

**Urban Educational Change:
Building Trust and Alignment among Fragmented Coalitions of Color**

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ABSTRACT: This article is a historical case study of an attempt to build a citywide coalition in Rochester, NY. The coalition wanted to improve urban education by implementing community based wrap-around supports in a similar form as the well-respected Harlem Children’s Zone. Our study found that groups had difficulty creating buy-in for this reform effort because of fragmented coalitions, changeover in leadership, and ambitious, yet evolving goals. Political theories relating to coalition building and civic capacity suggest fragmented coalitions can hamper initiatives when bridging between communities of color and power elites fails to take place, but our study suggests additional limitations when varying communities of color are not aligned in their efforts. Our historical case study suggests that strategic development of trust and coalition building is necessary to build civic capacity relating to urban education improvement – particularly between communities of color and power elites, as well as across communities of color.

Keywords: Community coalitions, civic capacity, urban school reform, communities of color

Introduction

Urban education reform is a complex and oftentimes contentious area. Strategies to align interests in urban areas not only vary by the substance of the reform (Boyd & Wheaton, 1983), but also are highly influenced by the people involved and the human, fiscal, and social resources they draw upon (Hess & Leal, 2001; Stone, 2005). The framing of agendas and development of inter-organizational networks by these individuals (and groups they are connected to) help to inform the research on urban educational change, by further considering the synergy that must exist between purpose and participants. In particular, when operating as “urban regimes,” governmental and non-governmental groups are better able to develop long-lasting partnerships and mobilize resources to enact a shared agenda (Stone, 1989). In this article, we use Stone’s concept of urban regime theory -- and related literature around power and coalition building -- to study how educational coalitions organize in struggling urban districts to improve outcomes for youth and what hampers their efforts.

This article is a historical case study of an attempt in Rochester, New York to address one of the most resource-“challenged areas of the city in order to improve schools” (Rochester Children’s Zone Community Plan, 2007, March). Rochester, located in the northern part of the State near Lake Ontario, is like many northern cities that lost large-scale manufacturing, but managed to recoup jobs through service industries and the post-secondary sector. Prior to the 1960s, Rochester experienced rapid development, growth, and success around manufacturing and was home to several corporate headquarters (Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch and Lomb). However, the 1960s began to see changes, including a decline in the total population by nearly

14,000 people resulting in a total population of 318,611 in 1960 (Warren Hill, 2010, p. 38) with an overall population decline of 34% from 1950 to 2010 (Office of the New York State Comptroller, n.d). Rochester also experienced a shift in its demographic makeup. Most notably, the African American population increased from 7,590 in 1950 to about 40,000 in 1964 (Wadhvani, n.d.). In 2010, Black/African Americans represented 41% of the city residents and Hispanics/Latinos represented 16% of a total population of 209,983 (U.S. Census Bureau).

Many coalitions operated between the 1960s and 2000s, but what is important about the Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation (RSCCC) is that it began with a desire to bring coordinated services through the school district, local government, community organizations (non-profit and for-profit), and churches in a way that had not occurred before – in the form of an urban regime. The initial reform plan called for “widespread and deep change within the Rochester Children’s Zone (RCZ) community as well as institutional and policy levels outside of the community” (Jimenez, 2007). Importantly, this effort sought to produce neighborhood-wide improvement for individuals living within a specific area of the city, an area primarily comprised of African American and Latino/a residents.

Our study of RSCCC is guided by the following research question: How did a cross-agency coalition¹ emerge in Rochester around educational equity? What facilitated (or hindered) this coalition’s ability to leverage resources toward its educational policy agenda? Through reports, newspaper articles, and other documents, we offer a close examination of who was formally involved in this effort and what seemed to limit the sustainability of these efforts.

Conceptual Framework

Examining urban regimes focuses on *who* is making reforms in a city to understand which reforms are pursued, which are successful, and why they are successful (Shipps, 2003; Burns, 2002; Mitra & Frick, 2011; Bulkley, 2007). As mentioned above, urban regimes involve partnerships among actors and the resources they mobilize. At the root of any urban regime is the idea of power. Power is the capacity to act in terms of both the resources that one might exploit to influence another’s behavior and the leadership to mobilize these resources effectively (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). Traditionally, the interrelationship of power in the community or community’s power structure involves a small group of influential citizens or interest groups competing for a role in policy development. However, research suggests it is important to examine not just this small group of citizens, but also the larger connections across individuals and agencies including the relationships and resources they can enact on social problems (Orr & Johnson, 2008; Stone, 2008).

For an urban regime to function and bring about reform, it must work to establish partnerships, which result in greater civic capacity. Stone and his co-authors (2001) note that for reform to be successful, actors must mobilize around a common objective or agenda. The capacity of a community toward change lies in the ability of key actors to develop a shared focus on community problems with the existence of a broad-based network of both elites and ordinary citizens involved in deliberation and action. The ability to engage a community’s civic capacity relies on a variety of institutions and individuals who contribute to a shared vision; participate in the change process; and plan to maintain the community over time (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001; Mitra, Movit, & Frick, 2008; Portz et al., 1999).

¹ It was originally called the Rochester Children’s Zone but was required to change its name and became the Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation (RSCCC). Interestingly it also tried out other names but kept facing legal and piracy issues. The RSCCC was the result of a naming contest (Jimenez, 2009)

Mitra and Frick (2011) argue the *purpose* of an educational coalition and *engagement* in these coalitions are important to consider. The synergy between educational purpose and engagement is an important aspect of considering the multi-sector coalition in Rochester. We were interested in the interagency aspect of these efforts because, as Tate (2012) argues, leaders, reformers, researchers, and educators must move beyond “parallel play.” As he points out, “if the goal is to produce a civic regime engaged in a collaborative problem solving journey where success is measured by the amendment of challenging social problems, then interdisciplinary and interagency action should be a point of emphasis in the mode of operation” (p. 524).

We were also focused on the racial dimensions of the efforts because political scholars have argued for a deeper consideration of how race affects regime formation and reform coalitions (Kraus, 2005; Seamster, 2015). Race may play a role with intra-coalition building, especially around trust (or lack thereof) among different community actors (Rusch, 2010). For example, Rusch found that Black group members in Detroit expressed difficulty forging relationships with White organizers, contending that historical racialized power differentials came to bear on how relationships were formed and enacted. The literature from these studies (particularly the work of Rusch, Stone, and Mitra and their collaborators) informed our efforts to understand the evolving civic capacity in Rochester in the early 2000s and how these efforts might inform new coalitions emerging today.

Context

The decision to have the initiative take place in one particular area of Rochester was because it had the most severe challenges of any part of the city, specifically:

- 42% of residents below poverty (compared to citywide poverty of 26%);
- median household income of \$19,000 (compared to citywide income of \$27,000);
- 8.3% of Rochester Children’s Zone residents were unemployed (compared to 5.4% citywide unemployment rate);
- 68% of households were headed by females (compared to 16% city wide); and 96% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch (13% higher than rest of the District).



Figure 1. Boundaries of the Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation (originally Rochester Children’s Zone).

The city of Rochester encompasses one school district, the Rochester City School District (RCSD), serving 28,300 students, 80% of whom are eligible for free and reduced price lunches. The RCSD exhibits the highest poverty rate among New York State's "Big 5" districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Yonkers). Importantly, the demographics of RCSD differ greatly from the city and surrounding Monroe county, which is much more homogeneous racially and financially more secure (Table 1). The demographics of areas of the city serving a few schools of RCSD are different from the overall citywide demographics as well.

Table 1: Racial and Ethnic Characteristics of the Larger Rochester Metro Area

	*Monroe County	*Rochester City	**Rochester City School District
African American/Black	15.2%	41.7%	57.3%%
Asian/Native American/East Indian/Other	3.8%	3.6%	3.9%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	7.3%	16.4%	28.4%
White	76.1%	43.7%	10.1%

*Census 2010 **RSCD District Profile 2016-2017

The RCSD has struggled in terms of academic performance for decades. Recently it has a 4-year graduation rate of 51%, the lowest of the five big city districts, and is currently in need of improvement (NYSED, n.d.). The RCSD has also had strained internal race relations (Macaluso, 2006a; Towler, 2007) and was plagued by infighting along racial/ethnic lines (Macaluso, 2007). In fact, newspaper articles documented these tensions which fell along both African American/White and African American/Latino lines, including complaints by African American clergy leaders that not enough black teachers were hired in the district, which had a primarily white teaching staff, and a view that the Latino Superintendent had "locked African Americans out of the district's higher-paying administrative positions" (Macaluso, 2007). It is in this context of a challenging urban community and school district that the RSCCC worked to bring together groups to alter these trends at least in a targeted part of the city.

Two community organizations are important fixtures in the Rochester community given the demographics and needs described above: the Urban-League and the IBERO-American Action League (IBERO). Both came into being after the Rochester Race Riots, which took place in June 1964 and resulted in over \$1 million of property damage, 350 people injured, and over 800 arrests (PBS, n.d.). At that time, several organizations were founded that called for changes to hiring practices, housing demands, and eventually educational change (Ares & Escher, 2015; Urban League of Rochester, n.d.).

While the Urban League of Rochester (ULR), an affiliate of the National Urban League, was formed in 1965 to "address the material needs of poor and minority citizens in areas such as housing, employment, health, and economic parity" (Urban League of Rochester, n.d.), it is by and large perceived to be an organization dedicated to the needs and interests of African Americans in the community. The ULR has also maintained a focus on education in several ways. For example, the ULR joined with the Council for Educational Development in 1986 and implored local businesses to participate in the effort to decrease dropouts of RCSD (Urban League of Rochester, 1986). The Urban League also established the Black Scholars Program that recognizes black students in the Rochester area who graduate from high school with a B or better grade average.

The IBERO-American Action League (IBERO) was established in 1968 to provide basic

needs, including food, clothing, and housing to those working in local agricultural work. Today, “IBERO is a dual-language human services agency that teaches individuals of all backgrounds how to become self-sufficient” (IBERO-American Action League, Inc., n.d.). Though IBERO says it supports individuals of all backgrounds, IBERO has primarily focused on educational issues through working with the RCSD to establish bilingual education, including commissioning reports in the 1980s and 1990s with the hopes of improving the educational attainment of Latino students (Ares & Escher, 2015).

Methods

With a focus on RSCCC in the urban context of Rochester, NY, this qualitative study utilizes original source program documents, newspaper articles, and existing research regarding reform efforts that emphasize addressing low performing, segregated schooling in the city to bound the historical case (Stake, 1995). The case is bound by the time that the Rochester Children’s Zone was an initiative under consideration (2004) until it dissolved in (2009) as the Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation. In particular, the case study focuses on RSCCC as well as two other community groups: Urban League and IBERO (Table 2).

Understanding what transpired with the RSCCC over its short period of time through a content analysis approach allowed us to focus on the retrospective experiences of the program, but with a focus on the real time ways that events were reported, while RSCCC was getting off the ground and through the various stages, before its demise. This provided us with a lens of “what was” as opposed to the wistful lens of “what might have been.” Importantly, by looking at historical documentation of the events and processes, we are limited in our understanding of the events as they unfolded; however, a historical content analysis approach allows for additional community voices to be depicted based on how the local media saw the reform initiative and the kinds of issues that were emerging that were not documented formally by the collaborative.

Table 2: Key Community Organizations involved with the Neighborhood Reform Initiative

Name of Organization	Year Started	Mission	Governance
Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation	2007	To provide an array of social services—health care, child care, family support and education- to improve outcomes for youth and families	Originally a program of United Way and Rochester City School District; later became independent organization
Urban League of Rochester	1965	To address the material needs of poor and minority citizens in areas such as housing, employment, health, and economic parity	Independent Community-based Organization

IBERO-American Action League	1968	A dual-language human services agency that teaches individuals of all backgrounds how to become self-sufficient	Independent Community-based Organization
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Data collection involved locating historic materials, documents, and traditional media sources (Newspapers, Television News transcripts), including “The Minority Reporter,” a weekly newspaper in print and online that bills itself as the source of “Community News and Information covering Rochester's African American Community” (Minority Reporter, 2017), and its bilingual sister paper, “La Voz”, which exists for “Rochester’s Hispanic Community: Our city, our culture, our voice.” (Rochesterlavoz.com, 2017). These and other sources were targeted for articles relating to the efforts of this coalition. Data were stored and organized in Dropbox.

Data analysis utilized a thematic approach to content analysis of archival documents and other documents. Analysis involved coding and re-coding of original documents focusing on areas of our conceptual framework relating to coalitions, engagement in policy issues, power dynamics, resources, etc. We also coded for emerging areas having to do with voice, leadership, and race. Our analysis involved systematic coding across sources both thematically (Barbour, 2008; Bernard, & Ryan, 2010; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and inductively (Charmaz, 2006; Lichtman, 2013).

Findings

In the following section, we discuss the evolution of this cross-sector coalition noting key aspects of leadership, including turnover and conflict that undermined the efforts. In addition, we specifically consider that tensions that prohibited the coalition from sufficiently addressing the underlying racial history and dynamics of the individuals and groups involved.

Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation emerged in 2007 from efforts by the then RCSD Superintendent—a Latino with strong ties in the community—that had started as early as 2005. The initial goal was to model it after the Harlem Children’s Zone and the Obama Administration’s Promise Neighborhood program specifically “to provide an array of social services—health care, child care, family support and education” (Jimenez, 2007). The initiative was focused on a particular few blocks of the city that included African American and Latino families and was selected because it was “home to the most academically challenged students who are living in the highest concentrations of poverty” (Jimenez, 2009).

RSCCC was originally funded through the United Way of Rochester and school district funds (Macaluso, 2006b). After the two years of planning, funds were provided by the State of New York. The initial iteration of the RSCCC, while it was the Rochester Children’s Zone, was overseen by a Design Team led by a RCSD official and was supported by other RCSD staff, area residents, social service providers (including IBERO), and staff from the Mayor’s office (Macaluso, 2006b). Notably missing was the Urban League of Rochester, who had attempted “A Call to Action” in 1986, which was also a comprehensive initiative, but one that failed to garner support from the larger community (Macaluso, 2005). Interestingly, the person in charge of the Urban League at the time of the “Call to Action” was William Johnson, Jr., a Black leader in Rochester, who served for 21 years as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Urban League before becoming Rochester’s first African American mayor in 1994. He ended his term as mayor in 2005, right as the Rochester Children’s Zone initiative was getting off the ground and as a White former police chief was taking over in this role.

While the initial plan that encompassed 40 multi-year objectives and 186 strategies involved the mayor, a social services agency director, and an attorney (Rochester Children's Zone Community Plan, 2007), key business groups were reluctant to participate because of the lead role of the RCSD. In fact, the Rochester Business Alliance CEO stated "I am a strong believer that we don't need to put more funds into the district" when asked about RSCCC (Towler, 2005). One of the reasons for this type of response is that there is a long history of educational reform in the RCSD that has not garnered the desired results, and per pupil spending is a contested concept that many believe is already sufficient. In some ways, pockets of Rochester organizations experience fatigue around the RCSD and want to invest in economic positives that spotlight the best of what the city has to offer. During the initial stages of the RSCCC, there was a general sense that the community, writ large, was not engaged in this as an engine for urban reform and that this reform initiative was purely the efforts of a small, elite, and influential group. An editorial in the alternative newspaper summarizes this view when they pointed out, "there is no widespread community involvement...no insistence that the Children's Zone must be adequately funded and supported" (Towler, 2006). The initiative's own report notes that it would take at least 10 years to realize the vision, suggesting the need for widespread community involvement and commitment (RCZ, 2007).

The garnering of support was also hampered by the contentious relationship between the RCSD Superintendent and the United Church Ministries, an assembly of African American churches (Macaluso, 2007). In fact, the RSCCC group admitted the challenges it faced in developing its vision and plan given the diverging needs and interests and underlying cultural tensions in its plan published in 2007. As stated in the plan, "the Rochester Children's Zone Community Planning process proved to be a complex maze of competing expectations, historical accounts, cross-cultural and cross-class relationships, and social policies" (Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation, 2007, p.13).

Organizationally, the RSCCC experienced several transitions from losing key leaders to shifting the focus and intent of the organization over the four years (2005-2009) that it went from planning to process stages. First, some key supporters left the city of Rochester, including both the Superintendent and the Mayor who were instrumental in bringing the idea to the larger community and garnering support. Both of these leaders believed that the RSCCC would yield improved student achievement over time. Unfortunately, as one community member commented, "nobody picks up the leadership. In many ways, you're seeing the weaknesses in this community: the lack of broad leadership, the sense of contentment" (Towler, 2006).

Another issue that came with their departure was a shift in the mission and focus of the organization. The original intent – perhaps driven by the leadership of the RCSD - was to target schools in the neighborhoods designated as the RSCCC area to serve as resource centers for both adults and children. As stated in the original plan, unlike the Harlem Children's Zone, Rochester's approach "was launched within the Rochester City School system itself, had schools as its initial and primary concern, and expanded into the community" (RCZ, 2007, p. 12). However, perhaps as the United Way became more involved, the emphasis shifted toward coordinating services across agencies in the community (outside of the school system) and the initiative became more focused on "youth and financial literacy, nurturing young children, health care, and community safety for residents ...with 21 local agencies who provide the services" (New York State Education Department, 2010). This shift meant that instead of the original purpose that was designed to provide stronger supports to students "24/7" in high needs schools by infusing those schools with community and social services, the schools and schools systems

seemed to move to the periphery in an effort to broaden the involvement of the whole community. In fact, the first RSCCC executive director shared the exact opposite vision of what was in the original reform plan. She was not interested in a focus on schools as a hub for services and claimed that the RSCCC was broader than the Harlem's Children's Zone. Her emphasis was instead on "action teams -- which address health and wellness, parent and youth support, education, community safety, and housing and community development-- [we] must build partnerships with the government and community agencies located in the zone, bring in more businesses to add jobs and offer job training, and garner donations for an endowment that will make the zone self-sustaining" (Jimenez, 2009). This was the first step in the RSCCC moving from being its own organization that worked to bring community services to groups through the schools one that wanted to, as Banister stated, "get business people to come and bring businesses into the zone to invest...You've got to get people to come and live and work and be part of the zone"(Jimenez, 2009). This approach was a radical departure from the initial process that was put in place, even though the mission remained mostly the same.

In addition, the RSCCC evolved from a program to an organization with its own 501c3 status. Initially, the RSCCC Board was made up of five residents of the "zone" and four non-residents, with the stated purpose that it would be "deliberate in advocating for the needs of every individual in this area regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or social status" (Newell, 2007). However, the Board experienced a tragic loss when one of the resident members was murdered on his way home from a community meeting, which resulted in the residents losing their majority on the Board. This shift became one more way that the organizing principles changed and upset the continuity of the RSCCC.

This was then compounded when the Board and Executive Director had a public falling out in the Spring of 2009 (Jimenez, 2009), and a state audit in 2010 (New York State Education Department, 2010) revealed an acknowledgement of mismanagement of some finances through poor record keeping, among other problems. More recently, a 2015 report on poverty noted that the "by 2009, the initiative had closed its office, beset by upheavals in leadership and infighting" (Riley & Singer, 2015). Despite reference in *Time* magazine (Caplan & Dell, 2007) and an extensive planning and pre-implementation process, RSCCC never moved beyond the process stage and, in fact, continued to be seen in the community as a top-down approach to change that failed to engage community support (Macaluso, 2012), despite the involvement of more than 450 individuals and the "building of cross-cultural relationships – across service providers, institutions, funders, politicians, and residents" (Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation, 2007). The people who were involved in the leadership of RSCCC and how their organizations and agendas steered the direction of the work and consideration of which groups were not represented is critical to understanding this disconnect.

Discussion

Our analysis reveals that when individuals who were central to founding organizations and supporting change initiatives left leadership positions there was a period of unrest with the collaborative. In many ways, what should have become a transition to a more maintenance stage for the organization instead became characterized by infighting as well as a change in the implementation and direction of the mission. Ironically, as the RSCCC became a corporation with the goal of linking multiple organizations to neighborhoods, we found little evidence of meaningful interactions across these agencies or the ways that residents in these areas benefitted. In fact, the engagement of different sectors within this coalition was limited, weakening this

coalition's potential as an urban regime. The local editorial board highlighted "distress signals" including turf wars and political tensions as early as 2008, stating that not only was a new champion necessary but that the group needed to reduce the scale of its efforts, get buy-in from service providers and the new superintendent, as well as acquire more active support from both the mayor and county executive. The newspaper team pointed out that: "a well-planned, broadly supported Children's Zone is the best way to end existence of the two Rochesters - one middle-class to affluent and the other poor like the Wilkins St. neighborhood. Build one community" (Rochester Democrat and Chronicle Editorial Board, 2008).

In the early mobilization phase, education insiders were prominent in ways that undermined the buy-in for the RSCCC in the broader community, such as the business community and local neighborhood groups, because of the status of achievement in the district and perceptions around hiring, fiscal management, and engagement from the larger community. As these key individuals left the initiative, educational "outsiders" took on pivotal decision making roles. While these individuals in many ways were insiders to the area (in spite of being outsiders of the education system) and intimately familiar with some of the challenges, they did not have the same status or power as the original advocates. In addition, the group lacked a strong coalition at any one point of time of both elite and broader community members – and rather seemed to hang in a politically tenuous balance with both groups. Additionally, the coalition seemed to have difficulty penetrating two groups necessary for change in an urban setting: governmental actors and activists (of color or white) who are trusted and can cross racial boundaries.

More recent efforts around urban regime theory has focused on issues of class, yet the history of Rochester suggests that historical constructs around race and advocacy continue to play an important role as coalitions try to bring about policy change. In addressing these racial tensions, Rusch (2010) points to the role of key people, termed *bridging mechanisms*—charismatic and caring individuals who worked to appeal to many types of group members, and were able to keep multi-racial groups focused and united. In Rochester, the lack of continuity with individuals who could serve as bridges across community groups hindered the efforts to develop these kinds of trusting relationships that crossed different cultural communities and in particular, the initiative did not seem to draw upon leaders of color with these types of bridging ties. For those key leaders who were connected to a variety of groups, underlying political tensions seemed to get in the way. However, mobilizing key leaders in the African American and Hispanic community who could have reached out to the groups who had contentious relationships might have increased the number of people actively supporting this community reform effort. Though building upon the United Way's African American Leadership and Hispanic Leadership Development Programs were mentioned as strategies for building capacity neither of these groups were clearly engaged in a formal way with the initiative.

The importance of engaging with issues of race and racism existed throughout the original plan, which emphasized targeting both cross-cutting areas in community safety and health and wellness. For example, the initial report that developed out of community meetings, which began in June of 2006, included the following:

- Ensure that all policies and programs promote racial equity to increase the positive impact on all children in the Rochester Children's Zone;
- Respond to the unique characteristics of racial, cultural, and language groups when developing programs, delivering programs, & communicating with Rochester Children's Zone residents;

- Assess policies and practices (sentencing, incarceration, detention, data reporting) through a racial equity lens to reduce youth violence, crime, and recidivism (repeating criminal behavior);
- Eliminate health disparities (prevalence, outcomes, & interventions) between racial and cultural groups (RCZ, 2007).

However, it was not clear that the collaborative had the leadership capacity to tackle these important areas around racial equity as the steps to reach these broad and vague goals were never articulated. In essence, step-by-step approaches linked to training or decision making or other areas might have built the capacity of RSCCC to ensure that all policies and programs promoted racial equity, but these were not evident.

RSCCC never seemed to move out of the planning stages because of underlying issues of trust, competing interests, and fragmented communities of color, areas which point to structural issues that may very well date back to the race riots (Hare, 2014). Put another way, that two independent newspapers consider Latino and Black populations as distinct populations of readers seems to focus on the ways that these groups are dissimilar. But are there areas that their combined interests around – e.g., the area of racial equity – might have strengthened the advocacy of Urban League and IBERO at a critical time? As urban centers continue to face on-going challenges, it is important that common interests are capitalized upon for successful urban sustainability.

Given the demographics of the neighborhoods targeted by the RSCCC, it might have been useful to develop particular programs, e.g., dual language programs or black parenting programs, at different schools, yet this type of myopic emphasis can prohibit the larger community from widely benefiting, which can also lead to strife. When groups are used to competing for limited resources, they can find it hard to work in cooperation on projects that require a good deal of trust. We found several instances of Latino and African American community members being at odds around educational issues that impacted the ability of the RCSSS to effectively organize and mobilize for educational reform. For instance, the Black community felt that they were being squeezed out of administrative positions within the RCSD based on the hiring of additional Latinos in key roles under the Latino Superintendent (Macaluso, 2007). It is possible that because of a long history of competing for scarce resources and the way that each of these groups have been established as very separate that there continues to be an us versus them mentality. In fact, this tension between Black and Latino citizens has become common across the country, as noted by Hutchinson (2007):

These days, the tension between the races is noticeable not only in prison life and in gang warfare (where it's been a staple of life for decades) but in politics, in schools, in housing, in the immigration debate. Conflicts today are just as likely -- in some cases, more likely -- to be between blacks and Latinos as between blacks and whites.

While it is not clear that these groups were directly in conflict in vying for different programs or supports since the larger initiative never really got off the ground, these broad trends suggest that it may have pitted programs targeted toward Hispanic students like bilingual education against programs targeted toward African American students, such as an “effective black parenting program” cited in the report (Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation, 2007). This is unfortunate when it is very likely that challenges facing students of color living in the most challenged parts of Rochester cross racial lines. Our findings are similar to a community study that found “tensions and contradictions of black–brown communities” as they sought to work

against oppression (Quinones, Ares, Razvi Padela, Hopper & Webster, 2011, p. 115).

Implications and Conclusion

Through this historical case study, we demonstrate how discrete community groups linked to particular racial/ethnic groups may be limited in their roles in community-wide mobilization efforts and when advancing the educational opportunities for the African American and Latino communities they represent, unless they find ways to be allies. In essence, the power of these two groups was much weaker separately than it might have been had they been aligned in a shared sense of purpose. Together, they might have influenced both the direction of and garnered support for the RSCCC. As the Grassroots Policy Project points out:

While the experiences of African Americans, Native Americans and immigrants of color have differed significantly, there are a number of parallels in experiences that stem from the racialization of citizenship, immigrant status, labor, and criminalization (p. 7).

This historical case study also shows that part of having a shared focus might mean a clear articulation of more pressing needs. With this initiative, prioritization became a problem because the extensiveness of this plan and competing expressions for which actions to engage in meant that it was not ever able to get fully off the ground.

Nuances of the racial dynamics at play were difficult to tease out in the public documentation of what happened given the nature of what people are willing to publically, put on the record. Since race can affect regime formation and reform coalitions (Kraus, 2005; Seamster, 2015), additional work should pursue this area further to understand the ways that racial tensions among individuals or groups may have been at the core in some of the leadership turnover and the fact that this plan never fully moved to implementation. Community-based initiatives for reform that are in beginning stages will need to do some groundwork at the very beginning to uncover underlying issues and build trust between multiple stakeholder groups, including Whites, African Americans, and Hispanic leaders and communities to allow for authentic community problem solving to occur. Communities engaging in this work would benefit from tools that help to break down structural racism. This would also enable the community to develop explicit goals for addressing racial disparities and to better understand how different strategies may be needed for different communities of color. For example, immigrants who may have particular needs around housing or employment or dual-language students who may have particular needs around language instruction or African American students who may have particular needs around discriminatory policing or discipline practices all require very different support and community resources (see, for example, Grassroots Policy Project, 2011).

A limitation of our study is that it relied on public documents and media reports. Future research could either observe these kinds of initiatives as they are unfolding to be able to capture some of the micro-level processes that shape the direction and trajectory of this type of collaborative. Alternatively, future research might involve interviews with individuals engaged in the initiative in different ways and at different times to dig more deeply into the cross-agency networks that unfold. This could also tease out the ways that underlying racial tensions impact leadership, trust, and sustainability of these type of efforts.

The Rochester Surround Care Community Corporation attempted to reform education in an urban school district by providing wrap-around support services to the neediest area of the city. Unfortunately, this type of reform relies on being able to not only form coalitions but to

have them mobilize resources to tackle common goals over time. In urban communities like Rochester, where political tensions can limit buy-in for broader reform efforts because of fragmented coalitions across racial and ethnic communities, it is important that urban reformers think strategically about ways to build trust and to align goals toward shared purposes in order to eventually build the necessary civic capacity to bring about educational change.

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