals lacked some capacity to implement the autonomy policy with fidelity.

To be clear, lack of capacity manifested itself in two specific ways. First, there was personal lack of capacity. That is, principals lacked the professional skills to manage their budget. This caused the distance between principals and their budget and principals’ reliance on others to carry out tasks related to balancing and managing a school’s budget. Lack of capacity also related to obstacles created by the policy itself. Principals were unable, because of policy restrictions, to carry out some tasks they believed were important to their practice, like firing teachers or choosing a curriculum to suit their schools’ needs.

The findings in this study are evidence that capacity, both personal and policy related, are critical for practice on the ground level. When policy makers ask implementers to take on new, unfamiliar tasks, policy makers have the potential to expose weaknesses in implementers, as was the case for principals and their budgets (Cohen, Moffit, & Goldin, 2007). Principals’ low capacity created by policy restrictions complicated principals’ abilities to implement the autonomy policy with fidelity and added stress to practitioners who were already overwhelmed by the daily responsibilities of being a principal in NYC schools. Although policy makers claimed autonomy was central to creating a system of good schools, rather than a good school system, they disabled principals when policy messages were vague.

One of the critical areas of autonomy principals claimed they wanted was autonomy over choosing their own staff. Since they lacked that ability with community school boards, they saw mayoral control as a way to bring staffing autonomy to fruition. However, the autonomy policy was severely inept at explaining principals’ power to make their own staffing decisions. While
most documents were completely devoid of any mention of staffing autonomy, several did seem to imply that “principals and their teams have much broader discretion over what happens in their schools, including which teachers and assistant principals to hire and retain” (NYC DOE, 2008). It is possible that principals never actually possessed the autonomy to fire. However, without any clear evidence to support the claim that principals could hire and fire at their discretion, principals struggled to figure out what was within their power and what types of staffing decisions were restricted by NYC teachers union contractual obligations. Ingram and Schneider (1990) state, “Inconsistency and vagueness in statutes may delay development of coherent legislation or contribute to interlocal variation in implementation” (p. 75). Although Ingram and Schneider were applying their theory to legislation, my study shows the same theory may apply to the implementation of educational policy. When laws or policies do not provide clear explanations for implementers, then implementers can easily subvert the policy ideas or interpret the goals to fit their own wishes (Ingram & Schneider, 1990). Principals in this study all expressed a desire to hire and fire the teachers at their discretion. So without clear directives from the NYC DOE, they easily believed the staffing autonomy would allow for hiring and firing at the discretion of principals and tried to implement this aspect of the autonomy policy in their schools, albeit with little success.

Findings in this study suggest that principals adapted Children First policies to meet their own expectations. Principals in this study articulated a desire to have teachers who they believed fit with the vision of their schools and they simultaneously wanted to fire the teachers who did not. Even the smallest amount of ambiguity caused principals to believe they could make staffing decisions at their discretion. As literature indicates above, vague policy directives will only enable implementers to mold the policies to fit with their vision (Chun & Rainey, 2005). Matland
(1995) argues that the clearer the policy directives and goals are, the more likely they will lead to conflict. It is in the best interest, then, of policy makers to leave policy directives vague if it means they can avoid conflict. However, vague policy means implementation suffers because implementers can adapt policies in ways that were not intended or expected by policy makers, which was the case with principals in this study (Cohen, Timmons, & Fesko, 2005).

These key findings are evidence that there are obstacles with decentralized and centralized forms of school governance, especially when practitioners, the ones most critical for improving student performance and achievement, are left out of developing policy. Without backward mapping, getting a sense of what policy makers are able to do, and have the desire to do, policy makers at the decentralized level as well as the centralized level, run the risk of designing policies that are incompatible with capacity on the ground level or simply too vague to actually yield the desired results of policy. If principals were afforded the opportunity to work with policy makers to design the policies, there is a possibility that the principal autonomy policy could have been implemented with fidelity.

**Implications for Research**

This study raises questions about research that studies the impact of centralized control versus decentralized control of schools. What literature has already made clear is that mayoral control, as a form of centralized control, is controversial because it has often stripped power from the public to make decisions about schools (Henig, Gold, Orr, Silander, & Simon, 2011). But, what literature fails to question is whether or not decentralized control is actually different beyond the electoral process. This study shows that both mayoral control and community school districts acted as obstacles to public participation in schools. Each governance structure acted in ways that left principals implementing policies they had no role in designing. Although mayoral
control appeared to relinquish decision-making authority to principals through Children First’s autonomy policy, it completely lacked participation from the public in actually designing the policy, which created other obstacles in the long run for principals. Community school districts, as principals reported, were also authoritarian and obstructed principals’ abilities to manage operational matters. Studies that seek only to explore the differences between centralized and decentralized school governance structures (Clune, 1993), may fail if they do not acknowledge how similarities between the two structures are powerful determinants of practice.

Findings in this study also contribute more knowledge on the effectiveness of mayoral control as a tool for reform in urban districts. The message delivered when Mayor Michael Bloomberg took over NYC schools was that the existing school boards were unable to do a good job at turning around schools. Instead of boards, the mayor would run schools and bring coherence to a system that was unorganized and chaotic. However, what this study teaches us is that mayors, especially those without previous professional experience in education, may not be the best suited to take over schools and create educational policy, especially if that mayor also eliminates locally elected community school boards, handpicks the chancellor, and handpicks a new, mostly powerless, school board of non-educators. Mayor Bloomberg certainly had access to a number of resources and institutions that supported schools in new and innovative ways, like through the Leadership Academy. However, he did not possess expertise on the issues impacting policy implementation at the ground level. This study suggests, then, that mayors who lack expertise on educational reforms should allow for the participation of practicing educators who can supplement the mayor’s lack of knowledge with first hand expertise on the issues currently affecting educational policy implementation.

My study also affirms our understanding of system-changing policy instruments and
generates new ideas. Research on policy instruments suggests that there are benefits to any policy instrument. In the case of system-changing, the benefit is that a new system of authority is empowered to make changes and this has the potential to help those who were once silenced become more active in the policy process. However, system-changing also means swift and sweeping changes that sometimes ask actors at different levels of the policy process to make significant change to their process, like principal autonomy in NYC schools. An idea that this study generates is that system-changing can also be complicated when the newly empowered group has little knowledge about the factors shaping implementation at different levels of the policy process. For example, if the mayor and chancellor had fully understood the importance of clear and reasonable policy directives, it may have helped principals understand more about their capacity to implement autonomy in NYC public schools.

Furthermore, the implementation research is abundant. Yet, it fails to examine how mayoral control impacts implementation of policies at the school level. In this era of accountability, mayoral control is becoming more prevalent in urban school districts and research must examine how it impacts not simply outcomes like graduation and performance on standardized test but the process of implementation and how implementers respond and experience mayoral control. Though this study is a start, research should continue to demystify what about mayoral control impacts the way implementation is carried out or obstructed. This study is evidence that the NYC school district’s combination of mayoral control and principal autonomy provides a unique opportunity to gain a better understanding of the impact of mayoral control on policy implementation at the school level.

Recent research on implementation is also narrowly focused on the central office’s capacity to implement reforms (Honig, 2009; Honig & Rainey, 2013). However, since President
Obama placed pressure on states to change school level practices, it is incumbent upon researchers to explore how implementation looks at the ground level. While I am not suggesting to abandon research on the role of central offices in implementation, this study proves that it is necessary to triangulate results from central office studies with the results from studies, like these, that focus on practitioners’ perspectives on implementation and reform.

This study takes a look at the policy process from the top down and the bottom up in order to understand the important factors that contribute to developing and implementing effective educational policy and to determine what challenges implementers faced as they implemented reforms at the last stage of the policy process. This study affirms the idea that vague policy design leads to significant variation in the way implementers implement policy. Spillane (2002) suggests that the variation is related to 1) the way district leaders convey policy messages and 2) the way implementers make sense of policy messages. The NYC DOE did not provide clear messages for implementers and, as a result, implementers developed their own understandings of what autonomy would look like in schools. Consequently, implementers spent a good deal of time pursuing actions, like firing teachers they believed were failing students, which the Children First policy did not actually give them the autonomy to do. However, if the policy makers provided models or were explicit about what they expected from the autonomy policy, it is likely implementers would have at least known what was possible and what actions were fruitless to pursue.

Researchers have found that what policy makers do at the top should be informed by what implementers do at the bottom and vice versa (Weimer, 1993). This study also affirms that the policy process is connected and supports the idea that backward mapping is an important part of the policy design process. Elmore (1979) says, backward mapping,
…Begins not at the top of the implementation process but at the last possible stage, the point at which administrative actions intersect private choices. It begins not with a statement of intent, but with a statement of the specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process that generates the need for a policy (p. 604).

Backward mapping helps to provide policy makers at the top level with crucial information about the capacity and level of skill of implementers at the bottom of the policy process. For instance, findings in this study suggest that one factor affecting principals’ abilities to implement reform was low capacity. Principals did not have the skill to manage their budgets on their own. Having this information ahead of time would have allowed policy makers to take a few steps to help build that capacity or to build structures around principals to support principals while still maintaining their autonomy.

This study confirms the idea that backward mapping can also be a tool for understanding the context of implementation, i.e., the policies, people, and places that shape implementation. In chapter three, I provide details about the social and political contexts shaping NYC schools. The history of reform in NYC schools, especially the NYC school district’s relationship with centralization and decentralization, play an important role in principals’ understandings about their roles and responsibilities as the school leaders. All the principals in this study agreed with policy makers that elected school boards were bureaucratic obstacles because boards imposed their will on principals and schools. However, principals simultaneously seemed to imply that the responsibilities principals currently held were overwhelming and that having support similar to the support provided by community school boards (for example, as it related to
paperwork and reporting) could have alleviated some stress for principals. Simply understanding what was going on at implementation level would have afforded the Department access to information about principals and schools that could have helped with policy design and adoption.

Collectively, these findings challenge, affirm, and enhance our understanding on two broad veins of literature, centralization and policy implementation. Without a laser focus on the perspectives on implementers, the ones carrying out reforms on the ground level, we would be disconnected from the multilayered nature of school reform when mayors take charge and the nature of implementation when districts are centralized. Though this study involved in-depth interviews and analysis of copious amounts of documents, it only provides some understanding of the relationship between mayoral control and policy implementation. More studies are needed to complete the picture.

**Recommendations for Policy**

The principals in this study wanted autonomy over their schools’ functions. Prior to autonomy, principals were subservient to the locally elected community school boards who determined a school’s budget, made hiring decisions, and chose a school’s curriculum. Principals reported feeling excited because they believed autonomy was “their chance” (Principal Evers, personal communication, 2012) to shape the vision of their schools as the way they saw fit. However, the autonomy policy lacked important qualities that could have helped principals effectively execute their autonomy in schools. Based on the interviews conducted with principals and policy makers in this study, as well as analysis of documents and newspaper articles, I make several recommendations to policy makers for improving principal capacity to implement policies, like the autonomy policy, with fidelity.
This study finds that the NYC DOE Children First policy directives lacked clear instructions, which caused problems for principals at different stages in implementation. In order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in implementation, it is my recommendation that policy makers ensure that policy messages are clear and direct. One way to ensure clear and direct policy messages is by asking what obstacles may arise to the policy solution suggested. As the policy implementation literature above suggests, evaluating possible policy outcomes is an important part of the policy design process (Stokey & Zechkhauser, 1978). Gauging possible outcomes can enable policy makers to consider the way the policy messages may be interpreted, how the policies may be played out on the ground level, and what possible obstacles may arise that will prevent implementation with fidelity to the policy design. If during this evaluating stage, policy makers notice that possible obstacles are related to sheer confusion or uncertainty about the policy messages, policy makers can then revisit their designs and move forward with designs that are clearly stated and appropriate for the problem at hand.

One way to evaluate the possible outcomes of policy solutions is by mapping backwards from implementation to policy design. As indicated above, backward mapping involves examining the last stage of implementation that produces the need for the policy in the first place (Elmore, 1979). One critical step in backward mapping effectively is to involve practitioners in the decision-making process. Backward mapping should go beyond looking at implementation from an outsider or top down view. It should allow implementers to generate questions and to map out the landscape that shapes their implementation (McLaughlin, 2005). Only then can backward mapping truly explore the last possible state of implementation.

Another way to get implementers involved in the policy process is to open the door to democratic participation in policy making. If implementers are involved in the process of
designing policy, this allows policy makers to map backwards from implementation to design. In their study of 11 districts, Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi (2001) discuss the distinction between districts that attempt reform with very few stakeholders actively engaged in the decision-making process, which they categorize as districts with low civic capacity. Districts with high civic capacity were those districts that worked diligently to include both empowered and historically disempowered groups in setting a policy agenda and implementing policies. The districts with the greatest level of civic capacity were the districts that had the most enduring reform. Those districts with low civic capacity often faced serious obstacles and were unable to form coalitions of resource rich groups to meet their reform goals. In the case of the NYC school district, reform becomes complex because there are so many stakeholders and so many interests to represent. Still, it is imperative that districts like NYC do more than call for an inclusive process, but rather engage all stakeholders in actual planning and implementation of reform.

NYC policy makers brought principals to the centerpiece of reform, yet excluded principals from policy making. In the same breath, those policy makers admitted that principals were the most knowledgeable about what happens in schools and deserved the chance and the power to make decisions on operational and technical matters. The contradiction of those actions is stunning and reflects the inconsistency and disingenuousness of reforms. If policy makers are serious about improving schools and truly believe that principals are critical to the success of schools, then principals must be empowered at all levels.

Also, in districts where mayoral control exists, mayors should do more to ensure coherence between the institutions related to educational practice and schools. In this study, it was made clear that principals’ practices were shaped by the daily struggles of students living in poverty and low parent engagement. Mayors should act to make sure institutions like the
Department of Homeless Services or the New York City Housing Authority are communicating with schools and working, collaboratively, to develop policies and practices that make prevent educational issues. This may entail intentional building of civic capacity that endures for the long run and is targeted at enhancing the quality of life for children and families.

School boards are also an important consideration. With the 2013 mayoral election results, it is unclear whether Mayor DeBlasio will abandon a mayoral control governance structure and return to community school boards. But, what should be clear is that no one group or person should monopolize and control decisions over public institutions as important as schools. This study reminds us that absolute power corrupts absolutely and regardless if the mayor or teachers unions, via community school boards, are in control, important stakeholders can be left out. A system of checks and balances, supported by the public, should be in place to ensure dissemination of power between all stake-holding groups.

If districts are interested in giving principals autonomy they need to actually give them real autonomy. NYCs policies used such vague language in their policy design like, “more discretion” or “increased voice.” The terms more and increased do not actually provide a concrete value nor do they tell principals if they will actually have autonomy or not. To the principals in this study, real autonomy, “allows a principal to have a vision for their school” (Coordinator Bennett, personal communication, 2013). Principals want to “choose their curriculum and instruction” they feel best suits their schools (Network Leader, personal communication, 2012) or to “hire and who they want for certain positions” (Principal Bogle, personal communication, 2012). The only way to give autonomy and to allow principals to make the decisions that are important for their schools is to actually give autonomy so that principals can make the decisions that are best for their schools.
Bloomberg claimed that taking over NYC schools was in an effort to make someone or some entity responsible for the results of students and teachers. Accountability, they believed, would force practitioners to act and work diligently to ensure student success. Yet, there was little accountability for Bloomberg and Klein. As they designed Children First, they claimed that they conducted a study of the entire NYC school district, from top to bottom. However, results of their study were never publically released. The public was left to trust that the reforms implemented directly addressed whatever issues were found in the Department’s 100-day study.

In an effort to remain transparent and accountable to the public, policy makers will need to publically disclose their true findings about schools. There should never be a study that is conducted, using millions of dollars, that does not produce findings for something that has serious implications for public life.

The NYC DOE and districts interested in mimicking these reforms will need to be bold and make clear statements about what kinds of power practitioners will possess. Although clarity in policy messages can lead to opposition (Matland, 1995), there is far more confusion in vague policy messages that stunt implementation, damage practice, and weaken relationships between policy makers and implementers.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There is still a lot to be learned about school reform that seeks to build capacity in school leaders. Research in the following areas is still needed:

1. One of the unique contributions this works makes to research on educational policy in the NYC school district is that it explores implementation from the perspective of practitioners. Previous research tends to explore implementation of educational policy in NYC schools from the perspective of the central office (O’Day, Bitter, Gomez, 2011;
Ravitch, 2010). While both the top-central office and the bottom-school level perspectives are important, the combined effect of top down and bottom up exploration can yield much greater detail about challenges faced at each level of the policy process. Future studies should place special focus on central office and school level perspectives to provide a more complete view of challenges faced throughout the policy process.

2- While there is an emerging body of research on principal autonomy in charter schools, there is not enough literature on principal autonomy in traditional public schools. As school districts around the nation move toward a model that allows principals to have more power over decisions, research will need to further explore 1) what autonomy for principals in traditional district schools actually looks like? 2) How autonomy is manifested in principals’ practices? 3) In what ways, if any, does increased autonomy for principals affect student achievement and teacher practice?

3- Research on mayoral control typically examines how mayoral control affects the organizational structure and politics of school districts. Future research should continue to make the connection between mayoral control and actual practice in schools. This may include making connections between mayoral reform policies and how they impact principal and teacher capacity to implement new reforms.

4- Other research should also examine the role mayoral control plays in advancing or limiting principal participation in the policy process in schools. Research should highlight the significant influence of mayoral control on a school district’s civic capacity. Civic capacity explains the ability of different sectors of the community—business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others to “act in concert around a matter of community-wide importance” (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001).
Findings from my dissertation research suggest that civic capacity is critical for school and district leaders and has a profound impact on principals’ decision making. Future research should ask how, if at all, mayoral control of schools impacts a district’s civic capacity?

5- Data collection in this study revealed that concentrated poverty played a pivotal role in principals’ abilities to improve their schools. Future research should explore the effect concentrated poverty in predominantly Black and a Latino community has on principal autonomy and principals’ abilities to shape teaching and learning. While there is literature that explores how poverty affects classrooms and teachers, literature does not explore the obstacles school leaders face when working in high poverty communities nor does literature explore how principals may begin to deal with those obstacles head on. Future research should ask 1) in what ways does concentrated poverty affect policymaking in predominantly Black and Latino urban school districts? 2) How do leaders engage in effective practice to confront those obstacles?

6- Future research on New York City schools should seek to include a broader range of schools across the city. This study only focused on principal autonomy in Brooklyn and Queens. Future studies may want to compare across the boroughs to include a broader spectrum of racial, ethnic, and economically diverse schools and the ability of principals in those schools to implement policies with fidelity.

7- Lastly, research should do more to explore how, if at all, school boards act to support democratic participation in schools. Rather than assuming that school boards affords the public more opportunity to make decisions for schools, research should explore the specific mechanisms that exist within districts run by community school boards, which
are intended to give the public voice. Moreover, this type of research should pay special attention to who is involved on school boards. If only one group predominates then the role of school boards should be questioned in the same way research on centralized governance is questioned.

**Conclusion**

In his 2013, state of the union address, President Barack Obama called for congress to “do work” to ensure that no children would start the “race of life already behind”. Although President Obama was referring to starting high quality pre-school programs, his sentiment rings loud and true for many disadvantaged children in schools across the country who start the race of life already behind. In places like NYC, where racial and ethnic disparities systematically link to a child’s achievement, policy makers, practitioners, business leaders, community groups, institutions of higher education, families, and politicians must work collectively to ensure that children are afforded political, economic, and intellectual access to high quality schooling. These recommendations are in no way meant to act as a magic bullet, but they do provide a starting point to fulfill President Obama’s call for action. Providing principals with autonomy was necessary but not sufficient because policy makers missed a number of crucial steps and excluded a number of important stakeholders from the design process. Working collectively as a community of concerned citizens to ensure that policies are designed with a clear focus on the problem at hand has strong potential to positively affect change in schools.
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Appendix A - Protocols

Interview Protocol - Principals
1. Tell me how you became principal of (blank) school. How long have you been a principal here? What were you before becoming principal of this school?
2. What would you say you enjoy about being a principal? What would you say are some of the challenges?

Segue: most of these questions will ask about your time when you were in the district.

3. How would you describe Children First in your own words?
   a. What parts of the reform stood out to you?
4. How would you describe the process of developing Children First?
   a. Please tell me about your role in helping to develop Children First. What parts of the reform were you strategic in helping to develop?

Implementation
1. How has the NYC Department of Education tried to implement Children First policies in the schools?
2. From your perspective, what parts of the reform have been the most complicated to implement? Why?

Autonomy
1. Mayor Bloomberg and Former Chancellor Klein said that the principal would serve as the centerpiece of their reform efforts. In your experience, has this been put into place?
   a. If you do believe it has been put into place, how have they put that into policy?
   b. If not, why do you think this hasn’t been put into policy?
2. How would you say autonomy is working in your schools?
   a. If you do feel you have more autonomy, what do you believe has helped you become more autonomous? What have been some of the obstacles to your autonomy?
   b. If you feel you don’t have that autonomy, why is that the case?
3. How would you describe the impact Children First has had on teachers? Curriculum? Students? Parents?
4. Overall, how would you assess the overall success of Children First at addressing the districts needs at the time it was enacted?
5. (If negative) Is it because of how the policy was implemented? Other unexpected things? The target areas?
6. Is there is anything else that I should ask you, that I haven’t?
7. Is there anyone else I should talk to?
Interview Protocol- District Officials & District Consultant
1. What is your current position? How long have you been serving in this position? What were you doing before becoming (blank)?

Segue: most of these questions will ask about your time when you were in the district.

2. How would you describe Children First in your own words?
   a. What parts of the reform stood out to you?
3. How would you describe the process of developing Children First?
   a. Please tell me about your role in helping to develop Children First. What parts of the reform were you strategic in helping to develop?

Implementation
1. How has the NYC Department of Education tried to implement Children First policies in the schools?

2. From your perspective, what parts of the reform have been the most complicated to implement? Why?

Autonomy
1. Mayor Bloomberg and Former Chancellor Klein said that the principal would serve as the centerpiece of their reform efforts. In your experience, has this been put into place?
   a. If so how have they put that into policy?
   b. If not, why do you think this hasn’t been put into policy?

2. How would you say autonomy is working in the schools?
   a. If you do feel principals have more autonomy, what do you believe has helped them become more autonomous? What have been some of the obstacles to their autonomy?
   b. If you feel principals don’t have that autonomy, why is that the case?

3. How would you describe the impact Children First has had on teachers? Curriculum? Students? Principals? Parents?

4. Overall, how would you assess the overall success of Children First at addressing the districts needs at the time it was enacted?

5. (If negative) Is it because of how the policy was implemented? Other unexpected things? The target areas?

6. Is there is anything else that I should ask you, that I haven’t?

7. Is there anyone else I should talk to? From your role working with empowerment schools, I was thinking of targeting the schools that were admitted and the schools that were rejected, do you have any suggestions for what principals I should contact?
Interview Protocol - teachers union Officials & Principal Union Officials

1. What is your current position? How long have you been serving in this position? What were you doing before becoming (blank)?

Segue: most of these questions will ask about your time when you were in the district.

2. How would you describe Children First in your own words?
   a. What parts of the reform stood out to you?
3. How would you describe the process of developing Children First?
   a. Please tell me about your role in helping to develop Children First. What parts of the reform were you strategic in helping to develop?

Implementation

1. How has the NYC Department of Education tried to implement Children First policies in the schools?

2. From your perspective, what parts of the reform have been the most complicated to implement? Why?

Autonomy

1. Mayor Bloomberg and Former Chancellor Klein said that the principal would serve as the centerpiece of their reform efforts. In your experience, has this been put into place?
   a. If so how have they put that into policy?
   b. If not, why do you think this hasn’t been put into policy?

2. How would you say autonomy is working in the schools?
   a. If you do feel principals have more autonomy, what do you believe has helped them become more autonomous? What have been some of the obstacles to their autonomy?
   b. If you feel principals don’t have that autonomy, why is that the case?

3. How would you describe the impact Children First has had on teachers? Curriculum? Students? Principals? Parents?

4. From your perspective, how would you describe the way the teachers union/principal’s union and the NYC Department of Education have worked together to implement Children First?

5. Overall, how would you assess the overall success of Children First at addressing the districts needs at the time it was enacted?

6. Is there is anything else that I should ask you, that I haven’t?
7. Is there anyone else I should talk to? From your role working with empowerment schools, I was thinking of targeting the schools that were admitted and the schools that were rejected, do you have any suggestions for what principals I should contact?
Appendix B- Sample Memo

Memo
Senior Policy Maker A
March 9th 2012

When Joel Klein was hired as the Chancellor of NYC schools, the first person he hired was Marcy Cornwall (pseudonym). Cornwall had extensive experience with educational programming, youth development, and public advocacy and met Klein as she worked for the [Corporation] on the new small high schools initiative. She admits to not having a background in classroom practice or school leadership, but felt qualified to be the chancellor’s Senior Advisor based on her extensive background in educational programming.

Throughout our interview, it was evident that Cornwall truly believe in the work they did in NYC schools. This might be because Cornwall truly hand in almost every aspect of the policy including writing it and “working on a range of pieces of it.” Many of the policies the district developed were a result of Cornwall’s thoughts on what school reform should look like. Cornwall said, without prompting,

“The theory of change of Children First was that we needed to create a system of good schools, with that location. Rather than a good school system. That meant that every school had to be a good school or an excellent school and that there are elements to a good school.”

One of those elements was a “strong and capable” principal. Cornwall said:

“…you could have a school that was moving toward being a good school and have a capable and strong principal. You could never have a good school that didn’t have that.

This statement confirms for me that principals were truly a major focal point for this reform. Some of the other district consultants I spoke with felt that the principals were only a small slice of the pie. They believed there were other, more important parts to focus on, including the development of small schools and the high school reforms. But, Cornwall is saying, with the above statement, that in order for other reform elements to work, the district had to first make sure principals were “capable” of carrying out tasks. On the other hand, maybe other consultants were hesitant to say principals were the centerpiece of reform because the district never actually proved it through action. Maybe it was the district’s intention to make principals a focal point of the reform, but that it never moved beyond rhetoric?

Later in the interview Cornwall also identified other important elements to the reform. She said

“…if we were going to create a system of good schools, parent engagement had to be a big piece of that, as well as a capable principal, a rigorous academically demanding curriculum, capable teachers who could form professional communities, a whole range of things.”

Each of these things, from Cornwall’s perspective, were important parts of what would make NYC schools significantly better. In particular, Cornwall honed in on the parent coordinator position (which she felt could only help principals be more capable). The parent coordinators
seem to be a big part of this puzzle. If principals were going to be given autonomy over things like the budget and staff (curriculum was really restricted for most schools that did not participate in the Empowerment Program), then the district would also have to endow them with specialized resources, human resources, that would help manage the parts of a school that might produce weakness. One particular weakness for many schools was parent engagement.

Many low-performing schools in NYC also have low parent engagement. So, taking the work of James Comer of Yale in mind, Cornwall developed the Parent Coordinator position. Comer was a psychiatrist who developed the Comer School Development Program and identified a gap between home life and school life as a major weakness for student achievement. In order to decrease that gap, Cornwall believed principals should have the ability to hire “people whose job it would be to make the school more welcome to the parents and to translate the school the parents.” Those people would also help “people [parents] understand what their kids needed and what they needed to do and help the principal.” The principal was directly responsible for hiring the parent coordinator. It was one of the first ways the district gave all principals more autonomy while also holding them accountable for parent engagement. By hiring the parent coordinator directly, principals would know, personally, the quality of the person they were hiring and could have a better hand in getting more parents involved in the everyday school life of their children.

In my interviews with principals, it sounds like the parent coordinator was a very successful addition. All the principals I talked with loved their parent coordinator because it really did increase parent involvement. Principals talked about having good, close relationships with their parent coordinators, which allowed them to work as a team to increase parent engagement. Plus, parent engagement really did help their schools, (even if it had not directly led to achievement gains, it helped principals develop a better rapport with parents and build community).

Plus, I think the parent coordinator position helped to reframe the image people had of principals. Cornwall said developing the parent coordinator position was highly controversial. She said

“A whole lot of the advocates, my old friends, were really angry about it because they did not think the parent coordinators should report to the principals because people had such a negative view of principals at that time. They thought they would just have them do like paperwork and Xeroxing and never let them really do the work. Which turned out not to be true.”

Once people realized that the parent coordinator position was an asset for schools, they began to change their perception of principals.

Cornwall said she was concerned as well. But, she was certain that reporting to the principal was the only way the position would really be useful. If parent coordinators reported to the PTA, it would only make them political hotbeds and make already dysfunctional schools more dysfunctional. Plus, it would not allow the district to hold the principal accountable for parent engagement. To me this statement shows, not only how risky it is to introduce new positions and programming in schools, but is also shows how every decision is scrutinized (even if it sounds well intentioned).

Parent coordinators are a very important part of this picture. In order for principals to be successful (which helps them maintain their autonomy. Unsuccessful principals are stripped of
autonomy in NYC schools), they need a team of people, including a parent coordinator to work on the different aspects of schooling that help children succeed.

Along with Parent Coordinators, Cornwall negotiated with the UFT to redesign the contracts so that it allowed principals to hire the teaching staff (a task that was once done at the district level). Principals would not have to accept teachers they didn’t choose, plus they could be held accountable for a teacher’s success or failure if they knew, personally, the quality of the teacher they hired. Cornwall said:

“…A principal from the Beacon high school calls me and says it’s like September 28th and we’ve been in school for 3 weeks and HR, this is the principal [talking], I selected a chemistry teacher and another teacher, I forget what the subject was, in June and then he volunteered and came for three weeks of professional development this summer. I carefully selected them, they came for three weeks, they are new teachers, and they’ve been teaching now for two or three weeks and they’re other people got, some schools now have an unassigned chemistry teacher and he’s just been assigned to my school. He’s going to bump out the teacher that I have. So this is typical. This had happened quite often and it was one of the principal’s biggest complaints. Well what is the classic problem with that? Is how can you hold that principal accountable for the Regents scores of her students if she’s done all this work to have a really good teacher and you take it away? It’s absurd!”

The district wanted to hold principals accountable for their school’s progress, but only after they gave the principal more control over what was happening inside of the school.

Cornwall fully believed principals enjoyed their autonomy while she was in the district. However, she acknowledged that it was difficult to keep the momentum going. I believe that as the years went on and more changes were introduced to the system, the complexity of the changes really slowed progress and community support dwindled. The district had been reorganized a number of times, community groups believed it was more difficult to have a say in policy (because of the lack of community schools boards), and the closing of large, low performing schools ignited a furor of opposition from educators and community members (Cornwall also ran the office of new schools in the DOE and helped “phase out” 23 of the largest lowest performing schools). It seems almost as if things happened too quickly for NYC educators.

Cornwall worked in NYC for 5 years before she returned to Carnegie. She never mentions why she went back to Carnegie, but I know from reading in newspapers that in 2004, Klein nominated her for the position of Deputy Chancellor. However, the NY State Board of Regents did not accept her application because she did not have a superintendent’s license. Plus, Cornwall seems like a program administrator at heart. The NYC scene may have gotten too political for her.

Themes that emerge:

- Parent Coordinator as a major tool for change in schools
- Even though principal’s autonomy is dependent on a few things, it was also seen as a prerequisite for success in a number of other areas. District saw it (the principal’s position) as a major intervention point in schools.
- I didn’t write about it in memo, but I keep hearing that the district struggled to figure out whether autonomy would be a reward for success or whether it would be a prerequisite for success. Frank Grant (pseudonym) mentioned it, Cornwall mentioned it, and so did Shultz (pseudonym). I will need to memo about this. What does it actually mean? What might be the outcomes of either of those?

- Quickness of change. Vastness of change. It happened in every part of the system very quickly.
Appendix C- List of Codes

Codes about Empowerment Program

Principals Sense that the empowerment program was at its best during the first year (EB1st)
- Indicates, maybe, that there was some fundamental (internal?) change to the empowerment program after the 1st year of implementation.

The Empowerment Program helped principals become successful (EmpHP)
- Some principals felt their success would not have come without having the autonomy from the empowerment program. This code helps identify how principals attribute their success to the implementation of the policy

Empowerment program had limited capacity to cause change
- Empowerment program had limitations
- Reforms do not accommodate special populations of students

Codes about autonomy (explicitly)

Definition of Autonomy (DOA)
- Helps me get an understanding of how principals see autonomy. Will need to dig deeper here to see how definitions differ, if at all.

Autonomy currently exhibited by principals was not the kind of autonomy DOE intended-policy makers believed principals did not share authority and this impacted autonomy (NotRyAut)
- Indicates when policy makers did not believe the autonomy principals exhibit was the kind the DOE intended to promote

Autonomy allows principals to do what is best for their schools (AutoHPri)
- Tells me when someone expressed the idea that autonomy allowed principals to do what is best for their schools

Engaging parents helps principals’ autonomy (EngParHep)
- Principals and others believe engaging parents helps principals

Principal professional tangential responsibilities (as a result of autonomy) are overwhelming (PriOver)
- Tells me when someone expressed the idea that principals had too much to do in the new system. New system overwhelms principals because work overload

Codes about power and powerlessness

Powerlessness

Principals felt a sense of Powerlessness both before and after children first implementation (PNP)
- These quotes give me a glimpse of how principals felt about their level of control before and after Children First implementation. Indicates where there was any change related to the policy (or other factors).

District offices told principals what to do before empowerment (DOCtrlPri)
- Tells me when principals felt powerless

Principals asked for autonomy!
- Indicates that principals wanted more power because they felt they didn’t have much to begin with
Power

Empowerment program made principals feel they had more say over their school's functioning; Empowerment program allows the principals more flexibility; Autonomy allows principals to do what is best for their schools (EPIInPrinV)
- Indicates when participants believed empowerment program gave principals more voice and say over school operations
- Principals felt joining empowerment would give them more power over their school
- Empowerment program made principals feel they had more say over their school's functioning

Codes about obstacles

District Obstacles- Obstacles that seem to derive from policy created at district level

Complex/bureaucratic system

Bloomberg and Klein Policies Depressed morale (NoMora)
- Tells me how professional morale may have been impacted by reform. Another obstacle

Inexperienced school leaders cannot make reform work (inexperienced because they are young and thrown in without having to do the years in the DOE)
- Young and less experienced leaders do not produce the results in schools as the more experienced principals do. This code gives me an indication of another obstacle to the reform (new inexperienced principals with more autonomy may not be good for the new reform).

Central Office was an obstacle to reform before Children First (CnrlPriOb)
- Before Children First, central office was an obstacle to reform.

Network system has obstacles; district system allows more collaboration (NetOb)
- Tells me when and how participants believed networks acted as an obstacle to school reform

School boards were roadblocks to reform (SBOb)
- Tells me when people saw district school boards as an obstacle to reform

Sense that Central office knows what’s best, Principals and teachers DO NOT know what’s best (PriCtPol)
- Tells me when someone expresses the idea that policy makers did not believe principals and teachers were best suited to make policy.

Sense that real control still lied with the central office (COCtrl)
- Tells me when someone indicates that the central office still maintains control even amidst autonomy policies

Bloomberg and Klein reforms failed (BKRF); Bloomberg and Klein reforms did not work
- Tells me when someone indicates policies, as they were designed, were not effective

Principals feel like current system is stunting their ability to be autonomous (CurRefStunt)
- Shows me how principals feel about current policy structure and ed system reforms
- Principals feel there is a lack of support from district officials

Policies and practices are constantly changing and principals and schools cannot keep up

Obstacles created by social conditions (low parent engagement, poverty, language barriers)-
Obstacles that arise due to social conditions that originate outside of school

Principals sense that environment within the school needed to be changed
- Gives some indication of how principals sought to use their autonomy to overcome external obstacles. Also implies that principals faced internal obstacles and decided to deal with them in order to change school

Poverty impacts students, teachers, and principals (PovOb)
- Covers when someone indicates how poverty impacted students’ lives, teachers’ practice, or principals’ autonomy

Students' personal challenges have a big impact on school.
Achievement gap- Expectations for Black and Latino youth, higher

Obstacles created by politics (i.e., mayoral control, union)- Obstacles that originate because of political fights, political polarization

Teachers union was a political roadblock to reform (TeachUOb)
- Tells me when policy makers, educators, others saw teachers unions as an obstacle to reform implementation.
- Union contractual obligations are a roadblock to autonomy

Unskilled Teachers is an obstacle

Policy makers sense that teachers are not a central part of the reform (TeachNFoc)
- Tells me when policy makers believed teachers were not a central focus of the reform. May indicate where teachers were left out.

Principals Distrust of the Department of DOE (PNTst)
- Research question #1 related to political obstacles. This indicates that there was one political obstacle, which was no trust between Principals and DOE.

Principals sense that reforms were overly political (R2Plt)
- Would give me a sense of why some people bought into the policy all the way and why others didn’t.

Parents are overly political and their political nature made them an obstacle to reform (ParOb)
- Tells me when policy makers saw parents as too political and an obstacle to reform

Policy makers purposefully silencing parents and families (SyPar)
- Identifies how policy makers intentionally silenced parents and families and kept them away from policy development.

Business world knows more than education world about ed reform (BizEd)
- Identifies the sentiment that the biz/corporate world knows more about education reform than principals and teachers

Overall Obstacle
Money Matters for principals' success
- Principals believed, in order to achieve goals, they needed money. This helps me understand the role money played in mitigating or agitating the obstacles principals faced.

**Solution for obstacles**

**Principal Solution**

*Sense that kids needed to be celebrated in order for schools to run well*
- Another solution for dealing with external obstacles.

*Collaboration would be the best way to turn schools around. (ColabGood)*
- Tells me when someone believes collaboration between principals, policy makers, parents, and others is good for schools and is the best way to turn schools around.

*Teachers and Principals work TOGETHER to implement reforms*
*Principals should be involved in policy making*

*Principals sense that their success has to do with their own hard work and dedication (DedPrin)*
- Tells me when principals believed their work and dedication to issues were the reasons their schools got better

**District Solution**

*Principals Sense they have to do more to help students overcome some obstacles (PriHelSOOb)*
- Tells me when someone provides examples of how principals deal with social obstacles like homelessness, hunger, language barriers

*Sense that being well connected, politically, helps principals (PolConHep)*
- Indicates when someone expresses sentiment that political connections help principals.

*Data helps principals stay informed about progress*

*Autonomy is only for capable principals*

**Codes about the Theory of Action and Structure of Reform**

**Theory of Action**

*Policy makers sense that strong principals are the only way to turn schools around (PrImpSchl)*
- Tells me when someone expresses the idea that strong principals are most effective

*Principals ARE the centerpiece of reform (PrCentRef)*
- Indicates when someone expressed this idea

**Structure of Reform**

*Mayoral Control was an effective reform*

*Mayoral control is a mechanism to increase accountability in the system (MCtrlAc)*
- Tells me when people believed mayoral control was a way to increase accountability
  - Accountability and impact on principals

*Mayoral control brought resources to schools*
Bloomberg and Klein reforms were useful
Parent Coordinators were great part of mayoral control reforms
Networks are good for supporting principals’ practice
Reforms were meant to serve the needs of children, primarily
Autonomy is not the reason for improvement. Good principals are the reason for improvement
Resources to help address social issues for students help improve performance, not autonomy
Appendix D- Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

Title of Project: Principals’ Perspective on Autonomy in New York City Schools

Principal Investigator: Tiffanie Lewis, Graduate Student
300 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(347) 267-1328; tcl135@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. David Gamson
310D Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-2583; dag17@psu.edu

Dr. Erica Frankenberg
207B Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-5862; euf10@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to explore principals’ perspective on autonomy in New York City schools. Specifically, this study seeks to explore the relationship between current school governance structures and principal autonomy. Furthermore, it seeks to explore how the combination of centralized authority and principal autonomy develops at various levels of administration.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will concern only professional activities and will not include any personal questions. The interview will be digitally recorded. If you choose not to be digitally recorded, you may still participate in this study. If you choose not to be digitally recorded, please indicate so on the bottom of this form.

3. Duration: The interview will be approximately 60-minutes long.

4. Benefits: My study intends to investigate principals’ perspective on autonomy in NYC schools. Participation will benefit the participant by allowing for an opportunity for reflection on their contribution to education. Participation will benefit society by contributing to our understanding of this topic through an empirically designed study.

5. Risks: There are no risks associated with this study beyond those of everyday life.

6. Statement of Confidentiality: At the end of this form, you will have the opportunity to choose how you want me to quote from our interview (by name and title, by title only, or without using your name or title). I will honor whatever you choose, and only I will be listening to and transcribing the recording of the interview. If you choose complete anonymity (by choosing to be quoted only without using your name or title), I will make every effort to protect your privacy. I will not use your name in the conference presentation or in any other publications. If you request anonymity, any information that lets me know who you are will be recorded with a code number. During the study the key that tells me which code number goes with your information will be kept in a locked drawer. When the study is finished, I will destroy this key. The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections, the Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this research study. All digital recordings will...
be destroyed by 2017 and all digital transcriptions will destroyed by 2021.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** If you have questions about this research at any point, please contact me via e-mail at tcl135@psu.edu or call (347)- 267-1328. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

I agree to participate in the “Principals’ Perspective on Autonomy in New York City Schools” study
Yes  No

I agree to be audio-taped
Yes  No

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Investigator Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

**QUOTING MATERIAL FROM THIS INTERVIEW**

Please check the box that describes the level of confidentiality you want this interview to have, and then sign below the list.

- I agree to be quoted by name and position (for example, “Mary Smith, the director of the Neighborhood Association”).
- I agree to be quoted only by position (for example, “the director of a community group”).
- I agree to be quoted only anonymously (for example, “a participant in the process”).
- I do not want to be quoted at all.

__________________________________________  ________________
SUBJECT: Principals’ Perspective on Autonomy in the New York City Schools

Dear Principal/District Official

I hope this e-mail finds you well. My name is Tiffanie Lewis, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Educational Theory and Policy at The Pennsylvania State University. I am writing because I am conducting a study on principals’ perspectives on autonomy in New York City (NYC) schools. Current research does not closely explore the role of the principal in school reform in NYC. Yet, indisputably, we know principals are critical for the development of successful schools. This study will help educators and policy makers gain a current understanding on the principals’ role in school reform and the value of autonomy in NYC public schools.

The primary goal of this study is to learn about the relationship principals have with increased autonomy in NYC schools. As a result, I am seeking to interview a range of NYC principals as well as other district officials and community members. Because my study is primarily about autonomy, I am seeking schools and principals who participated in the NYC Department of Education’s “Empowerment Schools” program during the 2006-2007 school year. Participation in this study is entirely optional. However, by speaking to you I will have a more complete understanding of the policy that grants principals more autonomy and the role principals play in NYC school reform.

Given your current role as (principal/district official) and your expertise, I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation includes a 60-minute in-person interview. My hope is that I might conduct the interview in December of 2011. However, the interview will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience.

Your voice is of considerable importance to the study. By participating, you would 1) help educators understand principal autonomy and 2) help policy makers get a better understanding of the role of principals in school reform. If you have additional questions, please contact me via e-mail at tcl135@psu.edu or call (347) 267-1328.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Tiffanie Lewis
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Theory and Policy
The Pennsylvania State University
Tiffanie Lewis
Curriculum Vitae
1510 Ashwicken Court N. • State College, PA 16801
Phone: 347-267-1328 • E-Mail: TCL135@psu.edu

Research Interests
Urban school reform, school/district leadership, educational equity, education policy, youth development

Education
2008-2013 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Theory and Policy

2000-2004 The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology
Bachelor of Arts, Journalism

Awards and Honors
Puksar-Holmes Scholar, 2009- Present
Bunton-Waller Fellowship, 2008-2012
Barbara Jackson Scholar, 2009-2011

Grants and Scholarships
Rodney J. and Vernell A. Reed Graduate Scholarship in Urban Education, 2012-2013
Penn State College of Education Office of Multicultural Programs Travel Grant, 2012
Penn State College of Education Research Initiation Grant, 2011-2012

Selected Publications, Manuscripts, and Conference Papers


