

FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY:
THE COMPLEXITY OF LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION-A PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD CASE STUDY

By

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ABSTRACT

FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY: THE COMPLEXITY OF LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION-A PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD CASE STUDY

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This dissertation case study explicates the construct of “policy implementation process tools” as integral to the work of implementing the Promise Neighborhood Initiative. Policy implementation process tools reify and fortify the relationships necessary for local implementation of federal policy among collaborative partners. This dissertation proposes three classes of process tools that operate within the ecology of policy implementation: Formal Ecology Process Tools; Operational Ecology Process Tools; and Relational Ecology Process Tools. The case study evidence suggests that the investment in partnership efforts to improve educational outcomes can bear fruit when process tools are identified and strategically employed. These “tools” embody the relationship currencies of “time”, “turf” and “trust,” the cultivation of which are essential to the furtherance of partnership development in collaborative policy implementation. When properly designed and deployed, these “tools” can effectively navigate educational policy implementation barriers/challenges and mediate the complexity of federal policy implementation in place-based initiatives. Accordingly, federal policymakers should allocate funding and specifically identify resources (both fiscal and human capital) dedicated to the development and deployment of “policy implementation process tools” when seeking to implement federal policy in the local context.

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PREVIEW

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.
This dissertation is a demonstration of my faith in God for His provision in my life.
This dissertation is also a testament to the values instilled at “114 E. Stephenson Street”
and the enduring legacy of Jesse and Marie Jones.

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

During the 2008 Presidential Campaign, then Candidate Barack Obama cited the Harlem Children's Zone as an all-encompassing, all hands-on deck, anti-poverty effort that is saving a generation of children in a neighborhood where they were never supposed to have a chance. Specifically, Senator Obama stated:

The philosophy behind the project is simple: If poverty is a disease that infects an entire community in the form of unemployment and violence, failing schools, and broken homes, then we just can't treat those symptoms in isolation. We have to heal the entire community and we have to focus on what actually works. ... You don't just sign up for this program. You're actively recruited for it because the idea is that if everyone is involved and no one slips through the cracks, then you really can change the entire community (Tough, 2008, pp. 265-266; Obama, 2008).

Senator Obama made a verbal commitment to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone in twenty cities across the country.

Senator Obama's promise manifested itself in the Promise Neighborhood Initiative through the United States Department of Education (USED) upon his becoming President of the United States. The USED summarizes the Promise Neighborhood Initiative in the following manner:

[T]he vision of the program is that all children and youth growing up in Promise Neighborhoods have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career. The purpose of Promise Neighborhoods is to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in our most distressed communities, and to transform those communities by—

1. Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results for children and youth throughout an entire neighborhood;
2. Building a complete continuum of cradle-to-career solutions of both educational programs and family and community supports, with great schools at the center;
3. Integrating programs and breaking down agency "silos" so that solutions are implemented effectively and efficiently across agencies;

4. Developing the local infrastructure of systems and resources needed to sustain and scale up proven, effective solutions across the broader region beyond the initial neighborhood; and
5. Learning about the overall impact of the Promise Neighborhoods program and about the relationship between particular strategies in Promise Neighborhoods and student outcomes, including through a rigorous evaluation of the program. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

A cursory examination of the Promise Neighborhood (PN or PN Initiative) vision and purpose statement reveals an extremely complex place-based initiative. In its stated vision and purpose, the policy seeks to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in distressed communities by transforming the communities in which they live. To accomplish this multi-faceted objective, schools are not the primary focus of this initiative. Rather, the policy seeks to mobilize many and varied institutions of youth development to support children and families. The institutions, which are the primary targets of the policy, include, but are not limited to local educational agencies (i.e. schools and school districts); state and local agencies; social service agencies; colleges and universities; community and not-for-profit organizations; and other potential public and private partners. As with most federal education policy, the policy construct is distant from the locus of implementation, thereby lending itself to modification by local implementers, which seek to understand and navigate the policy at the local level. Moreover, these entities historically have operated in silos to accomplish the stated goals and objectives of their respective organizations which are likely incongruous and disparate. In direct contravention to the way local stakeholders generally operate, however, the policy posits the willingness, capacity, and ability of these multiple organizations and individuals to coalesce around and partner to work towards the stated policy objectives and goals.

This dissertation examines the tension between the policy ideal, which presages the collaboration of many local agencies and organizations, and their historical operation in the context of a single Promise Neighborhood as it seeks to implement the PN Initiative. This study aligns with the fifth prong of the PN vision statement, which seeks to learn about the impact of the PN Initiative and improve its implementation over time. Of note, in 2014, the U.S. Governmental Accounting Office conducted a study of the PN Initiative to determine the efficacy of funding this place-based initiative, specifically examining:

(1) the extent to which [USED's] strategy for awarding grants aligns with program goals, if at all; (2) how [USED] aligns Promise Neighborhoods efforts with other related programs; (3) how [USED] evaluates grantees' efforts; and (4) the extent to which Promise Neighborhoods grants have enabled collaboration at the local level, if at all, and the results of such collaboration (GAO-14-432, p. 2).

Additionally, in 2015, Mathematica Policy Research Institute produced a report, a case study of five Promise Neighborhoods. The report stated its goals and conclusions as follows:

The goal of this study was to gather in-depth information about the five selected Promise Neighborhoods including organizational structure, the components of the pipelines, and the lessons learned during initial implementation efforts. This report summarizes the information we learned about each Promise Neighborhood in site profiles . . . and examines cross-cutting themes to provide Promise Neighborhoods grantees and stakeholders with a picture of the early implementation challenges and successes that may guide future efforts (Husley, 2015, p. A-3).

Unlike the GAO endeavor, this dissertation explicitly does not seek to evaluate the quality of the Promise Neighborhood Initiative or the efficacy of expenditures and resources associated therewith. This dissertation does, however, seek to expand the lens of the Mathematica study, by delving more deeply into implementation challenges and practices of one PN Implementation site, situating the PN Initiative within its broader historical context and its policy ecology (Weaver-Hightower, 2008), posing the following research

question: *to what process challenges or barriers must policy targets attend when charged with collaborating to implement this and similar federal policy constructs in local communities?*

To frame this question, the Literature Review of Chapter 2 begins with the history of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1964 (ESEA) and its subsequent reauthorizations through 2012. This historical lens establishes that the PN Initiative may be the first promulgated federal K-12 educational policy to explicitly seek collaboration with and among entities outside of the local educational agency (i.e. the school or school district) to act to improve student outcomes. Moreover, because the policy explicitly recognizes that the ecology of a student's existence impacts his/her individual growth and development, this section of the dissertation explores the concept of a student's ecology as first espoused in the Coleman Report of 1966 and explicated in Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, the literature review adopts the "ecology" metaphor for analyzing the implementation of this policy (Weaver-Hightower, 2008); utilizes Honig's policy analysis framework, which examines the "policy", the "place" and the "people" (Honig, 2006); and expounds upon each aspect of Honig's framework with pertinent research (Green, 1983; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; McDonnell, 2004; Hall & McGinty, 1997; McLaughlin, 1991; Lipsky, 1980; Smylie & Evans, 2006; Graddy & Chen, 2006; Jang & Feoick, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006; Erickson, 1987; Himmelman, 1991; Huxham, 1996; Guo & Acar, 2005; Sowa, 2009; Gazley & Brudney, 2007; and Mashek & Nanfito, 2015). The utilization of the more expansive **policy ecology lens** allowed this dissertation to view, disentangle and understand the complex organizational and relational dynamics that are in operation within the subject of this case study.

To investigate the PN Initiative, Chapter 3 of this dissertation discusses the methodology utilized. The dissertation utilizes a theory-building case study protocol examining the implementation of the Promise Neighborhood policy at a local site where both a planning and implementation grants were awarded (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). This dissertation is a qualitative study, employing traditional observation, interview and document review techniques in a selected PN site. The dissertation did not simply seek to describe the PN as is done in traditional qualitative research, (Geertz, 1973); but rather the dissertation sought to identify the barriers or challenges that were faced during the implementation of the policy and then build a theory regarding the processes within which policymakers must invest to effectively navigate those barriers and implement a federal policy at the local level. The chapter also provides a description of the subject PN site. The chapter then discusses the methods used to code and analyze the data that was collected.

The final two chapters of this dissertation provide the analysis of the case study and a “theory of the case” for policymakers to consider as they promulgate place-based initiatives. Chapter 4 first examines the Harlem Children’s Zone (the HCZ) as the model for the PN Initiative to glean operational and organizational practices that may be of assistance to PN sites. The first part of the analysis concludes that the HCZ is not a replicable prototype for the collaborative model envisioned by the PN Policy because each of the systems operate wholly within one governance structure that drives a singular, tightly coupled mission. The salient portion of the case study analysis then examines the subject PN site as it sought to shift from operation in silos into a more collaborative structure. This analysis distills the case study data and is organized according to the local initiatives that were undertaken by the PN site. With each local initiative, the dissertation first frames the

barriers that present themselves during implementation. Following the identification of those challenges, each section then describes the strategies and tools that this PN site employed to address the challenges and barriers that were present. Chapter 5 of this dissertation then constructs the theory of the case, explicating how policy targets might strategically employ process implementation tools to lower those barriers and navigate those challenges. In sum, this dissertation proposes a process implementation framework for policymakers moving forward from which policymakers may work to ensure more meaningful implementation at the local level.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A Promise Neighborhood creates, by its very construct, a multi-faceted public-private collaboration designed to improve educational outcomes. First, this literature review explicates the evolution of federal educational policy post *Brown v. Board of Education*. The review then summarizes relevant educational policy implementation research. Finally, the literature review explores the factors that impact collaboration of local organizations, which seek to implement a governmental policy.

A. The History of Title 1: An Analysis of the Federal Policy that spawned the Promise Neighborhood Initiative

Prior to the 1950s, education policy was left largely to local communities. The decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) opened the doors for federal intervention into local educational policy and practice. Since that time, each branch of the federal government, often prompted by political events, has delved into local educational policy to meet evolving national priorities.

The scope of this dissertation focuses upon one aspect of federal educational policy: the legislative evolution of Title 1 of *the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). As the precursor to the Promise Neighborhood Initiative, the ESEA encompasses the federal government's attempt to support local educational agencies in solving the issue of educating children identified as low income and disadvantaged in the K-12 arena. As a part of this dissertation, the researcher created Table 1 as a summary reference for the evolution of federal educational pronouncements germane to the study.

TABLE 1: EVOLUTION OF FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY

	Select Evolution of Federal Legislative Education Policy	Select Federal Judicial and Political Education Policy Pronouncements
1954		Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS reversed the “separate but equal” doctrine in education in a unanimous decision.
1964	In the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress called for a study of inequality of opportunity in education “by reason of race, color religion or national origin.”	President Lyndon Johnson catalyzed the idea of “compensatory education” with the War on Poverty and the commissioning the “Report on Educational Opportunity”
1965	Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) codifying the principle of “compensatory education.”	Commissioner of Education Frances Keppel espoused the principle of compensatory education.
1966		The Coleman Report is published indicating that the family and socio-economic background of a child impacts his/her learning in school. Differences within schools were more apparent than differences between schools.
1971	Congress reauthorizes the ESEA allowing “pull out” services for targeted individual students.	President Richard Nixon denounced the effectiveness of compensatory education programs and lamented, “it is time to realize that every time we invest a billion dollars in a compensatory program, we raise the hopes of millions of our disadvantaged citizens, whose hopes are more than likely to be dashed.”
1978	Congress reauthorizes the ESEA allowing “Whole School” services and support allowed to transform to achieve greater impact	
1979		President Jimmy Carter establishes the Department of Education and the Cabinet Position of the Secretary of Education.
1981	Congress reauthorizes the ESEA as the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA), changing the categorical funding formula to a “block grant,” ostensibly giving LEAs more flexibility to release funds.	President Ronald Reagan articulated the intention to disband the USED, reiterating the importance of local control.
1983		Secretary of Education Terrell Bell publishes <i>A Nation At Risk</i> , which indicated that the United States was lagging behind other countries in educational attainment in mathematics and science, emphasizing the need for a national educational dialogue.
1986		Secretary of Education William Bennett began hortatory advocacy for all curricula to be rooted in a national base of “core knowledge”.
1988	ECIA becomes ESEA with new authorization, and State levers were eased to improve accountability for Title 1.	
1989	“America 2000” standards advocated by state governors stalled in Congress.	President George H.W. Bush convenes governors and the “Goals 2000” project with Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton

TABLE 1 (Cont'd)

1992		President Bill Clinton appoints Secretary of Education Richard Riley to shepherd “Goals 2000” standards movement.
1994	Educate America Act of 1994 codified “Goals 2000” proposing aspirational goals for students in the United States alongside the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994	President Bill Clinton used the hortatory policy instrument to promote the “standards movement”.
1994	Congress reauthorizes the ESEA, as the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994. Adequate yearly progress is introduced. Safe and Drug Free Schools, Professional Development for Teachers, and Technology Improvements appear in ESEA. US Secretary of Education given more “discretion” in the allocation of federal resources into programs to accomplish the standards adopted in the Educate America Act.	
2001	Congress reauthorizes the ESEA, as the No Child Left Behind Act; tied receipt of Title 1 funds to performance and accountability on tests administered by the states; schools could be reorganized, closed, or reopened as charter schools to better meet the needs of students.	President George W. Bush used the hortatory policy instrument to develop a bi-partisan coalition that was increasingly frustrated with the lack of results for the expenditure of Title 1 funds, spawning the “accountability movement”
2009	Race to the Top and Promise Neighborhood Initiative are promulgated by the USED through Title 1.	President Barack Obama relaxes NCLB mandates through waivers and incentivizes states and local communities to define standards and supports for individual student success through a matrix of state supports.
2015	Congress passes the Every Student Succeeds Act as a reauthorization of ESEA. The reauthorization codified the flexibility of state and local organizations to meet the strict requirements of NCLB in exchange for comprehensive state accountability plans.	

1954-1965: Emergence of Federal Educational Policy

Ground zero for the involvement of the federal government in educational policy is *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In the mid-to-late 1950s, it was in the perceived national interest to eliminate race as a justification for “separate but equal” educational facilities. In 1954, Chief Justice Warren wrote in the unanimous landmark ruling for the U. S. Supreme Court that schools were to be desegregated with “all deliberate speed.”

Alongside this ruling, in response to world events (i.e. the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1956), the Executive Branch began to use the bully pulpit to advocate for US

exceptionality in education. President John F. Kennedy began his race to the moon in the 1960s. Yet, the *Brown* decision and its aftermath had unearthed an inequitable educational system, whose outcomes stood in stark contrast to what one might consider exceptional. The many and varied local educational systems across the country were not preparing black children and poor children to enter the evolving world with the skills and talents necessary to assert American pre-eminence. With this as a backdrop, President Lyndon Johnson proclaimed the “war on poverty”, and the US Congress reluctantly moved into education policy with the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which called for the study of racial inequality in schools.

Political ideologies questioned the need for any federal involvement in local schools. Yet, it fell to Commissioner Francis Keppel, US Educational Commissioner from 1962-1965, to resolve the three prevalent, intersecting, political concerns of the day—race, religion, and resource allocation—to garner the political support to pass any federal educational legislation. With regard to race, Johnson’s war on poverty sparked fear by southerners that integration policy was going to be forced upon them. Many southern states openly did not comply with Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the requirement that funds not be used in segregated schools. With the inclusion of a “local control” provision southern Democrats would support the legislation. A second barrier involving the allocation of resources to religious schools was resolved with a provision that disadvantaged and poor children who attend parochial schools would be eligible to receive allocated resources. Finally, with regard to general resource allocation, nearly every congressional district had children who fit the category of poor and/or disadvantaged. Resources allocated according to census tracts would ensure that all congressional districts would benefit from this

legislation. With the political landscape pacified, the Congress moved in the area of educational policy. Moreover, this political compromise, codified in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), established both the historical linkage between the politics of and the policy of education when a branch of the federal government promulgates education policy and the tension between the federal government and local control when it comes to such policy.

1965-1968: War on Poverty and “Compensatory Education”

The idea of “compensatory education” underpins the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Kantor (1991) argues that ESEA was the first piece of legislation that committed the federal government to the goal of “full educational opportunity” for all of its citizens, with an explicit focus upon the low income and disadvantaged children of our nation. Moreover, the law assumes the locus of the disadvantage rests with the individual as opposed to the overall economic or employment system that may contribute to the disadvantage. This belief assumes that with additional supports children and families can change their economic outlook (Kantor, 1991). Accordingly, the Congress chose to “compensate” for the disadvantage with fiscal support to the local educational agency charged with educating the children.

ESEA provided the modern foundation of federal education policy. Section 201 of the Act states in pertinent part:

...Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance (as set forth in this title) to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children.

From its inception, the drafters of federal policy balanced the resultant policy with the maxim of local control, a mantra that continues to dominate our educational landscape.

Congress specifically circumscribed the federal government's power to control the policy of local educational agencies. Section 604 of the ESEA specifically provides:

Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, programs of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution or school system, or over the selection of library resources, textbooks, or other printed or published instructional materials by any educational institution or school system.

Federal K-12 policy was largely relegated to incentivizing state and local actors to implement policy pronouncements with the carrot or stick of financial investment in the "poor" and "disadvantaged" within local communities. The mix of policy instruments with which they have acted variously possess the character of mandates, inducements, capacity building, and system-changers (McDonnell and Elmore, 1987), but they are only activated when the local educational agency (LEA) embraces the primary inducement, which generally takes the form of a financial incentive to receive financial support from the federal government to support its poor and disadvantaged students.

Underpinning the "local control" congressional limitation is the belief that local stakeholders are perceptively better able to identify issues that they face, develop solutions, and resolve barriers to local policy implementation. Moreover, the entities through which Congress chose to act in the ESEA are significant for purposes of our analysis. Congress created a system within which it awarded grants to states, which, in turn made grants to counties and local education agencies (LEAs). Eligibility criteria were rooted in census data at the county or school district level. As agents of the state, LEAs developed project plans for approval by the state, and grant awards flowed directly to

those plans. Yet, the principle challenge to federal policy implementation remains the complexity of the context or “ecology” within which the target (i.e. disadvantaged children) exists, and that ecology intersects dynamically with the policy pronouncement (Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

Since the passage of ESEA, three political questions ostensibly animate the federal K-12 policy environment:

- For what purpose (intent) should we expend federal resources to support local schools, a responsibility that predominately lay with state and local government?
- Who (the implementer) should be charged with allocation of those resources on the ground?
- On what (target) should we expend the resources that we allocate?

At any given point in the history of Title 1, how the questions are answered continues to depend on the fiscal policy and the attendant educational hortatory policy pronouncements from the executive branch in power. Each executive determines the policy tools that are employed and seemingly circumscribes the target of K-12 policy for each administration.

Within the Johnson Administration, the Coleman Report of 1966, commissioned by the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, confirmed the need for compensatory education programs and the principles embodied in Title 1 of the ESEA. Coleman summed up the major conclusions of the report: “Altogether, the sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to be first in the home itself and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home; then they lie in the schools’ ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home, and in the schools’ homogeneity which perpetuated the social influences of the home and its environment” (Coleman, 1966, pp. 73-74).

The question of “who should allocate the identified Title 1 resources on the ground” and “what the target of the allocation should be” have become the two questions for each