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## **Paradigms, Power, and PR in New York City: Assessing Two School Accountability Implementation Efforts**

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**Abstract:** This policy study critically compares two different efforts to implement an accountability system in the New York City public schools. In 1971, the New York City Board of Education contracted with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which created a lengthy accountability plan for the district. Fitful maneuvers to execute the ETS plan fizzled out by 1978. Roughly three decades later, New York City educational leaders publicly championed school accountability as a chief goal. By 2003, formal accountability system planning had commenced; in 2007, an accountability system went fully operational, with New York City public schools receiving a published letter grade that ranged from A-F. This study demonstrates how the maturation of a national education policy paradigm (standards-based school accountability) coalesced with several contextual factors (money, power, principals, and public relations) to enable successful system implementation in the 2000s. Importantly, this work also demonstrates how African-American community representatives and leaders in New York City contributed to the nascent movement for accountability in the 1970s, yet the voices of underrepresented and underserved populations were largely absent in the 2000s implementation effort. Finally, events in both eras illustrate how educational accountability can play an important symbolic role by transmitting political messages.

**Keywords:** accountability; educational policy; urban education; politics of education

**Paradigmas, poder y relaciones públicas en Nueva York: Evaluando la implementación de dos modelos rendición de cuentas escolares.**

**Resumen:** Este estudio compara la política dos modelos diferentes de implementación de sistemas de rendición de cuentas en escuelas públicas de Nueva York. En 1971, la Junta de Educación de la Ciudad de Nueva York contrató el Educational Testing Service (ETS), que creó un plan de responsabilidad para el distrito. Maniobras intermitentes para ejecutar el plan de ETS concluyeron en 1978. Casi tres décadas más tarde, los líderes educativos de la ciudad de Nueva York defendieron públicamente la rendición de cuentas escolar como un objetivo fundamental. Para el 2003, la planificación formal del sistema de rendición de cuentas había comenzado; en 2007, un sistema de rendición de cuentas entró en pleno funcionamiento, y las escuelas públicas de la ciudad de Nueva York reciben una calificación que va de A-F. Este estudio demuestra cómo la maduración de un paradigma de la política educativa nacional (basado en los estándares de rendición de cuentas escolares) se unieron con varios factores contextuales (dineroel poder, directores y relaciones públicas) para permitir la implementación del sistema en la década de 2000. Es importante destacar que este trabajo también demuestra cómo los representantes de la comunidad afro-americanos y líderes en Nueva York contribuyeron al naciente movimiento de rendición de cuentas en la década de 1970, sin embargo, las voces de poblaciones insuficientemente representadas e insuficientemente atendidas siguieron en gran medida ausentes en el esfuerzo de implementación del año 2000. Por último, los acontecimientos en ambas épocas ilustran cómo modelos de rendición de cuentas escolares puede desempeñar un papel simbólico importante para transmitir mensajes políticos.

**Palabras clave:** rendición de cuentas; política educativa; educación urbana

**Paradigmas, poder e relações públicas em Nova Iorque: Avaliar a implementação de dois modelos de prestação de contas da escola.**

**Resumo:** Este estudo compara dois modelos diferentes de implementação de políticas de sistemas de prestação de contas nas escolas públicas de Nova York. Em 1971, o Conselho de Educação da Cidade de Nova York contratou o Educational Testing Service (ETS), que criou um plano de prestação de contas para o distrito. Plano intermitente para executar manobras ETS concluiu em 1978. Quase três décadas depois, os líderes educacionais da cidade de Nova Iorque defenderam publicamente a prestação de contas das escolas como um objetivo fundamental. Para 2003, a prestação de contas do sistema de planejamento formal tinha começado; em 2007, um sistema de prestação de contas tornou-se plenamente operacional, e as escolas públicas da cidade de Nova York receberam uma nota entre A-F. Este estudo demonstra como a maturação de um paradigma da política nacional de educação (relatórios baseados em prestação de contas) juntou-se a vários fatores contextuais (poder, dinheiro, gerentes e relações públicas) para permitir a implementação do sistema no início 2000. É importante ressaltar que este trabalho também mostra como os representantes dos líderes da comunidade afro-americana de Nova York contribuiu para o aumento da circulação de responsabilização na década de 1970, no entanto, as vozes das populações sub-representadas e carentes seguido praticamente ausente no esforço de implementação de 2000 Finalmente, eventos em ambos os modelos épocas ilustrar como a prestação de contas da escola pode desempenhar um papel simbólico importante para transmitir mensagens políticas.

**Palavras-chave:** prestação de contas; política educacional; educação urbana

## Introduction

Previous scholars have examined the past in order to help make meaning of urban education's present (Cuban, 2010; Ravitch, 2000; Shipps, 2006). In this spirit, this study investigates two attempts, occurring roughly thirty years apart, to implement a school-focused accountability system in the New York City (NYC) public schools. First, in 1969, the politically appointed NYC Board of Education (BOE) formed a working school accountability committee that included a wide range of district stakeholder representatives. By January 1971, the NYC BOE signed a contract with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) based in Princeton, New Jersey (Buder, 1971a). In June 1972, ETS produced a lengthy accountability plan for the district (McDonald, 1972). After several years of fitful progress toward initiating the plan, in 1976, reports surfaced that "fiscal pressures" had "delayed...implementation" of the system (Maeroff, 1976, p. 182). Signaling the original plan's apparent demise, upon taking over as the NYC BOE's new Chancellor (equivalent to district superintendent) in 1978, Frank Macchiarola explained, "I want to get an accountability system that works" (Chambers, 1978a, p. 1).

Twenty-four years later in 2002, newly elected New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg was granted control of the school system, when the New York State legislature took supervisory powers away from the Board of Education. Bloomberg opened a new Department of Education (DOE) under his direct supervision. Mayors had no direct control over the Board of Education since "six different elected officials" [including the mayor] made appointments to the seven seats (Ravitch, 2009, p. 183). The Board of Education was replaced by the Panel for Educational Policy, a body to which the mayor appointed the majority of members and was "widely perceived as a rubber stamp for decisions made by the chancellor and mayor" (Ravitch, 2009, p. 184). Upon appointing Joel Klein as the school system chancellor in July 2002, Bloomberg described the school district as, "an organization that has not been accountable to anybody" (Steinhauer, 2002a, p. B4). Within five years of the Mayor's pronouncement, the DOE had developed, piloted, and then fully implemented an accountability system in which each public school citywide received a published A-F letter grade based predominantly on student test score growth (Shipps, 2012). Importantly, a school's grade would also be used as an essential part of each principal's yearly evaluation, ensuring personal professional responsibility was attached to school results.

These two contrasting accountability policy initiatives provoke this study's central animating question: *why did the implementation of a New York City public school accountability system fail in the 1970s yet succeed in the 2000s?* In answering this question, I first provide a brief history of accountability and urban school reform since the 1960s. I next detail the two different attempts to implement a New York City school accountability system. Using archival materials, policy documents, and newspaper accounts, I illustrate how and why the 1970s accountability system encountered numerous obstacles that stymied actual implementation. Subsequently, I reference media sources, policy documents, and emerging scholarship to describe why the 2000s accountability system moved relatively swiftly from design to implementation.

On one level, the 2000s implementation effort benefited from a reigning national policy paradigm that privileged the employment of tough bureaucratic accountability mechanisms for educators (Mehta, 2013). On another level, specific, definable elements help explain the failure of one New York City accountability system implementation and success of another three decades later. The contextual factors that enabled implementation of the 2000s system included: a more favorable budget climate; changed district authority and city socio-political dynamics; an open, intensive focus on school-based leaders as ultimately responsible for school performance; and more

effective district communication and message control operations. In essence, a new national policy paradigm (educational accountability) and four crucial contextual factors (money, power, principals, and PR) allowed the 2000s accountability system to be implemented successfully.

This study adds to the existing literature in several ways. First, it describes the interplay between a grand policy paradigm and several political and contingent considerations, and analyzes how these forces affected the pursuit of educational accountability system implementation. In addition, this study provides empirical insight into what Mehta (2013) called “the now almost forgotten accountability efforts of the 1960s and 1970s” (p. 65). Importantly, this work also demonstrates in particular how African-American community representatives and leaders in New York City contributed to the nascent movement for accountability in the 1970s, yet the voices of underrepresented and underserved populations were largely absent in the 2000s implementation effort. Finally, events in both eras illustrate how educational accountability can play an important symbolic role by transmitting political messages.

### **Accountability and Urban School Reform: A Brief History**

Over the past four decades, K-12 education in the United States has witnessed increased attention to educational accountability in its “bureaucratic” form, which is constituted by “rewarding and punishing outcomes” defined as “student performance measured by achievement tests” (Firestone & Shippis, 2005, p. 86). The ascension of educational accountability as the prevailing US school policy paradigm progressed in two discernible stages since the 1960s: an incipient period in the 1960s and 1970s and a full maturation phase spanning from 1983 to today (Mehta, 2013).<sup>1</sup> The 1966 release of the Coleman report, which found that schools had limited effects in terms of overcoming students’ socioeconomic backgrounds, provided an initial spark for the accountability movement (Mehta, 2013; Ravitch, 2002; Spencer, 2012). By considering school *outcomes* (academic achievement scores) rather than *inputs* (salaries, facilities, etc.), the report established a new means for considering school and, by proxy, educator quality (Mehta, 2013; Ravitch, 2002). In addition, during this period the influence of business ideas in education grew, which helped encourage greater attention to numerical performance and bottom-line objectives in schools (Lewis, 2013; Mehta, 2013; Spencer, 2012).

By the 1960s, some of the first accountability systems began to appear. Pennsylvania’s legislature approved annual achievement testing in 1963; due to the complexity of the design process, actual testing began in 1969 (Wynne, 1972). In the 1970s, the Michigan Department of Education instituted a “six-step accountability model, which linked testing, standards, and school improvement in one package” (Mehta, 2013, p. 80). Suggesting political difficulties, the state’s teachers’ union successfully impeded “linking...tests to the broader ambition of improving schools” (Mehta, 2013, p. 81). Assessing the development of state level accountability systems over time, one researcher demonstrated how state assessments had transformed from performing a localized student guidance function to, in the 1970s and beyond, an educator accountability function. This accountability function eventually became, by the 1980s, a public means of rewarding and sanctioning schools and personnel (Mazzeo, 2001).

With its dire depiction of American schools in dangerous decline, *A Nation at Risk* propelled widespread interest in holding schools accountable for student, community, and national improvement (Mehta, 2013). Two decades later, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) was

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<sup>1</sup> Though the time period is not germane to my study, Mehta (2013) situates the first accountability effort amidst the Progressive Era of the early 1900s.

signed into law by President George W. Bush in early 2002.<sup>2</sup> Relevant studies have depicted the political maneuvering and contextual factors necessary to pass NCLB (McGuinn, 2006; Vinovskis, 2009). Illustratively, Jaiani and Whitford (2011) demonstrated how, early in its tenure, the Bush administration seized a unique opportunity (a policy window) by building a bi-partisan coalition whose differences were many but whose common interests coalesced around the goal of improving schools through accountability. By 2001, then, accountability for student academic performance had emerged as a prevailing paradigm that proved irresistible to policymakers (Mehta, 2013). Under the accountability policy logic as it has matured, external agents (most notably elected state officials and their states' departments of education) hold educators responsible for student academic performance as reflected in quantitative, test-based outcomes. NCLB, with its yearly performance accounting and corresponding state-level school sanctioning mechanics, stood as testimony to the national triumph of the accountability idea (Mehta, 2013).

Educational accountability—in various forms—has been an essential part of the struggle to improve urban schools since the 1960s. In cities such as Newark, New Jersey, Austin, Texas, Chicago, Oakland, and Philadelphia, parents and community advocates pursued various strategies (from integration demands to grassroots protest organizing) in efforts to make educational professionals more responsive to their concerns (Anyon, 1997; Cuban, 2010; Shipps, 2006; Spencer, 2012). In late 1960s New York City, a burgeoning community control movement met stiff educator resistance in places like Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Disputes over school control and resulting teachers' strikes generated deep-seated distrust between predominantly African-American and Latino parents and mostly White, Jewish-American educational professionals (Perlstein, 2004; Podair, 2002). An African-American community activist and parent leader of an experimental school in Harlem explained in 1969:

Are teachers afraid to be held accountable for their performance? We believe that in most communities, teachers are, in fact, accountable for the achievement of their students. We are demanding the same protections for our children that other communities already exercise. (Lewis, 2013, p. 26)

While Mehta (2013) asserted that “only state departments of education saw educational accountability as a priority” (p. 76) during the 1960s and 1970s, African-Americans and other urban community members, advocates, and educational professionals contributed directly to efforts to enact bureaucratic accountability systems in the schools of major cities. From 1970 to 1972, the Washington D.C. public schools implemented an Academic Achievement Plan, which was intended to raise the academic performance of African-American children in the segregated district. Designed by renowned psychologist Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, the Plan emphasized basic skills and intended to evaluate educators based on students' test scores (Cuban, 1974). Clark had gained notoriety in 1954 when his research on children, dolls, and race played a major role in the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. He spent the next decades endeavoring to improve urban living conditions and schooling (Keppel, 2002). D.C.'s Academic Achievement Plan floundered and ultimately failed as key players, including Clark, the school board president, the superintendent, and teachers union president (all of whom were African-American) battled over “control of the reform in the schools” (Cuban, 1974, p. 16). As described below, Clark also played a prominent role in New York City's 1970s accountability system deliberations. In addition, in the 1960s and 1970s, African-American principal and, later, superintendent Marcus Foster made accountability for academic

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<sup>2</sup> Though much of the legislative action leading to passage and adoption of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 occurred in late 2001, President Bush actually signed NCLB into law on January 8, 2002. See Bumiller (2002).

results a central element of his efforts to improve schools in Philadelphia and Oakland (Spencer, 2012). As Spencer (2012) explained,

the ethos of accountability (if not the exact form it has taken) is ...a legacy of racial liberalism and civil rights activism...especially since the late 1960s. Foster and others of his era promoted an urgent, “no excuses” mentality, as they shifted the focus of public discourse from the alleged deficiencies of urban students to those of the schools. (p. 228)

More recently, bureaucratic accountability has been a central aspect of the school reform efforts in New York City. Under Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein, the district progressed from an initial top-down control structure toward employing a portfolio management model that provided principals autonomy in exchange for greater accountability (Gyrko & Henig, 2010). While some authors have provided academic assessments of various reforms instituted under this organizational approach (e.g., O’Day, Bitter, & Gomez, 2011), others have condemned what they portrayed as the democracy-debilitating business style of Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein’s change efforts (Ravitch, 2010). Others have enumerated problems created by the top-down implementation approach (Rogers, 2009). Importantly, principals, who emerged as key actors in both accountability approaches, have seen their work lives directly affected by the successful implementation of the 2000s system. In one study, many principals reported feeling “beleaguered” rather than “empowered” by the autonomy and accountability reforms that made them the center of district improvement efforts (Shipps, 2012).

### **Conceptualizing Accountability and Urban School Reform**

This study synthesizes existing literature in proposing its conceptual framework and devising an interpretive lens for understanding the deeper meanings of its findings. In regard to the conceptual framework, I employ insights regarding policy adoption and implementation described by Mehta (2013). First, Mehta (2013) defined “policy paradigm” as a “problem definition” that “has triumphed and assumes the status of a master narrative,” and represents “dominant views that preclude significant dissent” (p. 19). In this sense, policy paradigms are ideas that have developed over time into powerful forces for change. A paradigm can “shape politics” since it “*changes the nature of the debate,*” “*changes the constellation of actors,*” and may “*create an opportunity for major institutional change*” [all italics original] (Mehta, 2013, pp. 18-20). Applying these concepts to New York City, the inchoate status of standards-based accountability as a policy idea in the 1970s limited the potential for system implementation. When Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein assumed leadership, however, a paradigm shift had occurred toward a national embrace of standards-based accountability. In essence, the establishment of the standards-based school accountability paradigm by the 2000s offered the proper policy climate necessary to encourage successful implementation.

Mehta (2013) also explained that there were “more immediate considerations,” such as political concessions and national solidarity forged by the aftermath of 9/11, that helped ensure adoption of NCLB (p. 239). He labeled these actions and events “strategic and contingent shorter-term factors” (p. 240). Using Mehta’s definitions as a starting point, I employ the term *contextual factors* to describe the political realities and real world dynamics that helped determine the fate of accountability policy implementation in New York City. In the end, there were four contextual factors relevant to efforts to implement an accountability system in both eras:

- Money—School reform is typically expensive and, at times, profitable (Cuban, 2004). Implementing reforms requires either reallocation of existing funds or allocating new funds, so healthy budgets and supplemental financial support

from outside agencies become a necessity for enabling successful reform implementation.

- **Power**—The history of urban school reform can be framed as, in significant part, an intense power struggle among diverse political actors and groups who seek divergent outcomes (Anyon, 1997; Payne, 2008; Perlstein, 2004; Podair, 2002; Ravitch, 2000). Establishing systemic accountability within an urban school district amounts to a battle over who will hold whom responsible for what kinds of educational results.
- **Principals**—Bureaucratic accountability systems make professional educators responsible for student outcomes (Firestone & Shipps, 2005). Therefore, accountability systems must have a person to shoulder blame in order to signify the potent professional consequences of educational failure. Due to their role-based prominence as school leaders and (by the 2000s) their lack of tenure-based job security protections, New York City principals made inviting targets for accountability consequences (Peck & Mullen, 2010).
- **PR**—Press and public relations emerged as an important concern in the 1970s. Today, managing a district’s core messages is an essential consideration in modern urban school management (Carr, 2013).

Drawing from Mehta (2013), then, this study’s conceptual framework holds that a policy paradigm (standards-based accountability) and four contextual factors (money, power, principals, and PR) played vital roles in determining the success or failure of accountability system implementation.

In my discussion section below, I consider and invoke findings from the study of school reform as an interpretive lens. First, as reflected in the titles of Cuban (1990) (“Reforming Again, Again, and Again”) and Hess (2010) (*The Same Thing Over and Over*), forgotten, failed, or neglected reform ideas tend to reappear with new names attached. Second, I consider studies such as Anderson (2007), Goldstein (2011), and Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, and Jarvis (2004) that have examined the role rhetoric and symbols play in educational policy. Of particular note, Lipman (2002), in her study of Chicago, explained that “accountability polices...are a form of symbolic politics,” in that they “shape public definition of education, explain educational failure, and organize consciousness around shared understandings of what constitutes legitimate classroom knowledge, educational practice, and valorized social identities” (p. 394). Similarly, Mazzeo (2001) contended, “accountability testing provides politicians with a highly visible symbol of action, while also offering at least some leverage to shape and change what educators do and how the system is run” (p. 390).

## **Two Attempts to Implement a School Accountability System: An Overview**

Two separate efforts to implement school accountability systems in New York City resulted in different outcomes. In 1969, a new labor agreement between the Board of Education of the City of New York (BOE) and the teachers’ union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), included an important codicil recognizing the school system professionals’ “failure to educate all of our students” and the concomitant need “to develop objective criteria of professional accountability” (BOE and UFT, 1969, p. 1). In addition, representatives from the city’s traditionally underserved African-American and Latino communities agitated for the idea that professional educators should be held responsible for the academic results of students (Lewis, 2013; Wynne, 1972). By early 1970 the BOE had initiated an Accountability Committee with representatives from a range of constituencies, including individuals from the Board of Education, the teachers’ and principals’ unions, parent associations, and universities. Contests eventually occurred over who should and

could gain representative access on the body, with the Chancellor in 1971 “adding five additional representatives of the black and Puerto Rican community” (No Author, n.d., p. 1).

In June 1970, the City University of New York organized a conference in Tarrytown, New York, during which representatives from the Accountability Committee and other invited guests heard accountability experts such as Henry S. Dyer of the Princeton, New Jersey-based Educational Testing Service (ETS) explain the basic mechanics of school accountability systems and functions (CUNY, 1970). A 1971 BOE contract with ETS resulted in the production of an over-240 page document titled, “A Design for an Accountability System for the New York City School System” (McDonald, 1972).

The design document explained that the proposed accountability system would have “three characteristics”:

(1) the system will provide data on students’ achievement so that judgments about the adequacy of their performance may be made; (2) the system will provide a way of assessing the causes of deficiencies in the students’ performances; (3) the system will provide a way of taking corrective action to remove these deficiencies. (McDonald, 1972, p. S5)

Under the plan’s logic, the accountability system would identify schools that were “doing better for their students than are other schools” (McDonald, 1972, p. S13). Better schools would be examined to identify “process variables” that had allowed their children to succeed (McDonald, 1972, p. S15). Meanwhile, underperforming schools would undergo a “process of determining the causes of the deficiencies in students” (McDonald, 1972, p. S18). Underperforming schools would then develop a “Planning and Operations Committee” that included educators and, possibly, parents that would create the school’s “corrective action plan” (McDonald, 1972, p. S20).

Importantly, under the ETS plan schools were the unit of accountability; the plan did not ascribe responsibility for student performance directly to teachers and administrators. ETS’s Dyer had in fact called the grade equivalency tests that NYC and other systems were using to determine students’ reading grade levels “psychological and statistical monstrosities” unfit for determining “professional accountability” (Stevens, 1971a, p. 19).<sup>3</sup> Instead, the ETS accountability system was “designed to assess and analyze the problems of individual schools” (McDonald, 1972, S2). Rather than a consequence-bearing letter grade or other signifier of high-stakes accountability for performance, low-performing schools received a “Corrective-Action Plan” that would be “a matter of public record” (McDonald, 1972, pp. S22-S23).

After a series of delays, the Board of Education approved the ETS plan in April 1974 (Buder, 1974b). By 1976, the BOE had hired an accountability program director, Senior Assistant to the Chancellor Charles I. Schonhaut, who instituted field tests based on the ETS plan at over 60 elementary schools (Accountability Committee, 1977). Despite these forward steps and the apparent consensus regarding the need for greater school accountability, full implementation of the ETS accountability system never occurred. Notes from a July 31, 1978, Accountability Committee meeting revealed that, at the request of the new Chancellor Frank Macchiarola, the initiative’s name was changed to School Improvement Project. Moreover, as a pilot program, it would receive no publicity (Accountability Project Staff, 1978). Schonhaut, meanwhile, was transferred to the position of executive director of special education soon after Macchiarola became Chancellor (Chambers,

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<sup>3</sup> New York State had instituted required “uniform objective achievement exams...to all pupils in grades three, six, and nine” by 1966. The basic reporting system allowed for comparisons among geographic areas and “individual schools within communities,” but there was no data on “socioeconomic status of students” (Wynne, 1972, p. 76).

1978b). The ETS accountability plan, initially proposed in 1970, contracted for production in 1971, produced in 1972, and BOE-approved in 1974, was effectively dead by summer 1978.

Two-and-a-half decades later in 2002, Mayor Bloomberg chose Joel Klein as his chancellor. Klein had no previous experience as a professional educator, and was best known for his role leading anti-trust litigation against Microsoft while serving as an attorney general with the U.S. Justice Department (Ravitch, 2010). Klein and an elite cadre of Department of Education (DOE) reformers sought fundamental changes in school governance, including how the schools, educators, and even the system itself would be held responsible for student performance. Early on, high-profile policy actions constituted explicit symbols of significant change. First, the Mayor's victory in securing control of the schools meant that he owned the problem, so to speak, and could not simply blame the Board of Education for school failings as previous mayors had done (Steinhauer, 2002b). Second, the new administration announced plans to close Brooklyn's 110 Livingston Street, the legendary bureaucratic heart of the former Board of Education (Rogers, 1968; Steinhauer, 2002b). Instead, the new, Mayoral-controlled DOE would be housed in downtown Manhattan in a refurbished Tweed Hall, a historical building located directly behind City Hall (Steinhauer, 2002b). The proximity of the Mayor's Office and Department of Education signaled that reforming the schools would be a top priority of the Bloomberg administration.

In conjunction with these well-publicized reforms, Chancellor Klein and his administration emphasized the need to bring more accountability to the system. Initial targets of their accountability-focused talk and actions were principals. In January 2003, the public learned through newspaper articles that the Chancellor had developed performance-based individual report cards for principals, and that "at least 50...received failing marks" (Medina, 2003, p. B2). These fifty failing grades aligned with a previous Klein promise to remove fifty low performing principals at the end of the school year. A DOE spokesperson explained, "We've said all along that we are going to hold them accountable. This is one piece of a whole system of measuring" (Medina, 2003, p. B2). Mayor Bloomberg added, "You'll either do the job, or if we can't help you with better tools and better training, you're just going to have to work elsewhere" (Medina, 2003, p. B2).

Following this initial focus on holding principals publicly responsible for school performance, in late 2003 Klein announced efforts to develop an accountability system that would help address the fact that "we don't have very good measures or metrics" in education (Herszenhorn, 2003, p. B2). Central animating questions of the accountability system, he explained, included, "How do I reinforce those who are doing well and make sure they get the recognition? How do I support or ultimately terminate those who are not?" (Herszenhorn, 2003, p. B2). After initial planning began in 2003, in 2005 Klein selected a legal scholar to lead an accountability design effort that included significant input and activity from professional consultants (Childress, Higgins, Ishimaru, & Takahashi, 2011; Gyurko & Henig, 2010). In fall 2006, the accountability system piloted and, by fall 2007, it was in place citywide (Gootman, 2006; Medina, 2007).

Under the accountability system, individual schools received "A-F" letter grades denoting progress, measured predominantly through student growth on New York State standardized examinations. Importantly, the letter grades came with real sanctions attached, in the form of possible school closures as well as principal replacements at "F" and "D" schools (Gootman & Medina, 2007a). Chancellor Klein called it, "the best system for evaluating schools in the country" (Gootman & Medina, 2007a, p. A1). Interestingly, the 2000s New York City school accountability system actually supplemented an existing No Child Left Behind-mandated New York State accountability system that invoked school sanctions based on test-score performance and other indicators (Hemphill & Nauer, 2010).

## Explaining Accountability System Implementation Failure or Success

Why did the implementation of a New York City public school accountability system fail in the 1970s yet succeed in the 2000s? On one level, in the 1970s educational accountability was still a nascent idea. Suggestive of this developmental period, a 1970 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* was devoted to examining the new trend of accountability, and included an explanation of the New York City accountability plan written by Henry S. Dyer of ETS (Dyer, 1970b). The issue's guest editor, Myron Lieberman of the City University of New York, served on the BOE's Accountability Committee (Lieberman, 1970). In this sense, the 1970s accountability system implementation effort occurred as a noteworthy part of an emergent yet still contested policy idea. By the 2000s, however, standards-based educational accountability had matured into a policy paradigm, as reflected in the adoption of NCLB (Mehta, 2013). As noted earlier, the New York City accountability system actually supplemented a state-level accountability system (Hemphill & Nauer, 2010). By the mid-2000s, then, the time was right in New York City for accountability system adoption and implementation.

Besides the arrival of a fitting ideational context, there were also contextual factors that determined system implementation success or failure. Based on the accumulated data there are four discernible considerations: city budget realities, prevailing power dynamics, the organizational status and role of principals, and district communication and message control operations. In shorthand, the relevant contextual factors were money, power, principals, and PR. I begin by discussing how the city's financial situation affected both accountability system development and implementation.

### Money

In the early 1970s, economic woes and a budget crisis shocked the city and its schools, frustrating accountability system development and implementation throughout most of the decade. For instance, in February 1971, at a major press conference attended by representatives of the Board of Education (BOE), the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA), and parents groups, the Board announced that it had contracted \$100,000 with Princeton, New Jersey's Educational Testing Service to design an accountability system for the schools (Buder, 1971a). Financial reality soon intruded. In March 1971, the school board reported it was \$40 million short of funds necessary for the remainder of the school year (Madden, 1971). Suggesting how these financial events affected the accountability effort, a letter from the school system's head, Chancellor Scribner, to the BOE Accountability Committee apologized that their April 22, 1971, meeting "had to be abruptly cancelled because of the Press Conference by the Board of Education on the Budget Crisis" (Scribner, 1971, p. 1).

The accountability effort did proceed, and ETS provided its design documents in June 1972 (McDonald, 1972). The design document predicted costs of over \$200,000 for initial accountability system pilot testing in 62 schools and \$1.2 million per year once the accountability system was in place citywide (McDonald, 1972). Pilot testing involving a couple schools drawn from each of the city's 32 decentralized districts, was not initially announced until fall 1974 (Buder, 1974b). By fall 1975, the head of the Accountability program, Charles I. Schonhaut, was in place, though the pilot test was still delayed. The lack of necessary start-up funding was discussed as a primary concern during an Accountability Committee meeting in October 1975 (Cooper, 1975). Without district financial support forthcoming, Schonhaut sought funding from the Ford Foundation for the accountability system. He explained in a letter to the foundation, "Not only don't we have the system, we don't even have sufficient funds to begin implementing it" (Schonhaut, 1975). The curt rejection notice explained, "Our restricted financial condition...prevents our helping with activities which have been started and dropped by governmental or other organizations" (Bohrson, 1975). By

fall 1975, the city itself was in such dire economic straits that the *New York Daily News* exclaimed in a notoriously misleading front-page headline that President Ford told the city to “drop dead” when it requested federal emergency funding (Roberts, 2006). It is little wonder that a fall 1976 *New York Times* report explained that financial issues continued to delay the implementation of the accountability system (Maeroff, 1976).

The economic portrait was far different two-and-a-half decades later. After 2002, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) benefited from three financial developments. First, according to Stiefel and Schwartz (2011), from 2002-08, overall total spending in the school district increased by over \$5 billion (p. 64) while per-pupil spending increased by almost \$5000 (p. 80). In addition, the city, in the years immediately preceding the 2008 Great Recession, benefited from a robust economy with strong tax revenues (Wolf, 2011). These two developments contrast notably with conditions in the 1970s, when city budget strains severely impacted the schools. Finally, the Klein administration benefited from substantial contributions from private sources for schooling initiatives; once a program was established, costs could be transferred to the DOE budget (Gyurko & Henig, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Stiefel & Schwartz, 2011). New York City’s Independent Budget Office (IBO) explained, “Some accountability costs were initially covered with private funding, but these same costs are now increasingly being paid with city dollars” (Smith, 2008, p. 1). Thanks to the healthy budgetary context as well as access to private start-up funding, the DOE could absorb the expense of a school accountability system that the IBO determined an actual cost of over \$60 million for 2007 and estimated a cost of nearly \$130 million for 2008 (Smith, 2008).

A second difference between the two eras involved school governance and power.

## Power

In the 1960s through the 1970s, the decades-old New York City school system was embroiled in sustained conflict. Tensions rose as the professional interests of the predominantly White, Jewish-American teachers and administrators who staffed the schools confronted the personal interests and protest actions of the African-Americans and Latinos whose children attended the schools (Lewis, 2013; Perlstein, 2004; Podair, 2002; Wasserman, 1970). At the core of these disputes was a contest over power: who controlled the schools, professional educators or local communities? In a politically compromised effort to provide more community control of education while maintaining employment protections favored by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the state sanctioned the ambiguously-defined “decentralization” of the New York City K-8 schools in 1969. Decentralization established 32 separate districts with boards elected by local communities. High schools remained under direct control of the central NYC Board of Education (Lewis, 2013).

Under this new arrangement, the politically appointed NYC Board of Education and the Chancellor it selected effectively shared power with the 32 districts that operated with varying degrees of independence and authority (Lewis, 2013; Ravitch, 2009). Three different Chancellors served as system heads from 1970 to 1978, which suggests how the governance structure presented a challenge for district leaders. Moreover, the UFT asserted its powerful influence by executing several system-wide strikes during the 1960s and 1970s, while the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) regularly and forcefully asserted the rights of school principals and assistant principals. Ravitch (2000) likened the situation to a “hydra-headed school system in which authority was so broadly diffused that no one could be held accountable for its performance” (p. xxii).

The original accountability effort, then, was subject to attenuated central governance capacities as well as complex sociopolitical and racial tensions. Reflecting the prevailing impulse toward increased democratic involvement, the BOE’s Accountability Committee pursued designing and enacting the accountability system by including a variety of stakeholders in its deliberations.

Initiated in 1969, the Committee originally included representatives from the Board of Education, community school boards, the Chancellor's office, the UFT, the CSA, and parent organizations (No Author, n.d.). Of these groups, the UFT, perhaps the most potent, unified force in NYC educational politics, demonstrated a substantial interest in the accountability effort. Sandra Feldman of the UFT explained, "We thought we ought to get in and have a voice right at the beginning" (Maeroff, 1974, p. 20). Accordingly, the UFT was involved in July 1970 as the accountability committee narrowed its choice of design contractors to two finalists, which included Dyer's ETS proposal that focused on the notion of shared school accountability rather than accountability for individual teachers (Anker, 1970).<sup>4</sup>

Ongoing system governance and sociopolitical dynamics, however, virtually ensured controversy over just who should and would be involved in determining accountability policy. When the first ETS accountability design contract was publicized in spring 1971, for instance, well-known African-American psychologist and educator Dr. Kenneth B. Clark protested that the proposed system was a "cruel hoax" that would "give sanction to negative expectations for poor and minority-group children" (Buder, 1971b, p. 25). Clark's specific concerns were that Dyer's approach to accountability appeared to minimize the importance of assessing student basic skills while emphasizing variables such as student socioeconomic background as the central factors for poor performance. It also made the school the unit of accountability rather than specific educational actors. Clark asserted teachers would essentially escape responsibility for student performance in the ETS accountability system.

Like Clark, other African-American and Latino community members, advocates, and educational professionals during this time had generated greater attention to holding teachers and administrators responsible for educating urban children (Lewis, 2013). The United Bronx Parents, a federally-funded anti-poverty organization, "prepared training materials for parents on school evaluation, including the use of comparisons between interschool reading averages" (Wynne, 1972, p. 81). "Would you like to know how *your* school compares with the rest of the schools in the Bronx?" asked one training document (Wynne, 1972, p. 81). In Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, an African-American community school district superintendent employed an accountability system that featured frequent teacher and principal evaluation throughout his network of schools (Lewis, 2013). Meanwhile, an African-American principal in Bedford-Stuyvesant encouraged parents to visit and inspect instruction in his school during what he called accountability days (Lewis, 2013). In these ways, representatives and leaders from New York City's underserved communities helped promote the idea of increased accountability for professional educators.

Cognizant of this prevailing atmosphere, and in direct response to Clark's 1971 critique, Chancellor Scribner eventually added five additional minority group representatives to the Accountability Committee. One of these individuals was from the Metropolitan Applied Research Center [MARC] that Clark headed. In response to Scribner's actions, the teachers' and administrators' representatives walked off the Committee (Buder, 1971c). Albert Shanker, the president of the UFT, stated the addition of the new members "comes close to destroying" the accountability effort, while Walter Degnan, the president of the CSA, explained the Chancellor's decision "will only impede the committee's progress" (Buder, 1971c, p. 35). The UFT and CSA

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<sup>4</sup> Suggesting an emerging, productive relationship, on September 26, 1970, Dyer delivered a speech to the UFT regarding contentious features of accountability. The UFT subsequently transformed the speech into a distributable pamphlet, symbolizing an apparent alliance between the teachers' union and the man charged with designing a system that some outside the school system hoped would hold teachers more accountable for student academic results (Dyer, 1970a).

eventually returned to the group when they were allowed to add additional members as well (No Author, n.d.). This episode itself demonstrates how developing the 1970s accountability system was subject to the difficulties system leaders faced in attempting to address the concerns of so many diverse voices. It also highlights how the BOE's weak central governance structure impeded the swift implementation of reforms that the Chancellor favored.

Conversely, after 2002, Mayoral control of the schools, enacted by state legislation, essentially allowed an elite cadre of school system executives working under Chancellor Joel Klein to exercise final decision-making authority over operating policies for the sprawling five borough, 1-million-student system (Ravitch, 2010; Rogers, 2009). Gyurko and Henig (2010) described how, particularly under the initial school governance mode from 2002-2004, "working groups made decisions behind closed doors in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth century progressive reformers designing a system 'for the people but not by the people'" (p. 95). Hill (2011) explained that Chancellor "Klein's political strategy required that the DOE avoid the 'politics of paralysis' by acting fast and avoiding consultations that could only delay actions or dilute results" (p. 29). The resulting dynamic produced an "unpolitics," in which "public deliberation, debate, and contestation were at a minimum...because there was a powerful momentum and air of inevitability that made open challenge seem fruitless" (Gyurko & Henig, 2010, p. 113).

Accordingly, accountability system implementation under Klein was relatively swift, especially compared to the 1970s effort, although it too was delayed from its initial plan. Planning began in 2003, the system was piloted in 2006, and it was implemented in 2007 after multiple starts (Gootman & Medina, 2007b; Herszenhorn, 2005). In December 2003, Klein announced the development of an accountability system to start in fall 2004 (Herszenhorn, 2003). James E. Sailer, a senior manager at a consulting firm before joining the DOE staff as director of performance management, reported that he completed his accountability system design work when he left the DOE in July 2004 (Herszenhorn, 2005). Klein again announced the development of an accountability system in June 2005, with an intended pilot in 2006 (Herszenhorn, 2005). At least in part, the delay in implementation was tactical. Klein acknowledged that he had initiated an array of ambitious structural reforms that took precedence. Moreover, the New York State Department of Education, spurred by No Child Left Behind requirements, was introducing new tests that would require adjustments to any accountability system the city created (Herszenhorn, 2005). In the meantime, Klein and his team's consistent use of accountability rhetoric—especially in regard to principals—delivered the message that joining professional responsibility to student performance remained a looming administration goal. In addition, the Klein administration retained the power to impose reforms essentially at will, which suggested eventual completion of the system was a certainty, despite apparent delays.

At the request of Chancellor Klein, in January 2006 James Liebman, a Columbia University legal scholar who specialized in constitutional issues attendant to the death penalty, took leave from his university position to lead the accountability design effort (Childress, Higgins, Ishimaru, & Takahashi, 2011; Gyurko & Henig, 2010). Liebman reported that he was motivated to "be a part of public sector institutional reform through the lens of public education" (Finn, 2007, p. B4), and later described his goals as "helping the city shake up the bureaucracy and motivate and empower educators to accelerate the learning of all kids" (Miller, 2010, p. 1). Starting the system "from scratch," he underscored,

The purpose of grading these schools and making those grades public is not because we want to give them a whack on the knuckles, it's to generate pressure to get them moving forward, to improve. We're looking for innovators and problem-solvers among our educators, but there has to be accountability. (Finn, 2007, p. B4)

Professional consultants such as Sir Michael Blair, who helped reform England's schools through a focus on student achievement and school closures, played an essential role in helping spur New York's accountability thinking during the development and implementation phase (Herszenhorn, 2006). England-based Cambridge Education, meanwhile, designed and executed the accountability system's Quality Reviews, site-based school visits intended to ensure that all schools worked toward exhibiting central-administration-sanctioned educational best practices (Childress, Higgins, Ishimaru, & Takahashi, 2011). While the 1970s accountability committee sputtered as it sought to represent and satisfy diverse democratic interests, the 2000s accountability team hummed as it accessed consultants from a range of professional backgrounds to help develop and implement plans that represented unified executive interests.

Symbolic of this management-minded focus on exclusivity in the name of efficiency, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), unlike in the 1970s, played no discernible role in accountability plan development and implementation in the 2000s. In 2003, UFT president Randi Weingarten charged that teachers had not been consulted about the emerging accountability ideas, which meant that any implemented system would "be looked at with tremendous skepticism" by teachers (Herszenhorn, 2003, p. B2). In 2005, Weingarten again asserted that teachers had not been invited to provide input into possible accountability plans, and therefore any resulting system would, in her words, "be viewed as a weapon against teachers in schools" (Herszenhorn, 2005, p. B3). In addition to eschewing teacher participation, the accountability development team under Klein appeared to garner traditional public and community input only after the first distribution of school grades. Toward that end, in December 2007 Liebman was criticized at a City Council meeting and jeered by parents who held up signs with the letter "F" prominently displayed (Medina, 2007). Such events help crystallize a central difference in the two different era's power relations: in the 1970s, parents and community members exercised the right to share in school and system decision-making; in the 2000s, parents and community members exercised the limited right to boo after central administrators made decisions.

Just as teachers, parents, and community members saw their relative power change in the two eras, so did principals, who played visible roles in both accountability efforts.

### Principals

At the February 1971 press conference announcing the ETS accountability design contract, Chancellor Scribner stated, "the finger [of accountability] will not be pointed at any one individual or administrator" but rather on "staff performance in the aggregate" (Buder, 1971a, p. 29). In its promise of joint accountability without individual consequences, this statement reflected the Chancellor's effort to keep all interested professional parties at the system design table. However, from the mid-1960s into the 1970s, African-American and Latino representatives emphasized that they expected any accountability system to reward effective educators and, when necessary, remove ineffective individuals, whom these advocates deemed responsible for the poor educations children from their communities received (Lewis, 2013; Wynne, 1972). In a *New York Times* editorial, for instance, Kenneth B. Clark (1970) emphasized,

A system of accountability must be maintained to insure that each teacher is responsible to his principal or assistant principal for the reading achievement of the children in his class. The principal, in turn, must be responsible to the assistant superintendent or some other supervisor for the efficient performance of his teachers as this is reflected in the academic performance of their students. (p. 63)

At the outset of the 1970s effort, however, accountability appeared intended to preserve rather than challenge the professional status quo. Tellingly, a *New York Times* photo from the February 1971

press conference showed the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) president, the Board of Education president, the Chancellor, and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) president seated side-by-side at a conference table, symbolically united in their quest for joint accountability without finger pointing (Buder, 1971a, p. 29).

After Irving Anker became Chancellor in fall 1973, he helped jump start the accountability committee and reinvigorate the quest to have the BOE approve and implement the ETS plan. In another step, he publicly identified principals as one class of professional educators whom he expected to meet stated educational objectives or face professional consequences, including possible removal. As a mechanism toward achieving that end, he introduced a proposed yearly evaluation plan in which principals would be assessed on the degree to which they met specific goals during the school year (Buder, 1974a). In introducing the initiative, Anker explained the evaluation plan was “a highly significant attempt to improve the quality of supervisory practices” (Buder, 1974a, p. 1). The headline of a related *New York Times* story, meanwhile, announced “Principals Face Disciplining Under Grading System” (Buder, 1974a, p. 1). The message seemed clear: principals must improve, or else.

At the time, New York City principals, very few of whom were people of color, felt under siege from the democratic, sociopolitical forces affecting NYC education generally and their schools specifically. Student rights, community control, and parental advocacy had increasingly threatened administrators’ school-based authority, while principal tenure was being contested (Peck, 2011; SAANYS, n.d.). Moreover, African-Americans, Latinos, and individuals from other traditionally excluded groups successfully challenged hiring processes that had privileged Whites for teaching and supervisory positions (Collins, 2011). In response to these events, some veteran, tenure-protected principals, especially high school principals, became vocal political actors who would stake out reactionary postures and regularly protest actions by NYC school system leaders, including the Chancellor (Maeroff, 1982). In a widely-publicized act of protest in 1976, a high school principal, with the support of parents, barricaded himself in his office for several days in order to defy Chancellor Anker’s directive for his removal from the position. The principal eventually benefited from a compromise solution devised by multiple parties that allowed him to return to his position. These events suggest that principals also engaged in political activism (Peck, 2011).

In this fashion, some principals and the CSA publicly protested what they viewed as Anker’s attempt to impose an accountability measure directed exclusively toward their position. In a letter to the *New York Times* editor, for example, the CSA President Peter O’Brien called the Chancellor’s principal evaluation document “an unwieldy and unworkable form” and “a superficial report card that cannot improve the schools’ effectiveness” (O’Brien, 1974a, p. 1). By fall 1974, the principal evaluation plan was implemented. In a letter, O’Brien advised CSA members to comply with the form only partially, filling out only certain sections. In addition, he recommended members write objectives as general statements rather than specific, measurable items, essentially subverting the intent of the form to structure accountability through attention to concrete goals (O’Brien, 1974b).

Though it is not clear from available records how many principals followed CSA’s suggestions regarding the evaluation plan, the document offers evidence that CSA encouraged its members to resist, if not defy the Chancellor’s pursuit of greater accountability. Importantly, though, this episode also reflected how principals, by 1974, were viewed as an inviting starting point for those concerned with reforming the system through increased professional responsibility for school performance. A *New York Times* editorial from the period, for instance, chided school administrators for protesting the evaluation plan, explaining, “the supervisors, who have spoken out so often against chaotic conditions resulting from irresponsible students or community actions, cannot afford the irresponsibility of undermining the chancellor’s policy of accountability for professional school

leadership” (*New York Times*, 1974, p. 36). By 1982, Chancellor Macchiarola routinely removed and replaced principals in a highly visible indictment of the previous systemic culture that “often treated high school principals as absolute rulers with lifetime powers over their domains” (Maeroff, 1982, p. 1).

By the 2000s, the CSA had fully relinquished principals’ tenure job protections in return for higher pay (Wyatt, 1999). Therefore, principals retained little power to protest any changes enacted by central administrators as they now functioned as at-will employees without lifetime job assurances. In the 2000s, Department of Education (DOE) asserted they “empowered” principals since they had provided them with significant site-based discretion over budget allocations and personnel hiring. DOE leaders, however, retained fundamental authority to demand principals’ attention to particular managerial tasks as well as to define the essential educational outcomes they would be asked to meet (Ravitch, 2010; Shipps, 2012). By 2004, principals bore the brunt of the Chancellor’s tough public talk and well-publicized personnel actions. After the DOE released the names of 45 principals removed for poor performance, Jill S. Levy, the Council of Supervisors and Administrators (CSA) president, called Klein the “quintessential model for bullies” and noted, “it is not enough that the Chancellor is able to replace 45 principals...he has the need to destroy them publicly” (Gootman, 2004, p. B7).

CSA President Levy’s public complaints did little to stall the Klein administration’s focus on principal accountability. In fact, holding principals responsible for student achievement was publicly positioned as a focal point of the administration’s new accountability system as it moved toward the pilot stage. A front page *New York Times* headline intoned, “Principals’ Jobs On Line as City Grades Schools” (Gootman, 2006, p. A1). However, the reporter explained that “any effort to remove principals based on the new grades could require changes in their contract...[since] under the current contract, principals are rated satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and critics say even poor principals are rarely penalized” (Gootman, 2006, p. A1). CSA President Levy likened the school grades to “a sword of Damocles” that would hang over principals (Gootman, 2006, p. B8).

The evolution of principals as chief accountability targets was complete by the following year. Under a new DOE-CSA labor agreement in spring 2007, principals received significantly increased pay in return for signing performance contracts focused on their ability to meet targets for anticipated student test score growth. The student test score growth would be reflected in their school’s letter grade (Herszenhorn, 2007; Shipps, 2012). The agreement also replaced the binary satisfactory-unsatisfactory personal evaluation ratings with a more complex spectrum that would afford principals’ supervisors with more leverage to force change and improvement. While principals’ relinquishment of tenure in 1999 lessened their job protections and made them more vulnerable to professional consequences such as removal from their positions (Wyatt, 1999), the 2007 labor agreement directly tied their professional status to the accountability system. A fundamental change in the public dynamic of responsibility for school results was complete. Where Chancellor Scribner in 1971 had refused to point the finger of accountability at any single educational group, Chancellor Klein in 2007 pointed the finger of accountability squarely at one class of professional: the principal.

## PR

Leaders of the 1970s accountability effort were cognizant of the need to make their proposed design understandable and attractive to the public. Minutes from an early Accountability Committee meeting demonstrate that the group planned to access print media and television to promote the accountability idea (Cooper, 1970). The document explained, “Press releases and background information will be prepared for the public at the proper time. Dr. Dyer and our Office

of Public Information will collaborate on such announcements” (Cooper, 1970, p. 3). In addition to informing the broader public, the accountability committee recognized a need to inform constituents of the committee’s different organizations. The minutes concluded,

A program for selling Accountability [sic] to the clientele in each organization represented on the Committee should include consideration of the following:

- 1) Involvement of Dr. Dyer in the preparation of a press release.
- 2) Use of TV in presenting the program.
- 3) Emphasis on our responsibility to get back to membership.
- 4) Preparation by Dr. Dyer of public relations material. (Cooper, 1970, pp. 3-4)

While the accountability committee helped plan and execute key public relations events such as Chancellor Scribner’s announcement of the ETS design contract (Buder, 1971a), district accountability administrators experienced difficulties in effectively presenting the ETS-designed system to the lay public. In 1975, for instance, Board of Education (BOE) member Amelia Ashe sent a memorandum to the Accountability Director Charles I. Schonhaut explaining that she had “read the minutes of the last Consultative Council meeting and the Parents’ Federation Meeting and have had some calls from parents concerning their difficulty with comprehending the accountability program.” Her concern was that “I am not sure that your well-prepared presentation was fully understood by those present who may lack the background and familiarity with this area.” She continued,

The problem of conveying complex and detailed educational programs to lay people is one I myself have often had. It really requires careful examination of audience level and a presentation geared to their need and ability. I know how hard that is for those of us who are familiar with the sophisticated shorthand of complicated subjects and areas to translate to those with lack of familiarity. (Ashe, 1975, p. 1)

Ashe closed by noting, “If I can be of further assistance, I should be most happy to discuss this further” (Ashe, 1975, p. 1).

Ashe’s pointed advice to Schonhaut suggested the need for more professional management of the publicity for the accountability system plan. BOE public relations operations were relatively well-funded and well-staffed. A 1977 report stated that \$563,444 was budgeted for 25 personnel (Dembart, 1978).<sup>5</sup> Documents from the BOE’s chief public relations representative, Jerome Kovalcik, however, reflected how he had to fight for power and influence. In a series of letters sent from 1969 to 1974, Kovalcik, by 1973 formally designated as the Assistant Superintendent in Charge of the Office of Public Affairs, consistently argued he should be more involved in Board deliberations regarding key issues facing the district. In a January 1971 letter to Chancellor Scribner, for instance, he asserted,

I may be able to help you and the Board when reports and memoranda which you send to the Board are considered at informal meetings. However, I cannot do so at present time because I do not get copies of them. I sit in the outer circle guessing what it is being discussed, without being able at all to offer public or community relations counsel as is my responsibility....I respectfully submit that you and the Board should seek public relations counsel much the same way as the advice of the Secretary and Legal Counsel is sought and heard. (Kovalick, 1971, p. 1)

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Koch, a candidate for New York City mayor in 1977, seized on the public relations budget to criticize the Board of Education. He stated the BOE spent “more money on its public image than it does on its Office of Educational Performance and Accountability” (Dembart, 1978, p. B3).

By February 1974, he argued in a memorandum to Chancellor Irving Anker that the Office of Public Affairs be given “the responsibility and authority to utilize” the district’s television and radio stations “for public or community relations” (Kovalcik, 1974, p. 1).

Assistant Superintendent Kovalcik’s requests for more involvement suggest that the role of the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) in the Board’s publicity and outreach processes was unsettled. Specifically, while the OPA managed various publications produced on behalf of the BOE and had a News Bureau, the role that OPA would play in informing and managing external press relations remained ill-defined. In response to a proposal from a Board member that an Office of Media Communications be established separate from the OPA, Kovalcik explained, “I am not able to recommend a sensible or practicable plan for separating press relations from the Office of Public Affairs” and that “structural separation per se will not enhance press relations” (Kovalcik, 1975, p. 1). He also made a series of recommendations, including,

3. Regularly scheduled and frequent meetings of the Board’s public relations committee and any designated Board staff with the head of the News Bureau and me to discuss public relations (including press, radio and television) strategies: content, techniques, etc.
4. The inclusion of the [head of the News Bureau] or me in the Chancellor’s daily discussions with his immediate staff of contemporary problems, decisions, actions, etc. (Kovalcik, 1975, p. 3)

In the midst of the 1975 accountability system implementation effort, then, the Assistant Superintendent of the Office of Public Affairs, presumably the individual most likely to be able to promote reforms like the accountability system through effective press relations, was still fighting for a place in the Board of Education inner circle.

By the 2000s, Department of Education (DOE) school leaders benefitted from more concentrated and coordinated attention to savvy press relations. According to one report, during the Klein administration in 2008, the DOE press office stood at 14 employees who exercised a budget of \$1.3 million (Green, 2008). This figure stood in stark contrast to the early 1990s; a former BOE press secretary from 1990 to 1993 reported that he had a staff of 5, including himself (Green, 2008). The 2000s DOE press office also engaged in a concerted effort at message control. For instance, it established a seven member “truth squad” that monitored popular education-related websites and blogs, and, when necessary, posted responses to correct what they deemed as misinformation or inaccuracies (Green, 2008, p. 1). Christopher Cerf, a deputy chancellor who developed the idea, explained, “We try to keep track of what people are saying about us, and we respond periodically, because we believe in the truth,” while press secretary Eric Cantor stated, “It’s just correcting mistakes on a different kind of media” (Green, 2008, p. 1). Sol Stern, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, school choice advocate, and long-time observer of the New York City public schools, discovered that his *City Journal* writings were read regularly by the Truth Squad. He commented, “It sounds like Orwell’s Ministry of Truth. But I guess I should be flattered that the big boss [Klein] monitors my writing” (Green, 2008, p. 2).

The fact that high-level DOE administrators like Deputy Chancellor Cerf took a vested interest in press relations offers a pointed contrast to the 1970s, when the task of who should handle BOE press relations was unclear and contested. It seemed clear in the 2000s, press relations were so vital that considerations of how to manage media reporting on the schools began at the very top of the administrative firmament. For example, in his repeated use of principals as accountability targets in the press, Chancellor Joel Klein showcased the media skills of a skilled major 21<sup>st</sup> century organizational leader. In one notable instance, Klein made a phone call to Michael J. Petrilli, a noted Thomas B. Fordham Institute educational policy analyst, to discuss information the author posted to

the Institute's online blog. According to DOE press secretary Eric Cantor, Klein "knows Mike [Petrilli] well and thinks that Mike completely misunderstood the issue" regarding the DOE's use of a reading curriculum that Petrilli described as "hogwash" and "screwy" (Gootman, 2008, pp. 1-2). Petrilli later described Klein as "my personal stalker" (Gootman, 2008, p. 1). On a larger, symbolic level, Klein's phone call, as well as what appeared to be his familiar relationship with the author, underscores how, by the 2000s, managing press relations was the business of everyone in the DOE administration. The accountability system, unveiled through press accounts emphasizing how professional educators such as principals would be held responsible for school performance, became an essential part of the DOE's forceful, agenda-setting media campaign.

Importantly, the accountability system's single, user-friendly metric helped to promote the program in language easily translatable to the broader public. At a state of the city address, for instance, Mayor Bloomberg described the school letter grades simply as, "a better way to hold a principal's feet to the fire" (Bloomberg, 2007, p. 3). In this sense, explaining the substance of the school grades mattered less than emphasizing that they were a means to bring accountability to the schools. The school grades predated NYC's later employment of single letter grades to signify restaurants' sanitary level (NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2011). Whether used for ranking schools or steakhouses, the A-F symbol offered a simple, powerful signifier of quality, no matter how the signifier was derived. Single letter grades certainly stood in stark contrast to the Corrective Action Plans, the public document associated with the 1970s accountability plan.

## **Discussion**

In the 1970s, accountability was an incipient policy idea in the United States, and the ETS plan for New York City found no fertile ground in which to grow. In the 2000s, standards-based accountability was a reigning national policy paradigm (Mehta, 2013), which provided the proper environment for the system constructed under Chancellor Klein's administration to take firm root. In addition, better availability of funding, a tight-control power dynamic, principals as inviting accountability targets, and savvy media management were significant contextual factors enabling 2000s accountability implementation. A shorthand checklist for policymakers interested in implementing a school accountability system in a large urban school district, then, would include a supportive policy paradigm and positive developments in regard to several considerations including money, power, principals (or other accountability targets), and PR.

A particularly important contextual factor in both eras was governance power. The two accountability system implementation efforts demonstrated essential differences between a quasi-democratic, inclusive approach to implementation versus an executive, exclusive approach. The 1970s effort emerged in an arena where central power was so attenuated that expedited implementation was impossible. There were, quite simply, too many constituencies with too many different ideas to come to consensus on a viable way forward toward implementing a citywide accountability system. Conversely, the 2000s effort showcased how organizational power concentrated among an elite few allowed implementation to proceed successfully. In both eras consultants were paid and plans were produced, but only in the 2000s was the central administration's power consolidated sufficiently so that an accountability system was implemented amidst great media fanfare. One wonders, however, about the long-term effects of an implementation strategy based in part on exclusion of so many key, interested parties. If governance power shifts in the future, and now that Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein have departed, will the accountability system survive?

In terms of sociopolitical power, these two cases demonstrate a greatly changed role for communities of color in the battles for New York City education. In the 1960s into the 1970s, African-American and Latino advocates fought fiercely for the idea that professional educators must be held accountable for school performance in their community schools (Lewis, 2013; Perlstein, 2004; Ravitch, 2000). For individuals like Kenneth B. Clark, a formal school accountability system's design and, as importantly, who designed it, were crucial issues open to protest and dispute. In the 2000s, such community advocates were largely relegated to the sideline as policy elites imposed their own particular form of bureaucratic accountability on the schools. Chancellor Klein administration's approach to accountability system implementation proved successful, but it also begs the question: in a democratic nation, what are the costs of running public schools in ways that essentially minimize local community input?

Turning to a principle drawn from scholarship regarding the history of educational reform, the two quests, separated by roughly three decades, to create an accountability system in New York City underscore the notion that reform ideas do indeed return—even if in different arrangements (Cuban, 1990; Hess, 2010). Though not within the provenance of this study, the intervening time between the 1970s and 2000s effort was marked by repeated calls, successful steps, and failed missteps toward increased school accountability in New York City. For thirty years, then, members of the New York City professional educator classes as well as the communities the schools serve considered the proper place and role of “accountability.” The idea that someone, somewhere can, must, and will be held responsible for a student's academic performance is a reform idea that has emerged “again, again, and again” (Cuban, 1990, p. 3) in the New York City schools.

Finally, much as Lipman (2002) and Mazzeo (2001) found, symbolic politics suffused each of the two accountability efforts. Signifying democratic involvement, in 1971 Chancellor Scribner invited more stakeholder representatives to his Accountability Committee when complaints emerged. Contrastingly, Chancellor Klein's actions symbolized corporate-style prioritization of deeds over deliberation when he hired an accountability chief in 2006; the accountability chief in turn enacted an accountability system fully in 2007. Similarly, teachers' and principals' public protests against professional accountability in the 1970s signaled two Chancellors' relative impotence to take decisive action within their professional domain. In this way, Chancellors Scribner and Anker seemed less supervisors of the organization than subjects to its whims. In 2004, conversely, media reports regarding Chancellor Klein's removal of principals for poor performance symbolized a Chancellor's forceful initial efforts to bring accountability to the system. In media accounts, he was depicted as a strong leader taking tough, urgent action against deficient educators.

## **Conclusion**

In the 1970s, a politically appointed Board of Education and two Chancellors undertook ambitious efforts to develop and implement an accountability system in the New York City public schools. Inclusive development efforts, represented by an Accountability Committee, failed to produce system implementation. Thirty years later, the Department of Education (DOE) under control of the Mayor and his hand-selected Chancellor again undertook ambitious efforts to devise and implement an accountability system in the New York City public schools. Against the backdrop of a fully matured national educational accountability policy paradigm, closed-ranks DOE accountability system design efforts led directly to implementation. Moreover, positive conditions in relation to four contextual factors (money, power, principals, and PR) proved pivotal in enabling implementation success in the 2000s.

This study helps enrich and deepen our understanding of the interplay between policy paradigms and contextual factors, and demonstrates how these forces affect the implementation of educational accountability policy. In the case of New York City, the 1970s effort suffered from the fact that accountability, as an inchoate policy idea, engendered debates over what constituted suitable assessment measures as well as who should be held accountable for educational results. In the 2000s, holding professional educators responsible for student academic performance via test score outcomes was an accepted, commonplace reform idea, a fact which helped ease implementation of the new accountability system in New York City. Importantly, though, the role of several contextual factors in enabling system implementation was clear. For instance, whereas the 1970s effort lacked access to sufficient funding, the 2000s effort benefited from a strong city budget and substantial outside philanthropic support. In the end, the reigning policy paradigm certainly mattered in determining accountability implementation success or failure, but so did the contextual factors of money, power, principals, and public relations. Even with the policy paradigm in place, negative conditions in just one of the contextual factors may have complicated or even doomed system implementation. For example, it seems fair to speculate: would the accountability system have been developed and implemented successfully in the adverse budgetary climate that resulted after the Great Recession of 2008? Or, since a New York state school accountability system already existed to assess the City's schools, would a New York City-specific accountability system have been deemed a luxury item that was too expensive to purchase during troubled economic times?

This study also helps illuminate the neglected topic of how and why accountability first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. While Mehta (2013) described the 1970s as a time when establishing bureaucratic accountability mechanisms was predominantly the concern of state departments of education, major cities like New York City also pursued educational improvement through accountability systems. Furthermore, Dr. Kenneth B. Clark's integral role in the development of accountability systems in both Washington, D.C. and New York City suggests how African-Americans in particular played an important though underappreciated role in supporting educational accountability system development in the 1970s. In the state department of education in Michigan, for example, African-American educational leaders like John Porter and Ronald Edmonds (whose work eventually helped spark the Effective Schools Movement) led the way in developing a "six-step accountability model" (Mehta, 2013, p. 80). In the 1960s and 1970s, African-American urban school leader Marcus Foster utilized accountability in his efforts to improve schools in Philadelphia and Oakland (Spencer, 2012). Spencer (2012) explained, "the emphasis on academic achievement and accountability in our [contemporary] era is...in part—a *legacy* [italics original] of the black freedom movement" (p. 188).<sup>6</sup> African-Americans and members of other underserved populations in urban areas, then, proved essential to the early gestation of educational accountability as a preferred school reform approach. In the 2000s, however, community members, parents, and civic leaders from underserved populations were essentially ignored in an accountability system development and implementation process tightly controlled by DOE central administration. One wonders what long-term democratic costs to urban schools, communities, and students such an exclusionary approach exacted.

Finally, events in New York City demonstrate the possible political value of accountability, specifically in the symbolic frame it generates in which elected officials hold educators responsible

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<sup>6</sup> Spencer (2012) argued, however, that present-day accountability overly focuses on holding educators responsible for academic outcomes, and neglects attention to broader socioeconomic factors that affect urban children and the communities in which they live. Marcus Foster, for example, had advocated for community engagement and shared accountability.

for student academic results. In the 2000s, Mayor Bloomberg was elected in part to transform a school district perceived as corrupt, dysfunctional, and incapacitated. In media depictions, the new educational accountability system came to signify gutsy leadership willing to hold a “principal’s feet to the fire” in order to ensure a great education for New York City’s children (Bloomberg, 2007, p. 3). Moreover, when the Mayor ran for re-election in fall 2009, the fact that 97% of the elementary and middle schools received an A or B in the grading system that Chancellor Klein’s administration put into operation two years previously helped support the Mayor’s consistent public message that the school system had improved under his watch (Medina & Gebeloff, 2009). It seems that an accountability system implemented as a means to improve teaching and learning for students also provided benefits for the adults tasked with reforming the New York City public schools. Such are the potential political profits afforded by school accountability system implementation.

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