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What is This?

Regional Educational Policy Analysis: Rochester, Omaha, and Minneapolis' Inter-District Arrangements

Kara S. Finnigan[1], Jennifer Jellison Holme[2], Myron Orfield[3], Tom Luce[3], Sarah Diem[4], Allison Mattheis[5], and Nadine D. Hylton[1]

Abstract

Although regional equity scholars have demonstrated how cross-jurisdictional collaboration on transportation, housing, and employment can promote opportunity for low-income families, few have paid serious attention to the potential of regional *educational* policy to improve opportunity for children. This study seeks to address this gap by examining inter-district "collaboratives" or cooperative agreements between school districts within a metropolitan area. These collaborative arrangements address two inter-related demographic shifts: the rising level of segregation in public schools and the shift from within district segregation to between-district segregation. This article examines three regional collaboratives (Rochester, NY, Omaha, NE, and Minneapolis, MN) that involve varying degrees of cooperation, funding, and legal force. Drawing on 60 in-depth interviews across the three sites, this analysis considers how each program's design features interact with local political dynamics to shape the degree to which these collaboratives are able to achieve policy goals.

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After reaching historic lows in the early 1980s, levels of racial and ethnic segregation in U.S. schools have been steadily increasing over the past several decades (G. Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). As of the 2009-2010 school year, more than one third of Latinos (43%) and African Americans (38%) attended intensely segregated (i.e., 90%-100% non-White) schools, a significant increase from two decades prior (G. Orfield et al., 2012). Furthermore, current segregation levels are closely intertwined with poverty: In 2009-2010, the average Latino and African American student also attended schools with poverty rates that were twice as high as the average White and Asian student (G. Orfield et al., 2012).

While today's school segregation levels are reminiscent of the pre-*Brown* era, school demographics have changed significantly since that time. In the 1940s and 1950s, most students who lived within major metropolitan areas did not reside in the suburbs, which were just developing at that time. Instead, most lived within the boundaries of their metro area's central city school district (Mather, Pollard, & Jacobsen, 2011). These central city districts were demographically diverse, containing a substantial proportion of both White and middle-class students (see Mirel, 1999), but students were often segregated into different school buildings by race and class through school district policies and practices (Clotfelter, 2004).

Over the past six decades, the demographics of metropolitan areas, and the nature of school segregation, have shifted dramatically. As of the 2010 Census, a majority of the population in metropolitan areas lived in suburban communities (Mather et al., 2011). The suburban communities themselves are quite diverse: While some suburbs are the stereotypical White, middle-class suburbs of the past, other suburbs (often inner-ring suburbs) are high-poverty and largely non-White (M. Orfield, 2002). City school districts, furthermore, are no longer demographically diverse—in fact, many have become extremely racially isolated and high-poverty districts.[1]

As a result of these trends, students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are no longer isolated from one another *within* their district boundaries as in the past; in major metropolitan areas today, students from different backgrounds are now more likely to be isolated from one other *across district* boundary lines (Clotfelter, 2004). Levels of this type of "between-district" segregation are highest in "fragmented" metropolitan areas, where central city districts are surrounded by large numbers of smaller separate,

independent suburban school districts (Bischoff, 2008). One example of this type of fragmented metropolitan area is the metropolitan area of Detroit, which has a predominately non-White urban core surrounded by 108 suburban districts that themselves range demographically from predominately White and affluent, to predominately non-White and low-income (Clotfelter, 2001).

In such fragmented regions, urban and inner-ring suburban school districts that are adversely affected by racial segregation and poverty concentration—and the financial problems often associated with segregation (Ryan, 1999)—have little power to address these issues alone. In such contexts, cooperative agreements between school districts, involving inter-district integration plans and resource sharing, are one of the few policy tools available to reduce racial and economic isolation among students and schools (Holme & Finnigan, 2013).

Currently, eight regional inter-district collaboratives of this kind exist across the United States (Wells et al., 2009). All consist of inter-district student transfer policies designed to reduce racial or socioeconomic isolation between districts. Yet each of the plans, or "cooperatives," differ in terms of the structure and design of the student transfer policies, the governance structures, and the level of resource sharing across district lines (Wells et al., 2009).

While many of these regional collaboratives have existed for decades, few have been examined empirically. Indeed, while regional equity scholars have examined the ways in which cross-jurisdictional collaboration on transportation, housing, and employment helps to reduce isolation for low-income families and families of color, few have paid serious attention to the potential of regional *educational* policy—that is, inter-district cooperation and collaboration—to promote opportunity for children. Given that schools and school districts are key drivers of regional stratification, regional collaboratives offer an important and yet under-examined policy tool to counteract such stratification.

This analysis examines the implementation of three such inter-district plans in Rochester, New York; Omaha, Nebraska; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Each of the plans includes an inter-district desegregation program, some joint programming, and some resource sharing. Our focus is on the ways in which core program features of these collaboratives relate to implementation and, ultimately, access for students. Specifically, we examine how governance structures shape decisions about program design; how funds are distributed or re-distributed as a result of these arrangements and the impact of finance decisions on implementation; and the extent to which cross-district collaboratives reduce school segregation and improve educational access or opportunities for students.

Background

Inter-district desegregation plans, which we call inter-district collaboratives because they often are more complex than simple student transfer plans, first emerged in the mid-1960s (Wells et al., 2009). They were created out of a recognition that intra-district plans would not be effective in areas where urban cores were becoming increasingly low-income and non-White, as suburban districts both allowed white middle class families to separate themselves from urban challenges and provided them with a way to 'hoard' resources (Rury & Saatcioglu, 2011).

The first inter-district plans resulted not from court orders but from state laws. The very first program to be established was the Urban Suburban Inter-district Transfer Program (USITP), created in 1965 in Rochester under a New York state law (Wells, et al., 2009). The following year, two more programs were also established under the authority of state law: the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program in Boston (Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, 2013), and Project Concern in Hartford (which later evolved into an expanded program, Project Choice, in 1996 as a result of state court order; Eaton, 2007).

The voluntary establishment of programs by states ended in the 1960s; over the next several decades, federal and state courts were involved in mandating the creation of inter-district programs. As Wells et al. (2009) describe in their review, Federal courts authorized the creation of the Milwaukee Chapter 220 program in 1979, the Indianapolis-Suburban Township Plan in 1981, and the St. Louis Voluntary Inter-District Choice Plan in 1983, whereas state court rulings created the next three programs: the East Palo Alto program in 1986, the (expanded) Hartford plan in 1996, and the Minneapolis plan in 2001. The most recent program to be created was in Omaha in 2009, which was authorized through a state law (Holme, Diem, & Mansfield, 2011).

The structures of these inter-district programs share some common features. Each of the programs is designed to increase integration (either in terms of race or socioeconomic status) by allowing students to transfer across school district boundary lines. Most of the programs (six out of eight) are "one-way" programs—only allowing students living in segregated urban districts the chance to attend more integrated, or even predominately White, suburban schools. Two (Milwaukee and Omaha) are "two-way" programs, allowing both urban students to transfer to suburban districts and suburban students to transfer to urban districts. Several programs (Omaha, Minneapolis, and Hartford) also involve cross-district magnet programs that draw students from multiple districts into a single school building for diversity.

Enrollment in the plans has varied from 500 students per year in Rochester to more than 10,000 students at the peak of the program in St. Louis (Wells et al., 2009). Each of the programs relies to some degree on funding from state governments for transportation and for per-pupil tuition reimbursements for receiving (and occasionally sending) districts. The programs themselves are governed by an array of governance structures: boards comprised of superintendents in Rochester; local school board representatives in Minneapolis; and elected, geographically-based representatives in Omaha.

Although these programs have been in existence for many decades, they have been the subject of little systematic, cross-site research. The first comprehensive review of these programs was conducted by Wells et al. (2009), who reviewed the origins of the programs and existing research on each of the programs to date. Few researchers, however, have examined current implementation, particularly in terms of the ways in which core program features (authority, governance, and finance) relate to implementation and, ultimately, access for students.

Literature Review

To examine the programs, we turn to the literature on the implementation of regional reform (see powell, 2000; Reynolds, 2003; Weir, 2000). This body of literature is concerned with policy efforts to address problems stemming from geopolitical fragmentation, which, according to powell (2000) "facilitates race and wealth differences through territorial segregation and fiscal separation" (p. 221), thereby leading to inequalities in local tax resources and greater racial and economic segregation between jurisdictions. The literature on regionalism examines efforts to counter such processes through regional governance structures that promote inter-governmental cooperation in areas such as housing, transportation, and in some instances, tax base sharing (see powell, 2000; Reynolds, 2003; Weir, 2000). As stated previously, most of the policy efforts to address the problems stemming from fragmentation, such as segregation and tax base inequality, have been centered on functions typically provided by, or shared by, municipalities (e.g., transportation, land use planning, waste disposal). Policy efforts to address fragmentation-related problems in *education* (with the exception of some school finance reforms) have been far less common (Holme & Finnigan, 2013).[2]

In this analysis, we apply the research literature on new regionalist structures to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the programs we studied. This literature has identified a number of factors that are important to implementation. One factor that has been found to be central to the implementation of regional reforms is the *overall goal* of the reform (Foster & Barnes, 2012;

Weir, Rongerude, & Ansell, 2009). Regional efforts designed to cope with service-delivery issues (i.e., the provision of educational programming) tend to be easier to implement and meet less resistance from localities than reforms focused on addressing inequities in access and resources across boundary lines (i.e., access to tax resources) because they are less controversial (Basolo & Hastings, 2003; Provo, 2009; Vogel & Harrigan, 2007).

Another factor shaping the implementation of regional reforms is the *degree of authority* given to the regional governing body vis-à-vis localities. Of specific concern is the degree to which a regional governing body is able to push localities to come in line with a regional agenda (Vogel & Harrigan, 2007). Research has also found that compliance is often tied to the amount of control a governing body is given over resources, which can help encourage—or even force—cooperation by localities (Foster & Barnes, 2012; Griffith, 2005; Weir et al., 2009). Another similar division-of-power issue is the degree to which states grant some of their traditional authorities to a regional governing body (Griffith, 2005).

Research has also found that the *structure of the regional governing body* affects implementation (M. Orfield & Luce, 2010). Key here is the type of representation given to different localities: Some regional governing bodies are structured so that representation is proportionate to overall population (thus giving more populous urban cores more votes on a council than less populous suburban locales). Other regional governing bodies, however, are structured to give all localities a single vote, regardless of size, which can seriously disadvantage cities (M. Orfield & Luce, 2010). Another key issue in governance is whether governing board members are elected or appointed. Some argue that elected members tend to be more accountable to the local public than those appointed by governors or mayors (M. Orfield, 2002). Others argue that appointed members have a more regional perspective given that they are not beholden to local constituencies (Griffith, 2005). Given the dearth of research on the structure of these programs, this is a particularly important area of focus for our work.

Finally, the *local context of the metropolitan area* shapes implementation. Several dimensions of the local context have been found to "matter" in regional reform efforts. First is the overall level of fragmentation within a metropolitan area: the greater the number of jurisdictions (e.g., municipalities, school districts) in a metro area, the greater the challenges in implementing regional reform (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009). Another factor of local context is the prior history of regional collaboration within the metropolitan area. As Foster and Barnes (2012) note, "Regions with experience addressing a regional goal—even if they have failed in the past—can draw insights and knowledge—from prior efforts" (p. 277).

Method and Data Sources

In this article, we present a cross-case analysis of the three regional collaboratives within the study: Rochester, Omaha, and Minneapolis. These three collaboratives were selected because they varied on key dimensions including origin (court ordered vs. voluntary); scope (number of districts involved; number of students participating); funding (for student transfers and program operation); and governance structures (elected, appointed, size). Because we were interested in exploring how these dimensions shaped implementation, we sought out programs that were different on these dimensions (see Table 1 for a brief description of these plans.) When using this sampling strategy, as Patton (1990) writes, "The data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (p. 172).

Data were collected between 2011 and 2012. Teams consisting of researchers and graduate assistants led data collection in each of the sites. In the first stage of our work, we convened several meetings with local stakeholders to understand some of the key concerns in each community vis-à-vis the implementation of the collaboratives. The goal of these meetings was to ensure that our work was reflective of the needs and concerns of local communities. These meetings consisted of key representatives from a variety of stakeholder groups: business leaders, community group leaders, local university researchers, governance board members, and educators. After these meetings, and according to the input received from these local stakeholder groups, we refined our data collection plans, revising both our interview protocols to be more reflective of issues raised and our interviewee list to be sure that the lists included all relevant stakeholders.

The second phase of our work involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with 60 individuals across the three sites. Interviewees were selected based on their roles, and their history with, and knowledge of, the programs. Participants were also specifically selected to ensure that our overall sample was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Table 2 provides details of the interviews by different types of informants across the three locales.

Our interview questions were guided by the three over-arching research questions guiding the study relating to governance, finance, and implementation:

1. How do governance councils negotiate collective goals and local interests, and how does the structure of councils affect the decisions

Table 1. Program Features.

Site	Governance: Voluntary consortiums versus mandated authority?	Finance: Shared financial base versus categorical state/federal funding?	Transfers and integration: Access, opportunity, and achievement?
Rochester Urban-Suburban Inter-district Transfer Program (USITP)	Governing body is a voluntary consortium of participating superintendents. Governing body has powers to determine aspects of transfer program, as well as authority over limited per-district contributions for technical support (admissions and enrollment) for the plan.	Governing board activities are funded through district contributions (and are limited). The transfer program is funded through state funding. Receiving districts receive the per-pupil allocation of urban district (benefit to suburbs). Transportation funded by the state.	Choice-based urban-suburban transfer program that is race-based. Transportation is provided. Selective enrollment and limited access. 550 students participating approx.
Nebraska (Omaha Metro) Learning Community	Governing body is established by state legislation; governing body has statutory powers over taxing/resources, the diversity plan, and to establish inter-district schools of choice.	Shared tax base can be leveraged to fund regional programs determined by governing body; transfer plan is fully funded, including transportation.	Choice-based transfer program that is Socioeconomic Status (SES)-based, with transportation provided.
Minneapolis: West Metro Education Program and Choice is Yours (CIY)	Governing body is a voluntary consortium of participating board members with a governing superintendent. Governing board has powers to administer the inter-district transfer program; it also established and operates two inter-district schools of choice, provides professional development for educators and administrators across all participating districts, and runs family and student support programs. It has direct finance authority only over the dues that districts pay for membership in the collaborative.	Governing board activities funded through participating district membership dues. The transfer program is funded through state and federal funding.	Choice-based transfer program that is SES-based. It was initiated by court settlement but continues voluntarily. Programs have outreach, transportation, and support for students. Enrollment not selective. 1,800 transfers approx.

Table 2. Breakdown of Interviewees by Site.

	Omaha	Rochester	Minneapolis
Governing board members	10	3	2
Program administrators	3	2	3
Local superintendents (current/former)/ district administrators/school board members	11	7	3
Teachers/school administrators/parents from sending and receiving schools	3	6	2
Legislators/state officials	4		
Total interviews	32	18	10

2.   made around access and opportunity for low-income students and students of color?

2.   How do the finance structures within each of the collaboratives influence local decision making by participating school districts?

3.   How do governance and finance structures of each of the collaboratives shape the design and implementation in terms of policies, enrollment patterns, and supports for students?

The number of interviews conducted varied in each site, which was related to the structure (and reach) of these programs and access to stakeholders. We targeted 12 to 18 interviews per site and supplemented interview data with written documents (i.e., evaluations, reports, and news accounts.) We ended up conducting more interviews in Omaha due to the relative newness of the Omaha plan and the lack of written documents or external research to triangulate our own data collection. The Omaha plan was also relatively more complex given its scope (involving all 11 districts in the metro, its large formally elected governance body, and a tax-base sharing plan), which required a greater amount of data to understand. We had more difficulty accessing stakeholders in Minneapolis given some of the political turmoil of the program around the time of our study, and therefore we fell slightly below our targets in that locale. In addition to interviews, we conducted observations of governance board meetings in two of the three sites (Rochester and Omaha; we were unable to access governance board meetings in Minneapolis although we did have access to meeting minutes.)

Although the research teams were different across the sites, the teams communicated frequently with one another regarding issues and emerging findings. Data analysis proceeded in several stages. In the first phase, we

focused primarily on within-case analysis of data within each of the three sites (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). We first developed a summary report for each site based on interview data, which we augmented with supplemental data sources including field notes taken at governance meetings, governance council meeting minutes, newspaper accounts, and demographic data and student enrollment data (Yin, 2008). We also triangulated these within case findings within each individual research team by checking for validity and interpretation (Merriam, 1998).

The second stage of data analysis consisted of a cross-case analysis of themes. To develop our cross-case findings, we first met as an entire research team and engaged in an in-depth dialogue to identify and develop emerging cross-case themes. We then tested, developed, and refined these cross-case themes by re-visiting our interview transcripts. We also triangulated our emerging themes with the same multiple sources of evidence used in our within-case analysis (meeting minutes, news reports, etc.; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was during this phase of analysis that we found the separate research team structure to be beneficial to our analysis, as it required each team to carefully consider (and explain) how the unique aspects of the plan they were studying affected implementation; and it was also incumbent on each team to learn how the features of their sites contrasted with the others. This helped us to challenge one another on our findings and emerging themes.

In the following discussion, we first describe each plan in detail and present the within-case findings on each site. We then follow this analysis with the cross-case findings.

Findings

Description of the Regional Educational Collaboratives

Rochester, NY's USITP. The USITP allows students to move across district boundaries in the Rochester metropolitan area. The Rochester metro area consists of the Rochester City School District (RCSD), a mid-size urban district serving 32,000 students, surrounded by 18 suburban districts in Monroe County. RCSD is approximately 90% non-White, with 86% of the students receiving free and reduced price lunches (see www.rcsdk12.org; see Table 3) The district has a 4-year graduation rate of 43%, which is the lowest of the "Big Five" (New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers, and Syracuse) city school districts in the state of New York (Macaluso, 2013), with a recent study finding that Rochester had the lowest graduation rate for Black males in the country (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). Furthermore,

Table 3. Characteristics of Urban Core Districts.

	Enrollment (%)	% eligible for free/reduced price lunch	African American (%)	Latino/a (%)	White (%)	Asian (%)	LEP* (%)
Rochester	32,360	85.5	64.3	22.3	10.4	2.8	10.2
Omaha	48,720	64.6	30.7	26.8	38.5	2.6	13.7
Minneapolis	34,105	70.2	37.6	18.4	30.9	8.4	22.4

Source. U.S. Office for Civil Rights, 2009 data: http://ocrdata.ed.gov.
* LEP = Limited English Proficient.

2011-2012 was the ninth year that the district was "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) and recent scores from the new Common Core assessments indicate that only 5% of students in Grades 3 through 8 in RCSD are proficient on state tests, the lowest results in the state (DeMarco, 2013). RCSD is located within Monroe County, which is 76% White (U.S. Census, 2010).

The USITP, which was established in 1965, operates under New York State Education Department regulations and is administered by the Monroe 1 Board of Cooperative Educational Services (Monroe #1 BOCES, 2009). The purpose of the program is "to voluntarily reduce racial isolation in the elementary and secondary schools of New York state in order to enhance racial/ethnic awareness and sensitivity between and among students, teachers, and parents in the elementary and secondary schools of the State" (Monroe 1 BOCES, 2009). USITP was created during a time of racial tensions in the city of Rochester. It is a voluntary inter-district choice program, in contrast to mandatory, or court-ordered, school integration programs. The program began when one suburban district, the West Irondequoit School District, allowed 25 students from the inner city to transfer to its schools (Heinrich, 1969). Currently, approximately 550 students attend approximately 40 suburban schools across 7 participating suburban districts (Brighton, Brockport, Fairport, Penfield, Pittsford, Wheatland-Chili, and West Irondequoit; Finnigan & Scarbrough, 2013; see Table 4).

Governance. A governance board oversees USITP. The Board consists of the superintendent from each participating suburban district as well as the Monroe 1 BOCES superintendent and assistant superintendent and the RCSD superintendent (or designee), who serve as voting members (Monroe #1 BOCES, 2009). The USITP program director also serves on the governance board as a non-voting member (Monroe #1 BOCES, 2009). The chairperson is selected by the board, and meetings are held three times during the school

Table 4. Characteristics of Programs.

	Number of participating districts in transfer programs	Number of students participating in transfer programs	Number of students in magnet programs
Rochester	7	550	No magnets included in inter-district program
Omaha	11[a]	1,618[b]	216
Minneapolis	11[a]	1,997[c]	1,050[d]

[a]Both include the urban core district that does receive some suburb to city transfers under the programs.
[b]Data are for the 2011/2012 school year. These are transfers that are "contributing to diversity" Learning Community annual report to the state legislature 2012. The total number of transfers, however, is 4,392 of which 2,774 do *not* contribute to diversity.
[c]These are 2009 data (Aspen Associates, 2009).
[d]Enrollment in the two magnet schools run by the West Metro Education Program (WMEP) in 2010.

year. Decisions are made by consensus. The governance board is charged with the "power and duty to set forth all program policies and procedures" (Monroe #1 BOCES, 2009).

A program director, a community liaison, and an office assistant manage USITP's daily operations. There is a parent advisory committee consisting of parent representatives from each participating district, but this group does not have decision-making authority. They hold monthly meetings chaired by the program director with two parent co-chairs elected from among participating parents on the committee.

Finance. Per pupil student funding for each student from New York State is paid to the suburban districts, resulting in a higher level of state funding per pupil for these students than for resident students. Each participating suburban district pays a per pupil fee of approximately $300 per student to Monroe 1 BOCES to administer the program. The governance board oversees the budget for the program from these per pupil fees.

Transportation for participating students is paid by RCSD through a separate source of funding from the state. This is consistent with New York State's policies for transportation to private and charter schools. Parents must provide transportation for after school activities and when RCSD schools are closed.

USITP program administrators and the parent advisory group do a small amount of private fundraising for the program, primarily to provide

scholarship awards to graduating students ranging from $100 to $2,000 toward college. For example, they host a bowl-a-thon and sell coupon books each year. All parents are required to pay $15 dues toward this scholarship fund each year and participate in other fundraising efforts.

Implementation. Currently, 7 suburban districts of the 18 in Monroe County participate in the program. Six of the suburban districts joined the program in the late 1960s, whereas the seventh joined in 2003. Availability for placement by grade level is determined by the suburban districts and varies each year although some districts have informal policies that place students only at certain grade levels (e.g., K-3). Less than 10% of students who apply are admitted to the program each year.

Students are eligible to participate in the program if they are a Rochester City resident, are in Grades Kindergarten through 8, and are a minority student (defined by the State Education Department [SED] as pupils who are Black, Hispanic [non-White]/Latino, Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian, or Pacific Islander origin). The program does not maintain a waiting list and siblings are not given priority.

The application period for the program opens in October and closes in February. Applicants are required to submit a form, currently in English or Spanish, that requests basic information about the student, such as current school, home address, current grade, and race/ethnicity. This form is available electronically or via request from program administrators. Once this form is submitted, program administrators obtain applicants' academic records directly from their current schools. In addition, teachers are asked to complete a recommendation form for applicants, as part of the application process. As part of their student's enrollment in the program, parents are required to attend two parent meetings during the academic year organized by the program administrators and parent advisory group.

Omaha, NE's Learning Community (LC) of Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The events leading to the creation of the LC began in 2004, with a move on the part of state lawmakers to eliminate a long-standing state statute (NE Statute 79-409) from Nebraska law. The statute, enacted in 1891, stipulated that whenever the city of Omaha expanded its boundaries, the boundaries of Omaha Public Schools (OPS) would also expand. While the city of Omaha successfully annexed suburban land throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the OPS school board did not use statute 79-409 to annex the expanded city territory; thus, as the city of Omaha expanded, OPS did not, and by the early 2000s, OPS was left with less land, fewer tax dollars, and fewer middle-class families than the city of Omaha itself (see Table 3 for current district

demographics). The financial situation of OPS deteriorated so significantly that in 2003, the school board had filed a lawsuit in state court challenging the state school finance system, seeking more resources from the state to help it better serve the district's growing number of students in poverty.[3]

In 2002, the city of Omaha began formal proceedings to annex additional suburban territory, the city of Elkhorn, which was opposed by Elkhorn residents. As the municipal annexation battle was happening, an effort was made in 2004 by a state senator to eliminate statute 79-409 by deleting the long unutilized and nearly forgotten statute allowing OPS to expand in a "technical cleanup" bill. After a night of deliberation, the OPS board members voted unanimously to put the statute into action. They passed a "One City, One School District" resolution that activated statute 79-409, and called for annexing all territory and schools within the city of Omaha boundaries into OPS. The resolution meant that 21 suburban schools in two suburban districts would now become part of the central city OPS. The community reaction was intense: Rallies sprung up across the city while local school superintendents and board members exchanged angry accusations. The legislature became the locus for a solution, and legislators worked for several years to work out a resolution. The final LC legislation was enacted by the legislature and signed by the governor in May 2007. It included the following: (a) the creation of an 11-district socioeconomic-based transfer plan with the goal of fostering diversity across all buildings within two counties; (b) the establishment of a common levy (or tax-base sharing plan) designed to help property poor districts benefit from increases in valuation in suburban communities; and (c) the establishment of elementary learning centers (ELCs) to provide social and academic support services to children and parents.

Governance. The LC is governed by the Learning Community Coordinating Council (LCCC), which is 21-member governing board. Twelve members are elected from six electoral sub-districts (electing two members each). Six additional members are voted in via a caucus of school board members, to represent local school boards. Together, these 18 members serve 4-year terms. An additional three non-voting members are appointed by the school boards of districts that fail to win a seat through either the voting or caucus processes and serve 2-year terms. A "one district one vote" structure was originally proposed but was changed in the final legislation to a system of proportional representation based on resident population. This proved particularly important given the levy (taxing) authority of the council.

In addition, the 11 area superintendents serve in an advisory role to the LCCC through the "Superintendents Advisory committee meeting." Each of the six sub-districts ends up with three representatives who form an

"achievement sub-council" for their districts. These representatives are in charge of approving "poverty plans" and "ELL plans" for their sub-council.

Finance. The LC legislation addressed the school finance inequities between districts through a tax-base sharing program for school district operating expenses. The legislation therefore granted the LCCC the authority to set a common levy (or tax) on the *combined* value of all property across the 11 school districts. The property taxes are then collected by the LC but immediately distributed back to local districts for general operating costs. The distribution of funds is based on the state funding formula that was revised at the time the LC was put in place, which gives greater weight to poverty and ELL status, and incentivizes other behaviors (i.e., longer school days). Individual school districts have some discretion to add a small property tax over and above the levy set by the LC to maintain some of the advantages of local property tax wealth. The LCCC was also granted the authority to set a small tax for LC programs, including ELCs (yielding $4.7 million in the 2010/11 fiscal year) and capital projects related to LC programming. The LC staff (the CEO and the staff) are funded through a legislative allotment of about $800 million annually from the state for operating costs. The LCCC governance council members initially received a $12,000 annual stipend, but subsequent legislation eliminated the stipend.[4]

Transportation for the student transfer program is funded by the state and reimbursed to districts 1 year in arrears through the state funding. Students who contribute to diversity (affluent students transferring to a low-income school or low-income students transferring to an affluent school) receive free transportation if they live more than a mile from their school. Parents can receive a transportation allowance if they drive their child to school, equal to 285% of the state rate.

Implementation. The LC transfer plan is aimed at increasing the diversity in schools throughout the metro area and de-concentrating poverty in high-poverty districts and schools. The goal of the transfer program is to achieve an equal distribution of low-income students in all buildings across the two counties, so that all schools have the metro-wide proportion of low-income students. At the time the LC began, that number was about 35% (as measured by students eligible for free and reduced price lunch [FRL]); it is currently at 43% FRL (LC of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, 2012). There are, however, no specific goals or benchmarks, and no accountability for reaching any particular thresholds for diversity (see Table 4 for enrollment).

The LC legislation also allowed for the creation of "focus schools," which are inter-district magnet schools designed to attract students from across the

metro area. The legislation incentivized the creation of those schools by (a) providing a per pupil funding incentive of extra funding per pupil; and (b) creating a capital funds levy that, with the approval of the LCCC, would allow a district building a focus school to get funding (up to 50% of funding, with the balance of funding coming from the sponsor district) to construct the school. In October of 2011, the LCCC approved of its first focus elementary school and also approved a middle school in OPSs as a focus school. (The legislation envisioned focus school "pathways" that students could follow from elementary to middle to high school.)

The LC is required to establish at least one ELC for every 25 high-poverty elementary schools (defined as at least 35% of the students attending the school who reside in the attendance area of such school qualify for FRL)[5] to provide out-of-school supports for students and families. Currently, two of the six sub-districts qualify for an ELC and one of the districts has established an ELC: The other is in the process of creating one. The LCCC also made the decision to distribute some of the ELC funding across all the six sub-districts, providing some funding to all 11 districts in the metro for summer/after school programming.

Minneapolis, MN's West Metro Education Program (WMEP). WMEP is a voluntary integration program including Minneapolis and 10 suburban districts (Brooklyn Center, Columbia Heights, Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Richfield, Robbinsdale, St. Anthony/New Brighton, St. Louis Park, and Wayzata). As Minneapolis became more diverse during the 1990s, several local and state actions worsened school segregation. Despite severe residential segregation in Minneapolis, in 1995, the district ended the desegregation program that it had implemented after being released from court oversight in 1983 to comply with the state desegregation rule, which stated that no school could have 15% more minority students than the district as a whole for the city of Minneapolis (Kraus, 2008). This decision to return to neighborhood schools was facilitated by a waiver by the state board from the state desegregation rule (Kraus, 2008). As a result of these policies, along with demographic changes, by the mid-1990s, a quarter of the district's schools were extremely segregated (81%-100% non-White; Institute on Race and Poverty, 2007; Kraus, 2008).

In 1995, the state was sued in state court for failing to provide adequate oversight of the Minneapolis school district (*NAACP v. State of Minnesota*). The *NAACP* case was eventually consolidated with a nearly identical case, *Xiong v. State of Minnesota*, which was filed in 1998. During the 3 years between commencement of *NAACP* and *Xiong*, the district's poverty enrollment had increased to 65%, and non-White enrollments had reached nearly

70% (see Table 3). The number of extremely segregated schools (80%-100% non-White) had risen 10 percentage points, to over one third of the District's schools. The *NAACP* and *Xiong* cases settled in 1999-2000. The most important part of the settlement created the "Choice is Yours" (CIY) inter-district transfer program. At this point, WMEP not only became responsible for administering the CIY Program but also began operating two magnet schools and providing education and training programs for students and faculty in the member districts.

Governance. WMEP was originally formed in 1989 as an informal cooperative venture between Minneapolis Public Schools (MPSs) and eight of its surrounding suburbs. It operated as the Cooperative Inter-District Integration Program (CIIP) for several years and was formally established in 1995 as a joint powers school district. As one administrator described, it was created

> (t)hrough the joint ventures to create an integration and inclusion plan as opposed to each district having their own plan under the rule. So, the districts that were all contiguous to one another, that were contiguous to Minneapolis, said, let's work together and come up with a regional plan so that we don't have these individual relationships established.

The district is now governed like a typical Minnesota school district with its own superintendent and school board, except that the board is not elected but rather is composed of one board member from each of the 11-member school districts.

Finance. Most of WMEP's revenues come from the "tuition" paid by member districts for students attending the two magnet schools. Districts pay an amount equal to their own average per pupil spending, meaning that each district pays a different amount. This revenue covers all of the costs of the magnets and most of WMEP's administrative costs. In addition, during the 1990s, the State Legislature created the Integration Revenue program, which distributed nearly $90 million per year to regional school districts by 2010. Most of WMEP's member districts receive $129 per pupil in integration aid from the State and pass $19 per pupil of this through to WMEP. Two districts—Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center—are exempt from this transfer. These funds finance WMEP's training, teaching, and professional development programs and a small part of administrative costs.

Funds for CIY participants (equal to the Minneapolis' state aid per pupil) go directly from the State to the districts where participants enroll. The magnet schools are financed by revenues determined by the number of students

they draw and where they are drawn from. Each member district receives an annual number of slots for each school and sends per pupil "tuition" to the district for each of its students in the two magnets. The amount is equal to the average total spending per pupil in the sending district (including state aid, federal aid, and local levies). This means that each district sends a different amount of money per pupil and that Minneapolis and the other higher poverty districts send the most because they spend more per pupil, largely as the result of greater aid flows. This money covers all of the budgets for the two schools and the majority of district administrative costs.

Implementation. CIY is effectively an extension of Minnesota's state-wide open enrollment law, which allows any student to transfer to another school district, and the receiving district receives state aid for that student at the per student rate it receives for its own resident students. No property tax revenues or transportation services follow the transferring student, and students must compete for available spaces. Under CIY, low-income (FRL eligible) Minneapolis students can transfer to a participating suburban district, and they bring with them the full state aid associated with the Minneapolis School District (see Table 4). Similar to Rochester, typically this amount is substantially more than the per student rate for resident students in the receiving suburban districts because of various compensatory aid programs. CIY participants also receive transportation to their suburban destination. Eligibility for CIY is determined by residence and income—so, strictly speaking, integrative outcomes based on race are not guaranteed. However, nearly 90% of participating students are non-White. CIY participants are spread fairly evenly across nine suburban districts but the two districts receiving the most students—Robbinsdale and Columbia Heights—are also among the most diverse receiving districts. Students of color represented 69% of enrollments in Columbia Heights and 50% in Robbinsdale in 2010, up from 33% and 22% in 2000. These districts also have the first and third highest poverty rates among the participating suburban districts.

WMEP also operates two magnet schools, one in suburban Crystal and another in downtown Minneapolis. Opened in the early 2000s, the two schools operated fairly independently for much of their history with FAIR-Crystal serving roughly 550 4th through 8th graders and FAIR-Minneapolis serving roughly 500 K through 12th graders. However, the demographics of the two schools began to diverge as the schools grew to resemble their neighborhoods. Non-White enrollments in FAIR-Crystal started at 36% in 2000-2001, but fell to 28% in mid-decade. Conversely, non-White enrollments at FAIR-Minneapolis grew from 54% in 1999-2000 to 71% in 2009-2010. Because of this, WMEP recently reorganized the magnets to encourage students to attend

both schools in sequence. FAIR-Crystal still serves Grades 4 through 8, but FAIR-Minneapolis now serves K through Grade 3 and Grades 9 through 12.

WMEP also operates a variety of training, teaching, and professional development programs for all member districts. Teaching programs include leadership and community service programs for high school and middle school students, and an enrichment and academic remediation summer school program for several hundred students from the member districts for 6 weeks each summer. WMEP provides professional development opportunities to teachers and staff designed to support achievement of the district's mission and goals. These include adult workshops, seminars, and conferences for urban and suburban teachers and administrators that "promote cultural understanding and provide the necessary tools to meet the needs of diverse student populations."

Cross-Case Findings

Our study of these three regional collaboratives highlights important differences relating to governance, finance, and implementation. Below we discuss the major themes across these three areas that emerged from our data analysis to inform policy and practice relating to cross-district transfer programs across the United States. First, we discuss how governance councils negotiated collective goals and local interests, and how the structure of councils affected the decisions made around access and opportunity for low-income students and students of color. Second, we examine how the finance structures within each of the programs influenced local decision making by participating school districts (and political support) and access within each of the programs. Third, we examine how the governance and finance structures of each of the collaboratives shaped the implementation of these programs in terms of policies, enrollment patterns, and supports for students.

Governance

We found that the governance structure matters in terms of political support for, and the structure of, each of these programs. The governance structures of each of the programs are distinct. As mentioned previously, the WMEP joint power board members consist of one (appointed) school board representative from each district and thus is a one district/one vote structure. Rochester's governing board consists of all the superintendents of participating districts, including the city school district, as well as the superintendent and assistant superintendent from the countywide district (BOCES) that administers the program. The program director also serves on the board but

in a non-voting capacity. In Omaha, the governance board includes a complex structure of members representing electoral districts, those voted in via caucus of school board members, and non-voting members appointed by school boards.

Our cross-case analysis of interview data indicates that the governance structure of each of the programs has affected both the political support for the programs and decisions made by the board. In Omaha, the LC board's power is balanced between representatives residing in the boundaries of the urban district (which is far larger than the suburban districts) and suburban interests. This balance has meant that urban representatives have been able to successfully limit proposals from suburbs to dismantle or weaken aspects of the program (i.e., whether or not to require data sharing on the part of districts; and decisions to fight the legal challenges to the common levy). Despite the more balanced representation, the council has not pushed for more aggressive integration policies, timelines, or targets; thus, the more inclusive representation, while leading to greater equity in some respects, has not translated into increased access for students.

In Rochester, the governance of the program rests primarily with participating suburban superintendents. Superintendents of the urban district (Rochester City Schools) have not usually attended the governing board meetings (of which there are three per year), sending a designee instead. This lack of participation may be due to the small size of the program or to the fact that the program is currently one-way out of Rochester. However, a recent superintendent who is no longer in the district participated in several meetings and through that participation shaped important decisions relating to student access; for example, he promoted the inclusion of a Spanish application form and indicated that he personally would make sure that city schools sent students' academic records so that no student was excluded because of incomplete records sent by schools.

The governing board has had a number of important conversations recently about the procedures and program components. Although the governing board makes decisions by consensus, some conversations have uncovered differing perspectives on important issues and have led the participating superintendents, at times, to consider whether they would consider withdrawing from the program if decisions of the majority do not resonate with their own (or their school board's) perspective. The tenuous nature of voluntary participation has surfaced around major decisions around eligibility and placement of students, removal of students, parental requirements, and other related issues. In part, this is the result of turnover in governance board members as a result of superintendent turnover in these districts and the lack of discussion among board members of the goals of the program, current implementation of the program,

and ways that policies and procedures facilitate (or may undercut) those goals. Superintendents appear to be responding to larger issues relating to racial prejudices in their communities, thin political support for the program in some of the suburban districts, and different interpretations of the purpose of the program and eligibility of students (for more details, see Finnigan & Scarbrough, 2013). As one board member noted,

> I think the governance board has tackled some more difficult issues in the last couples of years than they probably ever had, so I think in a lot of ways it's been healthy, even though it doesn't necessarily seem like it, because I think . . . I think that it tries to reach conclusions from a governance board that it's healthy for the program, and I think it also has to be something that every district that participates is comfortable with, and that's a very difficult balance sometimes . . . here I can see a potential issue with that will be when we have some folks that may say, "We want to do something a little bit different with the program. We want to be able to take in more kids, we want to be able to do this and this." And you'll have some districts say "No, we don't want to do that," and some who say that we want to do it, and that's potentially where we could become . . . it could become an issue.

Another board member added,

> And I think sometimes programs begin and then they take on a life of their own, and they become almost sort of institutionalized in the way that things are occurring within the program. And I'm certain that in the time since the 60s there have been moments where there's been a pause and we've said, "ok, why do we do this?" and "is this the way we should continue doing this?" and I believe that we're at one of those points now. I think now is a good time to take a look at it.

As these board members suggest, in recent years, the USITP governing board has been grappling with issues that have also been facing other metro areas in terms of the ways in which this long-standing, voluntary inter-district transfer program fits with the larger educational challenges and demographic shifts in the metropolitan area and in doing so have unearthed both political and logistical issues. The major voices in these decisions are from the suburban communities given the greater representation and more active participation on the board.

As in Rochester, in Minneapolis, representation on the WMEP board is heavily tilted toward the suburbs: Under the current "one district/one vote" structure, for example, a wealthy smaller district (with 5,000 students) in this structure has the same "voice" as the 34,000 student MPS. MPS, frustrated at the lack of voice and other issues relating to program implementation,

recently voted to pull out entirely from the joint powers board and has voted twice to do so (later rescinding those decisions). According to an administrator, one of the reasons they proposed to pull out beyond this issue of voice was that the program was being too selective, serving mostly White students and not having an ELL or special education component. As he described,

> (y)ou know, and there was a selection process of students, a certain kind of student they wanted. We forced them to be a little bit more racially diverse, but for awhile the families tended to be a little bit more middle class, and the kinds of families whose kids were likely to succeed anyway. Namely [the families] were committed to a program, they made the selection, and they were willing to be involved. And when a section of the city loses that type of partner, and you have, you know, you have a much greater presence of families who are less empowered to partner with the school district then, you know, the one dimensional assessment of how good a school becomes [trails off].

The MPS board voted in late 2012 to remain in WMEP contingent on some changes demanded by MPS.

Another governance issue has to do with stakeholder representation. In Omaha, as stated previously, superintendents were intentionally left out of the governance structure because they were perceived to be obstructionist when the original legislation was created. Their role therefore is only on an "advisory" council with no formal voting authority/role. While this exclusion is, according to our interviews, perceived to have removed some of the roadblocks and to have facilitated the work of the coordinating council, it has come at a cost: Many of the superintendents feel their role/authority is usurped and have used their public positions to challenge the legitimacy of the governance council entirely. As a state official recalled, "There were superintendents that did not want this to succeed, and were looking for every opportunity, and had board members that were looking for every opportunity to have the Learning Community trip up." We found a similar issue of stakeholder representation in Minneapolis where board members, not superintendents, participate in governance. As one respondent described, "They put the board members from every district, they sit on this board and they make all these decisions and the superintendents are annoyed by it."

Another significant challenge with the Omaha governance structure is that, despite more broad-based geographic representation, there are few people of color on the governance council. One of the three current members of color is, in fact, openly hostile to integration, which also undermines the overall support for stronger integration policies within the council. Another key stakeholder that is not included explicitly in Omaha is parents: Although

a number of the LCCC board members who were elected are current parents of students, many are not and there is no formal parent group included in governance or in an advisory role. In Rochester, most of the governance board members are not people of color, with the exception of the last few RCSD superintendents (although as mentioned earlier, the RCSD superintendent rarely participates in governing board meetings) and, more recently, one of the suburban superintendents. This is related to larger issues relating to people of color in administrative leadership in the metropolitan area, as the race/ethnicity of the current superintendents is similar to countywide demographics. The parent advisory group, which is composed of all people of color whose children participate in the program, provides input to the director, who serves as a non-voting member of the governance board. This group, however, is primarily focused on fundraising and planning the required parent meetings, rather than program governance and implementation. In Minneapolis, there is a formal parent group as well but, as in Rochester, this parent group has no formal decision-making authority. However, this group, compared with Rochester, is more politically active: It lobbied the joint powers board (WMEP) to maintain support for the existing inter-district magnet school programs. The WMEP joint powers board is, as with Omaha and Rochester, predominately White, which is an issue that has come up as a concern in Minneapolis.

A final governance theme that was raised in our interviews in two sites (Minneapolis and Omaha) was the question of a *need* for a regional governance structure. In each of these sites, there have been questions raised about the resources spent on administration and staffing: Whereas the staff for each is quite small (less than five in each site), the funds have been characterized by opponents as "wasted" on an extra layer of bureaucracy. In Omaha, the funds are allotted by the state, but in Minneapolis, most of the money for administrative costs comes from "tuition" paid by the districts for students attending the inter-district magnets. In Omaha, questions have also been raised about the need for the governance council: Some have characterized the council as a "super board," and there have been accusations from suburbs that it is usurping local control on key issues. As a state official noted of the LCCC: "You have 11 school boards saying, you are in our territory now, and that's one of the weaknesses." One of the reasons for opposition is related to the council's responsibility for setting the common tax rate across the metro area for the tax-base sharing plan. Thus, the authority given to the board has put it in the spotlight in the metro area and it has become a political symbol of re-distributive policymaking.

The question of legitimacy of the governance board has been less of an issue in Rochester, for a number of potential reasons: First is the small size of

the program in terms of numbers of students enrolled and limited impact on either city or suburban enrollments, which keeps it politically out of the spotlight. The governance board also receives no public funding except the small amount of per-pupil money that each district contributes to administer the program and (like Minneapolis) has no control over per-pupil allocations based on state aid. Another issue is the relatively longer history of cross-district structures in the state/region: New York State established the Board of Cooperative Educational Services system in 1948 to provide shared educational services to districts with the exception of the Big Five districts in NY. Thus, the legitimacy of the administration of the program through Monroe 1 BOCES is not as big of an issue as in other locales due to the political acceptance of BOCES as a way to deliver cross-district services across the state.

Finance

We found, not surprisingly, that funding shapes access in significant ways. In both Rochester and Minneapolis, the local per pupil allocation follows the student to the suburbs; in both urban districts, the per-pupil funding level is higher than the average suburban per pupil allocations. Because this "extra" funding follows transfer students to the suburbs, this becomes somewhat of a bonus payment for suburban districts and in theory serves as an incentive to receive students. However, neither in Minneapolis nor in Rochester has this incentive been enough to cause the suburban districts to *create* extra capacity for students into the program: In both metros, suburban districts receive students to fill existing capacity. This is likely related to a perception of a political or economic "cost" of accepting transfer students that exceeds this funding level. As one board member noted, "We participate in the program as a district. It really can't impact [District] taxpayers negatively. We have to be mindful of that." Thus, the capacity, as it stands, remains relatively limited; to expand, some suburban administrators in Rochester noted that they would have to increase class sizes, which would cause the program to lose political support. This funding scenario, however, was not always the case in Rochester. In the early years of the program, additional state and federal money was provided to suburban school districts in addition to the per pupil expenditures. In Minneapolis, we found potential for conflicts of interest regarding participation in WMEP's magnet schools, especially for member districts with their own magnet programs or schools. Member districts pay "tuition" equal to their average spending per pupil for students attending the WMEP magnets. Districts with special programs of their own have a clear financial incentive to keep those students in the district, rather than sending them to WMEP's magnets. There have been years when some of the higher income

districts did not fill all of the slots allotted to them in the WMEP magnets—these incentives may be part of the explanation.

In Omaha, the funding also follows the students when they transfer schools, yet because the common levy redistributes funds back to schools in the same way across all 11 districts, there is no significant premium or "bonus" payment to districts that receive students. The state formula does attach extra funding to students eligible for free/reduced price meals, or who are ELLs, and thus this may act as a slight bonus/incentive; however, we did not hear of this in our interviews. Another distinction between Omaha and the other two programs is that the transfer program is two-way. Thus, the urban district is both a "sender" and a "recipient" of students. The urban superintendent noted that his district receives students under the program; the district is also operating the first regional magnet school and thus is likely to enroll additional students as a result. (The district receives a per pupil "bonus" of $900 for students enrolling in the magnet school, which represents an approximately 9% increase over OPS' per pupil cost of $9,493 (Omaha Public Schools, 2012)

Implementation

Although implementation varies across these metro areas, several themes emerged relating to the direction of the transfer (one-way out to the suburbs or two-way, i.e., in and out of both suburban and urban districts), components of the program that support students and teachers, and access. Rochester's program was originally two-way, but years ago, enrollment in the city schools faded after city parents resisted placement of suburban students in the most desirable city schools according to one of the early program directors. This political opposition by city parents resulted in a decision by city school administrators to only allow suburban students to enroll in these city schools *after* space was filled by city residents, resulting in no spaces available for suburban students (see Finnigan & Stewart, (2009) for more details on the historical and political context of the program). A couple of years ago, the program started planning to pilot a two-way program in two of the participating districts but leadership changes in the city and one of the suburban districts ended these discussions. More recently, developing a two-way program was raised during several governance board meetings this school year, but concerns about which schools and programs would be open to suburban students and whether they would be guaranteed placement have not yet been resolved. Interestingly, the "one way out" nature of the program in Minneapolis has been a point of contention for the MPS officials who have suffered significant enrollment losses to school choice (open enrollment and

charter schools), as well as to demographic change. In 2009-2010, the district lost roughly 1,200 students (net) to open enrollment and 6,000 students to charters. Combined with the 2,000 students lost to CIY, this means that the district lost more than 20% of its students to choice programs. These losses have contributed greatly to the budget crunches and school closure discussions in the district virtually every year in the past decade. As a program administrator in Minneapolis noted the need to address the costs for urban districts, "We've got to try to improve our inter-district transfers somehow and over time try to figure out is there a way to, you know, transfer suburban in."

We also examined policies that affected access for students: transportation, student supports, and teacher training. We found that transportation has helped significantly in access, and in all three sites it is funded by the state. In Rochester and Minneapolis, transportation has not been a political issue: In Rochester, this likely is related to the fact that private and charter school students are also bussed by home districts to their schools. In Minneapolis, the lack of controversy is largely due to the fact that costs are covered by the state, and to the much greater impact on the city's budget of the transportation costs they must absorb for charter students. Transportation however has become a significant political problem in Omaha due to the unstructured nature of the transfer program. While transportation was, during the initial years of the program, guaranteed for any student who contributes to the diversity of the school they are transferring to, there were no limitations about where students could transfer and, in some instances, the distances traveled were quite large. Some believe that superintendents were driving up costs intentionally (i.e., by allowing students to travel in taxis) and then, publicizing such costs as a way of undermining political support for the plan (an issue tied, in part, with governance and their lack of representation). There have since been limits placed on the distance that students can travel (see Breeze, 2013).

A key feature that distinguishes the WMEP collaborative from the others is the support it provides for districts and schools that receive students in the form of professional development (PD) to urban and suburban teachers and administrators focused on meeting the needs of diverse populations and developing cross-cultural awareness. This PD is paid for with the integration revenue that districts receive from the state, a portion of which is passed through to WMEP. Neither of the other two programs offer training for teachers.

Finally, in Omaha and Minneapolis, the programs have been authorized to establish inter-district magnet schools, but challenges have limited the development of these schools and ultimately, the integration impact of these

efforts. In Omaha, the responsibility for "authorization" of such schools (called "focus schools") was given to the governance council, although the operation of the schools is left up to school districts or a collaboration of districts. The legislation originally mandated that such schools be sponsored by one district; this ironically prohibited an existing inter-district collaborative school from applying for focus school status and receiving the extra funding. The legislation was then changed to allow inter-district collaborations; however, the change was made after a decline in political support, and claims of financial stress caused two districts to pull out from the existing collaborative school. The school was then given funding by local philanthropists, and the remaining sponsor (OPS) applied to the LC for endorsement as a focus school in October of 2011, when it became the first focus school approved by the LC. In Minneapolis, WMEP runs two inter-district magnet schools, both focused on the fine arts. Taken together, the magnet schools in Minneapolis have improved integration in terms of overall numbers: The FAIR magnet school enrollment in Minneapolis is about 1,000 total (compared with 2,000 annually transferring through CIY); in Omaha, the magnet school enrollment is much smaller, approximately 160 students, compared with 2,400 transferring in the inter-district plan.

Conclusions and Implications

As currently structured, the three plans have to some extent achieved their goals: providing access (albeit small) for students (particularly low-income students and students of color) to more integrated settings. The reach of these programs, however, has been somewhat limited based on important regional policy dimensions relating to the authority and structure of these governing bodies, financial issues, and local contexts. Such limitations are, in many ways, by design all of the programs are choice-based, and completely reliant on the cooperation of suburban schools to provide slots for students. Understanding the ways in which program features of these collaboratives relate to implementation and, ultimately, access for students is critical if regional *educational* policy is to result in the desired outcome of providing greater access and opportunity for low-income students of color and reducing racial and socioeconomic isolation. We briefly summarize the findings relating to each of the programmatic factors that were found to be important to regional policy and critical aspects of our findings: authority and structure, funding and implementation, and local context and history.

The authority and structure of the governing boards—important factors shaping regional reforms—are issues, to varying degrees, for each of these programs. None of these plans involves parents or communities of color in

any meaningful way in terms of governance. In two of the metros (Minneapolis and Rochester), the urban districts have relatively less voice or input, although this has been a serious issue of contention only in Minneapolis. Stakeholder exclusion has caused political problems in the Omaha plan, where superintendents have felt sidelined and have used their public status to undermine the plan.

We have also found that the funding and implementation of these programs shapes the supports provided. For example, the state funding for transportation has been critical and has muted some potential political challenges to the cost of the programs. The integration revenue funding in Minneapolis has been instrumental in supporting WMEP's efforts to provide teacher training and support; a lack of funding for such training in Omaha and Rochester has meant that supports are not offered. In fact, a lack of funding/infrastructure for outreach and counseling means that these programs may not serve the students most in need of better academic environments.

Although enrollment has been limited in Rochester by a selective application review process (compared with a lottery in the other two places) and limitations on available spots in the suburban schools, this may be changing as a result of increased attention by the governance board to issues of access. In addition, given the "one-way" nature of these programs (in Rochester and Minneapolis), little attention has been given to the costs (however small) to urban districts that lose students. Indeed, such programs have the potential to exacerbate existing segregation in urban districts by pulling even the more "relatively" advantaged students out of the urban core, leaving it even more segregated than it was prior to the introduction of these programs. Thus, the degree to which these policies are really "regional" in nature—in helping *all* districts within a region, particularly those in urban districts that have suffered the most as a result of geopolitical fragmentation—is questionable.

Importantly, aspects of each of these programs would be useful to apply to other settings, and we also note significant areas for improvement. In Rochester, for example, the hands-on involvement of superintendents has led to positive changes to the program in terms of application procedures and processes. Furthermore, the cross-district conversations between these superintendents around issues of access and equity are extremely important. This history of cross-district collaboration in the county can provide a potential springboard for deeper conversations about this inter-district transfer program, perhaps leverage the expansion to additional districts, and prompt a discussion of regional equity. Several aspects of the program merit some deeper consideration and ultimately modification: for example, the lack of a two-way transfer structure, limited space available, and non-existent supports for students and training for teachers in the suburban districts are all things

that could be considered at this important point in the history of the program. In addition, greater support (including financial support) from the state of NY might be necessary to incentivize the expansion of this program and improve the regional potential of this policy in reducing segregation.

Omaha's strengths, on the other hand, are the more "regional" structure, with benefits built in for the urban district; the two-way nature of the transfer program, the inter-district magnet schools, and the incentives to create such programs (which have potential but of which there is only one currently); the governance structure with proportional representation; and the tax-base sharing programs that ensure revenue equity between school districts. The plan, however, suffers politically from the lack of meaningful involvement of superintendents; a lack of student supports at receiving schools and teacher and administrator training; and a lack of accountability for integration progress.

In Minneapolis, the financial incentives in the CIY program appear to maintain suburban interest in the program. Similarly, the financing mechanism for WMEP's magnets also keeps the schools on solid financial ground. However, Minneapolis' approach is limited by the intermittent support by the city resulting from concerns about representation, implementation, and funding. The one-district, one-vote structure of the WMEP board gives disproportionate power to small districts, primarily at the expense of Minneapolis. In addition, the Minneapolis experience makes it clear that as city-suburb programs scale up, enrollment losses to city districts will eventually begin to significantly discourage their participation. In the long term, programs must find ways to compensate "sending" districts (usually the central city) to maintain their strong support. These types of regional collaboratives cannot hope to survive in the long run without strong support from the participating central cities and ultimately, the state.

Our study has highlighted important issues relating to the governance, finance, and implementation of regional collaboratives and, as we noted in providing the strengths and challenges in each locale, it is important to understand how local context shapes implementation. Ironically, while the voluntary nature of these programs has kept them relatively small in size/impact, the small sizes are likely responsible for the on-going political support for— or lack of opposition to—the programs. Beyond these local programmatic limitations, there has been little effort by states or the federal government to address school segregation and regional inequity by encouraging (through financial incentives) or requiring (through mandates) districts to accept students across district boundaries to bring about metropolitan integration. Based on these, we suggest important implications for future research and educational policy.

First, the research linking these programs to student outcomes is extremely limited given the longstanding nature of many of these programs. The few studies that have examined the short-term impact of these programs on academic outcomes (as measured by test scores) have found mixed results (see, e.g., Aspen Associates, 2009; Bischoff, 2011). Several studies of longer-term outcomes, that is, graduation college going rates, although extremely limited, have found more consistently positive effects (see Crain, 1992; Executive Office of Education, 2013). More research is needed, however, to better understand how program features (i.e., outreach, transportation, and academic and social supports) may relate to student access, opportunity, and outcomes.

More research is also needed into the factors involved in establishing collaboratives in contexts that lack such agreements. We have studied the implementation of one of these collaboratives, Omaha, since its inception. However, given the current context with large proportions of low-income students of color isolated in central cities, more research is needed to better understand the pre-conditions to forming such arrangements to reduce segregation across metropolitan areas in different contexts and the incentives and resource constraints that must be negotiated to induce participation.[6]

The findings from this study have several implications for policymakers who are interested in regional equity more broadly. First, our findings indicate the need to carefully craft policies that take into account a region's social and political context. This finding echoes the findings from the regionalism literature cited previously, which has illustrated that contextual factors, such as degree of fragmentation and prior history of collaboration between jurisdictions, have a significant bearing on the success of regional equity efforts (Pastor et al., 2009). Our work, however, extends that body of work by illustrating the importance of attending to the local political context in terms of stakeholder inclusion (i.e., superintendents, state agencies, and community groups), which we found shapes both political support and implementation. In addition, our study suggests that the more comprehensive programs and supports require strong policy advocacy on the part of local stakeholders, state-level inducements, and regional control over resources.

Our study also illustrates the need for policymakers and scholars interested in regional equity in education to coordinate with regional equity efforts in other policy domains. Indeed, while school districts are often pointed to as a cause of stratification by regional equity scholars, they are often overlooked in policy solutions. Regional equity, in essence, requires inter-governmental cooperation not just in housing, transportation, land use, and municipal governance but also in education.

Inter-district collaboratives, as our case study data illustrate, can be logistically and politically complicated. Yet, for those policymakers hoping to seriously address segregation and resource inequality between districts, these arrangements are likely a necessary, if difficult, endeavor.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. Some researchers have noted that the expansion of charter schools have negatively affected district enrollments (Ericson & Silverman, 2001) and exacerbated racial isolation (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011).
2. School finance reform, which has helped to equalize tax bases in some contexts, often leaves other fragmentation-associated problems largely untouched. As Ryan (1999) writes, "By defining the problem as one of inadequate funding, school finance advocates may be unwittingly legitimizing the de facto segregation of districts by race and income" (pp. 315-316).
3. Urban core districts in many other contexts have been affected by similar dynamics—declining tax base, increasing share of poverty, and inequitable finance systems—and have filed school finance lawsuits aimed at addressing these inequities (see Ryan, 1999).
4. Initial members who are still on the council continue to receive this stipend.
5. LB 1154, Section 23 (1).
6. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

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