

POLITICAL AGENDA-SETTING AND RACIAL INTEGRATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A  
COMPARISON OF DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND NEW YORK DISTRICT 15

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## ABSTRACT

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Title: Political Agenda-Setting And Racial Integration In Public Schools: A Comparison Of Denver Public Schools And New York District 15

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Although prior research has been done applying the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) and Multiple Streams Analysis (MSA) to political processes at the national or state level, no prior research has applied these theories on a local level specifically to racial and socio-economic integration plans in school districts. Interviews were conducted with key people in Denver Public Schools and New York District 15 in order to apply these theories to ascertain what the most relevant factors were that led to integration plans being approved in the respective school district. This study hypothesized that MSA would provide the most explanatory value when applied to these two school districts and that issue redefinition would be the most crucial factor leading to the approval of school integration plans. A deductive approach to qualitative analysis was used in order to analyze the interview data and connect the data to the theoretical frames of PET and MSA. This analysis revealed that while MSA had more explanatory value when applied to Denver's integration plan, both MSA and PET had significant explanatory value when applied to New York City District 15's plan. Overall, focusing events, issue redefinition, data availability, and long-standing community activism were all crucial factors in successfully creating and passing each integration plan.

**Keywords:** integration, public school, race, political agenda-setting, policy process, Denver, New York City, punctuated equilibrium theory, multiple streams analysis

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States declared in the case *Brown v. Board of Education* that the segregation of public schools is unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1), n.d.). Yet, more than half of schoolchildren currently in the US live in “racially concentrated school districts, where over 75 percent of students are either white or nonwhite” (Mervosh, 2019). The de-facto segregation of many schools is a miscarriage of justice; separate is not, and never will be equal. Segregation of public schools also correlates to disparities in school funding, with school districts that serve majority students of color receiving \$23 billion dollars less than majority white school districts in 2016 (Mervosh, 2019). Integrating public schools is incredibly important in helping to reduce the funding disparities and equalizing educational outcomes among all races.

A vast minority of school districts, 185 in total, are voluntarily attempting to address the issue of racial segregation in their schools and have implemented plans in order to do so (Potter & Burris, 2020). These districts range from rural towns such as Clinton, Mississippi to large cities such as San Jose, California, districts where 68% of students are white such as Boulder Valley in Colorado to districts where 7% of students are white such as in Miami-Dade in Florida, and school districts where 100% of students are on a free or reduced-priced lunch plan such as in Kindezi Schools in Georgia to school districts where only 10% of students are on such plans like in Palo Alto, California (Potter & Burris, 2020). It is not definitively known why these schools districts are the exception to the general trend of inaction with respect to integrating public schools, especially given the potential benefits such plans would offer in terms of correcting funding disparities and equalizing educational outcomes. Attempting to generalize reasons for why all these school districts voluntarily implemented such plans would be fruitless given the

vast diversity present within these areas. The reason for the voluntary implementation of integration plans in each district may depend on a myriad of factors such as the city's racial history, its demographics, political leanings, school board membership, and other factors unknown.

One school district that has not implemented an integration plan, although it is clearly needed, is Austin Independent School District (AISD) in Texas. AISD has the largest racial disparity in elementary school poverty rates between black and white students in the state, with black elementary students attending schools that “on average have rates of Economically Disadvantaged students that are 50 percentage points greater than the elementary schools that white students attend in the same district” (Sterne, n.d., p. 6). In AISD, students are assigned to schools based on their geographic zone (*Find Your School*, n.d.), and this zoning can facilitate segregation in public schools due to the vast geographic racial and socioeconomic disparities present in Austin. Although it seems like Austin is in dire need of an integration plan, no such plan is or has been forthcoming.

In order to understand why Austin and its public schools have remained segregated, it is important to study similar cities and public schools systems that have implemented integration plans. Two such school districts are Denver Public Schools (DPS) and New York City District 15 (NYC D15). AISD, DPS, and NYC D15 are all located in large cities, have relatively similar racial and socioeconomic demographics, political leanings, and percent of students on free or reduced-price lunch. Studying districts like DPS and NYC D15 that have such similarities to AISD helps improve the comparison among these districts by controlling for some of the potentially confounding variables. Consequently, the reasons why DPS and NYC D15 implemented integration plans may be applicable to AISD. Consequently, the goal of this study

is to examine what factors led to the successful approval of socioeconomic and racial integration plans in Denver Public Schools and New York District 15 in order to help explain why no such plans have been receiving attention or been implemented in Austin ISD.

The concept of a political agenda is crucial to answering the question of why some racial integrations have passed in some districts while they are nonexistent in others. For the purpose of this research, a political agenda is defined as the series of issues that the public as well as the relevant government officials are seriously paying attention to at any given moment in time. Political agendas are constantly changing as the public's attention wanders from issue to issue and as advocacy groups, the media, news events, and other interest groups draw attention to and from political issues. Any policy before being passed must first make it onto the political agenda, because if a policy never receives any serious attention, then there is no chance that a governing body would be considering the policy in the first place. Simply, making it onto the political agenda is a pre-requisite to a policy being passed. Therefore, in order to answer the question of why racial integration plans passed in certain school districts but not in another, it is necessary to answer the questions of why and how racial integration plans made it onto the political agendas in the districts the plans passed in the first place.

Yet, examining political agenda-setting and its place in the policy process (how a policy goes from being an idea to being approved and implemented) is an extremely complicated matter. One must think of the numerous stakeholders and varieties of people and organizations who attempt to influence the policy process, the interactions among different levels of government, and the effect of geographic, socioeconomic, and cultural condition to even begin to comprehend all that must be examined when analyzing the policy process.

The complexity of the policy process and how and why issues make it onto political agendas is why numerous theories have been developed in order to help organize and simplify the interactions among the many variables that affect any given policy process. Each of these theories is significantly different in how they attempt to explain how attention is gathered and drawn to certain issues and away from other issues. For example, some theories focus on social constructs and their effects on policy, some focus on institutions and how they shape interactions among humans, and some focus on how policies can diffuse from one place to another (Sabatier et al., 2014, pp. 10–11).

Out of all of these theories that explain the policy process and political agenda-setting, this research will utilize two of the most prominent and applicable theories to serve as a theoretical frame in order to help explain the policy processes in Denver and NYC. These two theories of the policy process are Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) and Multiple Streams Analysis (MSA). PET focuses on addressing why certain policy areas go through long periods of instability followed by short periods of great change and what the factors are that lead to the start of the period of change (Sabatier et al., 2014, pp. 59–60). MSA separates the policy system into three streams—problems, policies, and politics—and it focuses on how policy entrepreneurs can couple these three streams during special periods of time called policy windows (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 25).

These two theories serve dual purposes within the context of this research. First, they are used as theoretical frames to help explain the policy processes of the integration plans in both Denver and New York City. Second, they are compared to each other in order to determine which theory offers clearer insights into the policy processes of the school integration plans each city. This second question is important because neither of these theories have previously been



used to apply to education policy in a local context, so it is not clear prior to this analysis which of these theories would serve as a better frame in regard to this specific context. Overall, these theories will help specifically in identifying the key similarities and differences in factors that lead to integration plans being approved in each school district while taking into account the numerous factors that may affect why these policies were approved and implemented. The insight offered by analyzing the policy process of racial integration plans in both of these school districts is crucial because it could help similar plans be implemented in other school districts that need it.

This paper will first explain in detail the theoretical framework behind this research, the PET and the MSA. PET and MSA are two theories of the policy process that focus on political agenda setting, which is an area of study that attempts to explain how and why scarce attention is spent and divided by policy makers. In this section of the paper, key terms from both theories are defined and explained in depth. Further, the major aspects of both of these theories are explained in relation to one another in order to inform the later analysis that applies both of these theories to the policy processes examined in Denver and NYC.

Next, this paper will have a chapter focused on the research conducted in Denver Public Schools. First, the methodology of the research in Denver, including the strategy behind the archival research and how interview subjects were chosen will be explained. After that, the history of racial desegregation and past integration plans will be explained, including the specific timeline of events that led to the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) arriving on the political agenda there and being approved. Lastly, the results of the interview data will be summarized.

The fourth section of the paper will focus on NYC D15 and the Diversity Plan implemented there. Like in the section on Denver, this section will start off by reviewing the methodology of the research conducted in NYC D15, including how interview subjects were chosen and what archival research was done. Next, the history of racial segregation and integration in NYC will be discussed in order to provide context for an explanation of the timeline of how the Diversity Plan arrived on the political agenda and passed. Finally, the results of the interview data will be discussed.

Subsequently, this paper will have a discussion section focused on comparing the results of the research in DPS and NYC D15 within the context of PET and MSA. Key events and people in the timelines of both integration plans will be placed into the context of both PET and MSA in order to uncover how these theories may shed light on why the integration plans successfully arrived on the political agenda in both school districts. Within this section the question of which theory best provides insights into the policy process in each district will also be discussed.

Lastly, this paper will explain the limitations, conclusions, and the implications for further study of this research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND GENERAL METHODOLOGY**

This study aims to answer the question of how and why racial integration plans arrived on the local political agendas of Denver Public Schools and New York District 15 within the past several years. One secondary question of this study is which of the two theoretical models of political agenda setting, punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) or multiple streams analysis (MSA), best describe the political processes in Denver and New York. In order to answer both of

these questions, the current literature on political agenda setting theories of the policy process must be examined.

The following sections explain the major concepts and definitions from the two theories of political agenda-setting that serve as the theoretical foundation for this study. These two theories were chosen due to their relative importance and recent developments in the literature. Two key questions that political agenda setting theories and theorists attempt to explore are how and why scarce attention is divided and spent by politicians (Klüser & Radojevic, 2019). Some key concepts that are important to this field are serial and parallel processing, attention, issue definitions and redefinition, political institutions, and positive and negative feedback loops.

### ***Multiple Streams Analysis (MSA)***

The first of the two major theories on the policy process that form the theoretical framework for this study is the multiple streams analysis (MSA). This section of the paper will first provide a brief overview of the MSA frame. Next, it will outline the key assumptions of the theory and their implications on how MSA provides a distinct perspective on the policy process. After that, the three streams that make up the multiple streams in MSA will be explained. Finally, limitations and criticism of this theory will be briefly summarized. Throughout this section key terms will be defined in order to help clarify the discussion portion of this research.

MSA was first explained by John Kingdon in his work Agendas, alternatives, and public policies, and it attempts to answer three key questions: how is attention rationed?; how and where is the search for alternatives conducted?; and how is selection biased? (Kingdon, 2011). The theory goes on to outline three key streams of the policy system: problems, policies, and politics (Kingdon, 2011). Each stream is usually separate and has its own rules, but Kingdon claims that at key moments in time the policy streams can be coupled by policy entrepreneurs

(Kingdon, 2011). By coupling these three streams, a policy entrepreneur “dramatically enhances the chances that policymakers will adopt a specific policy” (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 26). Policy entrepreneurs are individuals or groups that take advantage of these opportunities in order to create their desired policy outcome (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30).

MSA operates under several key assumptions that are critical to understanding the theory. One key assumption of this theory is that policy making occurs under the condition of ambiguity, which is defined as “a state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena” (Feldman, 1989, p. 5). This assumption means that policies can be redefined and reframed in order to draw attention to the policy. Kingdon further claims that there are three concepts that can be used to measure ambiguity, and these factors are “fluid participation, problematic preferences, and unclear technology” (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 27). The more fluid the participation, the more people don’t know what they want, and the more unclear an organizations process for turning inputs into outputs, the more ambiguity is present (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 27). Fluid participation refers to how people involved in policy decisions come and go over time, including legislators, bureaucrats, and nongovernmental actors. Problematic preferences refers to how decisions makers often do not have very clear objectives. Unclear technology refers to how members of an organization often don’t know how their individual job fits into the larger picture of the organization’s mission, which makes the organizations process of producing outputs unclear (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 27).

Another key assumption is that individual attention or processing is serial, while systemic attention or processing is parallel (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 28). This means that individuals must focus their attention on one issue at a time while systems can focus their attention on multiple issues at a time. The next key assumption of MSA is that policy makers operate under time

constraints (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 29). These time constraints make it so not all policies can be considered during a set period of time and consequently only policies that are prioritized by politicians will have a chance at being implemented. Lastly, MSA assumes that the three streams of the policy process are independent (Sabatier et al., 2014, pp. 31–34). This means at most times events that occur in each stream do not affect each other.

Another key aspect of MSA is the act of political manipulation, which consists of redefining issues by providing different meanings and clarification in the face of policy ambiguity (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30). In MSA, policy entrepreneurs can use information as a means of political manipulation in order to influence policy makers and get preferred policies enacted (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30). The means through which policy manipulation is enacted is by changing how information about an issue is framed, thereby emphasizing a particular aspect of a political issue in order to change the meaning of a policy (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30). Institutions can also play a role in reframing a political issue (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30).

It is important to note that MSA does not assume that individuals making decisions are always rationalists, or that individuals will always behave in a way as to maximize utility (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30). Under MSA, individuals “sometimes behave rationally, but the process of making systemic decisions often does not exhibit rational properties” (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30). Systemic decisions often do not have rational properties because policymakers cannot create policy to maximize outcomes because they operate under ambiguity and have problematic preferences and are subject to manipulation by policy entrepreneurs. So, rather than policy be made in an entirely rational way, policy is made when policymakers determine a solution is good enough based on which aspect of a problem a policy entrepreneur is highlighting (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 30).

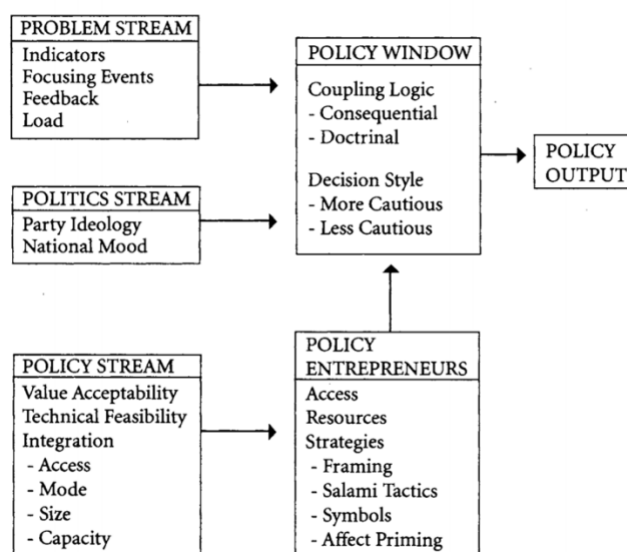
Kingdon states that there are three streams flowing through the policy system; these three streams are the problem stream, the politics stream, and the policy stream. The problems stream includes all of the issues that policymakers and residents want to address, and policymakers learn about these problems through indicators, focusing events, and feedback. Indicators help measure the scope of a problem, focusing events draw attention to problems, and feedback uses the success or failure of past policy to help inform what solutions may work in other policy areas (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 32). The policy stream consists of all of the ideas on what policy solutions could help address policy problems (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 33). Solutions that are technically feasible, that align with societal values, and that are able to be implemented with available resources are ones that are likely to be selected from this stream (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 33). The politics stream consists of “the national mood, pressure group campaigns, and administrative or legislative turnover” (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 34). National mood is when many individuals are thinking along the same political line, pressure group campaigns are the voices of interest groups, and legislative turnover is when policymakers are replaced (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 34). These three factors can all impacts which issues receive attention and which do not. At particular moments, the three streams can align, and these moments are known as policy windows. During these windows, there is an opportunity for a policy solution to be pushed through and approved by policymakers. Policy entrepreneurs are the ones in Kingdon’s model that must seize the opportunity during a policy window to manipulate information and implement their preferred policy (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 35).

There are also a number of limitations and criticisms of MSA that are important to acknowledge. One concern is that one major assumption of the theory, that the policy streams are generally independent, is not true. Critics claim that the streams could be more helpful as a tool

of analysis if they were viewed as interdependent, since policy changes in one stream can often have direct impacts on other streams, but advocates of MSA would respond that stream independence is crucial to understanding policy as at times irrational or in search of a rationale (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 42). Another criticism of this model is that it cannot be quantitatively analyzed. Although it is true that most applications of this theory have been through qualitative case studies, there are some notable exceptions, such as Travis and Zahariadis (2002) and Sagar and Rielle (2013) (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 43). Lastly, critics claim that this theory is too focused on actors and less focused on institutional arrangements and their impacts on the policy process (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 43). This is a valid criticism and must be kept in mind as a limitation of any conclusions drawn that the role of institutions on the policy process may be minimized due to less attention given to this aspect by MSA.

Overall, policies in the MSA can become implemented when a policy window is opened, and a policy window is open when three factors are present: problems are recognized, problems have a viable solution, and the solution is politically correct to make (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 35). Policy entrepreneurs can take advantage of policy windows to reframe policy solutions to draw more attention to issues and finally lead to a policy output (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 36). A summary of the policy process as laid out under MSA is presented below.

Figure 1: Model of the Multiple Streams Framework



Source: (Sabatier, 2007, p. 71)

### ***Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET)***

The second major theory of the policy process that is used within this theoretical framework is PET. PET primarily attempts to address the question of why political processes have long periods of small change but occasionally these periods of relative stability are disrupted by drastic policy change in a short period of time (Baumgartner, 1993). The two major concepts of the PET are issue definition and agenda setting (Baumgartner, 1993). Issue definition and agenda setting are interrelated in this theory, since a changing definition of an issue can often reinforce or question the place of a political issue on the policy agenda (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 60). Reinforcement creates barriers to large change while questioning does the opposite (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 60). Further, one key assumption of the PET is that the policy process is assumed to operate with the foundation of political institutions and bounded rationality decision making (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 60). The meaning of bounded rationality is that decision making is constrained by limitations of attention and time (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 60). Both politicians



and government in general are limited by these constraints under the PET model (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 60).

Under the PET, political institutions are said to be conservatively designed and require mobilization in order to create policy change in the face of established interests (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 62). PET also differentiates between macro-politics and political subsystems, where macro-politics is focused on the politics of Congress and the President and political subsystems are small and generally more issue-focused (Sabatier et al., 2014, pp. 60–63). A political subsystem that comes to be controlled by one interest is known as a policy monopoly, and this policy monopoly both controls the policymaking in an area and is supported by a powerful policy image (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 64). Policy monopolies can create negative feedback loops by systematically lowering the chance for the policy in that area to change, but policy monopolies can be destroyed by massive mobilization and issue redefinition or increased issue saliency (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 64). Following the destruction of a policy monopoly, new actors can come to the forefront in a policy subsystem and establish themselves in the policy space by implementing institutional reforms, thereby changing the balance of power (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 64).

The last three concepts of the PET that are important to this study are serial/parallel processing, negative and positive feedback, and policy images. Like in MSA, PET claims that individuals are serial processors whereas organizations are more likely to be parallel processors (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 63). Yet, PET further claims that at times parallel processing can break down in organizations when some issue rises to the forefront of an organization and requires a lot of attention in a small amount of time (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 63). Under the PET, positive and negative feedback loops occur when small changes become amplified into bigger changes, or

when stability leads to increasing likelihood of stasis, respectively (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 65). Positive feedback can occur under the PET especially in the macro-political arena where “small changes in objective circumstances can cause large changes in policy”, and this feedback process can be characterized by the “bandwagon effect” or a “feeding frenzy” (Sabatier et al., 2014, pp. 64–65). Policy monopolies can create negative feedback loops, as described in the previous paragraph.

Lastly, policy images are crucial to the policy process under PET. Successful, supportive policy images can help cement the stability of a policy monopoly, but when there are multiple competing images, specific images can be utilized by policy entrepreneurs to advance their interests in several different policy venues (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 67). Each different venue can offer a separate opportunity for a policy entrepreneur to achieve the policy output desired (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 67).

Both MSA and PET present significantly different views on the policy process. While MSA focuses on the three independent streams of the policy process and how at certain times individuals or groups can combine the streams to create a policy output, PET focuses more on explaining why the policy process is characterized by long periods of stability interrupted by short periods of great change. One key similarity between the two theories is their assumption that individuals process issues serially while groups, organizations, or institutions process issues in parallel. Another significant similarity between the two theories is their emphasis on redefining a policy issue as a means of drawing attention to the policy and consequently getting a policy to rise in prominence on political agendas. While PET emphasizes how policy redefinition can lead to a positive feedback loop to create massive change, MSA instead focuses on the individuals who are redefining the policy as being the crucial factor in leading to a policy output.

Both theories also focus on political institutions and how the interactions between institutions and advocates pushing for policy change are important to the policy process. Yet, PET focuses more on the interactions between macro-politics and policy subsystems and how these interact in such a way as to enable policy advocates to attempt to create change at different policy venues. It is unclear how well the macro-politics interaction will fit when applied to a local context, because within the context of a local school district there may be significantly less policy venues to achieve policy change and macro-politics may play much less of a factor. MSA does not have as specific a focus on macro-level institutions such as Congress and the President as PET does and consequently may be more fitting for a local context.

There is a gap in the literature of political agenda setting theory since no study has attempted to apply political agenda setting theories to a local school district's integration plans. This study attempts to address this gap in the literature by evaluating how well each of the two political agenda setting theories can apply to a local context. These two theories will also serve as the basis for analyzing and interpreting the results of the interview data in order to best determine what the key factors were that led to racial integration plans arriving on the political agenda in these school districts. In this way, this study will lead to new knowledge of political agenda setting in the context of local school districts.

### ***Methodology of the Theoretical Framework***

This section of the paper first explains why MSA and PET were chosen as the two theories that form the theoretical framework of the research. Then, it is explained how the theories will be compared against each other in the discussion and what metrics will be used to determine which theory models the policy processes in Denver and NYC D15 better.

Both MSA and PET are theories of the policy process that meet, and surpass, certain minimum criteria that qualifies them to be able to be used in this research. First, they are both thoroughly developed in that they have a set of clear assumptions, clear definitions of the main concepts of each theory, and have empirically testable hypotheses. Further, both theories have recent theoretical development and are contemporarily used by researchers in the field of the policy process, indicating that the theories are fruitful in their applications and are still considered to be applicable in a modern context although the theories were first proposed decades ago. For example, John Kingdon's 1984 book Agendas, alternatives, and public policies where he first lays out MSA has been cited 28,029 times according to Google Scholar (*John W Kingdon, 2021*), and Baumgartner and Jones' book Agendas and instability in American Politics, the second edition explaining their punctuated equilibrium theory has been cited 10,003 times (*Frank Baumgartner, 2021*). Sabatier in the Theories of the Policy Process book also notes when evaluating the activeness of the research programs of both of these theories that both theories have been extensively published, have numerous applications, and have been developing significantly over time (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 373). It is clear both theories are still in use today in an academic context and are currently being applied and developed.

Another reason for choosing these two theories is that they are readily comparable due to their similar levels of analysis, assumptions, and models of the individual, but are different in how they explain the causes of policy change. Both theories operate on a system level of analysis, which means that any conclusions drawn from applying these theories will be readily comparable since they will both be conclusions about the whole policy system. Further, the theories have assumptions that are compatible with one another, especially in regard to their views in individual and collective decision-making (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 369). Next, both

theories have similar models of the individual since they place special emphasis on how actors frame political issues in different ways and how actors' attention can change drastically over time (Sabatier et al., 2014, p. 370). These similarities make the qualitative data collection simpler because questions can be asked to interview subjects about how issues were framed and answers will apply to both theories. This simplification during the interview process is crucial due to the short amount of time interview subjects have to interview and the necessity to collect the most amount of relevant information within that time.

Both the theories are significantly different in how they explain the causes of policy change, with MSA focusing on policy windows and entrepreneurs and PET focusing on issue redefinition, feedback loops, and institutions. These differences are crucial because they allow the theories to be contrasted against one another and determine the criteria by which the theories will be evaluated to see which theory helps explain the policy process in each school district the best.

The main key concepts that are looked for within the interview data in order to determine which theory best helps to explain the policy processes examined in this research are: the presence of policy entrepreneurs, presence of key components from the policy, politics, and problem streams in MSA or components of a policy window opening, political issues being reframed or redefined, institutions playing an active role in either hindering or helping the policy move forward, or the presence of a policy monopoly. These are the key factors that differentiate the two models from each other. The extent to which evidence gathered of the policy processes in DPS and NYC D15 match factors present in one theory and not the other is the measure by which this analysis will determine that a theory models the policy process well. For example, if there is no evidence of a policy entrepreneur, but there is evidence of a policy monopoly creating

a negative feedback loop, then it will be concluded that PET is a better model for the policy process. If there is equal evidence for both theories, both theories will be concluded to model the policy process well. Finally, if there is little to no evidence matching factors in either theory, then both theories will be concluded to not model this policy process well.

### ***General Methodology***

This section will provide an overview of the methodology of this research, including the reason why interviews and archival data were chosen as the means of data collection, why Denver Public Schools and New York District 15 were chosen as study sites, how the interview protocol was formed, and what the procedure for this study is.

This study is a qualitative study utilizing interviews as its primary means of data collection and archival research as a secondary means of data collection.

First, interviews were selected as the primary means of collecting data in this study because personal recollections from relevant actors and representatives from interest groups can provide insight into the policy process of how school integration plans were developed that no other means could provide. With local political issues, especially with local education policy issues, much of the politics and decision making may happen off the public record. Simply viewing school board meeting recordings and committee meeting recordings is insufficient to determine an exact timeline of causes and effects that led to each specific policy examined in this study going from being an idea to being implemented. Archival sources by themselves are insufficient because in some cases meetings among public officials were not recorded because they are confidential, people did not say exactly what they thought when meetings were recorded, or meetings happened between different interest groups through personal conversations. Interviews are especially suited to getting the specific type of data of personal

opinions and impressions of events that happened that were not recorded or put online and which are essential to uncovering the local policy processes in the chosen study sites.

Six total interviews were conducted for this study, and examples of people interviewed include department of education officials, leaders of working groups that developed the integration plans, and representatives from parent groups. Three interview subjects requested to remain anonymous, and consequently will be referred to as Subject A, Subject B, and Subject C. Further, the anonymous interview subjects will be referred to by randomized pronouns and not be identified by job title. All of these different people were chosen to be interviewed because they all had a substantial effect on the policy process in their respective districts and based on their positions may have had access to different kinds of relevant information for this study. This study was not able to get interviews with some high-profile public officials that may have played a significant role in the policy process, such as Mayor Bill de Blasio from New York City or Superintendent Tom Boasberg from Denver, which may bias the findings by leaving holes in the data from not having these important perspectives.

Archival data was collected and analyzed in this study, including school board meeting minutes and recordings, specific task force committee meeting minutes and recordings, PowerPoint slides presented during these meetings, and articles written and podcasts recorded about these integration plans. These archival sources are a necessary supplement to the interview data to confirm the accuracy of interview statements, provide background knowledge to understand the context each actor was operating within, and to determine which individuals may be more involved and important in the policy processes.

The specific questions that make up the interview protocol for this study were created with the intent of determining what role each actor interviewed played in the policy process,

what they know about what roles other actors played, what the timeline of events were in the policy process, and which events caused other events to happen versus which events were not causally related. It is important to note that although all interview subjects were asked some questions in common, some questions differed depending upon what position each person interviewed held within the policy process and what information that specific person had access to.

The general procedure followed in this study was to first identify key actors and institutions through archival research, reach out to these identified people through email, and finally to conduct the interviews. The interview participants were required to fill out informed consent forms and were given the option to remain anonymous in the study. To this end, some interview subjects will be identified by name, whereas others will be identified as “Subject X”, will be given randomized pronouns, and will not be identified as holding a specific role such as parent or school board member. The ability to remain anonymous is crucial to this study in order to ensure participants were comfortable enough to disclose all relevant information without fear of outside reprisal.

### ***Choosing the Study Sites***

This section is dedicated to providing justification for why the study sites of Denver Public Schools and New York City District 15 were chosen.

First, it is important to note that one goal of this study is to determine why Austin Independent School District (AISD) has not passed a school desegregation plan. Upon first glance, given the severity of the geographic and school segregation in Austin combined with the generally liberal populace one would think that Austin is the ideal location where a racial desegregation plan would have support and be able to pass. Yet, no such plan exists or has been



considered. Uncovering why Austin did not pass an integration plan is a central organizing question behind this research, and it informs the decision to examine the policy processes in DPS and NYC D15.

These two school districts were chosen because successful integration plans were developed in each of these school systems, there was sufficient archival data covering the policy process in each school system, and because relevant statistics of each school district, including student population size, ethnic/racial composition within the districts, percent of students on a free or reduced-price lunch, and political orientation of voters were all similar to the relevant statistics in AISD. Because of these crucial similarities, the key factors that allowed integration plans to be successful in DPS and NYC D15 are more readily applicable to AISD since potentially confounding variables such as school size, racial composition, etc. are somewhat controlled for.

Specifically, a report by The Century Foundation entitled *Here Is What School Integration in America Looks Like Today* was utilized extensively in order to compare relevant statistics of students in AISD to students in DPS and NYC D15 (Potter & Burris, 2020). This report compiled “the most comprehensive inventory to date of school integration efforts across the country” (Potter & Burris, 2020). Out of all the school districts in the nation, 907 of them were found to be making efforts to integrate their schools either socioeconomically or racially, and only 185 of those districts implemented such integrations plans not due to a legal order or agreement. Consequently, potential study sites were only evaluated from this list of 185 school districts, since this research is not focused on school districts where integration plans were passed due to court order or agreement.

First, these 185 school districts were filtered by size. These districts were filtered first based on size under the assumption that policy processes for school districts located within similar size cities/towns would be more similar than policy processes for school districts located within very different size cities. The city size may also generally correlate to the student population served, and this study assumes that school districts serving similar size student populations may have more similar policy processes than that of districts with differing student population sizes. The Century Foundation classified cities by size according to labels assigned by the National Center for Education Statistics based on Census data, and under this classification system AISD is located within a large city. Filtering the 185 school districts for large cities, there are only 57 potential study sites left.

The study sites were then filtered by the percent of students who are on free or reduced-price lunch, a national classification made by the National School Lunch Program. Households qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) based on federal income poverty guidelines and household size. The percent of students who are on free and reduced-price lunch can be used as a proxy for socioeconomic class within a given school district. The reason why this statistic was chosen to filter the potential study sites down is because school districts with similar precents of students in certain socioeconomic classes may have more similar factors affecting the policy process of getting an integration plan passed than that of school districts with vastly different socioeconomic representation. AISD has 53% of students on FRL, and consequently school districts with greater than 73% or less than 33% of students on FRL were filtered out. Only 29 potential study sites were left in consideration after this filter was applied.

The 29 remaining potential study sites were then filtered by student population size. AISD has 80,032 students, and any school districts with less than 10,000 students or greater than

200,000 students were filtered out. As mentioned previously, this filter was done in order to find a school district as close as possible to AISD on a wide variety of metrics. After this filter was applied, only 17 districts were left in consideration.

The 17 remaining potential study sites were then filtered by the percent of students who are white vs non-white. This was done because racial composition of a school district is one factor that could impact policy making in that district and to determine which schools have the closest racial composition to AISD. AISD is composed of 30% white students and 70% non-white students, so school districts with less than 25% or greater than 35% white students were filtered out of the list of potential study sites. After this filtering, only eight school districts remained.

These eight school districts were in Denver, Omaha, Charlotte, Austin, Greensboro, Jacksonville, Minneapolis, and New York City. A cursory qualitative examination was then undergone through google search about the amount of information available about the policy process in each city, including number of news articles written about the integration plans, whether working group reports were published publicly, and number of school board meetings related to these plans. This evaluation was done in order to find the school districts in which extensive archival data was available to gather and to identify potential interview subjects. Although several school districts had numerous available sources for archival information, Denver Public Schools and New York City District 15 were chosen due to their relative abundance of information as well as since the scope of this study limited the number of study sites to only two.

The table below summarizes the relevant statistics examined above for AISD, DPS, and NYC D15. The Austin and Denver school district is sourced from The Century Foundation report mentioned previously, and the NYC District 15 data is sourced from their website.

Figure 2: Demographic statistics of DPS, AISD, and NYC D15

School District Name	# of Students	% FRL	% Black	% Hispanic	% White	% Asian	% ELL	City Size
Denver Public Schools	92,039	65%	13%	54%	25%	3%	27%	Large City
Austin ISD	80,032	53%	7%	55%	30%	4%	24%	Large City
New York City D15	29,846	57%*	13%	36%	30%	16%**	14%	Large City

\*NYC D15 FRL data also includes students whose families are in other social programs, such as food stamps, SSI, foster care, etc.

\*\*NYC D15 % Asian data also includes Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students

### **CHAPTER THREE: DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

This chapter will focus on both the methodology and the results of the research conducted in regard to Denver Public Schools. The major topics discussed within the methodology section are how archival research was conducted and how interview subjects were identified and reached out to. The major topic discussed within the results section is a detailed timeline of the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative based on the interview and archival data gathered.

#### ***Methodology***

The primary sources of archival information examined with respect to research regarding Denver Public Schools (DPS) are school board meeting minutes/agendas, school board meeting recordings, the DPS website, articles written by local news outlets, and documents/reports published by DPS. These various sources were used in order to fill in the timeline of events regarding the policy process of the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) as well as to

corroborate interview data gathered. In the discussion section of this research, it is important to note that interview data is valued more than archival data, because interview data provides insight into people and policy makers' perception of issues, and perception can be more important than reality when determining why a policy gained support and passed when it did.

Potential interview subjects were chosen by first identifying which individuals were most likely to have information that was not publicly available about how and why the integration plan gained approval and passed when it did in the school district. The major categories of groups identified that could have this knowledge were: policymakers (ranging from mayors, school board members, district officials, and planning committee leaders), parent groups, local media reporters, activist groups. In order to protect the anonymity of certain individuals who were interviewed in this research, a comprehensive list of names of people who were reached out to for an interview request will not be given, but they all were from one of these groups mentioned above.

The interviews were conducted using a snowball method in which the first people interviewed were asked about other groups, organizations, or specific people they knew had knowledge of the policy process, and then the people mentioned were sent interview requests. Interview requests were sent through email, or if an email was not publicly available, through LinkedIn message. In DPS, only one round of snowball interviews occurred, with all three of the three total interview subjects in Denver being a part of the first or second wave of candidates interviewed. First, Diana Romero Campbell and Subject A were interviewed, and from their responses Subject B was reached out to and interviewed.

All three of these subjects were first identified based on archival research conducted to see who was participating and playing a significant role in this policy process. These archival

sources included school board meeting minutes, papers and PowerPoints published by the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee (SNC), and through news articles published about the process of the SNI.

### ***Results***

This section presents the results from both the archival research and the interview data with regard to the timeline of major events that occurred in Denver leading up to, during, and after the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative.

#### **Pre-SNC Creation**

First, several key events and trends set the stage for the creation of the SNC in Denver. These events and trends were: rising gentrification, housing segregation, decreasing rates of school enrollment, and the publishing of the Dr. Bailey report.

Gentrification was one key factor identified by all three interview subjects as being an essential factor leading to the creation of the SNI. Campbell noted how the school district before the SNI had not previously talked seriously about how “gentrification was impacting students”, Subject A explained how Denver’s rapid residential and economic growth led to residents being pushed out of their neighborhoods, and Subject B explicitly mentioned how gentrification was a key reason the SNI was created (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Archival data gathered verifies these assertions made by the interview subjects. Denver’s population was booming in the years leading up to 2017, with thousands of people moving to Denver every month, which led to rent increases in neighborhoods that traditionally were affordable. For example, in some of Denver’s poorest neighborhoods, Montbello, North Aurora, and Westwood, the average rent increased by 18%, 17%, and 16%, respectively, from 2015 to 2016 alone (Gottlieb, 2016). The average price of a home in the Denver-Aurora-Lakewood metro area rose

by 11.4% in the 12-month period leading up to February 2016 (Gottlieb, 2016). One significant effect of these demographic shifts is that relatively affluent people are moving to the center of Denver, while poorer residents are pushed towards the outskirts of the city (Gottlieb, 2016).

Rising gentrification in Denver was occurring within a context of a city with already segregated housing, and this combination of factors was also mentioned by interview subjects as a reason for the creation of the SNI. Both Subjects A and B noted how geographic segregation was one impetus of creating an initiative to look at how that impacted schools and offer solutions for that problem (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021; Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). One recent study of segregation in the United States using 2020 Census data classifies Denver as an area with “high segregation”, places Denver as 56<sup>th</sup> for highest rate of segregation in a city nationwide, and finds that segregation in Denver increased over the time period 1990-2019 (Othering & Belonging Institute, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). In regard to black residents in Denver, another study found that there are moderate rates of segregation in 2019 based off of the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (Ray et al., 2021). At least in part due to this geographic segregation, Denver’s schools are segregated as well. The Denver Superintendent, Tim Boasberg, noted this connection in 2017, stating ““We have very significant housing separation and segregation in this city as we see in so many communities across the country ... so then you also see that in our schools,”” (Schimke, 2017). Overall, housing and school segregation were two interrelated factors that led to the creation of the SNI.

Another key reason for the creation of the SNI supported by both interview and archival data is the decreasing rates of school enrollment during the time period leading up to 2017. Subject A mentioned how there were significant enrollment disparities between students of color and white students and also how the district was facing declining enrollment of students of color

in the years leading up to 2017 (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). Similarly, Subject B mentioned how declining enrollment in certain neighborhoods in Denver has led to school closures and that the SNI was created in part in response to those events (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Both of these two interview subjects also explicitly connected these declining enrollment numbers to changing demographics within neighborhoods due to gentrification in combination with the existing segregation in Denver (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021; Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Statistics published by DPS support these assertions about declining rates of enrollment, with enrollment percent growth consistently declining from 2013 onwards, and DPS also acknowledges that this is due to demographic changes and rising housing prices throughout Denver (Denver Public Schools, 2021, p. 4). Further, these declines in enrollment, specifically from 2016-2020, are not equal over all areas of Denver, but are most significant in the Southwest, Northwest, and Central regions of DPS, regions in which relatively higher rates of people of color live (Denver Public Schools, 2021, p. 9; *The Racial Dot Map*, n.d.). Overall, significant changes in enrollment during the time period leading up the creation of the SNI were crucial reason for the creation of the initiative.

The final factor mentioned by interview subjects that led to the creation of the SNI was the publishing of the Dr. Bailey report. The Dr. Bailey report is a qualitative study conducted by Dr. Sharon Bailey that was commissioned by DPS in 2016 to examine the issue of racism against African-American students and teachers in DPS (*Balance of Power*, 2018). The report's major findings were that institutionalized racism significantly affects both African-American students and teachers through hostile learning environments and insensitive curriculum. Both Campbell and Subject A mentioned how the Dr. Bailey report drew much attention to issues of race,



including segregation, within DPS schools (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021; Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). Campbell notes how the Dr. Bailey report, through noting how DPS failed to serve its black students and teachers, emphasized how people of color, although they make up a majority of the district, do not have a proportional community voice that elevates people of color in the district (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Subject A noted how the recommendations that came out of the Dr. Bailey Report and the consequent African-American task force developed by DPS informed the SNC significantly because the Committee tried to align their work with those previous recommendations (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). The Dr. Bailey report overall both informed and prompted the creation of the SNI.

### **SNI Passes and Committee Created**

On March 16, 2017 the School Board of DPS voted on and unanimously passed “The Resolution for Strengthening Neighborhoods”, also known as the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative (Denver Public Schools, 2017). This resolution explicitly acknowledged that integrated schools “offer the best educational outcomes for our children”, that many parts of Denver are undergoing gentrification, and that housing pattern and demographic changes have caused school enrollment to decrease (Denver Public Schools, 2017). The resolution created a committee in order to respond to these key issues facing DPS through creating recommendations about school “boundaries, choice, enrollment and academic programs in order to drive greater socio-economic integration” (Denver Public Schools, 2017). During the school board meeting, board member Lisa Flores, co-sponsor of the SNI Resolution, specifically noted that although DPS is not the housing development organization, but DPS in order to ensure every child succeeds needs to respond to trends in the housing market that have increased gentrification and decreased

enrollment (Denver Public Schools, 2017). Another board member, Ms. Rosemary Rodriguez, noted after the reading of the resolution that she serves a primary Latino area of town and that her area is predicted to have an 11% drop in population over time, which is one of the reasons she supported this resolution (Denver Public Schools, 2017). Overall, the creation of the SNC was a major milestone in the development of integration policy in DPS and was informed by recent demographic changes and racial reckoning in the school district

### **SNC Meets Regularly and Develops Recommendations**

This section described the process undergone by the SNC from the time period of their creation in March of 2017 until December of 2017 when the committee released their recommendations and presented them at a school board meeting. Since recordings and minutes of the committee meetings were unavailable, the primary source of data presented in this section is from the interviews conducted. The two major themes during this time period are: the importance of the co-chairs as leaders and the establishing of definitions of the issue to be addressed.

The three co-chairs of the committee were Diana Romero Campbell, Antwan Jefferson, and Janice Sinden. Campbell notes how the co-chairs were a “trifecta” due to them being diverse racially, ethnically, in terms of gender, and in their areas of expertise (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Campbell, a Latina woman, is experienced with the community engagement side of DPS, Jefferson, a black man, has significant experience in the academic side of education policy, and Sinden, a white woman, had experience with the politics of education policy in DPS, according to Campbell (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Campbell went on to state that these differences were complementary and contributed to their success as co-chairs (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Subject A also

mentioned how the co-chairs were able to make the committee meetings very democratic and collaborative, so that all committee members from various backgrounds and perspectives could contribute to developing the recommendations (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). Subject B also notes how this committee was “really robust and strong” relative to other committees (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, from conversations with these three interview subjects, it is clear that the committee co-chairs were crucial to the success of the SNC due to their ability to utilize their various talents and background and to collaborate with other committee members.

Another key theme from the interview data about the committee meetings was the focus on defining the issues the committee aimed to solve. Campbell notes how Jefferson did a great job in the committee meetings on establishing common language and definitions of key terms, and that the committee in general was able to push the district to define issues such as racial inequity and gentrification and how having these common definitions was incredibly helpful to the committee process. Subject A mentioned one specific issue, defining integration, and how the district defined the integration as socio-economic in nature rather than racial, which came as a surprise to some committee members. Subject A went on to mention that while learning of these differences in definition and reconciling was frustrating, it was also helpful to the overall process of developing recommendations to resolve the issues presented before the committee. Overall, from these interview data it is clear that defining key terms and issues was an integral and helpful part of the committee’s process.

### **Recommendations Discussed at Board Meeting, Phase II Committee Introduced**

The SNC introduced their recommendations to the DPS school board on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017 (Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee, 2017). Some of the major recommendations

that came out of this report include expanding pilot programs that prioritize under-represented students within the school choice system, changing boundaries and enrollment zones to increase diversity, evaluating transportation opportunities for underrepresented students attending schools outside their enrollment zone, and increasing the diversity of staff at all DPS schools (Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee, 2017). All of these recommendations were more fully discussed at a second board meeting on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and during this meeting the Phase II committee (P2C) was introduced. This new committee's objective was to "Convert recommendations into specific action plans for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020" (Denver Public Schools, n.d., p. 8). Although this committee was announced in January, its first meeting was only August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (Denver Public Schools, 2018a). This late start date indicates that the committee was running behind schedule, because a draft timeline for the P2C presented a March start date (Denver Public Schools, n.d.).

It is not clear why the P2C took relatively long to start meeting, but one potential explanation was that new committee members were recruited and some committee members from the Phase I SNC did not stay in the process. Subject A notes that at least one committee member did not join the P2C because of a frustration with the school board that no clear promise was commitment was made by the school board that any of these recommendations would in fact be implemented at the end of this process (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021).

After the start of the P2C in August, other meetings were scheduled for late October and early December 2018, but it could not be confirmed through both archival research nor the interviews if these meetings actually occurred at those times. It could be confirmed that the goal of developing a report and presenting it to the school board by Fall 2018 was not met, and in fact no such report was ever created, even in 2019.

## **Unexpected Factors Delay Implementation**

Several key unexpected factors can account for the delay in the P2C's development of the implementation recommendations and the delay in the school board approving any of these recommendations. These factors include the election of three new school board members, the resignation of the superintendent Tom Boasburg, and a teacher strike.

First, less than a month before the Phase I Committee presented their recommendations at the school board meeting on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, three new school board members were elected, replacing several school board members that has supported the SNC up to this point in time. The school board members who either did not run for another term or ran and lost were Rachele Espiritu, Mike Johnson, and Rosemary Rodriguez. The loss of Espiritu is especially notable because she was the board member that seconded the resolution to form the SNC. Campbell notes how the SNC was really pushing to announce the recommendations before the election of the new school board members, since those members and the superintendent all supported the SNC throughout their recommendation drafting process. However, Campbell stated that the new school members, because they hadn't been through the community process like the other board members had, were wary of the recommendations, and so the new school board members wanted to have another whole community process, which turned into the P2C. Yet Campbell explained that the addition of many new members in the P2C led to a loss in the level of knowledge and process about the issues being evaluated compared to the first committee, and that the P2C wanted to requestion everything, leading to delays in development of their implementation recommendations. In summary, Campbell views that due to the transition in school board members, there was a "missed opportunity" to pass some of the SNC recommendations.

Next, on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Superintendent Tom Boasburg unexpectedly announced his resignation (Asmar, 2018c). His resignation started the intensive process of searching for a new superintendent, and since this search process was so time-consuming, other issues and groups such as the P2C were given less attention and support by the board. Over the four month-period of September to December 2018 the District spent over \$160,000 in the search for a new superintendent, and finally on December 17<sup>th</sup>, Susana Cordova was named the superintendent by the school board (Asmar, 2018a, 2018b). DPS officials explicitly have stated that the particular work of the P2C was hampered by the very consuming search for a new superintendent during this time period (Asmar, 2019b).

The third event that delayed and drew attention away from the work of the P2C was a three-day teacher strike after negotiations between the school board and the teacher's union in regard to teacher pay fell through. This strike started on February 11<sup>th</sup> 2019 and continued through the 13<sup>th</sup>, and was the culmination of a 15-month long process to negotiate teacher pay (Asmar, 2019a). The strike could provide an explanation for why a school board meeting on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019 was cancelled, since that was the very evening the teachers union voted to strike (Hernandez, 2019). This specific school board meeting is important because it was the meeting that the P2C was projected to present at according to a topics forecast released a couple of months prior (Denver Public Schools, 2018b). Although this meeting was rescheduled for February, no meeting in February mentioned the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative or the P2C. DPS officials also have explicitly said that the teacher strike and the negotiations preceding and following have been reasons why the P2C was not given attention and was delayed. After the cancelled school board meeting in January 2019, it could not be confirmed by archival

research or interviews that the P2C was ever able to present recommendations before the school board.

### **Results of SNI and the Potential Future Implementation: Unified Equity Plan**

The Resolution for Strengthening Neighborhoods, the Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee, and the Phase II Committee changed DPS education policy with regard to integration in their schools to a very small extent. After the P2C failed to release recommendations and the school board stalled in progress towards implementing integration policy, seven of the 42 SNC members signed a letter to the school board in early 2019 stating that they are concerned “the work we did, in good faith, may end up in the trash heap” (Asmar, 2019b). In response, the Superintendent Cordova pointed to her new plan, called the Unified Equity Plan, that would bring together recommendations from the SNC and many other equity-related initiatives and committee recommendations into one overall plan (Asmar, 2019b). This was, in effect, an acknowledgement that the Strengthening Neighborhoods plan was no longer being considered to be implemented on its own, only when combined with other equity initiatives, which further delays these recommendations from being implemented.

Although none of the major recommendations of the SNC were implemented, some few changes did occur in DPS because of the SNC. First, three schools joined an a pre-existing pilot program that prioritizes low-income students for enrollment in schools that are not within their enrollment zone (Asmar, 2018a). This pilot program better integrates schools that opt-in by allowing any open seats after nearby residents have enrollment to be prioritized for students on free or reduced-price lunch, increasing the socioeconomic diversity within the school. Next, the district increased the amount of seats each schools must hold open for late-arriving students, from a previous total of 250 seats to 2,500 seats (Asmar, 2018b). Students are considered “late-

arriving” when they move into a neighborhood or change neighborhoods in Denver over the summer, thereby changing which enrollment zone they live in, and because many families have already chosen schools for the next year before summer, often the highest-performing schools have already been filled. Because late-arriving students are more likely to be from a low-income family, reserving more seats for these students ensured that they also have the ability to enroll in high-performing schools (Asmar, 2018b). Lastly, when DPS was evaluating proposals for a new middle school, the District implemented some of the SNC recommendations to make new schools be diverse by design, including by having diverse staff, student body, and curriculum (Schimke, 2018). How well the proposals met this criteria was one standard used by the district when evaluating the middle school proposals (Asmar, 2019b). Overall, while many of the major recommendations of the SNC were not implemented and the development of the P2C was delayed by unexpected factors, some recommendations were implemented to a small extent.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: NEW YORK CITY DISTRICT 15, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

This chapter will focus on the methodology and results of the research conducted in New York City District 15. Within the methodology section the archival research and the process behind how interview subjects were identified will be explained. In the results section, a detailed timeline of the policy process of the Diversity Plan will be laid out and main themes from the interview data will be identified.

### ***Methodology***

The methodology of gathering archival and interview data in regard to NYC D15 and its Diversity Plan was very similar to the methodology of gathering data in DPS. Like with DPS, the primary sources of archival data examined for the Diversity Plan are articles written by local and



national news outlets, the District 15 website, and documents/reports published by District 15. School board meetings were not a source of archival data in D15 due to the differing school administration structure with mayoral control of education policy in NYC. These various sources were used in order to fill in the timeline of events regarding the policy process of developing the Diversity Plan as well as to corroborate interview data gathered.

Like with the process in regard to DPS, with NYC D15 potential interview subjects were chosen by first identifying which individuals were most likely to have information that was not publicly available about how and why the integration plan gained approval and passed when it did in the school district. The major categories of groups identified that could have this knowledge were: policymakers (ranging from mayors, school board members, district officials, and planning committee leaders), parent groups, local media reporters, activist groups. In order to protect the anonymity of certain individuals who were interviewed in this research, a comprehensive list of names of people who were reached out to for an interview request will not be given, but they all were from one of these groups mentioned above.

Further, interviews about the Diversity Plan were also conducted using a snowball method, with the exact same methodology as used with DPS. For interviews about the Diversity Plan, only one round of snowball interviews occurred, with two interview subjects being a part of the first wave of candidates interviewed and one subject being a part of the second wave. The two people who were interviewed first were Miriam Nunberg, representing the interest group Parents for Middle School Equity as one of the working group members of the committee that developed the Diversity Plan, and Anita Skop, the Superintendent of School District 15 in the NYC Department of Education. During the second wave of the interview process, one more

person was interviewed and chose to remain anonymous, they are hereafter referred to as Subject C.

## ***Results***

### **Pre-Diversity Plan Creation**

Several key factors played a significant role in the years and months leading up to the creation of the working group that was charged with creating the Diversity Plan that were essential to why the Diversity Plan got approval and was developed when it was. These factors include the rise in attention to segregation and gentrification in D15, the school choice system facilitating segregation and failing white parents, the Parents for Middle School Equity (PMS) group, mayoral control of education policy in NYC, and the appointment of a new Schools Chancellor in NYC.

The first key factor that set the stage for the Diversity Plan was the rise in attention in NYC and D15 specifically to existing and increasing segregation and gentrification. A report was released by the UCLA Civil Rights Project in 2014 that declared New York Schools the most segregated in the entire nation (Epperly, 2014), which led to a lot of negative press and attention to segregation according to Nunberg and Subject C (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021; Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). Further, segregation was seen as increasing specifically in District 15 due to rising house prices, rising population, and lower-income people being pushed out of their traditional neighborhoods; which according to Nunberg led to problems within schools since there were many more kids than there were seats in “good schools” (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). There was especially an increased awareness within D15 of segregation and gentrification because the district contains both some of the richest neighborhoods in Brooklyn such as Park Slope, where there are a lot of

richer, whiter people, and some relatively low-income more diverse neighborhoods such as Sunset Park and Red Hook (Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). For example, median household income in Park Slope was \$155,250 in 2019, whereas it was \$67,871 in Sunset Park, and while Park Slope is 68% white, Sunset Park is 36% Hispanic and 35% Asian (*Census Profile*, n.d.-a; *Census Profile*, n.d.-b). Overall, both Nunberg and Subject C explicitly tied the UCLA Report and the increasing segregation and gentrification as significant reasons that drew attention to the need for desegregation within D15 schools.

The next key factor that contributed to drawing attention to the issue of segregation in D15 schools and increased buy-in from a diverse set of stakeholders was the failures of the school choice system. In D15, specifically for their middle schools, prior to the Diversity Plan there was school choice with screened applications (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021; Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). What this screening process means in practice is that students and their families had the ability to rank their top choices from among all the middle schools in D15, then the schools would see these rankings and evaluate the students based on factors such as report card grades, test scores, attendance records, student behavior, interviews, and other means to determine which students would be offered admissions (*District 15 Diversity Plan Final Report*, 2018). Skop called these admissions policies out as having many loopholes and gimmicks through which more advantaged parents could game the system and get their kids into the schools they perceived as more desirable which less advantaged parents could not (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). For example, she explained how more privileged parents would have the time to take their kids on a tour or to request and get recommendation letters than less privileged parents did (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Yet, in the years leading up to the passing of the Diversity Plan

even privileged parents were having a difficult time getting their kids into the three schools deemed the most desirable in the district. Nunberg attributes this inability for rich white parents to get their kids into the best middle schools to the population boom in D15, which led to more students than seats in the best middle schools (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Skop also confirmed that many parents were complaining that their kids could not get into these schools, and that the screening of applications led to incredible amounts of stress on children (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, the problems caused by screened admissions, increased segregation and inability to get their kids into the best schools, led to buy-in to change the system from less privileged and more privileged parents, respectively.

The third factor that helped set the groundwork for the Diversity Plan was the rise in activism surrounding desegregation efforts, especially from the group Parents for Middle School Equity (PMS). Nunberg notes how PMS utilized many strategies that focused on garnering media attention to define the equity problems in D15 schools as explicitly caused by segregation. One such strategy was sending out a survey to gather parent opinions on what should be done to correct admissions for middle schools in D15 and then presenting the results to Superintendent Skop (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Another means of garnering attention was developing a working relationship with Brooklyn City Council Member Brad Lander, who would often reference PMS to the press in regard to integration efforts and activism, which would consequently allow PMS a larger microphone to speak out on desegregating the district's middle schools. Subject C confirmed that Nunberg especially was very willing to be in the press in order to garner attention for the cause of desegregating their schools (Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). Further, Skop, although she didn't mention PMS explicitly, also notes how "nice white parents" who were "politically savvy"

were pushing the equity efforts in the district (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, Nunberg claimed that, in her opinion, District 15 would not have been chosen by the NYC Department of Education to be the test run for implementing the Diversity Plan if PMS and other interest groups had not already been advocating about this issue for years prior (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021).

The fourth factor that enabled the successful start and approval of the Diversity Plan in D15 was the appointment of a new Schools Chancellor in NYC, Richard Carranza, and the willingness of Mayor Bill de Blasio to implement this type of plan. All three interview subjects mentioned the importance of support from Carranza as a factor that led to the success of the Diversity Plan. Nunberg notes how the previous Chancellor was not supportive of integration at all, but how Carranza was very supportive (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Skop, when asked why the Diversity Plan happened when it did, also mentioned the Chancellor being an outspoken proponent of integration and equity (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Subject C explained that Carranza was pro-desegregation and specifically that Carranza was not afraid to criticize detractors of desegregation efforts in public (Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). Further, Carranza had the support of Mayor Bill de Blasio in tackling desegregation within their school system (*Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza Announce District 15 Middle School Diversity Plan*, 2018), and because of this support from the mayor in a school system where the mayor has near-unilateral control of local education policy, the Diversity Plan was almost guaranteed success even before the plan had been developed. Skop explained how there was definitely a political willingness to support the Diversity Plan, or the Mayor and Chancellor would have never been chosen D15 for this process in the first place (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Skop then clarified that

although no one explicitly told her at the beginning of the Diversity Plan process that the recommendations would be approved, there was a clear expectation that that was the case (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, the appointment of Carranza and Chancellor and support from Mayor de Blasio were both crucial in ensuring the successful start of the Diversity Plan.

### **Developing the Diversity Plan**

Upon direction from the Mayor and the Chancellor, the DOE and a consulting firm called WXY started in August of 2017 to look for working group members that would help lead the process of developing recommendations to help integrate middle schools in D15 (*D15 Diversity Plan*, n.d.). These working group members were chosen by January 2018, and from January that year to June three public workshops and one final presentation were held (*District 15 Diversity Plan Final Report*, 2018). Finally, on August 3<sup>rd</sup> of 2018, the working group released the final report of the Diversity Plan (*District 15 Diversity Plan Final Report*, 2018). The main reasons why the integration plan was developed successfully during this time period was due to the emphasis on inclusivity, the clarification of the definition of the issues the group is attempting to address, and data transparency from the DOE.

First, inclusivity in both the working group membership as well as during the public workshops was one reason why the process to develop the Diversity Plan succeeded. Skop explained how the DOE and WXY were very deliberate in asking who to be a member of the working group based on ensuring all stakeholders were represented and that extensive outreach was done in order to achieve this goal and that this representation enabled the success of the plan (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). According to the final Diversity Plan, the working group members ranged from “students, parents, teachers, principals, administrators,

community advocates and members of local community-based organizations” (*District 15 Diversity Plan Final Report*, 2018, p. 5). Nunberg also noted how her and other community groups were able to successfully push the DOE to include more representatives from the Sunset Park neighborhood after concerns that only one advocate from that group was chosen to be a working group member (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Further, significant efforts were made by the DOE and WXY to make the public workshops accessible to all community members. There was live translation to English and Spanish, food was provided, childcare services was offered during the meetings, and metro cards were available for transportation to the meeting (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Additionally, the locations of the meetings themselves were varied in order to ensure accessibility to all the district’s constituencies and not just those of the richer neighborhoods (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, both Skop and Nunberg attribute these inclusivity efforts with the working group and the public workshops to be reasons why the process of developing the Diversity Plan got more buy-in from various stakeholders in the community and was successful.

Another issue important to the development of the Diversity Plan was the explicit definition of the issues that the working group hoped to address through this policy. Nunberg explained how she asked several questions early on in the process about defining what the goal was and what they were trying to achieve. Further, she attempted to redefine how other people in the group and in the public workshops perceived the school choice system by arguing that screening does not support a meritocracy, but instead supports segregation (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Additionally, Nunberg saw it as a big change in stance from the DOE when during the first public workshop they acknowledges explicitly the extent of

segregation, whereas previously the DOE had only discussed this policy issue in terms of diversity and equity. Subject C also noticed how the issue of school choice in D15 was starting to be explicitly being talked about in terms of segregation. For example, Subject C explained how Mayor Bell de Blasio had initially refused to use the word desegregation within the context of the Diversity Plan, but that the working group insisted on having desegregation be the explicit goal of this plan (Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). The difference between describing the plan in terms of diversity versus desegregation, in the opinion of Subject C, was that while diversity is more passive and abstract as a concept, segregation was a verb, which implies that somebody or something is segregating and somebody would have to actively desegregate (Subject C, personal communication, September 2021). Both Subject C and Nunberg noted how defining the issue in terms of segregation and desegregation help clarify the goal of the working group and to create a policy that truly addressed the issue facing D15 middle schools.

Another factor important to the success of the development of the Diversity Plan and the community engagement process was data transparency from the DOE. Nunberg explained how prior to this process, it was “not easy” to get DOE data that was not already made public, but that during this process the DOE was very transparent with the data surrounding the effect of school choice on racial segregation (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). For example, the DOE released data showing the impact of attendance criteria on which students were admitted to certain schools, and Nunberg stated that this transparency “drove home the arguments [PMS] had been trying to make” the whole time, but couldn’t fully support because they didn’t previously have access to this data (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). After the data was presented, Nunberg said it was “incontrovertible” that segregation was



perpetuated by screening and that the effect of this data was “transformative” on the public workshop process and the development of the Diversity Plan (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, data transparency from the part of the DOE was one crucial factor that helped this working group process succeed.

### **Diversity Plan Released and Approved**

On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, one year after the working group started to be formed, the final version of the Diversity Plan was released. The Plan called for retaining school choice but eliminating of all admissions screens and replacing them with a lottery that gives low-income, homeless, and English language learners priority for 52% of seats at every school, a percentage that reflects the demographics of the district as a whole (*District 15 Diversity Plan Final Report*, 2018). On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carranza announced the approval of the plan and an investment of \$500,000 to support these admissions changes (*Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza Announce District 15 Middle School Diversity Plan*, 2018). The admissions changes went into effect for incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders during the fall of 2019 (*Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Carranza Announce District 15 Middle School Diversity Plan*, 2018).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### ***Denver Public Schools***

In 2017, on March 16<sup>th</sup>, the Denver Board of Education passed the Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI), which formed a committee to look into how to address gentrification’s effect on schools, how to drive socio-economic integration, and how to change school choice to adapt to gentrification and decreasing enrollment in gentrifying neighborhoods (Denver Public Schools, 2017). This section of the study will evaluate interview data in terms of

MSA and PET in order to determine what insights these theories may offer in regard to the creation and subsequent limited success of the SNI.

The policy process that occurred in Denver will first be examined in terms of MSA. The data clearly shows that a policy window opened in Denver at this time and that this window was crucial in the creation of the SNI and the continued support from Denver Public Schools (DPS). In the problem stream there were two key focusing events. First, the Dr. Bailey report was released in 2016. The Dr. Bailey Report was a report commissioned by DPS to “detail on the experiences of our African-American educators and to listen to their perspectives and concerns about how our African-American students are being cared for and educated” (*African American Equity Task Force / Culture, Equity & Leadership Team*, n.d.). Two of three interview participants mentioned the importance of this report when explaining why the SNI happened when it did. Campbell, one of three co-chairs who led the SNI, mentioned how the Dr. Bailey Report highlighted at the time how voices of Black students, parents, and educators were not represented or listened to by DPS (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Subject A mentioned how the Dr. Bailey report highlighted racial discrimination and institutional structural racism in DPS, and how the recommendations that came out of the African American Equity Task Force, which DPS formed in response to the Dr. Bailey report, were used as a guide by the SNI and increased the legitimacy of the SNI’s recommendations (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). The Dr. Bailey report had the role of being a focusing event for DPS because it brought great attention to issues of equity in DPS and had a significant impact in framing the issues facing DPS in stark terms of racial discrimination and racism.

Another focusing event in the problem stream that led to the opening of a policy window in Denver was the economic expansion and gentrification of Denver. All three interview subjects

highlighted how rising gentrification had led to families being priced out of their neighborhoods, which led to decreasing school enrollment and a rise in attention to issues of equity and race.

Subject B highlighted how gentrification led to the school board at the time asking the question of how education and schools could help address the problem of gentrification and the increase in segregation gentrification caused (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, gentrification in Denver at the time increased attention to the issue of segregation and its effect on schools, which led to the problem of segregation and schools rising on the political agenda.

Also, in Denver at the time there was political willingness among the school board to consider issues of equity and segregation and to act on those issues. This political willingness ensured the politics stream was also open for change. Subject B noted how in the school board there was unanimous support for looking into issues of education inequality and that “having a strong equity lens” was important to all school board members (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Without the willingness of the school board, which is the policy-making body for DPS, the SNI would not have happened.

Consequently, both the problem stream and the politics stream were ripe for action on issues of equity in DPS, which created a policy window. An opening of a policy window in MSA means that there is an opportunity for policy entrepreneurs to shape policy and push specific policies high on a governing body’s agenda. In Denver, the policy entrepreneurs were the three co-chairs who led the process to develop the recommendations of the SNI. The interview data shows these three individuals as a group to be the policy entrepreneurs because they collectively used strategies such as framing in order to develop a policy that was technically feasible. Further, the co-chairs were also the primary people gathering support and input from the community to develop the policy and ensure its success. First, the committee co-chairs pushed on DPS and the

school board to ensure that the committee members chosen would be diverse and to clarify what expectations DPS had for the SNC (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Next, the co-chairs explicitly went about defining and clarifying the key issues that were at stake in this process and requested DPS to provide data about the issues as well (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Through re-defining this issue as one explicitly about race and segregation within Denver, the co-chairs brought more attention to the issue than it may have gotten otherwise. Further, this framing made the committee's solutions of changing zoning and giving underrepresented students priority in school choice more appropriate. Campbell identifies how defining the issues in their own terms, gathering increasing amounts of community feedback, and having the data to back up their recommendations were all very helpful in the process of developing the SNI recommendations (D. Campbell, personal communication, March 2021). Subject A also highlights how access to data and framing the language of the policy process was crucial (Subject A, personal communication, March 2021). Subject B highlights how this committee and its co-chairs felt very robust and strong when compared to other committees (Subject B, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, the strategies the co-chairs of the SNC utilized of framing the issue in terms of segregation, gathering and presenting data, and ensuring as many community voices were heard was essential to the development of the SNI recommendations. In this way, the co-chairs took advantage of a specific time in Denver's history when there was buy-in from the school board, and gentrification and racial inequity were rising in prominence as issues on the political agenda in order to create and get some of their recommendations implemented.

The PET does not offer as much insight into the policy process in Denver, mostly because there are no other venues for implementing school policy in Denver other than the

school board, and the macro-level education-policy institutions of Colorado and the US were not utilized as means of achieving similar policy goals and were not affecting the policy process in Denver locally at the time. It is also important to note that no policy monopoly was overturned in the process in Denver because power remained in the hands of the school board, and the policies implemented, while they are one step towards integration, were not any widescale change from the system. For example, the SNI recommendations of changing zoning district-wide and giving priority for low-income students district wide were not implemented. Only their recommendations for reserving seats for late-arriving, primarily low-income students were implemented district-wide, and enrollment priority and open-zoning only occurred in select areas within Denver, not district-wide (Asmar, 2018b).

### ***New York City District 15***

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Mayor Bill de Blasio and schools Chancellor Richard Carranza announced the approval of the District 15 Diversity Plan, which eliminated screening and applications for District 15 middle schools and replaced it with a lottery system in which low-income, English as a second language learners, and homeless students are given significant priority (Veiga, 2018). This section of the discussion will utilize MSA and PET as a frame to analyze interviews conducted with Anita Skop, the District 15 Superintendent, Miriam Nunberg, the head of the interest group Parents for Middle School Equity (PMS), an anonymous source, known as Subject C, as well as interview data gathered by New York Times reporter Chana Joffe-Walt, who covered the development of the Diversity Plan in episode five of the podcast “Nice White Parents”. Overall, both the frameworks of MSA and PET provide insights into the policy process in District 15.

First, the policy process will be analyzed from the MSA framework. There is ample data to support the alignment of the problem and politics streams in District 15, which created a policy window. There were also identifiable policy entrepreneurs who capitalized on this policy window to create their desired policy output, the Diversity Plan.

First, like in Denver, there were several key focusing events to make the issue of segregation in schools rise in prominence on the political agenda in New York City. In 2014, the UCLA Civil Rights Project released a report that made national news that provided data which clearly showed that New York State had the most segregated school districts in the whole country (Epperly, 2014). This report both helped draw attention to the issue of segregation in New York schools as well as frame the issue of equity in schools explicitly in terms of segregation. To Nunberg, hearing about this issue in terms of segregation was a turning point, and it helped redefine the mission of the PMS group from reforming the middle school application process to helping to end segregation in the school district (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Increasing gentrification and rise in population in the district was also identified by Nunberg as a factor that drew attention to the issues of segregation in the school district (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). This increase in population according to Nunberg made it so that even the privileged parents were not able to get their kids into good middle schools, which was an essential pre-requisite in her eyes to getting initial support from these privileged parents (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021).

Next, in the politics stream there was also support for implementing a policy such as this. Nunberg mentions how after the election of President Trump in 2016 District 15 became a hotbed for organization and liberal activism, which provided the framework and connections to get grassroots support for an integration plan (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March

2021). Further, central Department of Education (DOE) at the time was under a lot of pressure to address the issue of segregation due to grassroots campaigns from parents and students, the UCLA report, and attention from journalists, according to both Skop and Joffe-Walt (Joffe-Walt, 2020; A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, this pressure signaled that there was a general mood for change and achieving more integration in New York public schools. This pressure on central DOE combined with the focusing events discussed prior led to the opening of a policy window, a moment where change could occur, and the parents from PMS, led by Nunberg, took advantage.

PMS and its members were the policy entrepreneurs in this policy process due to their long-standing activism and their use of framing, media attention, and data. It is important to note that PMS was founded in 2014, and the process to develop the Diversity Plan only started in 2017 (Joffe-Walt, 2020). For over three years, PMS had been campaigning and gathering data and hosting workshops to address the issue of segregation and the middle school admissions process. Nunberg attempted to reframe and clarify the title of this plan, the Diversity Plan, which she thought was vague, and asked the DOE to redefine the issue as one of representation rather than diversity, which led to the policy goal of having 51% of seats in each middle school be for those who are on free or reduced-price lunch (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Nunberg saw her role as one of questioning and clarifying the process, or reframing the process to best achieve the goals she thought important, such as desegregation (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). PMS also made an effort to dispel the myth that white, rich parents would be the ones protesting against an integration plan by gathering data from people across the district and presenting that data to Superintendent Skop (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Finally, PMS in concert with Councilmember Brad Lander

effectively utilized the media to draw attention to the issue of segregation and inequity. Nunberg explained how PMS would push Councilmember Lander, and how he would in turn reference PMS to the press, which would lead to airtime for PMS while also legitimizing them as a political organization (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021).

Specifically because of the activism and press attention in District 15, especially from the white parents of PMS, District 15 was chosen by central DOE to develop an integration plan because District 15 was seen as potentially having the least potential for pushback against such a plan, according to both Nunberg and Joffe-Walt (M. Nunberg, personal communication, March 2021). Overall, the strategies used by PMS helped ensure that District 15 would be chosen to implement an integration plan and ensure the plan would be framed in terms of segregation and representation.

Analyzing the policy process of the Diversity Plan from the perspective of PET also leads to certain insights. The PET is applicable to District 15 because there is a clear macro-level policy institution, the central DOE, and a policy subsystem, the local DOE in District 15.

In District 15 prior to the Diversity Plan there was a clear policy monopoly in screened middle school admissions with applications and placements based on those applications. This policy monopoly was upheld by a policy image of supporting meritocracy; the loss of meritocracy was seen as one of the major points against the Diversity Plan to certain parents during the feedback process for developing the Diversity Plan (Joffe-Walt, 2020). This policy image and monopoly was supported by the central DOE, the primary institution that implemented the screening process and who had the power to change it. There was negative feedback supporting this monopoly due to the nature of a bureaucracy, where there is innate difficulty to change, and due to the catering of white families' interests to ensure they stayed in



the district. Overall, as long as the bureaucracy remained stagnant, white families' interests were fulfilled, and the policy image of a meritocracy was strong, the policy monopoly on screened admissions would remain.

Yet, the policy monopoly crumbled down, and the Diversity Plan was implemented. This occurred in the context of PET due to massive mobilization and the positive feedback created by mobilization. Mobilization started with the key focusing events of the UCLA Civil Rights report, grassroots activism from PMS and other parent groups, the political context of liberal activism, and the demographic shifts leading to rising population and increasing gentrification. These events changed the definition of the issue of how to admit middle schoolers from one based on supposed merit to one based on equity and desegregation. The saliency of this issue increased dramatically due to media coverage of the UCLA Report, PMS, Councilmember Brad Lander, Mayor Bill de Blasio, and other grassroots student organizations. These factors lead to greater rates of mobilization even once the process of developing the Diversity Plan started. The process of developing the plan was structured in such a way as to ensure to most participation and community input as possible: childcare was provided, the workshops had live translation for everyone, transportation costs were provided, and food was provided (A. Skop, personal communication, March 2021). All of these factors contributed to a massive mobilization that led to the decline of the previous policy monopoly and the rise of a new one.

When policy monopolies change, new actors often come to govern the process, and this was evidenced in New York City as well. Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza was appointed by Mayor Bill de Blasio in March of 2018, when the Diversity Plan was in the middle of development (*Mayor de Blasio Appoints Richard A. Carranza as Schools Chancellor*, 2018). Carranza, an outspoken advocate of integration in New York schools, replaced schools

Chancellor Carmen Fariña, who was much less supportive of mandated integration and wanted integration efforts to come about organically from communities (Harris, 2016). Overall, in New York City a policy monopoly was overturned and replaced with a new policy and new key leadership who was much more supportive of this policy.

## **CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH**

### ***Limitations***

This study has some possible limitations.

First, only two cities that had approved integration plans were included in this study, although a total of 185 school districts have been identified as implementing integration plans (Potter & Burris, 2020). Both of these cities were large, had similar racial/ethnic makeups in their school districts, and had similar political distributions. Having only two similar cities in this study limits the credibility of any generalized research findings and limits the applicability of any findings to cities of similar characteristics. In other words, the main factors identified in these two cities may not be the same factors relevant to integration plans in different cities. The limited scope of this study prevents this study from proposing any generalized model for helping other school districts get integration plans on their local political agendas.

Further, this study is limited by the nature of the interviews conducted, including the number of interviews, the time of each interview, and the specific people interviewed. First, only five interviews were conducted in total from both Denver Public Schools and New York District 15. Consequently, there may have been some factors that led to the integration plans being approved that were not uncovered by this study, and because of this the factors that were identified may be less or more consequential in reality than they are presented in this study. This study was not able to conduct interviews with people who opposed the integration plans, and

therefore was not able to adequately uncover why resistance in these two school districts was overcome, which could be another crucial factor in why the integration plans in each school district were eventually approved. Some relevant people who were involved in each integration plan were either not available or did not wish to interview, which may bias the findings of this study by leaving out the perspectives of people who are too busy or have sensitive information about the subject of this study. Of those people who were interviewed, many of them only had time limitations on how long they were available to talk, which meant in some cases not all the interview questions were able to be asked. This difference in the amount of time interview subjects had to talk may have affected the findings of this study by overemphasizing the responses of the interview subjects who had more time to talk because more information is available from those people.

Lastly, this study used only two of the several theories of the policy process for its theoretical background. The use of only two theories limits this study by overemphasizing the factors of the policy process the authors of the PET and MSA found relevant and underemphasizing the factors other theories of the policy process may deem relevant. If more theories were used for the theoretical background, more potentially relevant factors in the policy process in Denver and New York could have been identified and compared and the interview data could have been analyzed from different perspectives. Other theories of the policy process may have also had more explanatory power for local policy processes, since the two theories chosen for this study have only been applied to state and federal level policy processes.

### ***Conclusion***

This study attempted to address the question of what the key factors were that led to integration plans arriving on the political agenda in Denver Public Schools and New York

District 15. A secondary question this study evaluated is how PET and MSA can help in analyzing the policy processes that occurred in Denver and New York City.

By analyzing interview data from six individuals who are knowledgeable about the policy processes in Denver and New York, this study found that there were several key similarities and differences that enabled each policy process to be successful. First, key focusing events that drew attention to the issues of segregation and racial inequity in the school districts, such as the rise in gentrification and the release of key reports providing data to evidence segregation and discrimination, were crucial in enabling the subsequent steps in the policy process. Next, the inequity issues in both school districts were actively framed as issues of racial segregation, and by redefining and reframing the issue in this way more attention was drawn to these problems on the local political agendas. Further, access to data that detailed the extent and specifics regarding segregation, both racial and socioeconomic, were crucial to the process of developing the recommendations of both the SNI in Denver and the Diversity Plan in New York City District 15. The data helped tailor the recommendations in each city to the specific issues facing both districts.

Both PET and MSA were helpful lenses to examine the policy processes in each city. PET was more helpful in analyzing New York City due to the dual structure governing education there of the central and local DOEs. PET helped clarify the role of institutions in supporting previous policy monopolies and the relevance of how a changing issue definition can change a policy image and consequently help a new policy image rise to prominence, thereby disrupting an old policy monopoly. MSA helped clarify the importance of specific groups who played a crucial role in taking advantage of policy windows to frame issues and develop successful

policies. MSA also helped clarify how interest convergence among actors is crucial to the policy process.

The main takeaways from this research are that focusing events, data availability, and the framing of issues can play major roles in the policy processes of integration plans in local school districts. These results are far from being able to be developed into a model with applicability to other school districts, but with future research in more school districts, a more cohesive picture can potentially be made connecting how integration plans are developed and implemented in local school districts nation-wide. This research is one step towards helping to understand how integration plans arrive on the political agendas in local school districts, and it can hopefully be one step closer to helping reduce the segregation that pervades our school districts across the nation.

### ***Implications for Further Research***

This study, one of the first of its kind in applying theories of the policy process to local governments and school boards and in examining racial integration policy, leads to many opportunities for future research. These areas of future research can be categorized in terms of either further theoretical development or further implementation. This future research is crucial in order to both confirm, refine, and elaborate on the findings of this research paper.

One way in which future studies could elaborate on the findings in this paper would be to expand the theories used within the theoretical frame past just PET and MSA. Other theories of the policy process could provide more insights when compared to only utilizing these two theories and would provide more evidence to answer why similar policies are implemented in some localities but not in others. One way in which this expansion could be implemented is to first gather all of the data, then apply the theories of the policy process to the data and see which

theories at first glance apply the most, then use those theories as the theoretical frame rather than choose the frame prior to examining the data like this study did.

Another way future studies could expand this research in terms of applying the theoretical frames would be by gathering archival and interview data in localities where integration plans have been proposed but have not garnered enough attention or support to make it onto the political agenda and be implemented. A similar methodology to this study could be utilized, but the theories could be used to analyze what key factors may have been absent in the policy space in that city, and in that way the study could attempt to determine why the policy failed. Learning more about why policies fail and why they do not garner attention is just as important to developing political agenda-setting theory as learning about why policies do make it on the agenda, and expanding this research by adding study sites in the way described above would be a significant means of contributing to the development in this research topics.

In terms of the implementation of this research, future studies could improve upon and expand this research by simply examining different study sites and interviewing different types of people. As acknowledged in the limitations section of this paper, this research was limited to examining two study sites and conducting six interviews. Future studies could create more strong conclusions in terms of determining why racial integration policies fail in some cities but not others by comparing different types of locales in terms of population size, racial/ethnic makeup, school district size, political distribution rather than only studying large cities such as in this study. Further future research could focus on interviewing certain types of people not able to be interviewed in this study, such as representatives from media organizations, high-level politicians, and people who opposed the policy but failed in their opposition. These studies

would be able to improve the results of this study by having a more diverse body of data to analyze, which could lead to more significant and generalizable results.

Another future area of study that could help inform the results of this study would be taking a more historical perspective to analyzing political agenda-setting and racial integration plans in these two cities. This study was not able to go in-depth in regard to the decades of segregation these cities faced and the numerous, varied efforts undertaken by advocates to integrate the cities and schools, but this historical context could have had a significant impact on why the integration plans passed when they did. Examining this issue from a historical perspective could therefore help uncover if another factor such as past activism or a history of racial strife and segregation may be affecting the policy process and success of integration policies in a modern context.

The last area of future research that could stem off from this study would be introducing qualitative analysis in addition to the quantitative analysis in this research. There are many interesting datasets that may help shine light on why integration plans passed when they did in these cities. For example, a study could look at the number and variety of media published that mention racial integration plans over a certain period of time and see if there is a correlation between number of media written and the chance a integration plan has to pass and be implemented. This example is especially relevant because in this research focusing events, or major news stories, were determined to be one key means that initially drew attention to racial integration plans. Introducing qualitative analysis in this way would be one more means of affirming whether or not focusing events are significantly correlated to increased attention on and success of integration plans. Analyzing the number of articles over time and comparing this to the dates at which major steps were taken in passing the integration plan, such as when the

plan is approved to be researched by the city council or when a planning group releases a final report, would also be very useful in determining whether increased media coverage leads to increased likelihood of a plan passing or if media coverage simply follows after a significant event in the passing of the plan and if there is a third, unidentified factor leading to the success of the policy.



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## APPENDIX

### Interview Questions

1. What's your connection to the (Insert name) school district?
  - a. What is your history with the school district?
2. What role did you play in relation to this integration policy?
  - a. Did you play any other roles?
 

How did you hear of the integration plan for the first time?

    - i. From whom?
3. What methods or strategies did you use to draw attention to this issue and help/not help it get enacted? (if applicable)
4. What were the major obstacles for getting this policy to pass through the city council or local school board?
  - a. How were these obstacles overcome?
5. Who were the other key actors that may have played in role in relation to this policy?
 

What was your relation to them and were there people you interacted with regularly?

  - a. Individuals; if so did they represent any particular groups, institutions, and orgs, and ask about different realms and groups engaged
6. Now that you talked about all of this, what was it about the policy that you decided to support or put in this effort ;What need, if any, did you see this policy fulfilling?
  - a. Why do you support this policy?
  - b. What did you think about the policy that this one is replacing and why?
7. Why then, what was so special about that specific moment for this policy? Why not earlier?



- a. Why do you think this policy failed to garner attention or feasibility earlier?
8. I know you mentioned (insert individual), would you be able to give their contact information or give the introduction to them so that I could put together more of the narrative?
  - a. Any other key actors in process who you think would be interested in talking about their role in this process

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Shyam Madhani is a senior at the University of Texas at Austin majoring in Plan II Honors, Government, and Communication and Leadership. On campus, he was a research fellow with the Center for the Study of Race and Democracy, a Brumley NextGen Undergraduate Scholar, a coordinator for PlanTutoring, and a vocalist in the UT Chamber Singers and Concert Chorale. Off campus, Shyam was a water policy analyst at The Center for Water Security and Cooperation and marketing intern for The World Affairs Council of DFW. In his final semester, Shyam will be an Archer Fellow in Washington, D.C., where he will intern at The Brookings Institution. Shyam plans to earn a master's in public policy and a law degree after graduating from UT. In his free time, Shyam loves playing board games, reading sci-fi/fantasy novels, and going to the gym with his friends.