Looking Toward the Field: A Systematic Review to Inform Current and Future School Takeover Policy

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ABSTRACT

School takeover is a reform strategy that is utilized in the United States to address schools or school districts that are either in academic or financial crisis. Since its advent in the late 80s, school takeover has resulted in schools being put under control of the state or in the case of large cities mayors. The purpose of this study was to examine the presence of race in the research discourse surrounding school takeover. Specifically, this study is guided by the following questions: 1) How is race addressed in the school takeover research literature? and 2) How is school takeover described in the extant research literature? This study utilized a framework of color-evasiveness to better understand this policy phenomenon. Through a systematic literature review of 32 peer reviewed articles four themes emerged: race and racism, political (dis)empowerment, market-based reforms, and takeover effectiveness. Ultimately, while race was present in the literature to varying degrees a nuanced view of how race plays a role in school takeover was on average lacking.

KEYWORDS

School takeover; state takeover; color-evasiveness; school reform; critical race theory.

INTRODUCTION

School takeover is an increasingly common reform strategy utilized in the United States. Takeover describes where a school or a whole district is removed from local control (e.g., by a school board) and placed under direct supervision of the state or, as is the case in some large urban districts, the mayor of a city. School takeover policies are a widespread phenomenon occurring across different state contexts. The Institute on Education Law and Policy highlighted that the practice of school takeover of schools and districts is not limited to any specific geographic region within the country. This policy has spread across the country but typically follows three forms of implementation: "(1) keep the elected school board, (2) abolish the locally elected board and appoint a new school board, or (3) abolish the locally elected school board and not replace it at all," (Morel, 2018, pp. 10-11). This upward trend has continued as previous federal policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has laid the groundwork for labeling schools as failures and being subsequently eligible for school takeover (Ravitch, 2013). Oftentimes, schools with higher populations of Black and Latinx individuals are more likely to experience school takeover than their White peers (Morel, 2018). Beyond just impacting students of color, takeover policies have been linked to harmful effects to political involvement for Black community members (Morel, 2018). Due to the disproportionate effect that takeover policy has on communities of color a greater understanding on how race is involved in this scholarly discourse.

Therefore, the purpose of this review is to dive more deeply into the literature surrounding school takeover and specifically its impact on communities of color to answer the following questions:

- How is race addressed in the school takeover research literature?
- How is school takeover described in the extant research literature?

Public policy should be informed by the wealth of research literature. Malin and Lubienski (2015) noted the opposite, those with the most influence of policy are not those producing research in peer-reviewed outlets. Strydom and colleagues (2010) also noted that ontological and epistemological differences between the researchers and policy actors can widen this divide between the research and the policymaking process. While this disconnect may exist, this does not preclude the importance of policy actors looking to the most salient research in determining the effectiveness of various policy outcomes and adjusting the course of future agenda setting to be informed by such research.

In the remainder of this paper, I seek to understand the extant literature focusing on school takeover. First, I present color-evasiveness as a tenet of critical race theory (CRT) to function as a theoretical framework for this study. I then present the methodological approach used in the study. My findings are presented with four themes which emerged in the analysis: race and racism, political (dis)empowerment, market-based reforms, and effectiveness of takeover. I then present discussion and broader implications of the study prior to concluding.

Color-Evasiveness Framework

I utilized the Critical Race Theory tenet of "color-blindness" as a lens through which to examine the literature on school takeover. Color-blindness manifests as the refusal to acknowledge the systemic ways in which policy furthers racial oppression, this ultimately reifies the myth that the U.S. is a post-racial society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As Bonilla-Silva (2018) noted, "contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through 'new racism' practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial," (p. 3). Drawing on the work of dis/crit scholars, color-blindness has been reimagined from color-blind to color-evasive (Annamma et al., 2017). This change in terminology disrupts the deficit logics associated with the language of "color-blind". Color-evasive also helps to disentangle structures of white supremacy from words terminology associated with disability.

In his seminal piece, Gotanda (1991) provides a critique of color-evasive approaches to racial issues. In the U.S. racial issues may be addressed without ever considering race, the dominant logic is that when race is allegedly ignored the approach becomes as race neutral as possible. This racial neutrality is what Gotanda (1991) described as nonrecognition. Nonrecognition places merit at the center of decision making (Gotanda, 1991); meritocracy is noted by several scholars as a myth and one that plays a role in the upholding of white supremacy (Lawrence, 2001; Milner, 2008; Yosso et al., 2004). When policy tends to lend toward nonrecognition of race leads to problematic outcomes, namely with the minimization of racial subordination as a reality in the lives of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Expanding on Gotanda's (1991) identification of nonrecognition as a tool of color-evasiveness, Bonilla-Silva (2018) presents the central frames associated with color-evasive racism: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, minimization of racism. Abstract liberalism relies heavily on ideas of equal opportunity and merit to explain away potential racial subordination. Naturalization as a frame relies on the argument that this is simply the way of things, this is often present in how segregation of neighborhoods continues to be the norm in the U.S. Cultural racism shifts the more overt language of racism to ideas which rely on alleged cultural norms; this ultimately turns into coded language to continue racial subordination. An example of this in education is an idea that certain communities or cultures value education more than others. Finally, minimization of racism functions on the idea that while race is still present in some decision making, it is not the central factor leading to the lived experiences of people of color. These frameworks come together to continue racial subordination in a color-evasive and more subtle way as a the "new" form of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

METHOD

This review followed the framework provided by Hallinger (2013) for conducting systematic reviews in educational leadership. Hallinger (2013) identified eight criteria to guide systematic reviews of research:

- The guiding purpose of the review are communicated in explicit research questions or goals;
- A conceptual framework guides the selection, analysis and interpretation of studies;
- Search criteria and procedures are explicitly communicated and soundly justified in light of the study's goals;
- The types of sources included in the review (mixed, journals, dissertations) are explicitly communicated and defensible in light of the study's goals;
- There is an explicit description and justification of procedures employed for data extraction;
- There is explicit identification of the composition of the group of studies reviewed, regardless of whether the review analyzes qualitative or quantitative data;
- There is explicit description and sound justification and execution of the procedures for data analysis and synthesis; and
- There is clear communication of finding, limitations, and implications of the review (pp. 141-142)

Articles were found using the Academic Search Complete database through EBSCOhost. In the searches only peer reviewed academic journal articles were included from 1999 to 2021 were included. The first school takeover occurred in 1989 in Jersey City, NJ (Morel, 2018), a decade later research started to emerge. Using 1999 as the lower bound captured the foundational research on school takeover as a reform strategy. Initial search terms were "school takeover" and "race", these search terms yielded only four results. Subsequent searches with the following terms were conducted "school takeover" and "class", and "school takeover" and "socioeconomic" but yielded no results. To expand the data set for this systematic review just "school takeover" was utilized as a search term. This yielded 43 articles, including the four previously found articles from the search including the term "race". Following this initial search, all the abstracts were reviewed to ensure that the articles appropriately focused on school takeover. I removed eleven articles from this bounded search as they were not applicable to the topic, or were not presenting research (i.e. book reviews, editor commentary, etc.); this left me with a sample of n=32 for analysis, a size that Hallinger (2013) noted as appropriate. Appendix A provides a table of the articles which constitute the data sources for this systematic review, all sources are also included as entries in the reference section. Studies including both qualitative and quantitative methods were included, focusing solely on either method would have reduced the nuance of the data analysis and would not have provided an appropriate

picture of the of research discourse. Academic Search Complete was chosen as the search engine due to its access to a high volume of journals in the field of education policy.

To answer the research questions a content analysis was performed of the 32 peer-reviewed articles. Open coding was utilized as the first cycle coding method. Entries for each article were created in a matrix (Saldaña, 2016). This matrix served to organize the articles and their identifying information. The matrix allowed for the raw data from each article to be organized and analyzed. Categories were created through a process of axial coding which led to the emergence of four broader themes (Saldaña, 2016). These themes are presented in the findings below.

FINDINGS

The articles varied in how race was considered (or not). Some articles explicitly named critical race theory as a framework for their study while others tangentially mentioned race. While race was not examined specifically in some studies, they examined school districts with high proportions of Black and Latinx students. This was aligned with findings which suggest that students of color are more likely to experience school district takeover then their white peers (Morel, 2018). The four major findings which emerged across this body of scholarship were: race and racism, political (dis)empowerment, market-based reforms, and effectiveness of takeover.

Race and Racism

Across the literature there was a consensus that school takeover as a reform strategy is disproportionately implemented in districts with predominantly students of color (Hunter & Swann, 1999; Morel, 2016; Oluwole & Green, 2009; Welsh et al., 2019a; Wright et al., 2020). The presence of school takeover policy was positively and significantly correlated to the percentage of non-white students in a state (McDermott, 2003). Bowman (2013) highlighted that about a quarter of the Michigan's Black students were in districts under comprehensive state control. The legal history of states also played a role in setting the stage for school takeover to occur in communities with higher populations of people of color; Smith (2009) noted in Missouri laws which led to racially segregated neighborhoods have resulted in people of color being grouped in neighborhoods with lower property value and thus fewer financial resources to fund schools, ultimately this led to poor academic achievement and financial crisis in specific urban districts.

Race and/or racism appeared as a driving force for school takeover policy. Welsh and colleagues (2019a) found race central to the arguments in favor of school takeover in Georgia; they noted that, "a common thread binding these arguments is the 'white savior' discourse that is rooted in and perpetuates a racist narrative that pathologizes blackness and frames youth of color as inherently deficit," (p. 508). Conversely, instances of classism and racism underpinned arguments against a takeover in the Holyoke, MA Public Schools (Fried, 2020). Narratives, voiced during a public meeting regarding the takeover, blamed the academic achievement on students

living in poverty and English language learners; many white community members thought it unfair that the district was punished because of those individuals (Fried, 2020).

Wright and colleagues (2020) found race central to the implementation of school takeover policy in Michigan; fiscal mismanagement was the metric used to determine school takeover, yet districts with predominantly white student populations were not taken over despite having similar financial profiles to school districts serving students of color. Similarly, Philadelphia, PA schools were taken over in 2001, despite no evidence of fiscal corruption and test scores across the district being on the rise (Royal & Gibson, 2017). Wright and colleagues (2020) noted that, "the only clearly discernable difference in Detroit and other cities and districts that fell into receivership was not their fiscal debt, but rather that they were majority African American," (p.429). Takeover policies often favored school closures and charter school networks, these aimed to remake urban areas in a vision of whiteness and these policies often accompanied the disinvestment of the government in communities of color, specifically Black communities (Lipman, 2013). The removal of locally elected officials, predominantly in districts serving Black and Latinx communities is of concern and has been connected to violations of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Hunter & Swann, 1999).

In Philadelphia, PA the school takeover and subsequent superintendent regimes were accompanied with long-time Black educators being pushed out of leadership roles and being replaced with staff who were not from the community (Royal & Gibson, 2017). This is aligned with takeover often being accompanied by the mass removal of teachers and principals (Hunter, 2009). The takeover of New Orleans, LA schools led to a layoff of 4,000 teachers, many of whom had ties to the local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Furthermore, following the takeover many of the previous partnerships for in preparation teachers at these HBCUs ceased to exist, making the opportunities for training new Black educators scarcer (Akbar & Sims, 2008).

In some instances, however, race was central to the reasoning for takeover; in Holyoke, MA the goal of greater racial and class equity was a driving force behind the decision for state involvement in the district (Fried, 2020). While this may be a driving decision in a takeover, the privatization which accompanies it as a reform strategy is particularly problematic. As Hunter (2009) noted, "these schools serve students who come from predominately Black and poor socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents do not have sufficient economic and political power to fend off the profit motives of persons who want to privatize their children's schools," (p. 588). While racial equity has been the goal of some takeovers (Fried, 2020) the disproportionate use of this policy in communities of color (Oluwole & Green, 2009; Wright et al., 2020) pointed toward Lipman's (2013) assertions that this policy is more about control.

Political (Dis)Empowerment

School takeover is complicated as it affects the functioning of elected bodies (e.g., school boards) as well as community and parent voice in schooling (Morel, 2016). When the state

government can make unilateral decisions community voice is removed from the school. This lack of community voice is potentially problematic due to the racialized nature of school takeover policy implementation. Takeover often produced political upheaval rather than the stability needed to drive improvement (Mason & Reckhow, 2017). Districts where school boards were replaced experienced a change in board demographics following the school takeover, with Black school board representation being negatively impacted (Morel, 2016). Stability was often a driving reason for school takeover. Rogers (2012) noted that state politicians believed that "appointed boards were more stable than elected boards and stability was more important than participatory democracy. Order was more important than debate and plurality of voices," (p. 297). This called into question the cost of stability to drive improvement; does the end of stability justify the means of political disempowerment for Black community leaders? The outcome is often not stability but rather turmoil.

Morel (2016) noted that, "black communities are more likely than white communities to experience the political disruption that is caused by the abolishment of locally elected school boards following a takeover," (p.358). This lack of democratic representation did not preclude the community from engaging in grassroots activism; with Philadelphia, PA as a critical case the threat of mass school closures acted as a catalyst for local organizations to coalesce and resist this reform (Cohen et al., 2018). These coalitions of community organizations accompanied district takeovers in multiple states (Cohen et al., 2018; Welsh et al., 2019b); when there is collaboration with community organizations there is a greater potential for community empowerment through the takeover process (Schueler, 2019).

As previously mentioned, takeover policies vary by state. Some states placed a state or city appointed superintendent as a decision maker in concert with the community, while other policies give power to the state to make unilateral decisions without consulting the community (Welsh, 2019). This led to a lack of transparency regarding school takeovers, often without any solicitation of public opinion; when meetings were open to the public, they were procedural and often scheduled at times that are not accessible to working class families (Rogers, 2012; Useem, 2009). In some instances of takeover parent voices were not solicited or utilized when making decisions about which reforms would be used (Bulkley, 2007; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003; Useem, 2009).

Bowman (2013) noted that problematic outcomes occurred when greater autonomy was given to the governor in comprehensive takeover policies. Michigan Public Act 4, a previous iteration of Michigan's takeover policy, allowed the governor to control the appointment of the emergency manager for a district under state control. This removed the state superintendent and state legislators from the decision, ultimately removing the electorate's voice from the appointment process (Wright et al., 2020). In Philadelphia, PA the appointed board was decided by both the governor and the mayor (Bulkley, 2007; Useem, 2009); as the responsibility of appointment moved toward the state and away from local officials, there was a lower likelihood that these individuals would be representative of the community. In contrast, Wong and Shen

(2003a) noted that when school takeover turns school district control over to mayors, there was greater transparency and a potential for greater accountability to their constituents. Mayoral elections have a greater turnout of eligible voters than non-partisan school board elections, providing an opportunity for these takeovers to be more representative of a whole city's electorate (Wong, 2006). The use of takeover as a reform strategy has political implications and is often implemented during non-election years (Wong & Shen, 2002).

In instances where school takeover is controlled by the governor and relied on input from fewer elected officials, the process was less democratic than procedures in which appointment and hiring was more distributive (Welsh, 2019). To illustrate this point, think of a liberal city nestled in a more conservative state, the Governor may be more representative of the voice of state taxpayers overall, not those who live in the city. Appointments were made intentionally in the takeover of schools in Newark, NJ; the state government appointed the interim school board so that it was representative of the demographics of the community the schools served (Morel, 2016). The superintendent in school takeover is vital to the political empowerment or disempowerment of the community. In Lawrence, MA, the state-appointed receiver, the superintendent responsible for the district in takeover, was willing to engage with the union and created community partnerships. This created a more empowering approach to school takeover (Schueler, 2019). While the cooperation in Lawrence, MA led to a more successful takeover, when collaboration is absent between a state appointed official and community stakeholders, decisions may be made without the expertise of local educators; these decisions have been accompanied by litigation and may not be in the best interests of the students in the districts (Bowman, 2013). Cooperation is key in successful relationships between state and local education agencies. Morel (2021) highlighted the importance of strong relationships between local and state government in Union City, NJ in avoiding school takeover and producing an increase in achievement in the public schools.

While there was a trend for political representation to decrease for Black communities, there were increases in Latinx community representation at the school board level during and following school takeovers (Morel, 2016). In Holyoke Public Schools, however, while the school community was roughly 81% Latinx, speakers at a community meeting regarding the school takeover were 85% white (Fried, 2020). Therefore, not all instances point towards a greater level of empowerment of Latinx communities. In the takeover of New Orleans, LA schools, HBCU leaders were not included despite these institutions being cornerstones of the community (Akbar & Sims, 2008). Ultimately, the voices of Black and Latinx leaders were not authentically included in the decisions surrounding takeover decisions and subsequent reforms.

Market-Based Reform
Market-based reforms are school reforms that are based in business ideologies. These reforms aim to inject competition into schools to increase innovation and improvement. Market-based reforms lead to an increased reliance on privatization of public services. The boards appointed

following takeover were often made up of corporate or private sector executives, with more expertise in business than education (Lipman, 2013). Frequently in takeover proceedings the convergence of political and corporate influence over public education became commonplace (Rogers, 2012), and mayoral takeovers were often infused with corporate management processes (Wong, 2006; Wong & Shen, 2003a). Takeovers based on financial concerns in Michigan led to an emphasis on business leadership; emergency managers were required to understand budgets, yet comprehensive takeovers gave them jurisdiction over academic decisions, often without the necessary expertise to address the academic concerns (Bowman, 2013). Market-based reforms operate on the logic that competition creates an environment like a free market and allows for innovation free of bureaucratic hang ups. Gold and colleagues (2007) highlighted that the public sector is unable to engage with private contractors in a truly open market, as there are a limited number of service providers who can meet the complex needs of the public sector.

Increase of school choice policy and charter schools often accompanied district takeover; both school choice and charter schools are marquee market-based reforms. Welsh and colleagues (2019b) highlighted the role that school choice had in the coalition supporting school takeover policy in Georgia. Charter schools have become nearly ubiquitous with takeover policies. A similar phenomenon was present in the school takeover of Lawrence Public Schools in Massachusetts with the use of charter schools as a reform strategy (Schueler, 2019). Takeover of Philadelphia, PA schools coincided with an increase in charter schools and their enrollment (Cohen et al., 2018, Royal & Gibson, 2017; Useem, 2009). Charter schools were the preferred method of improvement in takeover legislation in Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee (Welsh, 2019). Similarly in Michigan, the Muskegon Heights and Highland Park school districts were moved completely to charter schools through a unilateral decision by the emergency manager and not the community (Bowman, 2013). The takeover of New Orleans, LA schools saw a mass movement to charter schools taking the place of the public schools, all in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Míron, 2008). The increase of charter schools in the wake of a school takeover is particularly concerning when, as Royal and Gibson (2017) noted, "these chain educational institutions plant schools across the nation and mass-produce their ethos and pedagogical practices irrespective of context, culture, or community," (p. 4). These charter networks while each distinct tend toward isomorphism (Ravitch, 2013). This reform strategy stripped communities of schools which served to anchor and empower the community (Lipman, 2013).

Portfolio management models were another market-based reform utilized in school takeovers. Portfolio management moves specific managerial duties from central district offices into the purview of private sector entities which are hired by the government. (Bulkley & Henig, 2015). Mason and Reckhow (2017) found that in both Michigan and Tennessee state takeover districts were modeled in the vein of the Recovery School District operated by the state of Louisiana. That model utilized the portfolio management system to run the schools in the district. The Lawrence, MA turnaround diversified school management by utilizing a modified

portfolio management system. The takeover in Philadelphia, PA utilized the diverse provider model which is in the same vein of the portfolio management system (Cohen et al., 2018; Royal & Gibson, 2017; Useem, 2009). This portfolio management approach means that as districts are taken over, they tend to become further privatized.

School takeovers often accompanied the removal of teacher unions from the school district. Míron (2008) noted that school takeover following Hurricane Katrina allowed for New Orleans, LA public schools to not hire unionized teachers as they became charter schools. In Michigan, the Public Act 4 policy gave the emergency manager of school districts the ability to change collective bargaining agreements or suspend collective bargaining all together (Bowman, 2013). Two key cases, Lawrence, MA (Schueler, 2019) and Philadelphia, PA (Gold et al., 2007), illustrated that takeover and de-unionization did not need to be synonymous. In these takeovers districts were still required to utilize a unionized teaching corps in the public schools which were transitioned to charters (Gold et al., 2007; Schueler, 2019). Burns (2003) pointed to the coalition between state government and the corporate community as they sought to take control of the Newark, NJ school system away from local leadership. This is aligned with the argument that some governors, state school boards, and legislatures may be seen as waging a war on public education (Hunter, 2009) or using takeover to weaken the influence of teacher unions (Bulkley, 2007; Useem, 2009).

Effectiveness of Takeover

The driving factors for school takeover were typically academic and financial crises, therefore these two areas were examined to determine the effectiveness of a takeover. Wong and Shen (2003b) have found that academic success as measured by test scores are contingent on specific outcomes yet was not broadly associated with most takeovers. Financial stability tended to increase following the takeover of a school district (Bowman, 2013). This financial stability came at the cost of leadership stability. In Ohio, districts labeled as in a fiscal emergency saw increased administrator turnover (Thompson, 2019). State governments sought to use privatization to increase financial stability, but in the process spent more than when the government provided the service directly (Hunter, 2009). The reliance of private management of takeovers on financial support from temporary philanthropic funds, the stability they achieved was not be sustainable. The reliance on philanthropic funds led to portfolio management companies being unable to deliver on their promises due to a lack of investors and profitability (Mason & Reckhow, 2017).

There was not empirical evidence linking school takeover interventions to sustained, increased academic success in these districts. Wong and Shen (2003b) found that at the district-level, gains in academics during takeovers were inconclusive; the lowest performing school in the district showed initial increases in academic achievement. State officials were often ill equipped to handle the complicated instructional challenges that come with taking over a district. To solve these problems, they looked toward leaders with business experiences to

address them; these alternative management strategies that accompanied school takeover did not yield increases in academic progress (Hunter & Swann, 1999). School takeovers were often accompanied with a focus on hyper-accountability; this led to a focus on test scores over the holistic education of students (Royal & Gibson, 2017). Teachers were less likely to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy during takeovers because of this hyper-accountability (Royal & Gibson, 2017). As Burns (2003) noted regarding the takeover of Newark, NJ, "overall, the state takeover improved management aspects of the school district to a much greater extent than it enhanced student achievement," (p. 296). Thus. takeover as a reform strategy is far from the panacea that proponents of this strategy make it out to be.

The goal of a takeover is to turn around the district academically and financially, ultimately leading to a transition back to local control. This goal, however, was often left unrealized. Welsh (2019) noted, "the end-game of state takeover—return to local control—is often the most muddled and vague elements of the legislation," (p. 324). Without a clear plan to transition out of takeover the likelihood for a district to be under state control for an extended period or fall back into state control could be increased. When takeovers did not focus on building relationships with community partners, it made the reform effort difficult to sustain when that regime was no longer present (Bulkley, 2007). Rogers (2012) noted in St. Louis, MO the advisory committee alluded to changing the law to extend the control of the state in the district and delay a return to an elected school board. Similarly, when a takeover of a district resulted in mayoral control it would likely to become the permanent governance structure (Hunter & Donahoo, 2003).

In specific cases, however, school takeover has found success. The takeover of Lawrence Public Schools, in Massachusetts, yielded early results by focusing on interventions which would create low disruption, this allowed for the state receiver to build momentum and get more buy-in from school and district staff (Schueler, 2019). Simmons and colleagues (2006) pointed to increases in student success in districts under mayoral control, this aligned with the greater accountability and transparency associated with a mayoral takeover (Wong & Shen, 2003a). In Philadelphia, PA academic achievement gains were noted under Paul Vallas, who was appointed CEO of the district during the takeover. To make these gains Vallas spent beyond the budget increasing the debt of the school district (Bulkley, 2007; Useem, 2009). The Union City Public Schools in New Jersey illustrated a successful alternative to a comprehensive school takeover (Morel, 2021). Academic achievement following school takeover is inconclusive at best (Morel, 2021; Wong & Shen, 2003b), Union City, NJ, however, increased academic achievement without a school takeover, mass firing, school closures, or moves to charter schools (Morel, 2021).

DISCUSSION

This systematic review sought to better understand how race was present in the research literature surrounding school takeover policy. Specifically, I looked to the literature to answer the following questions:

- How is race addressed in the school takeover research literature?
- How is school takeover described in the extant research literature?

Race was present to varying degrees among the literature; some authors sought to focus specifically on race, with some even using critical race theory as an underpinning of their work (e.g., Morel, 2016; Oluwole & Green, 2009; Wright et al., 2020), while others mentioned race but often as a passing comment (e.g., Hunter, 2009; Schueler, 2019) and still others barely acknowledged demography (e.g., Gold et al., 2007; Useem, 2009; Wong & Shen 2003b). This is troubling as Morel (2018) noted that this is a policy which is implemented more often in communities of color, and specifically more frequently in Black and Latinx communities. The race neutral position of this policy phenomenon has some troubling implications. As research examined the efficacy of takeover as a strategy to increase district academic achievement, race was not a key focal point. It is troubling that a strategy with little empirical evidence pointing toward its validity is disproportionately utilized in communities of color. Bonilla-Silva (2018) identified frames associated with color-evasiveness, one such frame is cultural racism which was present in Welsh and colleagues' (2019a) discourse analysis and Fried's (2020) study. These studies act as exemplars of how discourse surrounding takeover was coded with language associating cultural deficits with Black and Latinx communities. In Welsh and colleagues' (2019a) study, political campaign ads centered the issue of school takeover depicting Black children with heavy emphasis on the deficits of these communities. While Fried (2020) noted the underlying deficit mindset of board members blaming the problems in the districts on families due to their SES or their fluency in English.

The centrality of market-based reforms is particularly concerning when examining the impact of various school takeovers in the U.S. This, coupled with the lack of community voice in the direction of the school reform (Welsh, 2019), leads to a concerning pattern in which the interventions forced upon specific communities may not be what would best serve their interests. This is particularly true when communities undergo school closures and a heavy shift to charter schools (Cohen et al., 2018), further removing community voice. The demographics of the communities which are more likely to experience school takeover lead to charter schools disproportionately educating children of color in P-12 schools. Charter schools have increasingly been accepted by policy actors as the de facto strategy to reform schools, yet they have failed to demonstrate that they are more effective or efficient than traditional public schools (Ravitch, 2013).

The focus on market-based reforms, specifically the connections among school choice, charter schools, and school takeover, should be cause for pause. Diem and Welton (2021)

pointed toward the complexity of school choice and its potential to increase access to diverse and equitable schools or to further segregation. The current iteration often leads to affluent, white families being the prime beneficiaries of school choice policies, which aligns with the historical context where, "choice was immediately used after *Brown* [*v. Board of Education*] (1954) as a means for white families to preserve segregation and avoid school desegregation" (Diem & Welton, 2021, p. 40). This is particularly concerning as these policies claim to be race neutral (Wright et al., 2020) however, they are connected to racialized reform strategies such as choice (Diem & Welton, 2021) or school closure (Lipman, 2013).

IMPLICATIONS

Policy

This study can provide helpful guidance to policy actors. Whether school takeover has led to academic gains is inconclusive in the literature, yet the reform shows promise for increasing financial stability (Wong & Shen, 2003b). Policy actors should be wary about continuing holistic school district takeovers as a reform strategy and instead focus on takeover centered on the financial well-being while allowing district leadership to preside over academic affairs. Partnership seems to be an area of promise, specifically more collaborative work between the state and the local district as seen in Lawrence, MA (Schueler, 2019) or Jersey City, NJ (Morel, 2021). Additional research is needed to examine how partnership between state education agencies, districts, and the community can create a more effective takeover process or avoid takeover all together (e.g., Jersey City, NJ). It appears that school takeover policy is not producing the espoused outcomes, but it continues to be implemented. Holistic takeovers which subsume academic and financial management in a district may not produce either desired outcome. Therefore, policy actors should restructure takeover policy to limit the reach of the state government when a takeover is deemed necessary.

Practitioners

This study can also inform educational leaders' practice. The findings suggest that community involvement has helped districts navigate school takeover. The specific examples of community and parent partnership provide promising steps for districts to avoid school takeover, these areas require further examination beyond the scope of this paper. The findings also point toward the effective of coalition building among schools, community members, and local/municipal government in advocating for the specific needs of the community.

Research

While this systematic review presented four themes, it points toward a gap in the current research on this specific policy phenomenon. The research continues to build off Wong and Shen's (2003b) article in which the effectiveness of school takeover on academic performance is examined. This research should be revisited to examine the outcomes of more recent instance of school takeover and their impact on student academic performance. The research examined

in this study focused primarily on cases of takeover in urban areas. A great deal is left unknown about how this policy is enacted and experienced in rural and non-urban spaces. Future studies should focus on the ways in which the rural context is comparable or unique to previous urban based cases. Further research should be conducted on government and school partnerships, like the work of Morel (2021) on the school district in Jersey City, NJ. Research in this vein may provide a better understanding of ways in which state education agencies and legislators can support academic growth in districts which may be struggling. Finally, additional studies focusing on the use of critical policy analysis should be utilized in future studies of district takeover to better critique the policy beyond the bounds of simply understanding efficiency. Critical policy analysis allows for an examination of policy which centers critical frameworks and moves away from traditional policy analysis rooted in efficiency alone (Diem et al., 2014). Critical policy analysis can disrupt the logics of oppression often reified in traditional policy analysis which protects the status quo.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to provide a distillate of the extant research surrounding takeover policy in the American educational context from 1999 to 2021. The following questions were addressed: 1) How is race addressed in the school takeover research literature? and 2) How is school takeover described in the extant research literature? The critical race theory tenet of color-evasiveness was utilized as a lens for understanding the analysis of the literature on school takeover policy.

Through a systematic review (Hallinger, 2013) four major themes crystalized: race and racism, political (dis)empowerment, market-based reforms, and effectiveness of takeover. The literature suggested a connection between race and takeover policy. From data pointing to the greater prevalence of takeover effecting communities of color (e.g., Morel, 2016; Oluwole & Green, 2009; Welsh et al., 2019a; Wright et al., 2020) to assertions that race is playing a greater role in the implementation of takeover policy (e.g., Wright et al., 2020). School takeover is not a race neutral policy issue in how it is being implemented. Black and Brown bodies are more likely to experience takeover, but the literature on a whole did not adequately engage in a race mindful discussion. This is not to say that all articles in the sample took a nonrecognition approach for race, yet I found that a nuanced inclusion of understanding race and racism and its role in takeover was not present in most articles especially in studies which were older.

The research discourse on school takeover policy leads to some concerning conclusions when examined in aggregate. There were very few examples in the literature that showed increases in academic success because of takeover (Wong & Shen, 2003b). While takeovers could not demonstrate increased results, it did appear to have deleterious effects on Black representation on school boards (Morel, 2016). School governance has traditionally been a function of local control (Mitra, 2018), takeover implementation further removes the locus of

control from the community and is accompanied by a reduction of transparency in the takeover process (Rogers, 2012).

The implications of the deleterious effects that often accompany takeover are concerning when combined with the lack of compelling evidence for the effectiveness of takeover as a reform strategy. One such potentially harmful effect is the reliance on market-based strategies, such as charter schools, corporate leadership, portfolio management systems, school closures, and staff layoffs. The school closures and layoffs that accompany takeovers result in job and space loss in communities of color, another form of disinvestment which does economic harm to people of color (Lipman, 2013). The current findings of this study position takeover policies as social justice issues which require deeper study. Ultimately, state education agencies should be reluctant to utilize this reform strategy and should examine more effective strategies which engage the community and build meaningful partnerships with educators and parents at the district level.

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Appendix: Data Sources

Authors	Year	Title	Journal
Akbar, R. & Sims, M. J.	2008	Surviving Katrina and keeping our eyes on the prize: The strength of legacy in New Orleans's HBCU teacher preparation programs	*Urban Education*
Bowman, K. L.	2013	State takeovers of school districts and related litigations: Michigan as a case study	*Urban Lawyer*
Bulkley, K. E.	2007	Bring the private into the public: Changing the rules of the game and new regime politics in Philadelphia public education	*Educational Policy*
Burns, P.	2003	Regime theory, state government, and a takeover of urban education	*Journal of Urban Affairs*
Cohen, J., Golden, M. M., Quinn, R. & Simon, E.	2018	Democracy thwarted or democracy at work? Local public engagement and the new education policy landscape	*American Journal of Education*
Fried, S. A.	2020	State takeover: Managing emotions, policy implementation, and the support/sanction duality in the Holyoke Public Schools receivership	*Harvard Educational Review*
Gold, E., Christman, J. B. & Herold, B.	2007	Blurring the boundaries: A case study of private sector involvement in Philadelphia public schools	*American Journal of Education*
Hunter, R. C.	2009	Public school administration and *Brown v. Board of Education*	*Education & Urban Society*
Hunter, R. C. & Donahoo, S.	2003	The nature of urban school politics after *Brown*: The need for new political knowledge, leadership, and organizational skills	*Education & Urban Society*
Hunter, R. & Seann, J.	1999	School takeovers and enhanced answerability	*Education & Urban Society*
Lipman, P.	2013	Economic crisis, accountability, and the state's coercive assault on public education in the USA	*Journal of Education Policy*
Mason, M. L. & Reckhow, S.	**2017**	**Rootless reforms? State takeovers and school governance in Detroit and Memphis**	***Peabody Journal of Education, 92(1), 64-75***
McDermott, K. A.	2003	<u>What causes variation in states' accountability policies?</u>	*Peabody Journal of Education*
Miron, L.	2008	The urban school crisis in New Orleans: Pre- and post- Katrina perspectives	*Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*

Morel, D.	**2016**	**The effects of centralized government authority on black and Latino political empowerment**	*Political Research Quarterly*
Morel, D.	2021	How community engagement helped transform the Union City Public Schools	*Peabody Journal of Education*
Oluwole, J. O & Green II, P.C.	**2009**	**State takeover of school districts: Race and the equal protection clause**	*Indiana Law Review*
Rogers, R.	2012	In the aftermath of a state takeover of a school district: A case study in public consultative discourse analysis	*Urban Education*
Royal, C. & Gibson, S.	2017	They schools: Culturally relevant pedagogy under siege	*Teachers College Record*
Schueler, B. E.	2019	A third way: The politics of school district takeover and turnaround in Lawrence, Massachusetts	*Education Administration Quarterly*
Simmons, W., Foley, E. & Ucelli, M.	2006	Using mayoral involvement in district reform to support instruction change	*Harvard Educational Review*
Smith, J. D.	2009	Hostile takeover: The state of Missouri, the St. Louis school district, and the struggle for quality education in the inner-city	*Missouri Law Review*
Thompson, P. N.	2019	Are school officials held accountable for fiscal stress? Evidence from school district financial intervention systems.	*Economics of Education Review*
Useem, E.	2009	Big city superintendent as powerful CEO: Paul Vallas in Philadelphia	*Peabody Journal of Education*
Welsh, R. O., Williams, S., Little, S., Graham, J.	2019	Right cause, wrong method? Examining the politics of state takeover in Georgia	*Urban Affairs Review*
Welsh, R. O., Williams, S., Little, S., Graham, J.	2019	Examining the narrative: An analysis of the racial discourse embedded in state takeover	*Equity & Excellence in Edcuation*
Welsh, R.O.	2019	Recovery, achievement, and opportunity: A comparative analysis of state takeover districts in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Georgia	*Urban Education*
Wong, K.	2006	The political dynamics of mayoral engagement in public education	*Harvard Educational Review*
Wong, K. K & Shen, F. X.	2003	Big city mayors and school governance reform: The case of school district takeover	*Peabody Journal of Education*
Wong, K. K. & Shen, F. X.	2003	Measuring the effectiveness of city and state takeover as a school reform strategy	*Peabody Journal of Education*

Wong, K. K. & Shen, F. X.	2002	Politics of state-led reform in education: Market competition and electoral dynamics	*Educational Policy*
Wright, J, Whitaker II, R. W., Khalifa, M. & Briscoe, F.	**2020**	**The color of neoliberal reform: A critical race policy analysis of school district takeovers in Michigan**	***Urban Education***

Note: Entries in bold were the four articles that were obtained with the first search of "race" and "school takeover"