ISSN (Online) 2162-916b

Building Sustainable Civic Capacity in Urban Education Reform: Actors, Perceptions, and Recommendations for Inclusive Public Policy

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Abstract

The research and literature focusing on education change, policy development, and community engagement have indicated clearly that forming a broad coalition within urban education reform through greater civic engagement can create sustainable education change, help to develop inclusive education policy, and lead to greater accountability, transparency, equity, and efficacy in delivering 21st-century education to all students. However, the actors, barriers, and opportunities related to developing inclusive educational policy and greater civic capacity in urban education reform have been under-examined in the literature around public policy and civic engagement. Drawing from quantitative and qualitative data collected in a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods study, this article examines the perceptions and relationships of various actors in urban education reform in Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and offers a deeper understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for fostering greater civic capacity and engagement in urban education reform, and developing inclusive educational policy. The study findings suggest strongly that sustained civic capacity and engagement in urban education change efforts allow for systematic improvements in educational development and innovation. Moreover, the results indicated that structural openness to new actors, stakeholders, and the reconceptualization of education as a worthy good can lead to enhanced educational quality, equity, and inclusion, particularly in urban areas. The authors also present further discussion about and policy recommendations for increased civic engagement in urban school reform efforts.

Keywords: urban education reform, inclusive public policy, civic engagement in education, civic capacity

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The guarantee of publicly funded education has been a cornerstone of life in the United States for over 100 years. The call for high-quality schools and a more inclusive and equitable education system is neither uncommon nor unreasonable; however, in recent years, it has become increasingly urgent and critical. Government participation in U.S. schooling has traditionally centered on guaranteeing public access, public funding, and public governance in order to achieve accountability, representativeness, and equality. This has led to policies that establish the government as the near sole provider and producer of education services; as a result, such policies have created heavily bureaucratic public institutions that, in many instances, have fallen short of meeting their obligation to provide quality education for all, especially for diverse student populations in larger urban centers (Henig & Stone, 2008). In response, generations of educators, policy makers, and others within the education regime have tried to change or reform schools to enhance the quality of education, particularly urban education.

The research and literature around education change and policy have indicated that developing inclusive policy and initiatives through enhanced civic engagement can lead to greater accountability, transparency, equity, and efficacy in the delivery of 21st-century education for all students (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). However, in order to achieve these reforms, namely within urban education, a closer examination of educators' and stakeholders' perceptions and values about forming a coalition for developing more inclusive and equitable education policy and initiatives is needed (Guo-Brennan, 2012; Savas, 1981). Drawing from a mixed-methods study examining the perceptions and relationships of various actors in the education sector in Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this article reviews relevant literature on civic engagement and capacity for developing education policy and initiatives, offers a deeper understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for fostering greater civic engagement in urban education reform, discusses implications for developing inclusive education policy that encouraged greater civic engagement in urban school reform, and recommends strategies and questions for determining who should be involved in school reform and what specific changes should be implemented. Our recommendations center on efforts to enhance civic capacity and expand the education regime in order to introduce structural changes within urban education that increase accountability, representativeness, and equality through greater parental choice and a competitive education system.

Approaches to Developing Education Policy

Government intervention in education reform policy can take many forms. The traditional approach, also labeled "first order" education reform, focuses on

small, incremental, process-driven change in the existing educational system. This approach promotes change at the margins, or what Lindblom (1959) described as "muddling through." The government remains both the provider and producer of educational services and relies on policies focusing on curriculum change, professional development, the reduction of inequities in funding, and changes in student composition through legislative (or court) action to improve poorly performing schools. Reformers adhering to this traditional approach elevate education experts as drivers of change under the logic that they are better able to improve schools than elected officials or parents (Bush, 1945; Cuban, 1988; DeBoer, 1997; Hess, 2008a, 2008b; Labaree, 1999; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Noguera, 2004; Rogers & Terriquez, 2009; Stone et al., 2001; Tyack, 1974).

The second approach, often described as "second order" education reform, does not discount efforts to improve the educational process from within but often strives to change the structure of the educational system. Policy development guided by this approach includes enhancing community engagement by linking non-educational institutions—from private industry, parent groups, and community-based organizations, for instance—to the existing universe of education reformers. This expanded coalition of actors is able to consider non-traditional reform initiatives that include new structural changes to the education system (Cuban, 1988; Henig & Rich, 2004; Hess, Maranto, Milliman, & Ferraiolo, 2002; Hunter & Swann, 1999; Jones, Portz, & Stein, 1997; Osborne & Gaebler, 1993; Stone, 1998; Walker & Gutmore, 2002).

Under the second-order structural approach, efforts to implement education reforms require consensus from and a coalition of a large, diverse group of stakeholders. Members of such an expanded education system may include nonprofit leaders, parents, business leaders, other community leaders, and local and state governmental officials, along with traditional education actors, including teachers, administrators, education policymakers and experts.

Civic Capacity in Education Reform

The term *civic capacity* refers to cross-sector efforts to address community-wide problems (Stone, 2005). In the context of urban education reform, we define civic capacity as the capacity of education stakeholders to access, share, and engage with knowledge and resources as they work together to enhance education quality, equity, and inclusion. Urban regime theory, which offers a framework for discussing civic capacity and engagement in education policy reform, focuses on how members of existing organizations work together as a coalition in order to influence changes in policy and practice at the local level (Mitra & Frick, 2011; Mossberger & Stoker, 2001; Shipps, 2003; Stone, 2005). In the context of this article, we view a coalition of education reformers as an expanded regime that

incudes diverse actors not necessarily associated with education. In many cases, external stimuli encourage a new and expanded regime to act, such as endemic performance that may lead to a takeover of a district, urgent calls for organizational restructuring, or other pressing changes (Shipps, 2003).

The goal of fostering greater civic capacity in urban education reform is to develop broad, sustainable social and political support for change through the creation of new power structures, which often include new stakeholders and new relationships that cross all sectors of the community (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Saegert, 2006; Shirley, 1997; Stone, 2001; Stone et al., 2001; Swanstrom, Winter, Sherraden, & Lake, 2013; Wong, Shen, Anagnostopoulos, & Rutledge, 2007). Such relationships are frequently the result of informal connections and collaborations; however, building and sustaining long-lasting support for change among new stakeholders can be difficult. To be successful, there must be a shared understanding and definition of the problem at hand as well as a shared vision and commitment around developing agreeable solutions (Page, 2016; Stone et al., 2001). Yet, the variety and diversity of actors, their shared history of cooperation, conflict, conflicting interests, cultural barriers, changing priorities, political divisions, and the sheer number of issues that compete for attention on the local agenda may pose obstacles for reaching such a shared understanding and collaboration (Page, 2016).

Urban Education Context of the Study

To gain a deeper understanding of urban education context and the level of civic engagement associated with urban education change, this study examined the educational systems in two large urban centers—Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Specifically, the study focused on the intertwined actors and issues related to developing inclusive education policy, fostering greater civic capacity, and engagement in education change.

In the United States, education is commonly viewed as a public good, with the government serving as both the producer and provider of education services. However, competition and a market approach to education and other services for children have challenged this assertion (Easley, 2005; Lubienski, 2001; Strober, 2004). Teaching all in society to read and write confers private benefits and positive externalities that go beyond the cost paid by the individual. Those who support treating education as a public good argue that these externalities encourage free riders, and private education will not produce services at an adequate level to sustain society. To account for this inadequacy, government must provide education services (Shaw, 2010).

Pure public goods should be non-rival and non-excludable, meaning that the opportunities for obtaining them must be equal and freely available to all. However, all schools, high-performing or not, public or private, must at times turn away

applicants due to space limitations or the geographic location of students. Therefore, under these criteria, education does not qualify as a public good.

A more accurate descriptor related to education would be *worthy good*—that is, goods and services that are so important that their consumption should be encouraged regardless of the consumer's ability to pay (Savas, 2000). The government provides these goods either directly or indirectly by subsidizing private actors. For instance, vouchers for low-income housing in many parts of the country comprise an indirect provision of public services (Andrisani, Hakim, & Savas, 2002; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). Under this scenario, the government remains the provider of services but does not need to be the exclusive producer.

Chicago, Illinois

Chicago, Illinois, is a large metropolitan city in the midwestern United States with a large public-school system. The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have a long history of financial mismanagement, poor performance, and charges of racial segregation. In addition, acrimony between the central administration, controlled by the mayor's office, and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has led to frequent labor disputes and several teacher strikes. These challenges have driven frequent calls for dramatic change in Chicago's public schools, leading to two major reform initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s.

The first of these reforms came with the passage of the Chicago Public School Act of 1988. Despite the resistance of factions within the education employment regime to reforms designed to dilute and decentralize control of the city's school system through much of the 1980s, a new and expanded coalition of interests, including stakeholders from the broader community, united in favor of reform that gave parents greater control in local school decision making than in any other large city in the nation (Thomas, 1988). In addition to decentralizing authority and introducing new and tougher requirements for students, the law redistributed funds within the school system to reduce central control, created local school councils (LSCs) for each school in the city, and created new opportunities for the business community to become involved in schools.

Unfortunately, stakeholders, including the business community, became dissatisfied with the complicated governmental structure established under the new legislation and with the lack of positive progress; consequently, they pushed for a new round of reforms just seven years later. A second and more profound reform law was signed by Republican Governor Jim Edgar in May 1995 and put responsibility for school improvement squarely, once again, on the office of Mayor Richard M. Daley (1989-2011). The 1988 reform decentralized school authority and allowed for an increased role for parents and others outside the traditional educational establishment; however, the 1995 changes sought to reestablish

centralizing forces within the mayor's office, a move favored by the business committee. The ability of the business elite to successfully advocate for two major reform laws in less than 10 years demonstrated the power of a strong corporate-led urban regime. Through new governance structures, Republican legislators reversed themselves to support new business-backed reforms that turned control of the public schools to Mayor Daley, a Democrat. In exchange for this control, the mayor agreed to be held accountable for the success and failure of the schools (Lieberman, 2002; Pearson, 1995).

Business-supported legislation allowing for the creation of charter schools was adopted in 1996, just one year after the 1995 CPS reforms. In 1997, 15 charter schools opened in Chicago and continued to expand through successive mayoral administrations. In 2004, Mayor Daley, with strong support from the business and philanthropic communities, announced the Renaissance 2010 program, a plan to open 100 charter schools by 2010. Today, change continues within the Chicago school system under the leadership of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, elected in 2011. Frustration during contract negotiations over several issues—including the closing of several dozen public schools, the expansion of charter schools, and other reforms proposed by Emanuel centering on employment and evaluation of teachers—led to a strike in 2012 by the CTU, the first in 25 years. Similar concerns nearly led to another strike in October 2016 (Banchero, Porter, & Belkin, 2012; Green, 2015).

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Like efforts in Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburg, and many other large cities, early calls for school reform in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, grew out of demands to desegregate the public schools (Caldas & Bankston, 2005; Frye, 1997; Mallozzi, 1988; "Milwaukee is making good schools a reality," 1981; Nicholson, 1990; Overbea, 1986; Sewall, Foote, Howard, & Henkoff, 1980; Wycliffe, 1990). In the late 1980s, partnerships between schools and the corporate community helped to create an environment that encouraged expanded civic engagement and outside actor involvement. Longstanding racial tensions led African Americans who distrusted the public schools to look outside the traditional education regime for help. As a result, a coalition formed comprising minority groups, Black community leaders, including state representative Annette "Polly" Williams (D-Milwaukee), the Black newspaper the *Milwaukee Community Journal*, White liberals, and conservative White political leaders at the state level (McLarin, 1995).

These coalition members came together to push a new strategy in an attempt to save Milwaukee schools. Missing from the coalition were education experts, professional educators, and their allies in the business community. Despite strong opposition from the local teachers union, most Democrats, the state school superintendent, and both major city newspapers (the *Journal* and the *Sentinel*), major reform related to the structure of Milwaukee schools, sponsored by

Representative Williams and advocated by Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, was approved by the state legislature in early 1990. The legislation allowed parents of approximately 1,000 low-income Milwaukee students to send their children to any participating private non-religious school using a publicly funded voucher valued up to $2,500 (Farrell & Mathews, 2006; Johnson, 1990; Peterson, Greene, & Noyes, 1996).

The ability of this coalition to mount a successful education change campaign in Milwaukee demonstrated that a diverse group of stakeholders could build social capital and leverage relationships with outside stakeholders to establish cooperative arrangements within the city. However, the business community, despite being actively involved in the schools through partnerships with individual building sites, remained on the sidelines during this debate. Had the corporate elite joined the education elite and actively opposed these reforms, the outcome might have been completely different. Rather than the classic regime outlined by Stone (2005) and other urban regime theorists, this particular coalition reflected the longstanding tradition of ad hoc alliances in Milwaukee (Rast, 2006).

In 1993, Wisconsin enacted its first charter school law, which allowed certain organizations, including school boards, the Milwaukee City Council, and local colleges and universities, to create new charter schools. Four years later, legislators expanded the law to allow any individual, group, or corporate body to apply for a school charter. Since that time, partnerships between and among business, education, and community groups have led to the creation of over 40 new charter schools. In 1999, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee approved three charter schools, including the state's first two for-profit schools and the first K-12 science academy (Melcher & Galen, 1995; "UW-milwaukee to offer charter status to three new schools," 1999).

Research Purpose, Questions, and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of civic capacity and engagement on urban education reform and the development of a competitive education system. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are educators' and stakeholders' perceptions about civic capacity and engagement in urban education reform?
2. What obstacles, if any, hinder the development of greater civic capacity in urban education reform?
3. How does civic engagement impact the development of a competitive education system?

The study examined the following hypotheses:

1. Civic capacity is more likely to form when teachers, administrators, and others within the educational system have regular contact with diverse actors outside the educational establishment.
2. There are considerable obstacles that may prevent the development of civic capacity.
3. Non-education actors are more likely to support structural reforms that increase choice options and lead to a competitive system than traditional reforms and the status quo.
4. Most educators (i.e., teachers, administrators, and other education professionals) prefer traditional change-from-within reforms, such as increased funding, curriculum reform, and efforts to increase diversity, over broad structural changes that increase choice.
5. Market-based reforms that introduce competition and parental choice will evolve when there is strong civic capacity that includes a wide range of actors supporting choice and competition.

Methodology and Data Sources

To understand educators' and stakeholders' perceptions about civic capacity in urban education reform and the impact of civic engagement on developing inclusive education policy, this study applied a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design. Quantitative and qualitative data were first collected concurrently and then compared to identify convergences and differences. Quantitative data were collected through a survey administered to teachers, school administrators, parents, and business leaders affiliated with the public-school systems and communities in Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The survey was designed to examine the degree of civic capacity in each city. Additional quantitative data, including school demographic information, student performance, and issues related to civic engagement, education policy, and preferred methods for improving schools, were collected through the survey, document review, and interviews with participants.

A total of 191 respondents from Chicago and Milwaukee participated in the survey, and most respondents were education professionals. One hundred ten participants from Chicago reflected the racial and cultural diversity of the community: 68 respondents were White, 23 Black, 11 Hispanic, three Asian, and five identified as "other." Of the 64 survey respondents from Milwaukee, 44 were White, six Black, one Asian, and two identified as "other." Twenty-eight respondents from both cities chose not to identify their race. The proportion of respondents from Chicago and Milwaukee reflected the sizes of the respective local public-school districts. In Chicago, there are approximately 625,000 students in 624 public schools—much larger than Milwaukee, where approximately 94,000 students attend 229 public schools.

Qualitative data for the study were collected through secondary sources, document analysis, and in-depth interviews. Eight participants were purposely selected for individual interviews to provide a deeper understanding of their perceptions of and attitudes about civic engagement in shaping the educational system, barriers to education change, preferred approaches to education reform, and the support they needed in order to achieve greater civic capacity and parental choice in schools. Selected qualitative data related to stakeholders' perceptions and values around civic engagement in urban education reform and the policy-making process are presented and discussed later in this article. Both quantitative and qualitative data regarding policy issues related to who should be involved with school change and what changes should be implemented were triangulated and interpreted, and also are discussed in this article.

Findings and Discussion

The following themes related to civic capacity and engagement in urban education reform emerged from the analysis of the study's qualitative and quantitative data.

Strong Consensus on Greater Civic Engagement in Urban Education Reform

Developing support for sustained reform in the structure of education services requires a coalition of a broad set of actors. These actors must be willing to come together and support each other in fostering a shared understanding of the problems and potential policy solutions. Indeed, support from such a diverse set of actors remained strong through sustained reform in both Chicago and Milwaukee in the 1980s and 1990s. To measure support for diversity in today's education regime, study respondents were asked to rate the strength of their opinion about who should be involved in reform efforts. Applying a Likert scale (with 1 = "Strongly Disagree," 3 = "Neither Agree or Disagree," 5 = "Strongly Agree"), respondents were asked who should be involved in local school reform efforts. Table 1 displays the results of this survey question.

Survey Question	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness
Teachers, administrators, and school board members	174	2.00	5.00	4.8218	0.43990	0.194	-2.894
Parents, guardians, and parent support groups	176	1.00	5.00	4.5682	0.68110	0.464	-1.951
Local government officials	175	1.00	5.00	4.0514	1.02424	1.049	-1.013
Officials from the state and federal government	174	1.00	5.00	3.7184	1.16103	1.348	-0.778
Community groups and nonprofit human service agencies	174	1.00	5.00	4.0977	0.87131	0.759	-0.934
Individuals from the business community	176	1.00	5.00	3.7216	1.09898	1.208	-0.656

Table 1. Results for Survey Question, "Who should be involved in school improvement efforts?"

There was widespread agreement among survey respondents that diverse interest groups should be represented at the reform table; mean scores for this question did not fall below 3.7. As one might expect, there was a strong consensus that the education community and parents should be involved in efforts to improve schools. The low standard deviation scores and relatively high negative skewness scores supported this assertion.

Support for community and nonprofit organization involvement in school improvement was also high, with a mean score of 4.09. Support for local government was also strong, with a mean score of 4.051; however, with a standard deviation greater than one, there was considerably less agreement than with other measures.

Many respondents perceived the business community and state government actors as less critical to reform, although with mean scores greater than 3.7, there was overall agreement that both sets of actors should be involved in change efforts. Interviewees were asked specifically about their opinions regarding the role of private business in local schools. One nonprofit executive active in Milwaukee school politics commented that

> business involvement] is a mixed bag. Private business is represented by the local Chamber of Commerce. They have abandoned the Milwaukee Public Schools, are frustrated with the process, and have doubled down on choice and charter schools. Business is involved with individual schools and has adopted schools.

Another respondent, a leader in the business community who was active in school reform efforts in Milwaukee through the Milwaukee Metropolitan Association of Commerce, discussed the importance of the business community in the local education system. He believed that business has an important responsibility to help cultivate the workforce. Business "can't put [its] head in the sand."

Perceived Obstacles to Civic Capacity in Education Reform

Building civic capacity for change can be extremely difficult; therefore, agreement among stakeholders that diverse members should be a part of the reform regime is an important element in any change movement. Yet, despite this consensus, many other obstacles can erode efforts to implement policies and programs designed to improve the education environment. One common obstacle is communication. Different priorities, timeframes, and cultures can all diminish the ability of members of a reform collation to communicate effectively. Study respondents were asked specifically if they believed there existed obstacles to communication. The overwhelming majority, regardless of location or role, believed that such obstacles were present. Those respondents who acknowledged the existence of communication barriers were asked to rate, on a 1-to-5 Likert scale (with a 5 indicating strong agreement), a series of statements about contributors to those obstacles. Responses to the statements are displayed in Table 2.

Survey Question	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness
Individuals or groups outside the educational community may have different priorities that reduce their ability to come together to improve schools.	158	2.00	5.00	4.304	0.69309	0.480	-0.836
Those within the schools disagree on ways to improve schools.	157	2.00	5.00	3.841	0.90234	0.814	-0.634
There is a lack of time needed to establish and build relationships with others that are necessary to improve schools.	158	2.00	5.00	3.949	0.99552	0.991	-0.682
Business groups and others in the private sector are simply unwilling or uninterested in working together to improve schools.	158	1.00	5.00	2.697	0.98853	0.977	0.402

I have felt discouraged about working to build bridges with others to reform the schools.	156	1.00	5.00	3.135	1.04780	1.098	0.136

Table 2. Results for Survey Question Regarding Potential Obstacles to Reform

Participants in this study shared a consistent message that disagreements among actors and a lack of coordinated timeframes were obstacles for education reform. One stakeholder in the nonprofit sector suggested that the "pace of change is much longer than the public and political attention span" and that the disagreements over the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program have created a “toxic” environment. Another respondent from the nonprofit sector in Milwaukee described the frustration over disagreements among actors:

> School reform cannot succeed without a long-term strategy for systemic change … Institutional forces tend to take any idea and dumb it down to an acceptable form. There is lots of skepticism, and the pace of change is much longer than the public and political attention span. The school culture is still in a 1950s hierarchical structure. There is tremendous exhaustion over the debate, none of the reforms have had the success promised, and there is a lack of leadership.

Several participants expressed similar frustrations over the lack of success in Chicago:

> Change is very hard. The massive machine is hard to change. The perception is that change is difficult due to the strong teachers’ union [and] limitations of the teachers’ contract. It is frustrating that teachers have to vote on change.

Interestingly, participant responses suggested that the business community was not viewed as a significant obstacle—positive news for those who prefer a business- or market-based approach to education—and that actors from the business community should be involved in school improvement. Another notable finding was the somewhat strong agreement among respondents with the survey statement, “I have felt discouraged about working to build bridges with others to reform the schools.”

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to offer additional comments to clarify their responses. One teacher participant from Milwaukee commented that teacher unions were major obstacles to reform. Another Milwaukee teacher indicated, "The greatest obstacle to improve public schools is the power of teacher unions (through the politicians they support), especially in urban school districts.” Still another teacher from Milwaukee expressed a similar sentiment: "I think the biggest roadblock to true educational reform is the public-school teacher unions. The union protects and promotes bad teaching."

During in-depth interviews, respondents from the business and nonprofit communities raised similar concerns. Interviewees from both cities identified

teacher unions as significant blockades to real reform. According to one executive from Chicago, resistance to change and a focus on holding on to the status quo were difficult roadblocks to overcome. A participant from a Chicago nonprofit organization said she was "uncomfortable" with the power of the teacher unions. Study participants also reported other obstacles to high-performing schools, including poverty, poor child health, lack of parental involvement, lack of investment in infrastructure, lack of funding, and a narrow focus on self-preservation. Commenting on the education situation in Milwaukee, one participant said that "quality is lacking in the product schools put out. It appears that they are just churning the mill."

Different Opinions on Actors Best Positioned to Improve Schools

Despite the consensus that a variety of actors are important, there was disagreement among participants regarding which actors are in the best position to improve schools. Table 3 examines who is better at introducing long lasting change. This is a different measure than who should be involved with school improvement efforts which is focused on regime membership. Disagreement over who is best to improve schools can be a substantial obstacle to reform. Responses are broken down by role and then by location. While almost 68% of teaching professionals indicate they are in the best position to improve schools, less than one in three of other stakeholders agree. Teaching professionals appear less likely to believe in their own unions but are more likely to believe parents are in the best position to improve schools compared to those outside the school system. Teachers and education professionals appear less likely to believe government at any level is in the best position to improve schools. Disagreements such as these among stakeholders about who is best to impart change can lead to serious obstacles to reform.

Role		Local Business	Nonprofits	Local Government	State or Fed. Govt.	Ed. Pros (academic experts, etc.)	Parents	Teachers	Unions	Missing	TOTAL
All Others	N	0	1	3	6	1	2	9	2	5	29
	%	0	3.5	10.3	20.7	3.5	6.9	31	6.9	17.2	100
Ed. Pros.	N	1	0	1	11	4	14	108	6	14	159
	%	0.6	0	0.03	6.9	2.5	8.8	67.9	3.8	8.8	100
No Response	N									3	3
TOTALS	N	1	1	4	17	5	16	117	8	19	191

	%	0.5	0.5	2.1	9	2.7	8.5	62.2	4.3	10.1	100
Location		**Local Businesses**	**Nonprofits**	**Local Government**	**State or Fed. Govt.**	**Ed. Pros (academic experts, etc.)**	**Parents**	**Teachers**	**Unions**	**Missing**	**TOTAL**
Chicago	N	0	1	4	15	4	13	73	5	12	127
	%	0	0.8	3.2	11.8	3.2	10.2	57.5	3.9	9.5	100
Milwaukee	N	1	0	0	2	1	3	45	3	9	64
	%	1.6	0	0	3.1	1.6	4.7	70.3	4.7	14.1	100
TOTALS	N	1	1	4	17	5	16	118	8	21	191
	%	0.5	0.5	2.1	8.9	2.6	8.4	61.8	4.2	11	100

Table 3. Results for Survey Question, "In your opinion, whom is most likely to be in the best position to improve schools?"

Unions were not viewed as agents of change in either Chicago or Milwaukee. Teachers are highly favored, particularly in Milwaukee. Given the authority granted to parents in Chicago's local school councils, it is not surprising that 10.24% of respondents viewed parents as most likely to improve schools, compared to less the 5% of respondents in Milwaukee. Respondents in Chicago were also much more likely to spread responsibility to other actors outside the public schools.

Partnerships with outside organizations, namely in the private and nonprofit sectors, were viewed as important, allowing for creativity and innovation, according to one Chicago nonprofit executive whose organization works with physically disabled students. Despite the limited availability of charter schools in Chicago, this suggested there is support for collaboration with non-education actors.

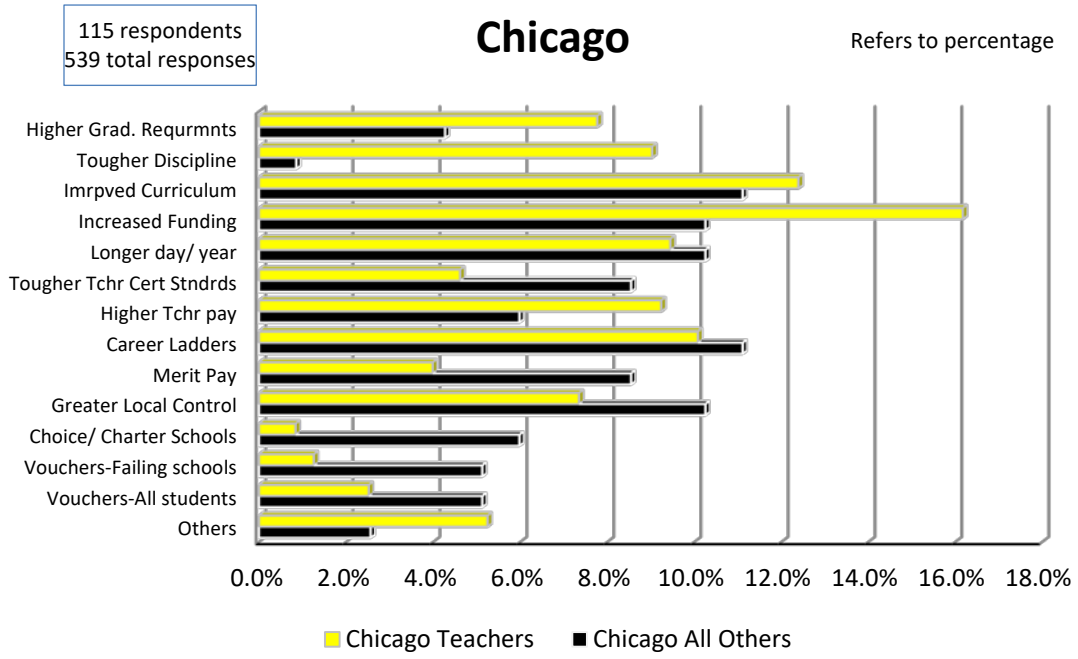
Several survey participants commented that parents are critical to better learning. A female teacher from Chicago offered the opinion that parents must take part in educating their children because teachers are not in the position to act as parents or babysitters when the school day ends. At least one educational administrator in Milwaukee highlighted the importance of parent involvement, suggesting that "parents working with their children to choose a school that is appropriate for them, setting high expectations at home, and reinforcing the values of their school is what makes public education work."

Others felt that schools do not include parents in the process. An executive from a Chicago company that does public relations work for charter schools

commented during interviews that "some schools do not know how to use parents and they would increase involvement if they could give parents a meaningful role."

Divergence in Preferred Approaches to Urban School Reform

Reform in both cities included substantial restructuring of the respective education systems. In Chicago, reform resulted in the reduction of centralized authority and support for limited choice options within the existing public-school system. The Milwaukee regime, on the other hand, placed a strong emphasis on market-based solutions targeting the most disadvantaged students. To measure the strength of support for these initiatives, respondents were provided a list of 14 strategies ranging from traditional reforms to structural approaches and then were asked to select up to eight that were most likely to improve schools. The results are illustrated in Figure 1.



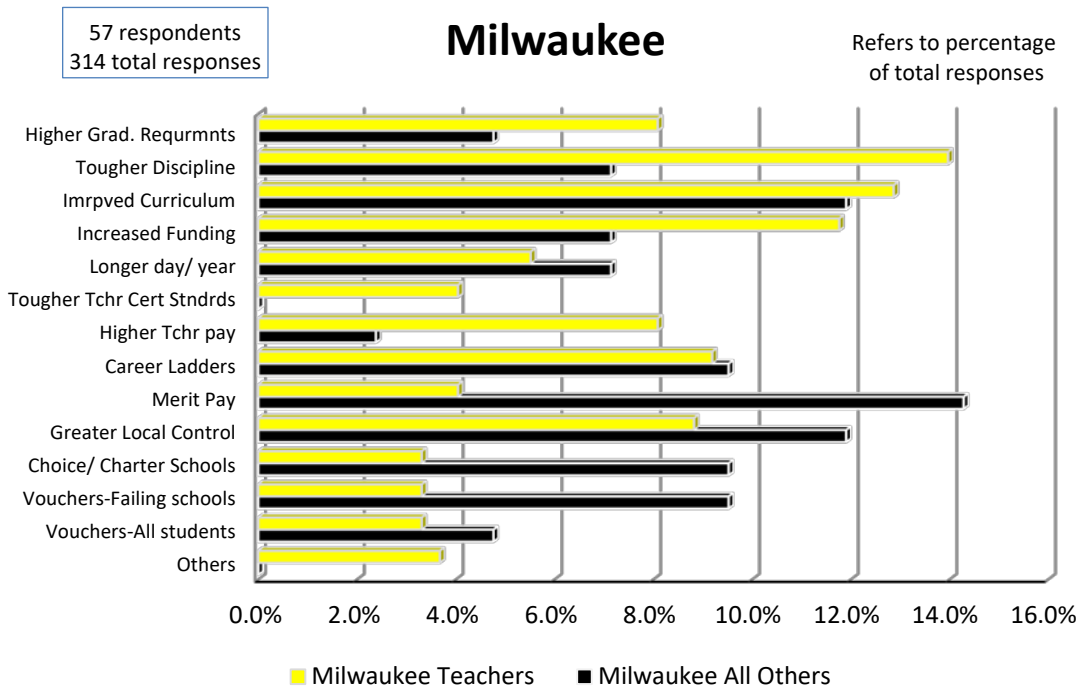


Figure 1. Results for survey question, "In your opinion, what is the best way to improve local schools (select up to 8)."

Strategies ranged from traditional reforms (toward the top of each graph in the figure) to changes involving the structure of public education to include parental choice (toward the bottom of each graph). Results were broken down by location to determine the impact of the local environment on actors in different roles. Teachers and educational staff tended to favor traditional approaches, such as increased funding, curriculum improvement, tougher discipline, and higher graduation requirements regardless of location.

In Chicago, increased funding was the preferred choice among teachers, accounting for 16.2% of responses, followed by improved curriculum (12.4%), and career ladders (10.1%). No other option earned greater than 9.5% of responses among educators. Those outside the schools in Chicago preferred a wider variety of methods. While Chicago teaching staff selected tougher discipline 9% of the time, those outside the schools chose that option the least number of times, accounting for just 0.9% of responses. Choice options, including charter schools and vouchers, comprised the least preferred method among teachers.

Likewise, Milwaukee educators focused on traditional reforms in tougher discipline (14.0%), improved curriculum (12.9%) and increased funding (11.8%), with career ladders as the only other option to score above 9%. Despite the

prevalence of choice options in Milwaukee, like their Chicago counterparts, choice and voucher options were the least preferred methods for reform among Milwaukee educators. Among those outside the schools, improved curriculum was the lone traditional reform to garner greater than 10% of responses, with a score of 11.9%.

Comparing results by role between cities, teaching professionals tended to be in much closer agreement regarding the options that they believed would lead to success than those outside the schools. This may reflect the organizational strength of the teaching profession itself. Despite this overall agreement, however, Chicago teachers strongly favored additional funding as the top option, while Milwaukee teachers preferred tougher discipline.

Those outside the schools in Milwaukee favored structural reforms over most traditional reforms, such as increased funding and tougher graduation requirements. Outsiders in Chicago preferred a greater range of options but did not prefer structural change to the same degree as respondents in Milwaukee. This rather drastic difference may reflect the existing cultures in each metropolitan area. While those outside the traditional education regime have been involved with education in both cities for more than 20 years, outsiders in Wisconsin have had the ability to provide publicly funded educational services since the establishment of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in 1990. Low-income parents have choice options, including public vouchers for private schools, and many organizations other than the public-school district offer parents publicly funded private educational options. This is very different in Chicago, where choice is limited to charter schools operated by the public school district.

Another area frequently mentioned by study participants as a target for reform was public/private partnerships. The director of a large nonprofit that works with the Chicago Park District stressed the importance of such partnerships. During her interview, when asked about the role of the business community, she commented that for-profits have a responsibility to give back and mentioned several examples of the business community working with schools. Other interviewees, including a woman from the Chicago nonprofit community and an executive from a large business firm in Milwaukee, echoed the belief that corporations have a responsibility to invest in the community, including schools. A business executive from Chicago commented that charter schools have done a better job of incorporating business then regular public schools.

Another leader in the Chicago nonprofit sector highlighted the significance of partnerships. Collaborative efforts that include the private and nonprofit community may encourage creativity and innovation, and lead to better communication. This executive, who directs an education co-op that serves children with disabilities, expressed her opinion that school districts too often stand alone. The limited numbers of kids with special needs whom districts serve prevent them from offering necessary specialized services. Fostering partnerships with

organizations willing to invest in specialized services can help to better meet the needs of all children. In the view of the executive, it is simply a “numbers game”: Districts lack the needed resources to adequately meet the needs of all populations served.

Participants’ Recommendations for School Improvement Strategies

Study participants offered significant insights and suggestions on ways to improve schools. One executive from a Chicago nonprofit suggested that improvements could be achieved through a longer school day, merit pay, some test/performance-based incentives, and a loosening of the union’s hold on the public-school system. To realize these changes, she believed there should be a consolidation of authority within the central offices, a restructuring of the system, and greater choice through additional charter school options for parents.

A leader in the Milwaukee business community identified school governance as one critical area in need of change. He articulated the belief that elected school boards were not the best approach to managing schools and that strong leadership, greater flexibility within the Milwaukee Public Schools, and an overhaul of the entire system was in order. A parent, working for a Chicago nonprofit organization, maintained that strong leadership from the school principal along with greater parental involvement and more effective use of partnerships with those outside the schools would improve neighborhood schools.

A leader in the Chicago nonprofit community who was also an actively involved parent in her neighborhood school commented that the schoolwide "International Baccalaureate” (IB) curriculum adopted by her child’s school was a big help in improving the school. The school, located in an upper-middle class, mostly White Chicago neighborhood, but comprising nearly 95% Latino students, had undergone significant changes in recent years. A review of teachers of kindergarten through Grade 3 saw a 50% turnover in staffing. Work to change the school was not easy. A father of a child who attended the school petitioned then Mayor Daley to improve the school. Daley replaced the principal and allowed the LSC to implement additional reforms, including the new IB curriculum.

An individual representing a nonprofit organization in Milwaukee who had also run an unsuccessful campaign to win a seat on the school board, criticized reform efforts as "too often using unitary prescriptions.” He advocated an outcome-based approach to education and felt there was too much emphasis on inputs. Specifically, changes in teacher education and training needed to occur. He also argued for easier entry into the profession as well as easier exit routes to other careers, including portable pensions, paid sabbaticals for training, and other tools for improving teacher effectiveness.

The director of a Chicago nonprofit that works with children with special needs commented during interviews that the special needs population was severely

underserved and that regular schools focused on academics at the expense of fine motor skill development, which is critical to adult independence. The respondent added that, although funding remained an issue, inclusion has been very positive, and "kids with physical disabilities should be included in regular education classes when appropriate and feasible." Her organization worked with schools for part-time inclusion; students spent half of the day in regular classes and the other half working on fine motor skills with specialized staff. In her view, charter and non-public schools are better able to adjust students' schedules to meet these needs and, with proper funding, would be able to develop curriculum specific to the special needs population.

Participants' Views on School Choices

Respondents were also questioned about the impact of specific reforms. Civic engagement may lead to more agreement regarding preferred solutions for improving schools. It may also reduce obstacles to reform. Table 4 shows responses by survey participants asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with the statement that parental choice is likely to improve all schools. With a mean score of 2.886, those questioned were slightly less likely to agree than disagree that choice will improve all schools. Despite the long history of regime support for parental choice in Milwaukee, differences by location did not appear to be significant. Role seemed to be a more important factor in measuring the importance that respondents placed on choice.

Role/ Location		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Totals**
Ed. Pros.	n	27	42	22	28	21	140
	%	17.6	28.4	19.6	16.6	17.7	NA
All Others	n	2	6	5	8	4	25
	%	8	11.5	24.6	29.8	9.1	NA
TOTALS	n	29	48	27	36	25	165
	%	23.1	15.7	23.4	26.5	11.3	NA
Chicago	n	18	36	18	27	13	112
	%	16	32.1	16.1	24.1	11.6	100.0/
Milwaukee	n	11	12	9	10	12	54
	%	20.4	22.2	16.7	18.5	22.2	100
n = 165	Mean: 2.886		St. Dev.: 1.346		Skewness: .151	Kurtosis: -1.347	

(26 non-responses)	

Table 4. Results of Survey Responses to the Statement, “Parental choice that offers parents the ability to choose a school for their child is likely to improve the quality of all schools”

During interviews, several participants commented that choice schools promote innovation and experimental teaching strategies. Specifically, in discussing charter schools, a leader in the Milwaukee nonprofit community commented that they are a "way for highly motivated teachers and leaders to isolate themselves from the bureaucracy." An executive from Chicago shared her belief that charter schools have done a better job of partnering with the business community. In her opinion, charter schools are more flexible, and charter schools and businesses are more naturally aligned.

The growth of choice options is not without consequences, however. During in-depth interviews, a leader in the nonprofit sector who ran an unsuccessful campaign for the Milwaukee Public School Board, said that choice has "put public schools on notice" and has done considerable damage to the Milwaukee school reform debate as those for and against market reforms become entrenched in their views. A White female teacher from Milwaukee commented specifically on the damage that choice has done to regular schools: "I feel that Parental Choice is taking much needed money away from public schools. Instead of spending this money to transport students around the district, we need to spend it on improving the quality of ALL schools in the district so that the neighborhood schools are schools that students want to attend."

When asked about support for publicly financed school vouchers, nearly all of the interviewees agreed that publicly financed vouchers should have limits on eligibility based on income. In Milwaukee, a former candidate for the school board commented that there need to be additional funding streams, regardless of eligibility limitations vouchers, but that racial politics muddles the discussion.

Some participants did not support vouchers because access to them is not equitable. A parent from Chicago, where vouchers are not offered to students, believed that if vouchers were available, everyone should have an option to access one. She commented:

> I have a lack of confidence [in vouchers] … People could lose a sense of community. It would be better to improve neighborhood schools. That is a better long-term solution. Transportation costs for vouchers could be too high, and from an environmental standpoint, [excessive] transportation is bad.

Education Policy Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study have significant implications for developing education policy and for supporting greater civic engagement in urban education reform. To continue the important government role of guaranteeing access, funding, and governance to achieve accountability, representativeness, and equality, we offer the following recommendations to public officials, public and private leaders, parents, and community activists at the local and state levels. These recommendations, while assuring a role for government as provider of education services, may not lead to government serving as the exclusive producer of education services.

Expand the Regime

New reforms are often forced upon urban school districts as the result of judicial review or a takeover by the state government or the court system. This often leads to traditional education reform focused on small, incremental, process-driven change within the education system. Change, mostly at the margins, is driven by teachers, administrators, and education experts. Any effort to introduce structural change must begin by expanding the diversity of actors within the education regime. Our research here suggests that while there is strong support for greater diversity in the regime, members of the traditional education regime are least likely to support structural reforms and more likely to support traditional change, which has not contributed to substantial improvements in student outcomes in most cities across the United States.

Through an expanded regime that links non-education institutions from private industry, parent groups, and community-based organizations to the existing framework, greater diversity in perspectives is more likely to lead actors to consider new structural change, including elements of a market system for education. Expanding the regime also increases accountability, improves representativeness, and enhances equality. Local officials can play a critical role in bringing these local actors together and sustaining the regime.

Promote Greater Civic Engagement and Capacity in School Improvement

Building and sustaining broad social and political engagement for change with a diverse set of actors that includes parents, nonprofit leaders, business leaders, other community leaders, and local and state government officials, as well as teachers, administrators, and other education experts requires a strong commitment from all involved. It also involves new power structures and new relationships that cross all sectors of the community. Leadership in the public and private sectors is crucial to developing and sustaining the informal relationships needed for civic engagement. Every effort should be made to develop shared understandings and shared definitions of the problems facing a school system.

The results of this study demonstrate the importance of stakeholders making a commitment to developing solutions acceptable to the new and expanded regime. This includes overcoming many of the obstacles identified by participants in the study, including differing priorities, lack of time, and disagreements over the best methods for improving schools. Local government actors and regime leaders are critical players in leading efforts to overcome these obstacles.

Identify and Reach out to Key Players

Though there may be similarities among cities, no two education regimes are identical. Local conditions, including economic conditions, relative strength of individual actors to shape the agenda, current actor involvement in the regime, willingness to cooperate around a shared agenda, and the capacity to influence decision making at the appropriate levels are all critical to creating sustained civic engagement. The informal nature of the relationships among key actors who have the interest, ability, and capacity to join and sustain the change regime is critical. Local leadership must first identify and recruit these actors and build relationships to expand the regime and develop capacity to influence decision makers in education so that new structures and new systems can be created.

Leaders within the two case-study cities actively engaged the local communities for change. By seeking support for reforms from key players, government leaders were able to build and sustain new coalitions of actors, despite opposition from actors within the education regime. This demonstrates the important role key actors can play and the significance of the informal relationships they have with other leaders in the community. This includes the business community in Chicago and grassroots and minority groups in Milwaukee.

Develop a Shared Vision and Plan to Overcome Barriers to Coalition Building

Along with identifying key actors, leaders must work to overcome perceived and real barriers to structural reform. The informal nature of a regime comprising a large and diverse group of stakeholders, all with various interests and motivations, can make sustained change efforts difficult. To overcome these barriers, leaders must develop a shared understanding and definition of the problem before looking for solutions. In addition to the diversity of the actors within the regime, conflicting interests, changing priorities, political divisions, cultural identities, and the sheer number of issues competing for resources all represent barriers that must be overcome to develop a shared understanding of and commitment to the regime.

The research here indicates that there is substantial division between education professionals and those outside the traditional education regime regarding who should be involved, who is “better” at reform, and types of preferred reforms. If the regime can come together under a shared vision, it would be in a

strong position to create long-lasting change. Local leadership is key to guiding this new vision.

Rethink Education as a Worthy Good, not a Public Good

Education is traditionally thought of as a public good. This justifies government as the sole producer and provider of public education services. However, rethinking education and treating public education as a worthy good is critical for successful reform in an increasingly competitive and global world. Many of those who participated in this study identified problems with the existing system and signaled their support for opportunities that make room for new producers of education services. Treating education as a worthy good allows for structural reform and encourages innovation and non-governmental producers of education services. To create this environment, leaders at the state level are needed to enact enabling legislation. It also requires support from those in the local community who can encourage legislators and then lead in the development of alternative producers of education. This can lead to voucher programs, charter schools, and other innovative changes in the education system (Andrisani et al., 2002).

Encourage Educational Innovation

This study confirms that generations of incremental, process-driven change from within that largely retains government as the exclusive provider and producer of education services has not succeeded in lifting urban education outcomes to the levels desired by parents, business leaders, and others to compete in the global economy of the 21st century. This suggests that new approaches are in order, ones that consider education from a new perspective. Treating education as a worthy good creates a window of opportunity to explore alternative education structures. New regimes that include new actors and new relationships are in a better position to consider new structures than the traditional education regime, which has historically relied on incremental, process-driven change.

Conclusion

Findings of this study demonstrate that sustained civic engagement in school improvement efforts will allow the education system to enhance its capacity for educational improvement, development, and innovation. Expanding the education regimes, fostering openness to new structures, and conceptualizing education as a worthy good allow new structures and collaboration to improve educational quality and equity, particularly in urban areas. Rather than approaching educational change through incremental adjustments that introduce marginal change, innovative strategies that encourage greater civic engagement and capacity and that favor school choice and competition should be explored and promoted. While retaining the government's role of providing education and guaranteeing

access, funding, and governance to achieve accountability, representativeness, and equality, greater civic engagement with innovative strategies can better facilitate structural change of schools and educational policy. Local leadership and policy should consistently encourage the existing education regime to engage stakeholders outside of the schools to identify new and alternative strategies to improve the quality, equity, and inclusion of urban schools and the education system as a whole.

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