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## National Affiliation or Local Representation: When TFA Alumni Run for School Board

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**Abstract:** Historically power to govern public schools has been delegated to local school boards. However, this arrangement of power has been shifting over the past half century and increasingly, local school boards are targeted as ineffective and antiquated. Teach For America (TFA), typically examined for its placement of teachers, also seeks to develop educational leaders and TFA now encourages and supports its alumni to run for local school boards. The involvement of a national organization, like TFA, with its own national education agenda in local school board elections may reflect the next step in the demise of local control. To investigate whether TFA’s involvement in local elections represents the spreading of a national agenda at the expense of attention to local issues, this research examines campaign messages for both TFA alumni candidates and their opponents. Results indicate that TFA alumni candidates incorporate significantly more messages aligned with TFA than their opponents (35 vs. 11), but they also maintain a focus on local issues as measured by the number of local issue messages they also incorporate into their campaign literature.

Rather than debating whether school boards have lost power, this research points to the need to better understand how local politics is changing and expanding as new voices enter the arena.

**Keywords:** school board elections; Teach For America; representation; politics of education

**Afiliación nacional o representación local: cuando ex-alumnos de TFA son candidatos para los consejos escolares.**

**Resumen:** Históricamente la autoridad para dirigir las escuelas públicas fue delegado a los consejos escolares locales. Sin embargo, esta disposición ha ido cambiando en el último medio siglo y cada vez más, las juntas escolares locales están siendo atacadas por ser ineficaces y anticuadas. Teach For America (TFA), ha sido analizada por su tarea en cuanto los docentes, pero también busca desarrollar líderes educativos y TFA ahora alienta y apoya a sus alumnos a postularse para los consejos escolares locales. La participación de una organización nacional, como TFA, con su propia agenda educativa nacional en los sistemas elecciones para los consejos escolares puede reflejar el próximo paso en la desaparición del control local. Para investigar si la participación de TFA en las elecciones locales representa la difusión de una agenda nacional en detrimento de la atención a los problemas locales, esta investigación analiza los mensajes de campaña de candidatos tanto ex-alumnos de TFA y sus oponentes. Los resultados indican que los candidatos ex-alumnos de TFA incorporan significativamente más mensajes alineados con TFA que sus oponentes (35 vs 11), pero también mantienen un enfoque en temas locales, medido por el número de mensajes locales que en aparecen en la literatura de campaña. En lugar de debatir si los consejos escolares han perdido autoridad, esta investigación apunta a la necesidad de comprender mejor la forma como la política local está cambiando y incorporando nuevas voces.

**Palabras-clave:** elecciones de consejero escolar; Teach For America; representación; política educativa.

**Afiliação nacional ou representação local: quando alunos de TFA são candidatos para os conselhos escolares.**

**Resumo:** Historicamente, a autoridade para dirigir as escolas públicas foi delegada a conselhos escolares locais. No entanto, esta disposição foi mudando no último meio século e cada vez mais, os conselhos escolares locais estão sendo atacados por serem ineficazes e ultrapassados. Teach For America (TFA) é frequentemente analisado por seu trabalho com professores, mas também procura desenvolver líderes educacionais e TFA agora incentiva e apoia os ex-alunos a concorrer para os conselhos escolares locais. A participação de uma organização nacional, como TFA, com sua própria agenda nacional de educação nas eleições para os sistemas de conselhos escolares pode refletir o próximo passo no fim do controle local. Para investigar se a participação nas eleições locais TFA representa a propagação de uma agenda nacional em detrimento da atenção aos problemas locais, esta pesquisa analisa as mensagens de campanha de candidatos tanto alunos TFA e seus oponentes. Os resultados indicam que TFA alunos candidatos incorporar significativamente mais mensagens alinhadas com seus oponentes TFA (35 vs 11), mas também manter um foco em questões locais, medida pelo número de mensagens locais que aparecem na literatura campanha. Em vez de debater se os conselhos escolares perderam autoridade, esta pesquisa aponta para a necessidade de entender melhor como a política local está mudando e incorporando novas vozes.

**Palavras-chave:** eleições escolares; Teach For America; representação; política educacional.

## Introduction

Historically, power to govern public schools has been delegated to local school boards. Throughout much of U.S. history, local school boards have enjoyed considerable autonomy over many education policy decisions including whom to hire, what should be taught, when to hold school, and how to allocate funds. However, this arrangement of power has been shifting over the past half century and increasingly, local school boards are targeted as one of the main contributing factors for lagging school performance. Characterized as “obsolete” (Maxwell, 2009b), “a dinosaur” (Finn, 2003) or “fighting for their survival” (Howell, 2005), school boards face increased criticism for ineffectiveness at reforming public education (Finn & Petrilli, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009). The solution proposed for these ineffective local boards is often increased state or federal oversight, and in the most extreme cases, complete take-over of local districts by state officials.

However, in this climate of centralization, not everyone is dismissing the role of local school boards as a place for creating change. One prominent national education organization, Teach For America (TFA), has recently taken an interest in school boards. TFA, mostly known for placing “top” college graduates in hard to staff schools across the country, is also committed to supporting corps members “to become lifelong leaders in the movement to make great education available to all” (TFA Lifelong Leaders, n.d.). To do this, TFA supports a number of Alumni Leadership Initiatives, including their School Board Leadership Initiative, which encourages and supports alumni to run for school board positions.

While it is clear to those tracking changes in education policy governance that the ground is shifting, we have a limited understanding of the shift. It is often assumed that increased involvement by state and federal agencies and national organizations like TFA necessarily means a corresponding loss of power at the local level (Kirst & Wirt, 2009) while others suggest that increased involvement by state and federal officials is not a zero-sum game (Manna, 2007; Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013). The involvement of a national organization, like TFA, with its own national educational agenda in local school board elections, provides an interesting case to study the way that power may (or may not) shift away from local decision makers and towards more centralized decision making. Alternatively, TFAs involvement may reflect recognition that local obsolescence is simply a myth that has become common wisdom with little empirical backing (Henig, 2009).

Therefore, we ask: How does the entry of TFA alumni into local education politics shift the focus of elections and potentially, the local politics of school boards? Is there evidence that TFA alumni running for school board further diminish the focus on local issues? Specially, we examine whether TFA alumni entry in local education politics indicates further centralization of education policy decision-making away from local stakeholders. We do this by examining the campaign messages alumni and their non-TFA affiliated opponents use during their campaigns. We code all campaign material and media interviews for all candidates in 12 school board elections in which a TFA alumnus ran and then quantitatively analyze coded data to answer the following questions:

- To what extent do TFA alumni candidates promote messages that align with the national mission, priorities and core values of TFA?
- How do the messages promoted by TFA candidates differ from those of their opponents?
- If TFA candidates do focus on TFAs national priorities and core values, does this focus come at the expense of attention to the local issues being discussed by non-TFA candidates?

## Background

We begin by providing an overview of Teach For America as an organization and its mission to improve educational equity. Because TFA is mostly known for their role placing uncertified teachers in high-need areas, we situate extant literature on TFA in these debates about teacher quality. However, the mission of TFA is much broader, suggesting that extant research should also examine other areas of TFA, in particular, their emphasis on developing educational policy leaders. Thus we explain their efforts to develop educational leaders and focus, in particular, on their role in supporting alumni to run for public office. We next focus on school board governance, which is often characterized as waning, to situate the entry of TFA alumni into local education politics in the larger shifts in educational governance.

### **Teach For America: From Placing Teachers to Cultivating Leaders**

Teach For America (TFA), started in 1990, is best known for placing “top” college graduates into schools in low-income communities around the country. TFA selects college students and recent graduates committed to improving the educational opportunities of low-income students. TFA corps members must be willing to teach in a low-income school for two years, and as of the 2013-2014 school year, TFA placed corps members in schools in 48 sites. TFA reports to have about 11,000 active corps members serving over 750,000 students annually (TFA, 2013).

Shortly after it began placing teachers in high need areas, TFA quickly became embroiled in national policy debates about teacher preparation, certification and teacher quality. TFA is frequently charged with providing inexperienced and unprepared teachers to the most needy students (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 1994; Labaree, 2010) and the impact of TFA teachers on student learning has been hotly debated (Heilig & Jez, 2010). While a thorough review of the research on the effectiveness of TFA teachers is outside the scope of this paper, findings are generally mixed with some positive results. Results vary by subject, grade level, location and the comparison group employed in the analysis (e.g. Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Vasquez Heilig, 2005; Glazerman, Mayer & Decker, 2006; Kane, Rockoff & Staiger, 2008; Xu, Hannaway & Taylor 2008; Heilig & Jez 2010).

While placing teachers is a highly visible aspect of TFA that has received a good deal of popular press and research attention, it is just one part of the TFA mission. In addition to impacting students directly through teaching in high need areas, Teach For America works to develop a “movement of leaders who work to ensure that kids growing up in poverty get an excellent education” (TFA Our Mission, n.d.) and this work extends far beyond the classroom and the two-year commitment. To achieve this aspect of its mission, TFA actively supports corps member and alumni involvement in education and explicitly prioritizes developing alumni as public leaders who serve at every level of government (Kopp, 2008). Wendy Kopp, founder and Chair of the Board of Teach for America, stressed this goal for the organization in her reflection on TFA in its 20<sup>th</sup> year by stating that TFA seeks to “foster and accelerate the leadership of our alumni ... in policy, advocacy and elected office” (Kopp, 2011, 26).

As many newspapers report, the initial efforts of Teach For America to promote leadership have been extraordinarily successful. TFA and its alumni have been called a “political powerhouse” (Simon 2013) and a “spawning ground” for educational entrepreneurs (Higgins, Hess, Weiner & Robinson, 2011). Thomas Toch, co-director of the think tank Education Sector, notes TFA is “front and center in the emerging generation of policy leaders” (Hoff, 2008, p. 18). While media often cite the role of TFA in education policy, formal research on this aspect of TFA is sparse. Higgins, Hess, Weiner and Robinson (2011) provide one of the few studies on this aspect of TFA and they find that TFA appeared more frequently in the professional backgrounds of entrepreneurial leaders

than any other source. Moreover, they find that 15 percent of the organizations they examined were either founded or co-founded by alumni of TFA, a percentage unmatched by any other organization. TFA itself stated that, “more founders and leaders of education organizations participate in Teach For America than in any other organization or program” (TFA Fueling Long-Term Impact, n.d.). In leadership roles, Michelle Rhee, former Chancellor of the Washington, D.C. public schools and current Chief Executive Officer of Students First, may be the most recognized alumna, but she is far from alone. Indeed, TFA reported in 2009 that more than 500 alumni were working work on Capitol Hill or in politics and/or advocacy (TFA, 2009).

While many who enter TFA may be drawn to leadership roles naturally (McAdam & Brandt, 2009), Teach For America also makes a concerted effort to develop corps members and alumni as leaders. To focus specifically on political leadership, TFA launched the Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE), a 501c(4) in 2008. Upon completing their two-year teaching commitment, TFA alumni can join LEE, which seeks to grow the number of TFA alumni who serve in elected office. While encouraging public office generally, LEE also established a specific program called the School Board Fellows, which pairs alumni with board members so they can learn first-hand how a school board functions (LEE, 2010). “Through fellowships, trainings, partnership programming, and multimedia resources” Teach For America provides its alumni with tools to “help them succeed in the fields of politics, policy, advocacy, and community organizing” (TFA Public Leadership Initiative, n.d.).

As the media reports above indicate, the coordinated efforts and growing presence of TFA alumni in leadership positions writ large has the potential to significantly impact education policy. The efforts outlined above demonstrate that running for public office, and school boards specifically, is a priority for the organization. But involvement in school boards seems curious given popular criticism that local school boards are ineffective and losing power (Finn & Petrilli, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013).

### **Local School Boards and Shifting Education Governance in the U.S.**

#### *Popular perception of school boards*

As the rhetoric of crisis in public education spread, a common target of criticism became local school boards. Often characterized by education reforms as “amateurish” and overly influenced by teachers’ unions, many reformers looked to state and federal officials as more effective alternatives that would be able to hold schools accountable for academic performance (Manna 2007; McGuinn, 2006; Moe 2005). Indeed, some reformers welcome the “end to educational exceptionalism” (Henig, 2013), preferring Mayoral control of urban school districts over local boards (Hess, 2008; Hill, 2013). But while popular criticisms abound, surprisingly little empirical research has documented school board effectiveness or failure. In fact, the scholarly base of research on school boards is quite limited with Howell (2005) finding that “in the past four decades, fewer than 25 articles related to school boards have been published in major political science journals” (pg. 14) and Land and Stringfield (2005) discuss just two studies in their review of research on school boards that “offer preliminary evidence of a link between school board governance and students’ academic achievement” (pg. 264). Such a limited empirical base, however, has not stopped critiques of local school board governance and calls for reform.

While scholars seem to ignore school boards, popular critiques grow increasingly common. With funding from the Wallace Foundation, for example, *Education Week* hosted a Live Chat titled “Are Local School Boards Obsolete?” (Maxwell, 2009b). This chat followed an *Education Week* article titled “An Overlooked Institution Struggles to Remain Relevant” (Maxwell, 2009a). And this characterization is not confined to the education press. In the *Post Gazette* of Pittsburgh, Elizabeth

(2003) titled her article “School Boards’ Worth in Doubt,” Mathews (2011) questions “Who Needs School Boards?” in his article in the *Washington Post*, and Mendez (2003) of the *Christian Science Monitor* titled her article “School Boards: Democratic Ideal or a Troubled Anachronism?” This last title was inspired by one of the most outspoken critics of school boards, Chester Finn, President of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Cited in all of the above articles, Finn frequently provides colorful ways to describe school boards including his description of them as “worse than a dinosaur, they are more like an education sinkhole” and that they “are an aberration, an anachronism” (Mendez, 2003). Based on these conclusions, Finn calls for policy makers to “put this dysfunctional arrangement out of its misery” (Elizabeth, 2003). But while such almost universally negative characterizations of school boards are ubiquitous, the tradition of local control remains.

*The assumed zero-sum relationship: A framework for understanding the changing influence of local school boards*

For much of U.S. public school history, local districts enjoyed considerable power. But as test scores lagged, state and federal officials entered the education policy arena often curbing the power and influence of local school boards. Often framed as a tug-of-war between different levels of government, the increased role of state and federal officials is assumed to accompany a decline in the role of local school boards (Henig, 2009; Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013). Such a characterization runs throughout the limited literature on local school boards, often without empirical evidence. Statements such as state regulations have “eaten into school board authority” (Todras, 1993, n.p.), local boards have been “losing influence over education programs for some time to state and federal officials and other interests” (Kirst and Wirt 2009, 3), and by the “second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, state and federal governments have assumed greater role in governance of education” and “reduced school boards’ local control” (Land, 2002, 232) are common throughout the literature. Probably the strongest of such statements was by Kirst (1994) who stated the local school board was the “biggest loser in policy influence”. Kirst goes on to predict that unless school boards change, the “erosion of their influence on policy making will most likely continue” (1994, 381).

But is there more going on here? While school boards now operate in an environment more constrained by state standards and federal policies and regulations, their role and importance may not be completely gone. As Henig (2009) so aptly noted, “Local is different. But different is not dead” (112). In fact, recent research documents the “resurgence of the local role in education policy making” (Marsh & Wohlstetter, 2013, 281). Local policy makers continue to significantly shape (and often frustrate) state and national reform efforts. School boards continue to implement policies from the state and federal level to fit within the local context, thus wielding significant authority in shaping reform (Howell, 2005; Malen, 2003; Spillane, 1998). One of school boards’ most important functions in the twenty-first century may very well be to mediate communication between parents, taxpayers and community members and state and federal officials (Resnick, 2010).

The entry of Teach For America into local education politics provides a unique example in which to examine whether and how local issues and agendas are being usurped by a national agenda. Supporting alumni to run for office may be a way to elect like-minded, local officials that ensure national reform efforts are not frustrated at the local level, thereby diminishing attention to local issues. But do alumni share the national agenda and promote it at the expense of local issues and goals? Does entry of members of TFA exemplify this zero-sum game or provide evidence that local education politics may be changing but is far from dead?

## Methods

In 2009 and 2010, 12 TFA alumni ran in school board elections against 43 opponents. Ten of the elections were contested. In some cases, alumni campaigned in locations where they had taught. However, some campaigned in the district where they currently resided and enrolled their own children (See Appendix A for additional details about candidates and the elections).

### Data

We identified 12 election using the LEE website, which keeps an up-to-date list of all alumni who are running for office. Once races with TFA alumni were identified, we tracked all candidate websites and campaign information using web searches. While not every candidate developed a personal campaign website, we found that the majority developed such a site. Webshots captured candidate websites and we followed all links. Additionally, we located all news articles, press releases and media interviews related to the election using lexis nexus. By setting up a “Google alert”, we were able to capture additional newspaper stories as they occurred. Tracking of each election began in September of 2009 and 2010 and continued until each respective election day.<sup>1</sup>

### Analysis of the Data

Content analysis enables the researcher to categorize and link ideas systematically across multiple data sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009). For this reason, we utilized a coding scheme to categorize candidate messaging across the wide range of data sources used in this study. Once all messages were categorized, we used quantitative analysis to compare the campaign rhetoric of TFA alumni running for school board and their opponents to better understand whether and how TFA alumni candidates differed from their non-TFA affiliated opponents. These comparisons enabled us to make inferences about how the entry of members of a national organization into local school board elections potentially shifts the focus of local school politics.

We should note that campaign priorities, while potentially subject to change once a candidate is elected, provide an important initial indicator for the way that TFA alums are likely to influence local education politics. While it is popular perception that campaign rhetoric is simply “empty promises” crafted to win votes, research, though limited, suggests otherwise. In fact, researchers find for both presidential and congressional elections, campaign promises are often a strong predictor of later legislative action (Ringquist & Dasse, 2004; Shaw, 2004; Sulkin, 2009; Sulkin & Swigger, 2008). For example, in examining legislative action on environmental issues, Ringquist and Dasse (2004) found that members of Congress voted consistently with their campaign promises 73% of the time. In a broader study of 18 different issue areas and across multiple election cycles, Sulkin (2009) found statistically robust linkages between campaign appeals and later legislative activity for 14 of the 18 policy topics examined, leading the author to conclude that campaign rhetoric can serve as a useful signal about which issues legislators are likely to pursue once elected. While school board candidates may behave differently from presidential and congressional candidates, we have no reason to suspect that this is the case and thus believe that campaign rhetoric serves as a good indicator of the the education policies candidates are likely to pursue if elected to the school board.

To code the campaign material we gathered for each candidate, we developed a set of deductive codes (which we call “TFA codes”) based on the TFA mission statement, TFA core values and TFA priorities (See Appendix B for these documents). These documents serve as the guiding principals for the national organization and TFA annually reports progress towards these

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<sup>1</sup> The election date varied somewhat by location. For five of the races, the election date was November 3,

goals. Using these sources, we developed 20 *a priori* TFA codes (See Appendix C for the complete coding list). We should note that not all of these statements or ideas are unique to Teach For America. In fact, some of these statements and ideas are generally popular and may be used by candidates not affiliated with TFA. Therefore, we apply these codes to both TFA alum candidates and their non-TFA alum opponents.

In contrast to the identification of TFA codes, we inductively developed a set of topic codes through iterative coding to capture what we call “local issue codes”. While reading a randomly selected sample of campaign materials from each election site, both researchers created a list of issues raised by the various candidates. For example, in each of the 12 races, candidates discussed issues such as the school budget, teacher quality, school safety and drop-out rates. The authors compared their lists and finalized an agreed upon set of “local issues codes”. In total, we used 21 “local issue” codes (See Appendix C for the complete coding list).<sup>2</sup>

Both authors coded a subset of campaign literature to check for inter-rater reliability. Based on our initial agreement rates, code definitions were refined and revised. We continued this iterative process until we reached an 80% agreement on a subsample of our data. Each author then coded every piece of campaign literature and the final inter-rater reliability was 81%. Coding was done by line, and a total of 1,862 messages were coded across the 55 candidates examined.

### **Descriptive and Statistical Analysis**

The coded campaign message data were descriptively analyzed using an excel spreadsheet. For each code, we identified the total number of mentions overall, the number of mentions by campaign and the number of mentions by candidate. We also grouped candidates by their TFA status or opponents, to descriptively compare the relative frequency of different campaign messages. Because of the relative consistency across elections, we collapsed all messages into four groups (TFA messages from TFA alums, local issue messages from TFA alums, TFA messages from non-alum opponents and local issues messages from non-alum opponents). Using these categories, we analyzed the data statistically (using t-tests). We also used t-tests to test for significant differences between TFA alumni and their opponents for each individual message.

## **Results**

### **The Use of TFA and Local Issue Messages in Candidate Campaign Material**

Throughout all of the campaigns and across all of the candidates, we found a wide range of messages. All candidates, both TFA alumni and their opponents, used messages that were related to TFAs national priorities and core values as well as local issue messages. But message use was not uniform across candidates. We found that TFA alumni put forth over three times as many TFA messages as their non-TFA opponents; on average, TFA candidates expressed 35 TFA-related messages while their opponents averaged 11 such messages. Thus, as we hypothesized, TFA alumni do attend to the national messages of TFA more often than their non-TFA affiliated opponents. It seems that TFA alumni candidates do bring this national agenda to local education politics.

However, surprisingly, this did not come at the expense of attention to local issue messages. In fact, TFA alumni also reference local issue messages more often. This occurred because we found that TFA alumni candidates use nearly double the messages as their opponents. On average, TFA candidates used 60 messages in their campaigns while non-TFA candidates used only 26 campaign

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<sup>2</sup> While additional “local issues” were identified in the campaigns, only issue codes with at least five occurrences were included in the data.

messages. Put simply, TFA candidates talk more and their talk includes national TFA messages and local issues messages.

*Statistical differences in average message use by TFA status across all campaigns*

Based on the above, it appears that the messages used by alumni and their opponents differ. We found that the differential usage of TFA messages is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), with TFA alumni both communicating more campaign messages in the aggregate and using more TFA specific messages (See Table 1).

Table 1  
*Mean Number of Campaign Message by TFA Alumni Status*

	TFA Alum	Non-TFA Alum	t-statistic
All Messages	60.5	26.4	-3.490***
TFA Messages	35.3	11.0	-4.618**
Local Issue Messages	25.2	15.4	-1.954*
N	12	43	

*Note:* \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

When viewed in the aggregate, it appears that TFA alumni do attend to TFA messages more often. However, some key distinctions arise when we examine specific messages individually. Below we detail some of the more frequently used messages, both TFA and local, to elaborate the main finding above and to point out a few of the exceptions.

*Descriptive analysis of TFA messages*

As was noted above, TFA messages are not necessarily unique to members of the organization. In fact, some of the messages are common to most anyone involved in education. For example, pursuing measurable results, a component of the TFA Core Value “Relentless Pursuit of Results” is nearly ubiquitous in education discussions today. Thus, we expected to find that some TFA messages were used by all candidates, but we expected that the rate of use would be higher for TFA alumni candidates. While this was generally true, as pointed out above, it was not always the case.

The most common TFA message used across all of the candidates was the need include diverse perspectives in school policy decision-making. This is a component of TFAs Core Value “Respect and Humility”. Examples of this message in use included Courtney English, a TFA alumnus running for school board in Atlanta, GA who stated, “We deserve a system that embraces the voice of its community and respects the opinions of its parents.” In a news story regarding candidates running in the Bridgeport, CT election, Maria Pereira, a non-TFA alumni candidate, stressed that “more needs to be done to welcome, involve and inform parents.” Richard Lewis, a non-TFA alumni candidate in Long Beach, CA stated “by building relationships with both the public and private sector, and by having an open and responsive dialogue with you [community members], we can rise to the challenges before us.” While the exact phrasing differs, each of these examples captures the need to seek and consider diverse perspectives as a school board member. This message appeared 240 times across all of the campaign material we coded (accounting for about 13% of all messages). Moreover, unlike our expectation, we found that TFA alumni candidates and their opponents discussed this topic in nearly equal proportions; it was not unique to TFA alumni candidates even though it is an explicit value of TFA.

But this proportional use was not true for the TFA priority of fostering leaders committed to providing equal opportunities for all students. Only TFA alumni candidates commonly used this

message. This may not be surprising given TFA's mission: "One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education." We found that TFA alumni candidates often echoed this sentiment, and in some cases, used the exact phrase from the TFA mission in their campaign literature and media interviews. TFA alumni candidates often used strong wording to stress this point. For example, Kate Conrath, a TFA alumna candidate in Long Beach, CA, wrote in her "Why I am Running" section of her campaign website that she is "passionately invested in public education. [She] believes it remains the best, most equitable solution to propel children to succeed in the United States." Similarly, a press release from Jason Freeman, a TFA alumnus candidate in West Contra Costa, CA, noted "He is sincere about his passion for giving each child the opportunity for a quality education." While TFA candidates did not exclusively use this theme, we found that they were more likely to discuss this issue than their opponents (See Table 2).

The emphasis TFA places on developing educational leaders focused on results was also prevalent throughout the TFA candidate campaign material. This theme appears in both TFA's Priorities and its Core Values: Priority 2 – Maximize the impact of corps members on student achievement and Core Value 1 – Relentless pursuit of results. Repeatedly, TFA alumni candidates emphasized the need for measurable results and often provided concrete examples from their own work in the classroom of achieving measurable results. For example, Kate Conrath, a TFA alumna noted on her website that she is "a leader that will use her expertise in educational strategies to improve test scores" and that she has already accomplished this type of work in her classroom teaching. Her "About Kate" page noted that she "managed to increase 60% of her students' reading levels by 2 or more years and aided nearly 80% of them in reaching grade level in reading by the end of the school year." Similarly, Aaron Pomis, a TFA alumnus candidate in Charlotte, NC stated that he "demonstrated impressive results as a classroom teacher, with his students tripling the average state science scores expected." This emphasis on measurable results and providing concrete numbers from previous work was far more common among TFA alumni candidates. In fact, while TFA alumni mentioned achieving measurable results in previous experiences 11 times, their opponents never offered similar statements. Overall, we find multiple examples of TFA alumni using TFA messages more often than their non-TFA affiliated opponents.

#### *Descriptive analysis of local issues messages*

In addition to examining TFA messages, we also compared the use of local issue messages. The most common issue (TFA message or local issue message) discussed across all of the candidates was the budget. Given the economic conditions in most states and school districts at the time of these elections, the fact that budget related items were discussed 249 times (representing over 13% of all messages) is not especially surprising. Candidates discussed both their qualifications for handling budget issues and their plans to address budget issues in the school district. For example, Aaron Pomis, a TFA alumnus candidate repeatedly noted that he had the budgetary skills needed to serve on the school board and often stated in his material that "with a budget that focuses on what works for kids, students can achieve at a high level." Similarly, Margaret Brodtkin, a non-TFA alumna running for school board in San Francisco stated on her campaign website that "she will defend existing school funding streams and advocate for more state and federally sourced funds." While the majority of candidates discussed budgetary issues in their campaign literature, we found that non-TFA alumni candidates discussed budgetary concerns at almost twice the rate as TFA alumni.

The need for programs such as the arts, athletics, and early childhood education opportunities was another common local issue message (accounting for nearly 5% of all messages). For example, Jason Freeman, a TFA alumnus, provided several examples of the work he did to create new after-school programs. As he noted on his campaign website, "I have spent the past five

years working to improve opportunities for students to engage in science and technology through after-school programs.” In Baton Rouge, LA, Connie Bernard, a non-TFA candidate, stated that she supports “continued improvement of early childhood program” and specifically mentioned the need for family literacy programs.

School safety was another local issue message commonly discussed across candidates. As Mary Hernandez, a non-TFA candidate in Sacramento, CA listed on her website “a safe, secure learning environment for all our students” was among her top priorities. Similarly, Juliet Stipech, a non-TFA alumni candidate in Houston, TX stated in an interview “we need to have a safe, secure infrastructure for the children.”

Among the most commonly cited local issue messages - budgetary issues, supplemental programs and school safety – we found that non-TFA affiliated opponents more frequently raised these issues in their campaign material. While TFA alumni candidates certainly discussed these issues, as the examples provided above suggest, the rate at which they discussed these issues was substantively less. For example, discussions of school safety accounted for about 6% of all non-TFA candidate messages but only 1.4% of TFA alumni candidate messages.

There were some local issue messages that were discussed *more* often by TFA alumni candidates. One of these issues was an emphasis on teacher quality. While not a specific TFA priority or core value, it is certainly a topic often associated with TFA. TFA is often accused of providing low quality, under prepared teachers to high need classrooms and most of the research on TFA concerns teacher quality. Thus, it may not be surprising that this is an issue for which TFA alumni candidates are acutely aware. We found that TFA alumni candidates more frequently discussed this issue in their campaign literature. For example, Eva Kemp-Melder, a TFA alumna candidate in Baton Rouge, LA listed “Recruit and support the best teacher, develop them professional and pay them for excellent results” as her number 1 priority in an interview.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Analysis of Code Usage by TFA Alumni Status*

TFA Messages	TFA Alumni		Non-TFA Alumni		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Priority 1a: Diverse Corp Members Serve as Role Models	5	0.69	9	0.79	14	0.75
Priority 1b: Share Racial/Ethnic and SES Background of Students	7	0.96	18	1.58	25	1.34
Priority 2a: Significant Academic Gains	25	3.44	13	1.14	38	2.04
Priority 2b: Rigorously Evaluate	5	0.69	1	0.09	6	0.32
Priority 2c: Measurable Impact	11	1.52	0	0.00	11	0.59
Priority 2d: Realize Potential and Dreams of Students	26	3.58	27	2.38	53	2.85
Priority 3a: Commitment to Closing the Academic Achievement Gap	11	1.52	47	4.14	58	3.11
Priority 3b: Educational Equity/Equal Opportunity	62	8.54	51	4.49	113	6.07
Core Value 1a: Personal Responsibility for Student Achievement	26	3.58	14	1.23	40	2.15
Core Value 1b: Measurable Results	42	5.79	34	2.99	76	4.08
Core Value 1c: Urgency/Crisis	16	2.20	15	1.32	31	1.66

Core Value 1d: Persevere in the Face of Challenges	8	1.10	20	1.76	28	1.50
Core Value 2a: Optimism	11	1.52	2	0.18	13	0.70
Core Value 2b: Think Boldly	7	0.96	1	0.09	8	0.43
Core Value 2c: Open to New Ideas	5	0.69	20	1.76	25	1.34
Core Value 3: Disciplined Thought	28	3.86	18	1.58	46	2.47
Core Value 4a: Limitations of Experience	1	0.14	2	0.18	3	0.16
Core Value 4b: Seek Diverse Perspectives	98	13.50	142	12.50	240	12.89
Core Value 5a: Honest Self-Scrutiny	0	0.00	2	0.18	2	0.11
Core Value 5b: Work Towards the Broader Good	30	4.13	38	3.35	68	3.65
<b>Total TFA Messages</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>58.40</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>41.73</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>48.23</b>
Local Issue Messages	#	%	#	%	#	%
Accountability	26	3.58	27	2.38	53	2.85
All Students	14	1.93	21	1.85	35	1.88
Budget or Financial Issues	64	8.82	185	16.29	249	13.37
Capital and Classroom Resources	4	0.55	22	1.94	26	1.40
Drop Out/Graduation Rates	4	0.55	42	3.70	46	2.47
Excellence in Education	28	3.86	5	0.44	33	1.77
High Expectations	16	2.20	6	0.53	22	1.18
Leadership	8	1.10	10	0.88	18	0.97
Learning English	0	0.00	9	0.79	9	0.48
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender	1	0.14	17	1.50	18	0.97
Literacy	1	0.14	5	0.44	6	0.32
School Choice	3	0.41	29	2.55	32	1.72
School Safety	10	1.38	68	5.99	78	4.19
Standards	5	0.69	20	1.76	25	1.34
Stepping Stone	1	0.14	4	0.35	5	0.27
Supplemental Programs	19	2.62	69	6.07	88	4.73
Teacher Evaluation	16	2.20	28	2.46	44	2.36
Teacher Quality	34	4.68	27	2.38	61	3.28
Teacher Support or Development	34	4.68	37	3.26	71	3.81
Technology	3	0.41	3	0.26	6	0.32
Transparent Board Communication	11	1.52	28	2.46	39	2.09
<b>Total Local Issue Messages</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>41.60</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>58.27</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>51.77</b>
<b>TOTAL MESSAGES</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,136</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,862</b>	<b>100</b>

Overall, we find that the non-TFA affiliated opponents more frequently cited local issues messages. However, we again examined the statistical significance of the differences we found.

*Statistical significance for each message*

While differences were found, as examined above, the degree of consistency across candidates and elections enabled us to collapse all TFA alumni candidates into a single group. Similarly, we combine all of the non-TFA opponents into a single group. This enables us to examine statistically whether the average use of a message differs significantly between TFA candidates and their non-TFA opponents.

For two-thirds of the TFA related messages, we found a statistically significant difference in their usage rates; TFA alumni candidates used these messages more frequently. TFA alumni candidates use eight of the TFA Core Values messages and five of the TFA Priority messages at a significantly higher rate than their opponents who are not affiliated with TFA (see Table 3). Only two TFA messages (openness to new ideas and commitment to closing the achievement gap) are not used at significantly different rates. However, even in these cases, the direction of the difference is consistent.

Table 3

*Statistical Differences in Mean Number of TFA and Local Issue Messages by Alumni Status*

TFA Messages	Average Use by TFA Alumni	Average Use by Non-TFA Opponent	Difference	Statistical Significance
Priority 1a	0.42	0.21	0.21	
Priority 1b	0.58	0.42	0.16	
Priority 2a	2.08	0.30	1.78	***
Priority 2b	0.42	0.02	0.39	**
Priority 2c	0.92	0.00	0.92	***
Priority 2d	2.17	0.63	1.54	***
Priority 3a	0.92	1.09	-0.18	
Priority 3b	5.17	1.19	3.98	***
Core Value 1a	2.17	0.33	1.84	***
Core Value 1b	3.50	0.79	2.71	***
Core Value 1c	1.33	0.35	0.98	**
Core Value 1d	0.67	0.47	0.20	
Core Value 2a	0.92	0.05	0.87	***
Core Value 2b	0.58	0.02	0.56	**
Core Value 2c	0.42	0.47	-0.05	
Core Value 3	2.33	0.42	1.91	***
Core Value 4a	0.08	0.05	0.04	
Core Value 4b	8.17	3.30	4.86	**
Core Value 5a	0.00	0.05	-0.05	
Core Value 5b	2.50	0.88	1.62	**
Local Issue Messages	Average Use by TFA Alumni	Average Use by Non-TFA Opponent	Difference	Statistical Significance
Accountability	2.17	0.63	1.54	**
All Students	1.17	0.49	0.68	
Budget or Financial Issues	5.33	4.30	1.03	
Capital and Classroom Resources	0.33	0.51	-0.18	
Drop Out/Graduation Rates	0.33	0.98	-0.64	
Excellence in Education	2.33	0.12	2.22	***
High Expectations	1.33	0.14	1.19	***
Leadership	0.67	0.23	0.43	
Learning English	0.00	0.21	-0.21	
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender	0.08	0.40	-0.31	

Literacy	0.08	0.12	-0.03	
School Choice	0.25	0.67	-0.42	
School Safety	0.83	1.58	-0.75	
Standards	0.42	0.47	-0.05	
Stepping Stone	0.08	0.09	-0.01	
Supplemental Programs	1.58	1.60	-0.02	
Teacher Evaluation	1.33	0.65	0.68	
Teacher Quality	2.83	0.63	2.21	***
Teacher Support or Development	2.83	0.86	1.97	*
Technology	0.25	0.07	0.18	
Transparent Board Communication	0.92	0.65	0.27	

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

When we compared the average use of each local issue message, we found fewer differences. TFA alumni candidates used only five (of 21) local issue messages at significantly higher rates. We found that TFA candidates discuss accountability, teacher quality, and teacher support and development and use the phrases “excellence in education” and “high expectations” at higher rates in their campaign material.

The statistical analysis conducted demonstrates that while non-TFA opponents do discuss local issues on the whole at a greater rate, their use of individual messages are not statistically more frequent. In fact, TFA alumni candidates are the ones who stress a small handful of local issue messages.

## Discussion

The results presented here indicate that TFA alumni candidates’ do campaign differently than their opponents. TFA alumni running for school board rely on the national organization’s priorities and core values and frequently cite them in their own campaign literature, using them to explain the values and priorities they hope to promote if elected. TFA alumni candidates incorporated, on average, 35 TFA related messages in their campaign material. It is important to note that many of the non-TFA opponents also include these same messages in their campaign literature, but much less frequently. The opponents used only an average of 11 TFA related messages. Given previous research findings that campaign rhetoric is a good predictor of future legislative action, we can assume that if elected, the TFA alumni candidates would likely pursue an agenda that focuses substantially on the issues and priorities of the national organization. This is consistent with the often-cited story of increasing nationalization of education policy at the expense of local control.

However, the story is not so simple. What may be more interesting is that TFA alumni candidates do not ignore local issues unrelated to TFA national priorities. The data discussed above present evidence that TFA alumni candidates spend a good amount of time also talking about local issues in their campaign literature. Moreover, for five of the local issue messages examined, TFA alumni candidates did so at even higher rates than their opponents. Although TFA alumni candidates include significantly more TFA messages in their campaigns, it does not come at the expense of local issue messages. This is due, in part, to the fact that TFA alumni candidates are active campaigners issuing more than double the number of messages, on average, than their opponents (60 vs. 26).

One possible explanation for this finding is that TFA alumni are more savvy campaigners with greater resources due to the support provided by their TFA networks and/or LEE. We might expect that TFA alumni candidates, who are younger and highly educated, are more technologically

sophisticated and more capable of using social media and the Internet to send more messages through these venues. Yet this does not appear to be the case; we find that some TFA alumni candidates did not have websites and many of the non-TFA opponents used social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter to campaign.

Further, we might suppose that TFA alumni candidates had deeper pockets due to access to the TFA alumni networks, which allowed them to send more messages. However, in several of the elections, newspapers reported total spending by candidates. Where available, the data indicate that TFA alumni were not outspending their opponents.

This suggests that something else must be going on. Rather than attributing these findings to campaigning savvy or resources, we speculate that TFA alumni candidates paid attention to both national and local messages because of a growing recognition that local politics is far from dead. In fact, these candidates provide evidence that there is a new sense of localism growing (Henig, 2009). In the assumed zero-sum game of education governance, the local level has been almost universally characterized as the loser. Teach For America's emphasis on local education politics might have provided evidence that the loss of influence and power was continuing as state and national officials and organizations become increasingly active in the education policy areas. But the research we present here suggests that local political leaders remain influential leaders who continue to shape schooling. These results indicate that there is not a zero-sum game in education governance. Even when members of a national organization become involved in local politics, they must attend to local issues. We find that TFA alumni candidates certainly incorporate national TFA messages to the local election debates, but they also maintain a sense of localism as measured by the number of local issue messages they also incorporate into their campaign literature. Put simply, candidates associated with TFA did double duty; they attended to the national priorities as well as to local concerns and developed campaigns that spoke to both.

Such a finding is not dissimilar to work done in the late 1980s, which investigated the impact of increased state involvement in education policy. Rather than finding a direct trade-off, this work documented that the arena for governance simply expanded (Fuhrman and Elmore, 1990). The findings we present here continue in this tradition; TFA's involvement in school board elections may actually be expanding the scope of local school boards through candidates who bring additional priorities to the forefront of their campaigns and likely to the actions of school boards if they are elected.

## **Conclusion**

While many focus on the problems local control has created for the U.S. educational system, local school boards have a long tradition and continue to make important decisions that shape the future of our schools. Even after decades of increased federal and state involvement in U.S. education policy, local boards remain a venue for creating change. In fact, school board elections appear to be growing in their visibility with donors pouring millions of dollars in donations into some school board candidate coffers (e.g. Nichols, 2011). Like Teach For America, it seems that many education reformers now recognize that school board members, whether everyone likes it or not, remain key to shaping the future of our schools. Therefore, rather than debating whether school boards have lost power, this research points to the need to better understand how local politics is changing and expanding as new voices enter the arena. As this work demonstrates, national leaders may see local school boards as a place to make significant investments. This renewed interest has the potential to bring new resources and ideas to local school politics, but it also may fundamentally reshape how local voices participate and whether their interests are represented.

Our findings strongly suggest a new era of localism may be emerging where non-local actors “still need to tap into local governmental capacity to build locally-based supportive coalitions if they want to be effective and to maintain their access over time” (Henig 2009, p. 127). Teach For America may be employing this strategy in their efforts to spread their education reform agenda. While operating as a national organization, they recognize that they must also tap into the local arena in order to affect change, and supporting alumni to run for local school boards may be the most effective way to advance their agenda. Supporting and encouraging alumni to run for school boards, however, is no guarantee that the national agenda will prevail. As this research also demonstrates the concerns of local constituents cannot simply be set aside. Recognizing that one must be elected by local voters, TFA alumni candidates paid significant attention to issues that were often very particular to the unique context of their local school district.

In addition to reframing research on local school boards, this work also suggests that research on Teach For America must be reframed. Too often, researchers focus on questions related to teacher quality, often comparing the effectiveness of TFA teachers (as measured by the performance of their students on standardized test scores) to other teachers who are not part of TFA. Debates about the effectiveness of TFA teachers continue to churn, but the myopic focus on this aspect of TFA has led researchers to miss a key aspect of TFA’s mission: the development of educational leaders. TFA actively supports multiple initiatives aimed at developing exceptional educational leaders. Further, their definition of leadership is broad, including educational leaders who can effectively run excellent schools and those who can provide political and policy leadership through publicly elected positions. While our research is not an evaluation of these initiatives, it does demonstrate the growing influence TFA is having education policy and politics in new and expanding ways. As more TFA alumni assume an ever-wider range of leadership roles, researchers ought to consider the political and policy impacts of these new leaders. Specifically, as the number of TFA alumni seeking, and winning, school board positions increases, future research should expand our analysis to investigate whether alumni do, in fact, continue to attend to both national and local issues as they work to implement education reform. Continued work in this area will more accurately describe the true nature of governance and shifting power dynamics in education politics.

After a decade of federal policy attempting to work around local institutions, Teach For America seems to recognize that local authority, while significantly changed, is far from obsolete. Although TFA’s involvement is relatively new and the sample examined here is relatively small, the case of TFA alumni running for school board presents a new and interesting way to understand education governance; rather than characterizing the relationships between different levels of influence as in a tug-of-war, we should be examining the ever expanding nature of education politics.

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Appendix A  
Candidate List

Candidate Name	Election Location	Date of Election	TFA Alum	Winner	Self or Kids Attend(ed) Schools in the District
Courtney English	Atlanta, GA	3-Nov-09	Yes	No	Yes
Bobby Simmons	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Unknown
Juan Hernandez	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	No	No
Leticia Colon	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Unknown
Maria Pereira	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Yes
Nate Snow	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	Yes	No	No
Patrick Crossin	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Unknown
Raul Quiroga	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
Sauda Baraka	Bridgeport, CT	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
Aaron Pomis	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	Yes	No	No
Hans Peter Plostender	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
James Ross	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	Unknown
Joel Levy	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	No
Joyce Waddell	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	No
Nicole Hudson	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
Teresa Tudor	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
Vivian Mitchell	Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC	3-Nov-09	No	No	Yes
Brandon J Dcuir	East Baton Rouge, LA	2-Oct-10	No	No	No
Brian Blackwell	East Baton Rouge, LA	2-Oct-10	No	No	Unknown
Connie Bernard	East Baton Rouge, LA	2-Oct-10	No	Yes	Yes
Eva Kemp-Melder	East Baton Rouge, LA	2-Oct-10	Yes	No	No
Max Turner	East Feliciana, LA	2-Oct-10	Yes	No	Unknown
Judith Cruz	Houston, TX	2-Nov-10	Yes	No	Yes
Juliet Stipech	Houston, TX	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Yes
Peter Schwethelm	Houston, TX	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
John McGinnis	Long Beach, CA	29-Dec-09	No	Yes	Unknown
Kate Conrath	Long Beach, CA	29-Dec-09	Yes	No	No
Pauline Stenberg	Long Beach, CA	29-Dec-09	No	No	Yes
Raymond Chavarria	Long Beach, CA	29-Dec-09	No	No	No
Richard Lewis	Long Beach, CA	29-Dec-09	No	No	Yes
Molly Stevens	Manitou Springs, CO	3-Nov-09	Yes	No	Yes
Andrea Corso	Sacramento, CA	2-Nov-10	Yes	No	No
Jeff Cuneo	Sacramento, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	No
Mary Hernandez	Sacramento, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Bill Barnes	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	No
Emily Murase	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Yes
Hydra Mendoza	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Yes
Jamie Rafaela Wolfe	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Kim-Shree Maufas	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Unknown
Margaret Brodtkin	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Natasha Hoehn	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	Yes	No	Yes
Omar Khalif	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Yes
Starchild	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Tom Chan	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Winifred Dajani	San Francisco, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown
Jorge Hernandez	South Whittier, CA	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Yes
Jose Alvarado	South Whittier, CA	3-Nov-09	No	No	Unknown
Layla Avila	South Whittier, CA	3-Nov-09	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Sylvia Macias	South Whittier, CA	3-Nov-09	No	Yes	Unknown
Audrey Miley	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Unknown

Charles Cowens	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	No	No	Yes
Charles Ramsey	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Unknown
Elaine Merriweather	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Unknown
Jason Freeman	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	Yes	No	Unknown
Madeline Dronenberg	West Contra Costa, CA	2-Nov-10	No	Yes	Yes

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Appendix B  
*Teach For America Mission, Motto, Core Values and Priorities*

**Mission (2010):**

Our mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation's most promising future leaders in the effort.

**Motto:**

One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

**Core Values (2010)**

Teach For America's core values reflect how we as an organization want our staff to operate, individually and collectively. Our core values are central to our culture and represent the style of operating that we believe to be critical for moving us most quickly and purposefully toward our goals.

- **Relentless pursuit of results:** We assume personal responsibility for achieving ambitious, measurable results in pursuit of our vision. We persevere in the face of challenges, seek resources to ensure the best outcomes, and work toward our goals with a sense of purpose and urgency.
- **Sense of possibility:** We approach our work with optimism think boldly, and greet new ideas openly.
- **Disciplined thought:** We think critically and strategically in search of the best answers and approaches, reflect on past experiences and data to draw lessons for the future, and make choices that are deeply rooted in our mission
- **Respect and humility:** We value all who are engaged in this challenging work. We keep in mind the limitations of our own experiences and actively seek out diverse perspectives.
- **Integrity:** We ensure alignment between our actions and our beliefs, engage in honest self-scrutiny, and do what is right for the broader good.

**Priorities (2008 Annual Report)<sup>3</sup>**

**Priority One:** Grow in scale and diversity

**Priority Two:** Maximize the impact of corps members on student achievement

**Priority Three:** Foster the leadership of our alumni as a force for change

**Priority Four:** Building an enduring American institution

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<sup>3</sup> Additional details provided for each priority in the annual report.

Appendix C  
Coding Scheme

TFA Codes		Local Issue Codes	
Code	Description	Code	Description
Priority 1a	Grow in Scale and Diversity: Diverse Corps Members to Serve as Role Models	ACC*	"Accountability"
Priority 1b	Grow in Scale and Diversity: Share Racial/Ethnic and SES Background of Students	ALL*	
Priority 2a	Maximize the Impact of Corps Members on Student Achievement: Significant Academic Gains	BUD	"ALL" Students Budget or finances discussed; Ability to address the budget crisis in district; Budget skills; New lines of revenues; Ensuring budgets are not cut
Priority 2b	Maximize the Impact of Corps Members on Student Achievement: Rigorously Evaluate	CAP	Capital and Classroom Resources – specifically textbooks, class size, new buildings or rooms added
Priority 2c	Maximize the Impact of Corps Members on Student Achievement: Measurable Impact	CHOICE	School Choice – providing the ability for families to choose a specific school for their child
Priority 2d	Maximize the impact of corps members on Student Achievement: Realize Potential and Dreams	DROP	Drop out or graduation rates discussed as either improving or an issue to be addressed
Priority 3a	Foster Leadership of Alumni as a “force for change”: Commitment to Closing the Academic Achievement Gap	ENG	Learning English is an important skills student need, more efforts need to be made to meet the needs of students who are learning English
Priority 3b	Foster Leadership of Alumni as a “force for change”: Education Equity	EXCEL*	“Excellence in Education”
Core Value 1a	Relentless Pursuit of Results: Personal Responsibility for Achievement of Students	HIGH*	“High Expectations” Leadership – the importance of new, bold, improved, etc. leadership in the district. Discussion of candidate as a leader. Examples of leadership record. Literacy – any discussion of literacy in
Core Value 1b	Relentless Pursuit of Results: Measurable Results	LEAD	
Core Value 1c	Relentless Pursuit of	LIT	

Core Value 1d	Results: Urgency Relentless Pursuit of	LGBT	school. Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender –
Core Value 2a	Results: Persevere in the Face of Challenges Sense of Possibility: “Optimism”	SAFE	any discussion of the need to address the issues of these specific students. School Safety – needing to improve school safety or discussing the current record of school safety.
Core Value 2b	Sense of Possibility: Think “Boldly”	STAND”	“Standards”
Core Value 2c	Sense of Possibility: Open to New Ideas	STEP	Stepping Stone – whether running for school board is a stepping stone for a future political career
Core Value 3	Disciplined Thought	SUPP	Supplemental Programs – discussing afterschool programs, the arts, sports/recreational programs and early childhood/pre-K programs in the district.
Core Value 4a	Respect and Humility: Limitations of Experiences	TEVAL	Teacher Evaluation – the role of evaluating teachers, the need to evaluate teachers or specifics about how to evaluate teachers
Core Value 4b	Respect and Humility: Seek Diverse Perspectives	TECH	Technology – addressing issues of inequity in technology in the schools or new ways to use technology in the district
Core Value 5a	Integrity: Honest Self- Scrutiny	TQ	Teacher Quality – the need to improve teacher quality, discussion of hiring “the best” teachers, ways to improve teacher quality.
Core Value 5b	Integrity: Work towards broader good	TRANS	Transparent Board Communication – discussions of making decision making clear and open to the public. Discussing ways to promote transparency or how the candidate will communicate with the public and parents
		TS	Teacher Support/Development – programs for or discussing the need to further support existing teachers to improve teaching and learning

\* Note: The exact phrase was required for the code to be used.

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Rebecca Jacobsen, PhD. is an Associate Professor of Education Policy and Politics at Michigan State University. Her research uses a political perspective to examine how education policies shape education politics. Her recent research examines accountability policies and how school performance information shapes parent and public perceptions of school performance. Prior to enter academia, Rebecca taught in the New York City Public School system.

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Tamara Wilder Linkow, Ph.D. is an Associate in the Education Practice at Abt Associates. She has a wide range of experience in educational research focusing on federal policy, accountability, school choice, and program evaluation. Her current research interests are focused on strategies to improve college access. Prior to joining to Abt Associates, she was a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Michigan, where her research concentrated on issues of college preparation, enrollment, and persistence.

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