

**Beyond the Boundaries:**

*A Sharing of Power in Processes of Public Education Decision-Making and Planning*

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the absence of court-ordered desegregation processes, districts have resorted to other methods of comprehensive public education planning. The student assignment and school boundaries review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), conducted in Washington, DC in the fall of 2013, is a prime example of such an activity. The last review of this process was undertaken in 1968, and since that time over 50 DCPS schools have closed. Over many years, there was a steady decrease in the city's population and the rise of a separately governed system of public charter schools. In the last few years, the population has increased. The goal of the most recent review process was to engage communities in conversations about not only particular boundary proposals but also deeper policy conversations focused on equal education opportunities and issues regarding a need for responsiveness to the changing demographics of the city. This dissertation study examines how a sharing of power, between administrators and the public, in decision making can work to ease the inherent tensions between bureaucracy and democracy. Using a unique dataset, the researcher examines a single-case study, of Washington, DC, to explore a process representative of 'shared decision-making' between citizens and government and discusses how processes designed to be deliberative and inclusive not only encourage participation but ultimately have a vital role in creating a sense of legitimacy and ownership of a process. From these findings through the theoretical frameworks of coproduction and inclusion, the researcher hopes to glean insights that can contribute to how shared decision-making processes, through the actions of the public manager, play a role in addressing public education issues.

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### **GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

This research is focused on how public managers, bureaucrats, can show responsiveness to the needs and wants of the citizens they serve through authentically including citizens in the process of decision-making. To examine this topic, this research reviews a process of public decision-making regarding how revisions were made to public school boundaries in Washington, DC. The findings from this research showed that the inclusion, and authentic partnership, of citizens throughout the process lead to greater outcomes, which the citizens felt were reflective of their participants and feedback.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the most amazing, and strongest women I know:

- My grandmother, Mary V. McQueen; my mother, Ethlyn McQueen Gibson; and my aunts, Teresa Thompson and Yvette McQueen. Thank you for always seeing me for exactly who I am and for inspiring me to keep pushing even in the face of adversity.
- My closest sister friends, Tonda Linsey, DeBaja Coleman, Nicole Lucas Neely, Melanie Croxton, and Errin Haines Whack. Thank you for loving me as I am, for your unwavering friendship, and constant support.
- My mother-in-love, Gladys Blackwell Hubbard; and sisters-in-love, Alysia Green and Kerri Yoder Hubbard.
- Lastly, to all the amazing women who have shaped my life – countless sister friends, sister scholars, mentors, and second mothers who inspire me daily; my Sorors of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc – especially the Zeta Phi Chapter; my sisters of the Washington, DC Chapter of The Links, Inc.; and fellow moms of the Washington DC Chapter of Jack & Jill of America.

I dedicate this dissertation to my former staff from the Office of the Student Advocate – Dan Davis, Tiffany Wilson, and Ryvell D. Fitzpatrick. Our time together changed me, it inspired me, and pushed me to be my very best. Thank you for believing in me and for your unwavering encouragement and support.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful children – Colton Maceo Hubbard and Emerson Drew Hubbard. Words cannot express the joy you both have brought to my life. Being your mommy is a precious gift. Because of you I push harder to be my best all because I want you both to be proud of me.

Most importantly, I dedicate this dissertation to husband, Drew Edward Blackwell Hubbard – the lover of my soul, my number one fan, and proofreader of every paper I wrote in my masters and doctorate program (even this dissertation). Thank you for believing in me even when I did not believe in myself. Thank you for pushing me to keep going when it seemed like the end would never come. Thank you for showing me what love looks like not only in words but in action. Thank you for being amazingly you. I love you endlessly.

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## TERMINOLOGY

### DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

DC – District of Columbia

DC Council – Council of the District of Columbia

DCPS – District of Columbia Public Schools

DCPCSB – District of Columbia Public Charter School Board

DME – Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

LEA – Local Education Agency

Mayor – Mayor of the District of Columbia

OSSE – Office of the State Superintendent of Education

PCS – public charter school

SBOE – District of Columbia State Board of Education

SEA – State Education Agency

### OTHER TERMS

**Coproduction** is “...the process by which citizens and government officials jointly contribute to production or service” (Sharp, 1980).

**Inclusion** in public participation this entails creating continuous opportunity for community involvement in address public issues through decision-making (Quick & Feldman, 2011).

**Legitimacy** is “the justification of authority” or validation of process/outcomes (Rawls, 1971, 1993; Rakar, 2017, p. 60).

**Public Participation** is “...the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organization/institutions responsible for policy formation” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 253).

**Shared Authority** is “... the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy formation” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 253).

*Additional detail regarding these terms can be found in chapter two of this dissertation on page 17.*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

From the founding of the United States of America, until today, the voice and participation of its citizens has been paramount to the establishment and evolution of this nation. While public participation is interwoven into the fabric of this country, evidence of good, let alone great, processes of public participation are hard to find. Many instances of the engagement of citizens in processes of public policy decision-making, at all levels, seems highlight the process for their “don’ts” more than their “dos.” Theoretically, the concepts of deliberative democracy and collaborative governance works to outline the “dos” of processes of decision-making by infusing the values of deliberation, in the form of reasoned discussion, and collaboration in public decision-making (Cohen & Fung, 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2007). The principles of deliberative democracy and collaborative governance further highlight the “dos” of public decision-making by noting the design structures that foster the engagement of those who are most affected by the policies and the process.

When I think about what has drawn me to this area of research, I had to think about when I deeply believed that public participation, or the lack thereof, mattered. To find that moment in time I had to search back to the early years of my career in public education as a middle school language arts teacher at Lake Shore Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida. In the fall of 2003, I received an alternative teaching certification and began my professional, and personal journey, in public education. Upon receiving my teaching certification, I landed a life-changing position teaching language art to seventh graders at Lake Shore Middle School, on the west side of Jacksonville. To know anything about Jacksonville is to know that Jacksonville is the largest city in the United States because of its landmass—the city and county are annexed

together creating its large size. Such a large metropolitan area is bound to lead to vast disparities in the areas of socio-economic status, resources distribution, race and equity issues, access to services, transportation, and definitely in the space of public education.

In terms public decision-making processes, Nabatachi (2010) notes it is essential to consider the complexity and sensitive nature of the issues surrounding processes of engagement. Issues such as disparities and the unintended consequences of public policies can be hard to resolve in decision-making processes. The aforementioned statement is important to note because teaching at Lake Shore Middle highlighted the stark differences and persistent disparities often discussed in terms of public education—which all resulted from policy decisions. Our school, filled with mostly black students, had less access to the resources we needed to make our students education experience as rich as the students across town in the more affluent parts of town. At the time I taught at Lake Shore Middle School, most of our students were bussed to the school because the community where the school was located housed mostly retired residents with no children. The legacy of busing at our school resulted from court-ordered desegregation policies, which lingered from the 1970s as an effort to remedy issues of segregated schools and the catalyst for inevitable racial and socioeconomic inequalities (Lutz, 2011; Billings, Deming, & Rockoff, 2014). Our black students were coming from the north side of town, which at the time was dealing with various issues stemming from persistent social ills, such as poverty, unemployment, uneven resource access, and violence. Engaging the families of our students was difficult because they were bussed the long distances' daily to receive an education within the walls of Lake Shore. This issue of engagement is thus an example of the

unintended consequences of court-ordered desegregation being one of “...the most ambitious and controversial government policies of the previous century” (Lutz, 2011).

Closely tied to our nation’s grounding in the ideals of democracy is the “... fundamental principle of public participation in governance” (Dewey, 1916; Pappas, 2012). Thus, the ideas of the education reform movement have long been rooted in the “promise of bridging the gaps” between schools and families through the engagement of families in public education (Farkas & Duffett, 2015). But reaching families has proven to be a challenge that many school districts and cities have struggled to find the right mediums and formulas to accomplish such a task. In my time as a classroom teacher at Lake Shore Middle School further underscored this challenge in the engagement of families at it was hard to meaningfully connect with families outside of our infrequent conversations regarding their child’s academic standing. Many of my colleagues, naturally, assumed the worst of our students’ parents because of their absence within our school community. Unlike most of my colleagues, I coached our step team and cheerleading squad, which frequently caused me to take students home and see where they were living; it gave me a better insight into the issue both our students, and their parents, were dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

After talking with my principal, Iranetta Wright, we embarked on an opportunity to have our teaching staff better understand and connect with the needs of our students and their families. We set up time for the entire school staff to take a bus trip to travel over to the communities where our students lived. Prior to the trip, we gave families advance notice of the trip and let them know that we wanted to engage with their families—not to talk academics but to gain a better understanding of their families, their interests, and to know the beautiful things

their communities offered. We could knock on the doors of our students' homes, connect with parents, bring that learning back to our school building to find better ways to connect with our students' families and to work in partnership with our families to improve the quality of our school. In our going to the homes of our students we established a different level of caring and better ways of opening our school to families in a welcoming fashion. See, what our school was missing, that the more affluent school communities had, were families who felt a sense of ownership of and belonging inside of our school. Families who feel welcome and have a sense of connection to, or ownership of, their child's school and thus engage and advocate on a deeper level than families whose schools disenfranchises them. Schools who realize the value in the voices and engagement of families often fare better than those who lack parent voice and engagement.

My experience at Lake Shore Middle School was the catalyst for my interest in public participation and engagement. I not realized the connection and passion fostered by my time at Lake Shore until I moved to the District of Columbia and immersed myself in the immense value of public participation in public education and its reforms.

### **From the Classroom to the Policy Table**

If you say the words Washington, DC most people readily think about the national monuments, Capitol Hill, and the White House. While those elements are the federal part of the city, the city is more than just our nation's capital or a federal city. Aside from its federal roots and footprint, the District of Columbia has a rich local history of its own. This history filled with culture, a diversity of residents, and a long history of social justice movements, coupled with a very engaged citizenry. Phrases such as "No Taxation Without Representation," which adorns the

license plates of District residents, or the rich history of Black Georgetown and the social activism surrounding race, economic, and resource needs, are just a few of the examples of the many outward facing symbols that speak to the activism of the city's residents.

Moving to Washington, DC further illuminated my interest in public participation and its processes. In 2010 my husband and I bought a single-family home in the quaint neighborhood of Woodridge, in Ward 5, in the northeastern quadrant of the city close to the Catholic University of America. One of the first things I did was to join my neighborhood email listserv to stay aware of the neighborhood news and happenings. One of the first messages I read was a call to action message regarding public education—it spoke and my interests immediately. This email, an urgent call to action, focused on a need for public participation on middle schools, or the lack of middle schools, in Ward 5. This call to action caused me to get involved with the Ward Five Council on Education, a civic organization focused on public education, and was thus a catalyst for my deep engagement and participation in public education in the District. My involvement in this organization opened my eyes and further peaked my interest in the processes of public participation in public education and its reform. My personal experience with District residents left me with a sense that residents deeply valued opportunities for engagement and participation; especially since the topics of their concern impacted them, their families, and their overall quality of life. My interactions with bureaucrats and elected officials included discussions of a need to check the box of public participation but the unevenness of its implementation and overall quality was not always clear.

So, in a city with a rich history of public participation and social ills that need addressing, my desire to learn more and explore what public participation means in public education

decision-making processes in the District of Columbia. There are issues of democracy, race, socio-economic status or class, equity, legitimacy, power, public voice, and collaboration are at play in considering this topic of public participation and the coproduction of decision-making processes. In Washington, DC, there was a constant action in recreating the wheel and not having a framework of understanding to start and work from. From this lens, I developed a deeper interest, and desire to understand, how can one design a process of decision-making with a goal of inclusiveness.

### **Purpose of Study**

There is an inherent tension between bureaucracy and democracy is well documented and researched. The relationship between governance and democracy comes as no surprise, but the focus of most of the scholarship of the role of public participation in this tension-filled relationship frames its use and practices through the use of normative actions and terms. Through this normative lens, we frame public participation as *good*; thus, making an argument for the need of coproduction and space for deliberation in decision-making processes (Abelson, Forest, Eyles, Smith, Martin, & Gauvin, 2003, p. 240; Putnam, 1993; Veenstra & Lomas, 1999; Sandel, 1996; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Rowe & Frewer, 2005). This addition of coproduction into the theoretical framing of public participation does not account for the fundamental disconnects between bureaucracy and democracy (Joshi & Moore, 2004; Bovaird, 2007). To further explain, coproduction in participation fosters the ability to build community, collaboration, and trust amongst its participants thus leading to clarity in the

defining of public issues and the shared agreement of ways to address the public issues at hand (Joshi & Moore, 2004).

This study examines public participation in processes of shared decision-making authority and how such processes contribute to the ability of the public to have access and influence in public policy. In this study, there is a merging of the basic tenets of public participation with the theories of deliberative democracy, inclusion, public participation as a continuum, and coproduction to explore how power-sharing arrangements, in decision-making processes, can work to address the tensions between democracy and administration—thus leading to frameworks of collaborative governance. This study is an investigation into a case study of coproduction and the inherent tension between a bureaucratic process and democratic norms.

### **Significance of the Study**

I designed this study to examine the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education policy processes. Another significant role of this dissertation is to examine the actual ability and practices that administrator used to respond to the public voice and values. The role of public voice and the acceptance, or legitimacy, of policy decision is salient regarding issues of public education and in the degree to which it can trust the government. “... Americans evaluate their distrust in institutions (e.g. government) based on the overall perception of environment in which they live” (Blendon, 2007). While public policy issues often impact a wide range of individuals public education is unique in that most of the public can attest to some form of experience, knowledge, of a sense of values regarding public schooling and its systems. With such centrality to the lives

of citizens, public education is the perfect policy area to explore the ideas and principles of governance, trust, and public participation at play.

This study will explore how the public is integrated into processes of decision-making by:

- Understanding the potential scope or reach of administrators in public participation;
- Observe and examine the role of the public in decision-making processes, specifically public education policy solutions;
- Empirically evaluate current theorizing of the roles coproduction and deliberative democracy play in public participation and shared authority decision-making processes; and,
- Observe and define how inclusive participation addresses the inequities evident in traditional forms of public participation and makes room for the public voice in policy processes.

### **Research Questions and Objectives**

Issues of race, class, and persistent inequities foster institutional barriers to equitable access to public education (Lutz, 2011; Billings, et al., 2014). Such institutional barriers empirically show up in areas of study in public engagement, and power sharing in policy process for public education (Dewey, 1916; Lutz, 2011; Pappas, 2012). The tension between democracy, bureaucracy, and governance are inherently connected. Langston (1978b) offers a definition of public participation in which it makes a connection between citizen engagement and the improvement of governance, service delivery, and public management. King , Felty, and Susel (1998) discusses the need for a participation mechanism which fosters relationship building,

between the public and administrators, and involves both groups who are “in administrative decision making...[and acknowledges the role of citizens as] owners of government and [partners in the] coproducers of public goods” and services (Sanoff, 2000; Wang 2001).

Conversations regarding the process of decision-making in public education connect to the ideas of participation. For example, Wells (1996) notes, when public debate over questions of public school reform issues arise, the discussion and focus of the issues is viewed through the lens of racial attitudes and perceptions, evidence or lack thereof parent involvement, and student achievement. These racial and economic indicators become clear in the discussion and are foundational in the policy solutions offered if robust engagement and a sharing of power are not present.

Both veins of literature denote this idea of shared decision-making authority. In such a frame, power sharing in decision making is what Wang (2001) describes as an inclusive form of participation which gives citizens a role as “dominant discussants and decision makers” in the process while also positioning the government in a supplementary role where they operationalize the inputs and participation of citizens into implementable policies; such as setting goals, providing incentives, monitoring processes, and information sharing (Gray & Chapin, 1998; Plein, Green, & Williams, 1998). Ultimately, this level of participation and sharing of power can improve the public’s trust of decision-making processes by offering legitimacy to the process and creating a sense of ownership of the policy solution (Wang, 2001, p. 324). I focus this dissertation study on the theoretical frames of deliberative democracy and coproduction. An initial set of questions to guide this empirical evaluation is:

**Q1)** How can the concept of coproduction mitigate tensions between the public and administrators while interjecting a dynamic of power sharing in decision-making processes?

**Q2)** What role does framing play in decision-making processes, and how are both correlated to issues of race, class, and equity in the space of public education?

**Q3)** What elements of process led to the legitimacy of decision-making processes? What evidence exists from this process to show the shared ownership by both administrators and the public of the final policy recommendations?

### **Single Case Study Research**

A one-case design allows for a deep exploration into the relationship between the concepts of shared decision-making authority, deliberative democracy, and coproduction within the case study example of Washington, DC and public education reform. Public education is one of the few areas of public policy that touch the lives of all citizens. Public education is not only tax-funded by citizens, but it is also compulsory for all children ages 5-18 in the United States by federal law. Experience with public education is wide ranging for citizens—whether that experience is through their own public education journey, through their property value, or through their lens of understanding and the values associated with public education, all citizens have the degree of a connection. Public education, and its reforms, is one policy area we can explore how the policy setting, inclusive of heterogeneous communities, can attempt to address wicked problems through publicly accepted practices that implement inclusive practices such as

coproduction. To date most of the research in this area focuses on homogeneous communities with less controversial policy settings and agenda.

The examination of the nexus between issues of policy decision-making, government action, distrust, and coproduction in heterogeneous populations is vitally necessary as the experience of less homogeneity is becoming the norm even outside of large metropolitan areas. Case studies such as this can assess the myriad of variables that impact the environment, values, and the outcomes of policy decision-making within the diversity of heterogeneous communities (Beal, 2003; Barrick, Kristoff-Brown, & Colbert, 2007). As Alesina & La Ferrara (2000) discuss, participation, in varied forms, requires a level of 'social capital' (understanding of "... social norms, trust, and networks of civic engagement") that is not always possible to attain outside of more homogeneous communities (p. 847, p. 849). Previous scholarship and empirical studies "... suggest that income inequality and racial and ethnic heterogeneity reduce the propensity to participate..." partially due to a lack of social capital and historical context and factors (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000, p. 850). Racial fragmentation is a determinant in a group's or individual's propensity to participate (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000, p. 850). It ties such a level of fragmentation to a group's willingness to trust, thus leading to apathy and the rise of social ills whose resolutions are absent of the 'voice' of those most impacted (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; Gay, 2002; Arneil, 2006; Wilkes 2011).

The gap I am looking to assess in this study focuses on a diverse community with deep issues of race, mistrust, and a history of challenges between residents and their government. This gap makes the District of Columbia an interesting and unique case study. The area of public education, and its long history in the District of Columbia, has been central to the

aforementioned challenges besides issues of racial fragmentation, gentrification, social capital, and the ability to address the needs of diverse stakeholders.

This study will examine the role of public participation—through the practices of deliberation, collaboration, and coproduction—can play in not only remedying the social ills in public education but also how it can mend the relationships between residents and the government through the fostering of trust and collaboration. While the role or shape of participation is not to determine, the design of the process, designated roles of the public and administrators, and the sharing of authority in processes can impact the legitimacy of a process and ultimately the ownership of the policy decisions. Case studies, such as this examination of decision-making and heterogeneous groups, can uncover the commonalities and areas of interdependence of various subsets of the group. The exploration of these areas of interdependence provides a roadmap for methods of communication and partnership that lead to the ability to achieve commonly established goals and outcomes (Beal, 2003; Barrick et al., 2007, p. 546). This form of research can facilitate in supporting diverse groups in working together toward policy solutions that maximize efficacy and foster inclusiveness in decision-making processes.

The focus of this study is to explore the impact of deliberative democracy and coproduction in terms of public participation in public education decision-making. As the researcher, I made the deliberate choice to only examine the impact and outcomes of this process in Washington, DC and its repeat focus on public education in the city and its varied reforms. I made this decision because of my deep interest in how this theoretical lens looks in practice specific to District of Columbia and the policy area in which I am intimately engaged

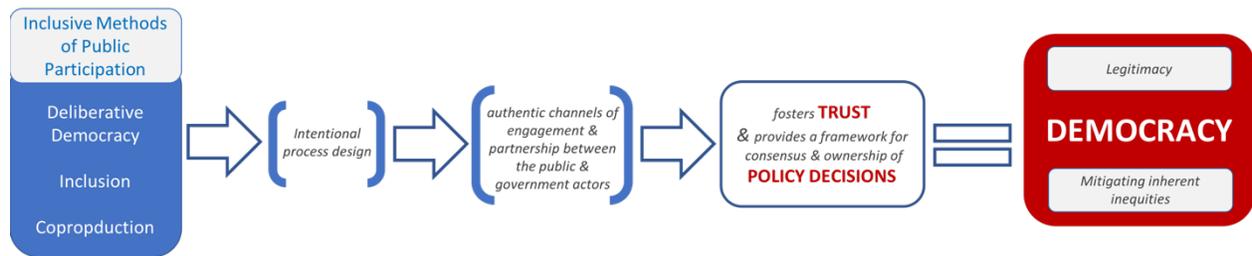
with both personally, as a parent of a DC Public School student and District resident, and professionally, as an education leader in the city—as the Chief Student Advocate for the District of Columbia and in leading the work of the DC Office of the Student Advocate. The day-to-day activities of my work require a focus on the engagement of families through providing support in navigating the complexities of our public education system in the District. With that focus, I design this study to only examine only one case study—the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools, which took place in 2013 and 2014. Reviewing this process alone can offer useful recommendations and consideration for future opportunities for public engagement and participation in public education decision-making processes in Washington, DC. The scalability of this research for other processes of public participation in the District of Columbia, because of the tight structure of governance, is possible. Using this framework in jurisdictions based on the conditions, governance structure, and historical considerations likely applies.

The next chapter will focus on the theoretical framework of this study through a literature review.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the ideals and principles of democracy there is a classic problem of inequity. The practices that stem from democracy can easily work to exacerbate issues of equity and create imbalances of power, thus building barriers that disenfranchise those most impacted by an issue of public policy and the policy solutions that follow. Public participation, or engagement, in governance and processes of public policy decision-making have long-standing connections to best practice. These practices highlight its ability to mitigate issues and to build public trust. While there is a scholarly thread of pro-public participation literature that normatively espouses public engagement as “good” in governance, there is a gap in the literature—specifically regarding how processes design can lead to “good” benefits for those most impacted by the policy solutions selected to remedy a specific social ill. “Good” defines the form of public engagement that authentically integrates public voice and desires into the processes of public decision-making. We see forms of “good” engagement in the reflections of public sentiment and wants in the final policy solutions or plans that stems from a decision-making process. Although a process might be “good,” questions remain regarding exactly how the democratic process, through public participation and shared decision-making, can help to mitigate existing power structures. The questions include how this process improving the extent how to capture public sentiments and voice, and how a process can reach equitable outcomes can through the procedures of the process itself.

**Figure 1: Inclusive Methods of Public Participation**



Public engagement in decision-making, and the relationship between administrators and the public, varies in patterns, roles, levels, and functions as it relates to public participation. Webler and Tuler (2000) open their article by stating, “[T]he challenge is to design a participatory decision-making process that produces effective policy outputs (Coenen, Huitema, & O’Toole, 1998; Hansen, 1998) and meets the democratic expectations of all involved” (Dryzek, 1990). The role or shape of participation is not easily pre-determined but the design of the process, designated roles for the public and administrators, and the sharing of authority in processes can impact the legitimacy of a process and ultimately the ownership of the policy decisions. The scales of engagement, or the various pathways for inclusion in public decision-making processes, can foster trust while building community, increasing capacity, and thus establishing a greater understanding and buy-in of the policy solution selected to resolve the issue at hand. Design and the mode of inclusive, or shared authority, matters in public policy decision-making as it can lead to more robust policy outcomes.

This inquiry raises questions regarding what the varied approaches are to address participation and legitimacy. This inquiry also explores how through processes we can create the space and deeper understanding of the role of shared authority in processes of decision-making.

We can define this process through Ansell and Gash's (2007) description of shared authority in decision-making as "collaborative governance." The authors define "collaborative governance" as the formal coming together of multiple stakeholders in a "... collective decision-making that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets" (Ansell & Gash, 2007, pp. 543-44). In this context public governance, the oversight or management of public goods, is made possible through collective action in decision-making and thus inclusive of rules, terms, and forms understood by more than one actor but familiar to a diverse set of stakeholders impacted by the process at hand (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001; Stoker, 2004, p. 3). This process of "collaborative governance" can lead to 'small wins' that can lead to greater policy outcomes and connectivity to the overall process (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

In this chapter I will further discuss the ideas of "collaborative governance" and shared authority in public decision-making processes through the examination of the following principles and ideologies:

**Table 1: Principles and Ideologies of Shared Decision Making**

CONCEPT: Principle/Ideology	DEFINITION	DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS
<b>Collaborative Governance</b>	Collaborative Governance is the formal coming together of multiple stakeholders in a "...collective decision-making that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets" (Ansell & Gash, 2007, 543-44)	In this context public governance, the oversight or management of public goods, is only made possible through collective action in decision-making and thus inclusive of rules, terms, and forms that are understood by more than one actor but familiar to a diverse set of stakeholders impacted by the process at hand (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001; Stoker, 2004, 3). This process of "collaborative governance" has the ability to lead to 'small wins' that can lead to greater policy outcomes and connectivity to the overall process (Ansell & Gash, 2007).
<b>Deliberative Democracy</b>	Deliberative Democracy is rooted in the democratic idea of equality and infuses the values of deliberation, reasoned discussion, and collaboration in public governance and decision-making.	As a process it is dynamic and operates through keeping the lines of communication open and thus makes room for continuous dialogue, which has the ability to engage various stakeholders at the table for deliberation. This theory accounts for the role process design plays in fostering collaborative deliberation and the need for inclusive processes that are sensitive to the value of plurality inherent in complex policy issues.
<b>Public Participation</b>	Rowe and Frewer (2005) define public participation as "...the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy formation" (253). In this context it is where "information is exchanged between members of the public and the [organization or administrator]" or more simply defined as "collaborative problem solving" between the public and administrators.	Public participation is framed, and can be evidenced, in four simple components (King, Feltey, Susel, 1998, p. 319): 1. "the issue or situation; 2. the administrative structures, systems, and processes in within which participation takes place; 3. administrators; and, 4. citizens." Public participation in action might look like build capacity to improve government responsiveness to citizen needs or working collaboratively to re-creating a sense of community and connectedness to problem solving measures (Abelson et al, 2003, p. 240; Putnam, 1993; Veenstra & Lomas, 1999; Sandel, 1996; Bellah, 1985). Such techniques can create the inclusion of varied perspectives and potential outcomes in participation.
<b>Inclusion</b>	Inclusion in public participation entails creating continuous opportunity for community involvement in addressing public issues through decision-making (Quick & Feldman, 2011). Inclusion has the ability to enhance and build the capacity of communities for the purpose of tackling public issues and implementing coproduced solutions to address the issues.	Inclusive engagement allows for the stimulation, exploration, and generation of new understanding and policy solutions. Inclusion has the ability to foster trust by opening the lines of communication between the government and the public. Inclusion allows for the fostering of knowledge and capacity-building through open lines of communication, sharing of perspectives and historical impacts, the ability to work through public issues collectively, and policy solutions are able to gain traction and support for implementation.
<b>Coproduction</b>	Joshi & Moore (2004) discuss coproduction's ability to foster the development of trust, collaboration, and the building of community in decision-making. Sharp (1980) defines coproduction as "...the process by which citizens and government officials jointly contribute to the production or urban services."	This process allows for the "defining and addressing [of] public issues" through a shared decision-making process and collective action in the policy solutions thus leading to a greater sense of investment, and buy-in, in the policy solution (Joshi & Moore, 2004). Pestoff et al. (2006) describes this area of public services provision, development, and implementation can be categorized in three ways: co-governance, co-management, and co-production. This approach moves public service delivery and processes of decision-making toward a more 'citizen-capability' approach (Osborne et al., 2013; Sen, 1993; Sicilia et al. 2016).

The combination of these ideologies makes shared, or coproduced, decision-making possible and directly connects to the role of deep, authentic public engagement in governance. For this dissertation, I test the case study of the DCPS student assignment and school boundary review through the theoretical frameworks of inclusion and coproduction. For this study I will focus on the process of public participation, and shared authority in decision-making, as defined by Sopanah, Sudarma, Ludigdo, & Djamhuri (2013), as the public's ability to change or influence public policy. This kind of shared authority in decision-making is defined as "... the practice of

involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy formation” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 253). While the ability of the public to influence public policy is the goal of participation, we know, as stated by Arnstein (1969), “[p]articipation without the redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless” (p. 217). In this scenario, the public is usually in the role of “the powerless,” which calls for shared authority in decision-making processes. This sharing of authority makes room for the public’s ability to influence as a positive outcome when public participation processes are designed to with inclusive practices in mind—thus leading to public policy outcomes that are coproduced by the government and the public.

Found in the various elements of public participations are theories of shared decision-making. For this study a design of a public participation process through the theoretical frames of inclusion and coproduction contribute to the ability of administrators and the public to enter a relationship of power sharing in decision making. This dissertation confronts the inherent tensions that exist between democracy, bureaucracy, and governance—coupled with issues of trust, access, and equity—through the empirical evaluation of the role a of shared decision-making process, the DCPS student assignment and school boundary review process, can play in abating those inherent tensions.

I focus this dissertation study on the theoretical frames of deliberative democracy and coproduction. The study was focus around three central questions:

**Q1)** How can the concept of coproduction mitigate tensions between the public and administrators while interjecting a dynamic of power sharing in decision-making processes?

**Q2)** What role does framing play in decision-making processes, and how are both correlated to issues of race, class, and equity in the space of public education?

**Q3)** What elements of process led to the legitimacy of decision-making processes? What evidence exists from this process to show the shared ownership by both administrators and the public of the final policy recommendations?

To organize, analyze, and categorize the themes found in the existing literature to guide this study, the chapter will be grouped into four areas, which align with the research questions above:

- o Framing and defining democracy and its relationship to public participation.
- o The role of inclusion and coproduction in sharing decision-making authority to mitigate tensions between the public and administrators.
- o The role of framing and process design in addressing issues of trust, access, and equity.
- o The elements of process legitimacy and process/policy outcome buy-in.

### **Analytical Category 1: Framing Democracy Through the Lens of Public Participation**

#### **A Framing of Democracy**

From the most simplistic perspective, we define democracy as a structure of government by the people, or under the rule of the majority. Democracy is thought to be a governance structure in which it vests the power in the people through a system of free elections and representative governance. While simplistic, it is the foundation upon which our understanding of democracy can begin, and it is closely connects to the scholarly perspectives of democracy.

The government, and the principles of governance, being vested in the people it serves is essentially the greatest foundational element we should hold on to regarding democracy.

By definition, 'democracy' is a rather vague term. While many scholars and practitioners have wrestled with defining the ideology and principle, in the simplest of terms it refers to structures of government and governance connected to the overall theme of majority. As noted by Dummett (1997),

*[People] are captivated... by what may be called the mystique of the majority; it is often thought to be the foundation of democracy that the will of a majority should be paramount. It is not the foundation of democracy, however... (71)*

Bühlmann, Merkel, Müller, and Wessels (2008) notes that "... we define freedom, equality and control as the three core principles of democracy. To qualify as a democracy, a given political system has to guarantee freedom and equality. It has to optimize the interdependence between these two principles through control. We think this idea of control of as control by the government and control of the government" (15). As further noted by Sodaro and Collingwood (2004), "[t]he essential idea of democracy is that the people may determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens" (31). It directly connects Sodaro and Collingwood's (2004) and Bühlmann et al.'s (2008) discussion of the aspects necessary for the "ten conditions for democracy":

- o state institutions;
- o elites committed to democracy;

- o a homogeneous society;
- o national wealth;
- o private enterprise;
- o a middle class;
- o support of the disadvantaged for democracy;
- o citizen participation, civil society, and a democratic political culture;
- o education and freedom of information; and,
- o a favorable international environment. (Sodaro & Collingwood, 2004, pp. 207-220)

One of the “conditions for democracy,” public participation, is the aspect most relevant to the focus of this study. Some scholars have worked to define ‘democracy’ through the lens of public participation. Finer (1997) described democracy as a construct within “... political decisions are taken by and with the consent, or the active participation even, of the majority of the People...” (p. 1568). This addition of public participation, through the process of decision-making, connects to Dahl’s (1998) discussion of democracy and the opportunities it can provide for effective communication through gaining enlightened understanding in the process of governance; providing the ability of “the people” to exercise control over the agenda; inclusive citizenship through the of varying ideals and perspectives; and the provision of information through alternative sources. Such a description of democracy through the lens of public participation shows democracy as more than just majority rules or the representative governance – this discussion is more focused on democracy as a diffusion of power between government and the public.

Other scholars, such as Carole Pateman (1998), deepen this conversation by further defining the role of participation in democracy by stating that it "... means that all citizens must be enabled to exercise self-government, to participate, to the extent they so choose, in all aspects of social and political life" (p. 211). This ability of citizens to "participate" as they so choose is something that T.H. Marshall (1963) explains is one duty of citizens, often difficult to specify for both administrators and citizens themselves to clarify based on the situation at hand. The citizenship itself is not synonymous with democracy but citizen participation has become more of a key principle of democratic processes (Marshall, 1963; Pateman, 1998, p. 193).

Applying such a lens to the definition of democracy is what Pateman (1998) refers to as associating democracy, and the participation of citizens, to structural and social change, or "the distribution of or access to resources" or knowledge (p. 194). As noted by Hysing (2015), citizen participation in democratic processes "increases the quality and efficiency of the public policy as well as the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, and accordingly makes government better equipped to handle difficult problems" (p. 2).

### **Defining Public Participation**

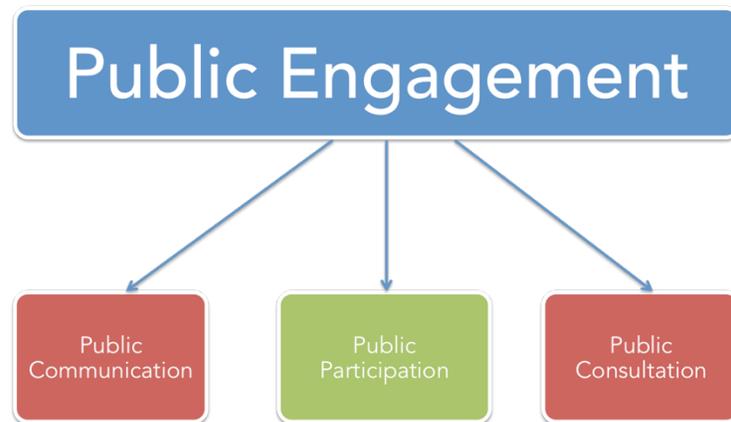
Rowe and Frewer (2005) offer a commonly accepted definition of public participation, "... the practice of involving members of the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy formation" (p. 253). What is challenging about organizing all forms of "public participation" into this definition is the all-encompassing, broad nature of the term. While it is necessary to distinguish actions of participation from action of nonparticipation defining what specific form, or function, of "public

participation” is being used is relevant in determining outcomes and appropriateness of set expectations. The ability to set expectations leads to the ability to gauge and evaluate the effectiveness of a public participation—this is another area often lacking certainty or clarity.

Rowe and Frewer (2005) move the conversation of public participation from broad, ambiguous ideals or concepts to the specifics of three areas under the umbrella term of public engagement. In this context, I define public engagement as actions intended to interact with the public “... and the methods intended to enable this as engagement mechanisms or engagement initiatives or exercises” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 254). Moving to this definitional understanding allows for the “initiatives or exercises” of public engagement to be clarified based on that actual objectives or expected output and outcomes of that activity. From the Rowe and Frewer (2005) definition, there are three exercises of public engagement identified:

- Public Communication: “information is conveyed from the [organization or administrator] of the initiative to the public.” This exercise is inclusive of one-way communication and does not require the involvement or feedback of the public.
- Public Consultation: “information is conveyed from members of the public to the [organization or administrator] of the initiative, following a process initiated by the [organization or administrator].”
- Public Participation: “information is exchanged between members of the public and the [organization or administrator].” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p.253-260)

**Figure 2: A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms**



Graphic derived from Rowe & Frewer, 2005, *A Typology of Public Engagement Mechanisms*

The definition that best fits this dissertation case study is public participation through the lens of its connectedness to public engagement. As an engagement initiative, it is exercised through its ability to foster various degrees of deep dialogue between the public and administrators. This dialogue can be an “act... of negotiation [that] serves to transform opinions...” of the public and/or the administrators because of the process (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 256). Designing this mechanism of public participation to the desired expectations and outcomes of a process enables the public and administrators to test effectiveness. I can find evidence of this process in group settings, which are inclusive of representation from both the public and administrators and provides room for the establishment of trust and buy-in for a policy decision or solution. Power sharing, as an activity of public engagement, is inclusive of both controlled and uncontrolled selection methods, a need for facilitation or unfacilitated interactions, and flexible iterative interaction a flexible need a use of input and various interactions of feedback and comment periods. Examples of this mechanism include:

- Action planning workshop
- Task forces
- Deliberative planning sessions
- Negotiated rule-making

Effective techniques of public participation, as listed above, go beyond fostering “collaborative problem solving” between the public and administrators. Such techniques can build capacity and improve government responsiveness to citizen needs besides re-creating a sense of community and connectedness to problem solving measures (Abelson, et al., 2003, p. 240; Putnam, 1993; Veenstra & Lomas, 1999; Sandel, 1996; Bellah, et al., 1985). Techniques like this matter because they make collaborative problem-solving efforts evidence of authentic actions in a process. These techniques create the inclusion of varied perspectives and potential outcomes in participation. Such measures are also inclusive of the creation of opportunities for stakeholders, with varied perspectives and access, to the nurture the skills, knowledge, and ability to engage on the issues being address through the decision-making processes (King, et al., 1998, p. 324). By fostering participation, the alienation felt by the public minimizes and administrators reorient themselves toward a process of cooperative, or shared decision-making (King, Felty, & Susel, 1998, p. 325; Denhardt & Aristigueta, 1996; Stivers, 1990). We ground this reorientation of power and a shared process of decision-making in the community and the needs of those most impacted by the issue or issues being addressed (Fox & Miller, 1995; King, et al., 1998, p. 325).

While looking at one policy, and its process of decision-making, might seem narrow in scope and understanding, there are various elements regarding public engagement that gleaned from such a study. Honing in on one process of policy decision-making allows us to take a deeper look at the authentic actions put into place in order to not only engage with the public but ultimately to gain their buy in for the final decision and implementation of the policy solution. Not only can we study the collaborative actions taken but we also can see the creation of the connections fostered and trust built between the public and administrators. This development of trust can ideally foster better processes of decision-making for the future and helps to sustain the momentum established for policies already in place.

### **Participation v. Inclusion**

Clarifying the definitions of participation and inclusion allows for processes of engagement to move from the practice of increasing public input, through participation, to the place of a practice of continuously engaging with the community in a process of coproduction, inclusion. The shift from participation to inclusion can completely reshape the public engagement process by creating a foundation of trust between government entities and the public while fostering public buy in of a process and yields ownership of the policy decisions made. This shift in definition and action leads to processes of shared authority, between the government and the public, in decision-making.

As noted above, Carole Pateman (1998) closely ties the principles of democracy to the ideals of inclusion and the ability of citizens to take part in self-governance through the structural change democracy can bring. Inclusion thus provides a forum to create better policy outcomes and spark the structural, or societal, change desired by both administrators and

citizens. The infusion of inclusive actions and processes creates connections between administrators and citizens regarding the policy issue, and its solution, while also fostering trust between the parties not only at the table but also impacted by the solution to implement (Pateman, 1998; Hysing, 2015).

Quick and Feldman (2011) give a detailed analysis in their article that defines the difference between the process of participation and the process of inclusion.

**Participation** practices entail *efforts to increase public input oriented primarily to the content of programs and policies.* (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 272)

**Inclusion** practices entail *continuously creating a community involved in coproducing processes, policies, and programs for defining and addressing public issues.* (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 272)

The authors' discussion of distinguishing the difference between processes of participation and inclusion works to "... illuminate the implications of different practices of public engagement for the capacities of the community to make decisions..." (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 272). Quick and Feldman's discussion of inclusion speaks to "...enhancing... the capacity of the community to implement the decisions and tackle related issues [while]... *making connections* among people, across issues, and over time" (2011, p. 274). The authors further note, inclusive engagement should "... stimulate exploration and generate new understandings" (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p.283).

Quick and Feldman's (2011) research, which is a long-term ethnographic study set in Grand Rapids, Michigan, defines features necessary for inclusive public engagement processes and are inclusive of: 1) multiple ways of knowing; 2) coproduction of the process and decision-

making content; and, 3) sustained temporal openness (Quick & Feldman, 2011, pp. 276-281). Their research draws on "... salient distinctions between inclusion and participation in engagement...[and provides a] lens for analyzing engagement, identifies key features of inclusive practices, and suggests what inclusion may add to existing models..." of public participation (Quick & Feldman, 2011, p. 286). From a theory building perspective, this article outlined dimensions of inclusion that need to be a part of the design of engagement processes to ensure they appropriately connect to the intent of process. Various mechanisms embody the ability to meet participant expectations, but the process goal or intent has to be at the forefront in the exercise.

Evidence of including the public, to influence a process or policy decision, applies to the design of the case study of DC Public Schools and their student assignment review. The process which included multiple rounds and iterations of policy solutions, appears to have captured and engages with the community around the issues plaguing the existing policy of student assignment and school boundary lines. We can observe further evidence of inclusion in the parent, student, and community focus groups which were an initial part kicking off this process.

### **Framing of Public Participation Through a Normative Lens: Fairness, Access, and Competence**

The engagement of the public in various levels of governance is a hallmark of working to foster the public's trust in government and their actions through the infusion, or inclusion, of the voices of the public in decision-making processes (Berner, Amos, & Morse, 2011). Often, we frame public participation in four simple components (King, et al., 1998, p. 319):

1. "the issue or situation;

2. the administrative structures, systems, and processes in within which participation takes place;
3. administrators; and,
4. citizens.”

This grounding of public participation within the ideals of normative theory seems to liken such an activity as a sign of effectiveness (Berner, Amos, & Morse, 2011). The role of ambivalence in the role of public participation has led to public participation being designed to not only “engender and active citizenry...[but also]... to protect political and administrative processes from a too-active citizenry” (King, et al., 1998). A normative framing of public participation provides a pathway for a reframing of participation from one of isolation to a process of collaboration. By moving the needs of citizens closer to the issue and by framing the issue, and the responsiveness of the process design, through the perspectives of those who are the most impacted by the issue, the development and trust, the interesting in participating in the problem-solving, and the potential policy solutions clearly identified (Wamsley et al., 1990; King, et al., 1998).

While many scholars reference public participation in government to be an essential element of governance and decision-making, the extent of engagement, authentic measures, and effectiveness continues to be in question (Moynihan, 1969). King, et al. (1998) offer a useful definition of “authentic participation” in which they describe it as “citizen-focused, placing citizens ahead of technical or administrative processes.” Through this lens authentic participation is a process of “on-going, active involvement...[in which all who participate] have an impact on the decision-making process” (King, et al., 1998). This impact on the decision-making

process should begin with authentic participation in the collaborative framing of the issue that is being deliberated (Roberts, 1997). This authentic framing of participation allows the public to see the value of their input from the beginning of the process. While this definition works to shape the ideals of authentic participation through specific guidelines, it does not give a way to measure the effectiveness of such an activity. Making a process more “authentic” does not guarantee the effectiveness of the outcome. Perhaps the quest to design a more “authentic” engagement process is irresponsible without the consideration of the technical needs of policy processes. The idea of “authentic” processes and the awareness of the technical needs of a process are not mutually exclusive—a process can be inclusive of both. The design processes for “authentic” modes of participation does not mean a shift to pure citizen rule, but it is an acknowledgement of the investment, expertise, and stake the public possesses in government.

Achieving effective and authentic levels of public participation is done through defining and designing processes of participation that address the diverse needs of the publics they intend to serve (King, Felty, & Susel, 1998). This means more than just mechanisms to encourage participation and buy-in but also sustainable ways to ensure the public’s voice and sentiments are reflected and infused into the process and its outcomes. This can be seen in defined roles, responsibilities for both bureaucrats and citizens, open lines of communication and consistent dialogue, a desire for cooperation and citizen-focused advocacy, feedback loops and mechanisms, and appropriately allotted time (Berner, Amos, & Morse, 2011).

Through a normative framing of public participation, the ideas of fairness, access, and competence emerge in this frame of theorizing (Habermas, 1996; Webler & Tuler, 2000). This kind of is what Habermas refers to as being “uncovered... [and inclusive of] all interested and

affected parties in collaborative decision-making...” (Habermas 1973, 1979, 1984, 1987, 1991, 1992, 1996; Webler & Tuler, 2000). This framing interjects the ideas of fairness, access, and competence into the decision-making and participatory process:

- Access through fairness in that “the opportunity for all interested or affected parties to assume any legitimate role in the decision-making process” (Webler & Tuler, 2000). This level of fairness requires a process that is deliberative, which allows for an equal chance for all participants to make their voice heard and to have a hand in the shaping of the final decision or outcome (Webler & Tuler, 2000). Some might question if access is an appropriate measure of fairness. While bureaucrats could work internally to understand the needs and desires of the public, their limited understanding and distanced perspective would not reflect the public’s needs. Access provides a forum for the assessment of needs to come from those most impacted by the issues at hand and its potential outcomes. A commitment to access in participation should be built in throughout the process from the issue defining stage to the agenda-setting process through the outcome.
- Competence in “the ability of the process to reach the best decision given what was reasonably knowable under the present conditions” (Webler & Tuler, 2000). Through this lens, competence must include access to information, its interpretations or the use of a common language for the understanding of all parties, which leads to procedures for decision-making and knowledge-building through the process (Webler & Tuler, 2000). A process is inclusive of competence when there is a clear understanding of the process, and its various components, by all participants. The process information, conditions, the

use of a common language for understanding, and access to that information must be available to all those wishing to participate. Crosby, Kelly, and Schaefer (1986, pp. 171-173) explore this idea of competence in participation:

- "... citizens [should] be provided with accurate and meaningful information;"
- "... information presented... should be accurate and relevant...[and] organized and presented in a way which meaningful, without being patronizing;"
- "... the timing allotted for the participation must be sufficient for the process at hand and allow participant the time to learn the information and goals relevant to the decision;"
- ... the procedures for the participation must be "fair" and connected to the ideas of "good governance," free from manipulation, and the absence of unanswered questions relevant to the process;
- ... the process must be flexible and adaptable for the task at hand and consistent of participatory mechanisms related to the issues considered.

Since its inception, "[T]he role of participation in public administration has historically been one of ambivalence" (King, et al., 1998, p. 318). This role of ambivalence has led to the dissatisfaction the public has felt regarding "normal institutional channels" of public participation (i.e. town halls) in decision-making processes, which has shown little result or has little "impact on the substance of government politics" (Crosby, et al., 1986, p. 170; Alford & Friedland, 1975, p. 472). This acknowledgement of the deficits of more traditional methods of public participation opened the door for the development of a "better," more authentic, processes of participation. "Better" methods of public participation show signs of engagement that "work for all parties

[involved] and stimulates interest and investment in both administrators and citizens, requires rethinking the underlying roles of, and relationship between, administrators and citizens” (King, et al., 1998, p. 317). It encompasses such shifts in process in normative theories of participation because of dwindling trust in bureaucracy and a desire for a deeper involvement in public decision-making (Bell, 1973, p. 365). This normative theory of public participation has resulted in various scholarly frameworks of necessities for participation, many of which are included in the seven principles of public participation as derived by Tuler & Webler (1999), which include: (1) access to the process; (2) the power to influence the process and its outcomes; (3) constructive interactions; (4) a quality space for discourse; (5) access to information; (6) adequate analysis of data and relevant information; and, (7) the creation of the right conditions necessary for future collaborative policy-making process to occur. The literature to follow further underscores these principles and the value of consensual decision-making (Webler & Tuler, 2000), or coproduction, which highlights how the ability for collaborative participation in decision-making leads to a sense of ownership and power in policy processes.

## **Analytical Category 2: The Role of Coproduction & Process of Sharing Decision-Making**

### **Authority to Mitigating Tensions Between the Public & Administrators**

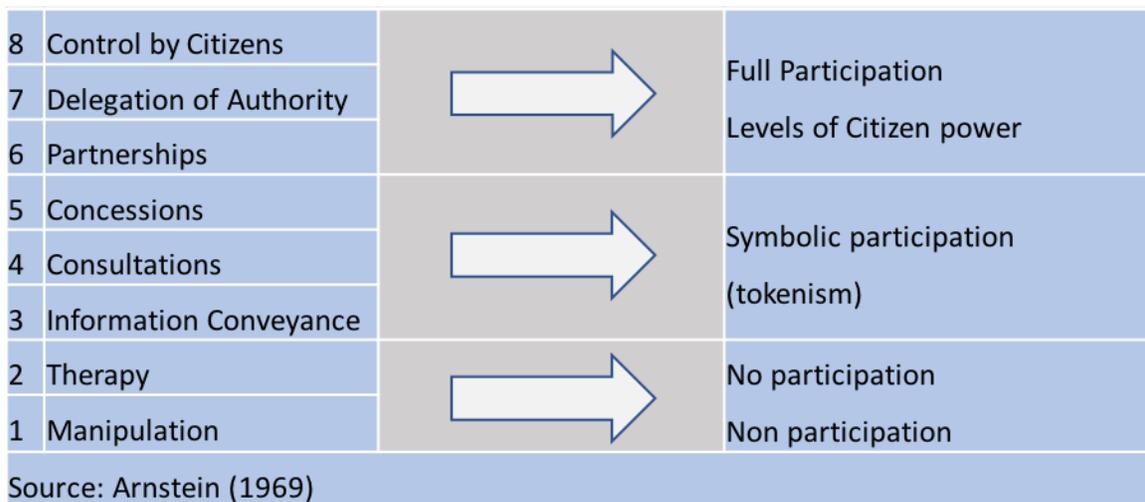
#### **Public Participation as a Continuum: A Sharing of Power**

Public participation as a continuum was first introduced by perspective is clear through the application of Arnstein’s (1969) theory, the *Ladder of Participation*, which highlights levels, or a continuum, of public participation spanning from total bureaucratic control of a process, manipulation, to mechanisms relevant for more engaged forms of stakeholder (or citizen)

involvement in the decision-making processes, total citizen control. Arnstein’s (1969) theory is a framework for an understanding of where public participation processes fall within a spectrum from the lowest level of participation with no participation at all to the highest level of participation with full participation and a level of citizen authority (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein (1969) states:

*[P]articipation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo (p. 217).*

**Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Participation**



Tina Nabatachi (2012) builds upon *Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation* through further analysis of Direct Citizen participation, which she defines as “a process by which members of society share power with public officials in making substantive decisions related to the community” (Nabatachi, 2012). The author denotes that although public participation is touted

as being an important process “not all public participation processes are created equal.”

Nabatchi (2012) shapes her writings by noting the views of John Dewey, which recognized the challenges of public participation, which lies in “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion.” This analysis similarly conceptualizes effective methods of public participation through the lens of a sharing of decision-making power between the public and administrators. Participation design choices may or may not maximize the ability of administrators to respond to public values in policy conflicts and decision-making but some participatory design elements that can help public administrators in understanding the role of the public in the participation process and identify the value that the public brings in policy conflicts. Nabatchi’s (2012) analysis leads to a revision of Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation in eight elements :

**Figure 4: Eight Elements of Public Participation**

1.	Level of Cooperation
2.	Communication Mode(s)
3.	Level of Shared Decision Authority
4.	Participatory Mechanisms
5.	Informational Materials
6.	Participant Selection
7.	Participant Recruitment
8.	Recurrence and Iteration
Source: Nabatchi (2012)	

The element of a ‘level of shared decision authority’ is interesting—Nabatchi notes, “if the public is to be involved in resolving values-based policy conflicts, then it must have a certain

level of influence, or shared authority, over the decision” (2012, pp.702-703). To get a better grasp of the levels of shared decision authority, Nabatchi adapted the five-point continuum, which is a part of the Spectrum of Public Participation, crafted by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Nabatchi’s adapted version shows a spectrum of the flow of information regarding communication modes, goals, and promises made to the public at each point along the continuum (2012, p. 703).

In Nabatchi’s (2012, p. 703) adapted continuum there are five levels: to *inform* the public; the to *consult* with the public or “obtain public feedback”; to *involve* the public “to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered”; to *collaborate* with the public to “identify the preferred solution”; and, last, to *empower* the public through a sharing of power with administrators in which “final decision-making in the hands of the public” (IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, refer to <http://www.iap2.org>; de Lancer Julnes, 2006, p. 165).

### Public Participation Design

The design of a public participation process can yield positive or negative responses. According to Nabatchi (2012), using public participation designs that foster direct citizen participation can lead the public to have a certain level of influence over the decision-making process and moves the involvement of the public to a place of collaboration.

- Direct Citizen participation
- Participation Design can foster positive and negative responses
- Public must have a certain level of influence over the decision

- Not just involving but collaborating and ultimately placing the “final decision-making in the hands of the public.”

A public participation design focused on an “engagement and partnership platform...[enables] effective decision making and building a partnership with the community... [and ensures] concerned groups gain access to control over policy processes and implementation decisions” (Kasymova & Gaynor, 2014, pp. 140-41). Moving public participations toward a design structure that fosters collaboration, benefits both administrators and citizens, and provides an avenue for the creation of policy solutions. As noted by Kasymova & Gaynor (2014), an inclusive public participation design not only increases involvement but can strengthen “activist citizenship skills” and foster community trust in engagement processes and policy decisions (141). Shifting public participation processes in this direction can be more iterative and slow moving, as reaching consensus, building trust, and sharing decision-making takes time. Active citizenship and other engagement processes, such as deliberative democracy, can boost the “institutional capacities for collaboration, conflict resolution, decision making, and effective public action” (Natachi, 2010, p. 390). This focus on design and the sharing of power can make room for practices such as coproduction.

### **Coproduction: A Sharing of Power**

At its core, coproduction, as an approach to governance, fosters the development of trust and collaboration in decision-making. Quick and Feldman’s (2011) discussion of defining participation versus inclusion ties closely with coproduction; coproduction is participation that builds community. Joshi & Moore (2004) discuss coproduction to foster relationships and the development of trust. This action requires risks:

*The development of mutual relationships in which both parties take risks — the community has to be able to trust advice and support of administrators, but the administrators must also be prepared to trust the decisions and behaviors of the community rather than attempting to dictate them.*

A process through the lens of coproduction uses collaborative actions for “... defining and addressing public issues” through shared decision-making and policy action (Joshi & Moore, 2004). While coproduction has various meanings, Marshall (2004) discusses the need for collaboration and the interdependency that exists when meeting public needs through the involvement of the public by stating, “the fundamental point is that without active citizen participation the capacity of government to provide public goods and services is severely compromised.” Coproduction offers a way to manage the interdependencies between the various actors impacted in decision-making or service delivery processes (Bovaird, 2005, 2008; Sancino, 2010). Coproduction speaks to policy-making, or decision-making, processes as multi-actor dependent and relational because it intersects with multiple organizations and institutions responsible for the development and implementation of public services and decision-making processes (Osborne, 2010; Sicilia et al., 2016).

Sharp (1980) defines coproduction as “... the process by which citizens and government officials jointly contribute to the production of urban services;” Parks et al. (1981) further underscored this discussion of the combine inputs of regular producers (government) and consumer producers (citizens) in this process. Bovaird’s (2007) extended definition encompasses ways in which citizens contribute to the plan of how to create and execute services. As noted by Pestoff et al. (2006), this area of public services provision, development, and implementation has

three areas of categorization: co-governance, co-management, and co-production.

Coproduction, through this lens, broadens service beyond delivery to other areas of governance “... the whole cycle of public services, ranging from planning, design, managing, delivering, monitoring, and finally, to evaluation activities” (Sicilia et al., 2016; Alford, 2009, 2014; Bovaird, 2005; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Thus looking at the process of coproduction as a mechanism for co-planning, or collaboration, and the participation of diverse groups (Bovaird, 2007; van Eijk & Steen, 2014). A participation mechanism, which fosters relationship building and a foundation of trust between the public and administrators, involves a sharing of power in processes of decision-making.

Joshi and Moore (2004) describe coproduction as having two possible organizational triggers— (1) as governance drivers or as (2) logistic drivers. Considering the theory of coproduction as a means for co-planning reshapes the idea as on that is inclusive of a sharing of power, which is most present in the trigger of governance drivers. This sharing of power, from the perspective of governance drivers, in which both groups understand the role of ownership the public has in governance, creates an environment for coproduction public goods, services, and a sense of investment in policy solutions (King et al., 1998; Sanoff, 2000; Wang 2001). A sharing of power in this way requires the “... development of effective tools for engaging the population and for empowering its capabilities,” such as

*... involving co-producers in the decision-making, directly or via participation; restraining the involvement of external authorities to preserve the right of communities to self-organize; and developing a (social) infra- structure for resolving conflicts between actors* (Sicilia et al., 2016; Ostrom, 1996).

This research study examines power sharing in decision-making processes between administrators and the public. Addressing and managing the tension between democracy and administration is possible through power-sharing arrangements between administrators and the public. This idea of shared authority in decision-making has theoretical roots in deliberative democracy and coproduction. Sharing authority, within the framework of coproduction and deliberative democracy, moves public service provision and processes of decision-making away from a “service-dominant approach’ [to one that is centered on a] ‘citizen-capability’ approach” (Osborne et al., 2013; Sen, 1993; Sicilia et al. 2016). Moving to this framework in policy processes not only yields more desirable outcomes for the public and administrators but as a tool to create “actionable knowledge for policy-making”; power sharing contributes to the effectiveness of the process, provides for the creation of mutual trust between the government and public, through establishing ownership of a policy solution from all sides thus legitimizing the process (Sicilia et al., 2016).

### **Analytical Category 3: The Role of Framing & Process Design in Addressing Issues of Access, Equity, & Trust**

This study focuses on assessing the gap between collaborative governance and shared authority in decision-making processes through the use of assessing examines the use of coproduction and deliberation heterogenous communities with a legacy of deep issues of race and lingering feelings of distrust in government institutions (Arneil, 2006). From this perspective, trust is central to the relationship between a principal and agent. As noted by Rodet (2015, p. 17) “[t]rust between principal and agent—defined as the expectation of the latter acting in the

interests of the former—is foundational [at both the macro and micro levels] where trust in the institutional system influences civic engagement” (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Gay, 2002). But we know that in many communities’ distrust of the government and processes of decision-making persists. Blendon (2007) noted, “... Americans evaluate their distrust in institutions (e.g. government) based on the overall perception of environment in which they live.” Thus, the perceptions of a particular group can serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of an institution and closely connects the institution’s successes or failures. The framing of a process, access to the process, and the level of control (or deep engagement) the public can have in the deliberation to influence public sector decision making make positive strides toward building trust or foster a legacy of distrust.

### **What is Deliberative Democracy?**

Deliberative democracy is a systemic approach, rooted in political theory and in the democratic idea of equality, which makes necessary the inclusion of many stakeholders and diverse perspectives in the process of engagement (Cooke, 2000; Rostbøll, 2008). As noted by Sharp (2012), “collaborative governance is built on deliberative democracy” (p. 117).

Deliberative democracy infuses the values of deliberation, reasoned discussion, and collaboration in public decision-making (Cohen & Fung, 2004). The approach of deliberative democracy shifts the focus of participation from the decision, or outcome, and places an emphasis on the overall quality and elements of the process itself (Pereira, et al., 2003; Cavalier, 2011). Similar to the ideas of public participation design selection, deliberative democracy believes it is necessary to engage those most affected by the policies, or decision-making process. This requires the inclusion of groups, in terms of this case study example, students,

parents, communities, and all stakeholders in public education in Washington, DC, to have more direct influence over the decision-making processes and closely engaged in the options for policy solutions. Various scholars note how this model ensures process designs inclusive and focus on the complexity and sensitive nature of the issues at hand. This process fosters the use of shared frameworks and norms to allow space for the development of trust and provides an avenue for shared accountability.

Deliberative democracy is a dynamic process and thus is a condition that sets the stage for legitimacy in participation (Cooke, 2002); this approach keeps the lines of communication open and makes room for continuous dialogue, creating collaborative agreement in action (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Pereira, et al., 2003). This continuous dialogue can engage various individuals at the table for deliberation and thus can transform individual preferences into values that represent a community's policy needs. Nabatchi (2010) states, "... designs of deliberative democracy are inclusive and sensitive to the value plurality inherent in complex policy issues, they can help rediscover the public's preferences" (p. 387). It designs this experience to "... empower citizens to forge effective partnerships with government officials, yielding shared governance arrangements that enhance both democracy and accountability" (Sharp, 2012, p. 116; Jacobs, Cook, & Delli Carpini, 2009, pp. 7-9). The connection between democracy, accountability, and effective partnerships requires specific ingredients for success is in the elements of deliberative democracy.

### **Active Citizens**

Schachter (1997) defines active citizens' as "people engaged in deliberation to influence public sector decision making, animated by concern for the public interest, a concept that each

individual may define in a different way” (p. 1). The concept of an active citizen is brought together by the idea that citizens want to have a “hand in setting the political agenda through common talk, decision making, an action... [while also] evaluating the merits of current programs” and initiatives (Barber, 1990; Schachter & Yang, 2012, p. 10).

Applegate (1998) describes active citizens through the lens of opportunity and persuasion in the agenda-setting process. Citizen and administrator interactions become an “opportunity [for citizens] to meet face to face with and persuade decision makers” (Applegate, 1998, p. 923). This interaction can thus lead to the legitimacy of a decision-making process and foster collaborative action between administrators and the public (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004, p. 57).

**Table 2: Advantages of Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making**

	<b>Advantages to Citizen Participants</b>	<b>Advantages to Government</b>
<b>Decision Process</b>	Education (learn from and inform government representatives)	Education (learn from and inform citizens)
	Persuade and enlighten government	Persuade citizens; build trust and allay anxiety or hostility
	Gain skills for activist citizenship	Build strategic alliances
<b>Outcomes</b>		Gain legitimacy of decisions
	Break gridlock; achieve outcomes	Break gridlock; achieve outcomes
	Gain some control over policy process	Avoid litigation costs
	Better policy and implementation decisions	Better policy and implementation decisions

Advantages of Citizen Participation in Government Decision Making  
 Source: Irvin & Stansbury (2004)

Active citizenship makes room for citizens to inform administrators, through collaborative measures, about their policy preferences, which can bypass unilateral decisions imposed by

administrators (Kasymova & Gaynor, 2014, p. 142). Hearing from citizens through this active process “entrenches public participation in government” as a necessary process that opens and enhances the lines of communication between citizens and administrators (Taylor, Maphazi, & Mayekiso, 2013, pp. 187-88). This enhanced communication works to “... build public support for local goals, and to develop public trust” (Taylor, et al., 2013, p. 188). Active citizenship cannot influence administrators and removed power imbalances, but it serves to enhance local government, their processes, increase accountability, and elevate the level of government responsiveness (Taylor, et al., 2013, p. 194).

Sharp (2012) discusses in a more detailed context of the theory of active citizenship through the lens of neighborhood-based activism. Features of neighborhood-based activism come into play with a host of issues such as “... gentrification, development issues, problematic city service delivery, or other contested matters.” (Goetz & Sidney, 1994, 1997; Boyd 2008; Sharp, 2012, p. 105-106). This engagement is a key part of the political process and sets a standard for participation through acts similar to lobbying.

#### **Analytical Category 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy & Process/Policy Outcome Buy In**

##### **Legitimacy and public participation**

Within the confines of democracy, the principle of popular control leads to an expectation of the public’s ability to influence public policy and government actions through public participation (Stivers, 1990; Rawls, 1993; Habermas, 1996; Wallner, 2008, p. 424). As noted by various scholars, government actions through public policies are the manifestation of the government’s responsiveness to the needs of an impacted community or group (Rawls,

2001; Habermas, 1984, 1992; Wallner, 2008; Timotijevic, Barnett, & Raats, 2011). While this action might be on behalf of the public, the legitimacy of the action allows the public to accept the action at large. It strengthens legitimacy in public policy through the engagement of citizens in the planning and process of decision-making (Hysing, 2015, p. 2). The participation of citizens in the process “increases the quality and efficiency of the public policy and the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, and accordingly makes government better equipped to handle difficult problems” (Hysing, 2015, p.2).

The question surrounding legitimacy, and what it means, might remain. For this argument I would like to define legitimacy as “the justification of authority” (Rawls, 1971, 1993; Rakar, 2017, p. 60). Various scholarly perspectives see public participation as a normative function of democracy and thus governance. The process of participation can be a factor in legitimation— “the events or process which must be carried out in order to achieve legitimacy”—of a process of public decision-making (Rakar, 2017, p. 60). This legitimation creates a path of trust, accountability, and transparency between government actors and the public in, during, and after the process of decision-making is complete (Rawls, 1993; Habermas, 1984; Wallner, 2008; Timotijevic, et al., 2011; Rakar, 2017).

Public participation in decision-making processes and governance allows for public influence and voice. Government action that lacks such an opportunity lacks legitimacy and thus public buy in to policy solutions and actions. In many situations the relationship between administrators and citizens is already fragile and feelings of distrust are commonplace, which leads to a lack of effective and efficient implementation of a policy solution. Government actions are rarely one-time policy issues or problems; many of the issues warrant revisiting. With a lack

of legitimacy, each time the issues approached are a missed opportunity for citizens to build trust in government action by not providing public access to the agenda-setting process. This lack of access in government action creates challenges in finding the right solution to a policy issue and reduces the possibility of coming to a long-term fix for the problem.

Legitimacy is only possible if the government works to shape its political agenda through the lens of public participation right from the start of a process (Thomas, 1993, 1995; Wallner, 2008). While all aspects of public decision making have a need for public acceptance, the arena of public education is an area where public perceptions and consultation make the policy area quite unique (Wallner, 2008; Abowitz, 2013). Public education is one of the few areas in which citizens have the most knowledge about and have personally experienced (Abowitz, 2013, p. 21). In terms of public education, legitimacy moves beyond the simple definition of “the justification of authority” (Rawls, 1971, 1993; Rakar, 2017, p. 60) to that of *political, substantive, and procedural legitimacy* (Wallner, 2008, pp. 431-32; Abowitz, 2013, p. 22). Such deeper levels of legitimacy connects to the covenants, or shared agreements, of democratic government through the “justice of arrangements” created through the process of public consultation and fairness of participation through shared governance in policy solutions and implementation (Abowitz, 2013, pp. 23-25; Wallner, 2008, pp. 431-32). In this sense, legitimacy is a public and political good necessary for the public’s acceptance of public policy through the normative lens of a democratic state (Wallner, 2008, pp. 431-32). This level of legitimacy is earned through the acceptance and consent of the public through the meeting of established criteria for governance and the representativeness of responding to the needs of those most directly impacted by a policy issue (Wallner, 2008; Abowitz, 2013, p. 39).

Legitimacy is not only “the justification of authority” but it is the public acceptance that comes with accountability to the public through shared understandings and the values of shared ideas and principles for action (Rawls, 1971; Stivers, 1990; Wallner, 2008; Abowitz, 2013).

### **Inclusion as a means for Legitimacy**

Stivers (1990) stated, “... legitimacy requires accountability to citizens... accountability requires a shared framework for the interpretation of basic values.” In their article “Ideals of Inclusion in Deliberation,” Karpowitz and Raphael (2016) argue that legitimacy can be found through the elements of inclusion in public participation. Forums of public participation often have a goal that aims to speak for groups of people but they can only do that through a sense of openness to embrace the ideals of inclusion. As noted in their article, the goals of civic forums can show inclusiveness by aspiring to have a “... holistic vision...” which has to be inclusive of the perspective of those most impacted by the collective decision at hand (Karpowitz & Raphael, 2016). Karpowitz and Raphael’s (2016) article is complimentary to Quick and Feldman’s argument regarding the forum, or processes, need for a level of openness to all who want to participate to promote inclusion. One dimension of inclusiveness that Karpowitz and Raphael (2016) discuss which focuses on the “relational matters” regarding the recognition of sensitive issues and how the deliberation of such issues can impact portions of the public. Interesting, inclusion in deliberation is not possible without legitimacy, which depends on the initial framing of an issue, or problem, and the justification of the issues definition as defined by those most affected by the problem (Karpowitz & Raphael, 2014; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000; Habermas, 1996). Legitimacy cannot be achieved without the inclusion and representativeness of the right people at the table for the deliberation, thus requiring openness and transparency of intentions.

### **Summary: Making the Connection**

Cooperative action and deliberation in governance are the elements that make public acceptance, and ultimately public buy in, of policy actions possible. The aforementioned literature framed how the practical use of coproduction and an inclusive design in processes of public decision-making provides both government actors and citizens with the ability to rebuild and foster trust through a sharing of authority and roles through the process, its implementation, and evaluation. The literature outlines the conditions for the approach of inclusion and coproduction can and should be initiated, designed, and put into action but a gap exist in the visualization of this process in action. Capturing such a process at play is challenging with homogeneous communities but has more stark lines for examination in communities composed of a diversity of heterogeneous groups and legacy challenges; but particularly with issues of distrust and participation.

The policy arena of public education is a prime area to view such factors in governance and decision-making at play. Public education is a policy area in which most citizens are familiar with and closely associate with their own deep beliefs and values. In the following chapters, I will explore these elements in the case study of Washington, DC and its public education efforts and reforms particularly in the school redistricting process that occurred in the fall of 2013 and concluded in the fall of 2014. The area of public education, and its long history in the District of Columbia, has been central to the aforementioned challenges regarding public participation and inclusion. In the District, public education long coupled with other instances of “community trauma,” disinvestment, and adverse power dynamics that have disenfranchised certain

communities leading to distrust in government and apathy in participation (Urban Institute, April 2018). Finding a way forward requires a focus on community-focused policy solutions, capacity-building by the community and government, with an emphasis on partnership in decision-making. This study will look at the role of public participation, through the practices of inclusion and coproduction, as a remedy not only social ills in shared authority in public planning and decision-making, but how this framework can mend the relationships between residents and the government through the fostering of trust and collaboration. While the role or shape of participation is not easily pre-determined, the design of the process, designated roles of the public and administrators, and the sharing of authority in processes can impact the legitimacy of a process and ultimately the ownership of the policy decisions. This study looks to explore such a roles and outcomes while adding to the scholarship and empirical examination of a case through the frameworks of inclusion and coproduction.

The next chapter will provide a deeper context of the case study. Chapter 3 will explore the case study location, history, challenges regarding issues of public education and persistent inequities which have fostered a lack of trust between the residents of the District of Columbia and its government.

## CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDY LANDSCAPE & CONTEXT: A SINGLE, QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Using case studies can be a very valuable qualitative research tool (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Case studies, which allow a researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific situation, possesses the ability to examine a situation through the lens of an interest in the process, not just the outcomes (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). A single-case study design allows for deep exploration into the nature of various concepts; in this study the nature of the relationship between shared decision-making, authority, deliberative democracy, and coproduction all within the same case study example, Washington, DC. All the insights gleaned from this examination develops a theoretical frame for understanding the nexus of public education, public policy decision-making, diverse stakeholders, and policy solutions or reforms. The theoretical framing established for the exploration of this topic, and the empirical outcomes from it, can directly influence not only policies and practice (Merriam, 1998 p. 19), but also help to shape future scholarship in the areas of coproduction and shared decision-making in a host of public policy arenas. For this dissertation research I will use a qualitative, single-case study research design to describe and interpret how a sharing of power, by administrators and the public, through the theoretical framework of coproduction and deliberative democracy, can ease the tensions between bureaucracy and democracy while contributing to the legitimacy of a process and fostering a sense of ownership of the final policy decision.

## Why a Case Study?

Case study research is an “... intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is... to shed light on a larger class of cases” (Gerring, 2007). Qualitative case studies facilitate the exploration of a phenomenon within a specific context using a variety of data sources. This form of exploration ensures that we explore the issue from a variety of lenses, which can allow for the deeper understanding of multiple facets of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As noted by Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), case studies allow for the exploration of a case of interest in such a way that reveals the essence of the phenomenon and the observations are worthy of discussion (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

As noted by Yin (2003), case study research can cover the contextual conditions of the study, as the context applies to the phenomenon being observed. Unlike experiments, the contextual conditions in a case study are not delineated or controlled, they happen in real time as a part of the investigation. The deeper analysis of a single case studies can give a more in-depth analysis and understanding of the “how” and “why” of the case being investigated (Fiss, 2009). This in-depth analysis can create, strengthen, and expand the constructs of theories and their relationship to the setting and context of the case. This strengthen and expanding can work to fill gaps or holes in existing theory, or even to apply theories to the investigation of new phenomena.

In deciding to undertake a case study, I realized I was interested in the process of shared authority in public education decision-making. While outcomes are useful, a better understanding of “... the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable...” allows this investigation to potentially share insights that can directly influence both

policy and practice in the areas of public education planning and shared authority in decision-making (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach for this research uses empirical inquiry of a sharing of power in public education decision making in the examination of the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). This single-case study exploration will allow myself, as the researcher, to view the theories of coproduction and deliberative democracy within the real-life context to describe the process and relationships that result from the process itself. Additionally, the use of a single-case study will also allow me to examine and interpret the role I, as the researcher, played in the process. I was intimately involved in this case as a member of the Advisory Committee for the process. As a process participant, I had first-hand experience of the process, but this process of a case study exploration helped me to be reflective and interpretative of my perceptions and participation in the process. As a resident of the District of Columbia, and as a DCPS parent, gaining a greater understanding of the process, its impact on fostering trust with the public, its ability to foster legitimate outcomes, and the ability of the city to replicate this process was of great interest to me. As single-case study would allow me, as the researcher, to explore all of the varied aspects of the process and its outcomes.

### **Case Study Setting: Washington, District of Columbia**

When most people think about Washington, District of Columbia (Washington, DC) they envision a federal city with national monuments, the White House, Congress or the Capitol building, tourists, and a federal system designed to serve our nation's needs. What most people, both Americans and abroad, do not consider is that while the establishment of Washington, DC

facilitated our federal needs, the city itself has a local system of governance and residents who live, work, and spend their leisure time in the city every day.

Washington, DC was established by the Residence Act in July 1790 and established a federal city on the banks of the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers. This federal city was to be set apart from other states as a federal district to be the seat of our nation's governance structure. What came from its establishment was not only a place of permanent residence for our nation's government but the creation of a local jurisdiction and its rich history and culture.

Washington, DC's close federal ties and its relationship of Congressional oversight was a large part of the foundation of its establishment. While the first few years after the establishment were a time of growth and development for our nation's new capital; much of this growth was because of the labor of slaves of African descent, thus foreshadowing the latter impact of African Americans, and culture, in the District. In 1801 the District of Columbia Organic Act, further amended in 1871 after the Virginia land included in the initial establishment of the District seceded back to the state, placed the District under the direct control of Congress and denoted provisions for the creation of limited local governance. With the establishment of this new federal district, residents of the District of Columbia were not residents of any state, neither Maryland nor Virginia, and thus had no right to vote for representatives for the United States Congress or in presidential elections. It was not until 1961, with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution, that the residents of the District were given the right to vote for president. While residents of the District now have one congressional representative in the United States House of Representatives, the representative has limited powers and can only vote in committee and offer debate but has no authority to participate in any final voting procedures.

In 1973, with the passage of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, the local governance structure was further empowered with the devolution of certain congressional powers to the District. This legislation provided the District with a home rule charter that created an elected mayor and a locally elected legislative body, the Council of the District of Columbia. While the Home Rule Act supports the self-governance of the District locally, it continued the congressional authority and oversight through the review of laws and budgetary provisions passed by the Council of the District of Columbia and its mayor. This review of locally passed laws by the District also allows for Congress to block certain laws and provisions at will.

The city includes eight (8) wards each has their own unique histories, strengths, and challenges. Variations between the wards include vast disparities in resources and school quality and large gaps in student achievement, which continue to plague the city and raises the question of the quality of the schools citywide. The educational disparities, and lack of access to quality schools, are not only visible through the lens of public education but also in other areas such as housing, workforce development/jobs, neighborhood development, and access to amenities. Rock Creek Park and the Anacostia River divide the city geographically, and Ward 3 and the Upper Northwest quadrant of the city has long included the 'haves' and east of the Anacostia River, Ward 7 and 8, the 'have nots' (Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014). The disparities in a host of areas are glaring.

To date, Washington, DC is nearing 700,000 residents and has a continued legacy of considerable Congressional oversight coupled with limited home rule authority. Disparities and structural challenges persist. The historical context and current city conditions makes the city of Washington, DC an interesting case study for educational public policy because of the limited

devolution of powers to the city and the “test lab” of education reforms used (Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014).

### **The DC Public Education Landscape**

The public school system in the District of Columbia (DC)—District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) established in 1805—and since its establishment has endured various iterations; from Congressional control to traditional school board supervision to the complimentary system of public charter schools. In 2007, the Council of the District of Columbia passed a major piece of education legislation, the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007, which established mayoral control of schools and dissolved the traditional school board was in place. This shift in school governance ushered in an era of mayoral control of public schools and the creation of new education focused agencies and policy offices (i.e. Office of the State Superintendent of Schools, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education).

*“School districts are traditionally controlled by a locally elected school board, which makes decisions about how schools are run, including hiring and firing the...[Chancellor of DCPS]. Mayoral control, however, is a shift in the power structure wherein mayors are given a greater degree of authority over schools,”* (Wong & Shen, 2013).

While many other jurisdictions have mayoral control of public education, mayoral control can have various forms. The District of Columbia adopted a “full mayoral control” model in which a mayor has a “very high” degree of control of all aspects of the public education system in their city (Wong & Shen, 2013). This “very high” degree of control gives mayors exclusive control over the school district—in the case of Washington, DC without the oversight of a locally elected or

appointed school board. This exclusive control allows for mayors to operate the school district and use resources in the way they deem best. Such examples of mayoral control vary in the support infrastructure for the system; while have limited staffing and centralized supports, others, like Washington, DC, have created additional layers of bureaucratic supports.

### **DC Public Education Governance Structure**

Since its inception, and over its two-hundred-year existence, public education in the District of Columbia has undergone various structural and governance changes. In 2004, Mary Levy (a long time DC resident, practitioner, and expert on DC public education history, governance, and finance) wrote a summary on the “History of Public School Governance in the District of Columbia.” This summary outlined the historical and varied nuances of public education in the District from its early inception until the early 2000s. As noted in Levy’s summary, early governance structures endured several variations during the founding years of the District until 1874 the four school systems operating in the District were unified (Levy, 2004). The federal government heavily influenced early structures of governance through their appointment authority of the members of the board that oversaw the public education operation in the District (Levy, 2004).

Introducing Home Rule in 1973 ushered in the ability of the residents of the District to locally elect members to the Board of Education, or school board (Levy, 2004). In 1862, the role of school superintendent was introduced into the public education governance structure; this role was designed to play a key role in the operation and governance of schools and from the moment of its introduction lead to a rocky relationship with the school board (Levy, 2004). The

role of school superintendent is both embodied in the State Superintendent of Education and role of the Chancellor of DCPS.

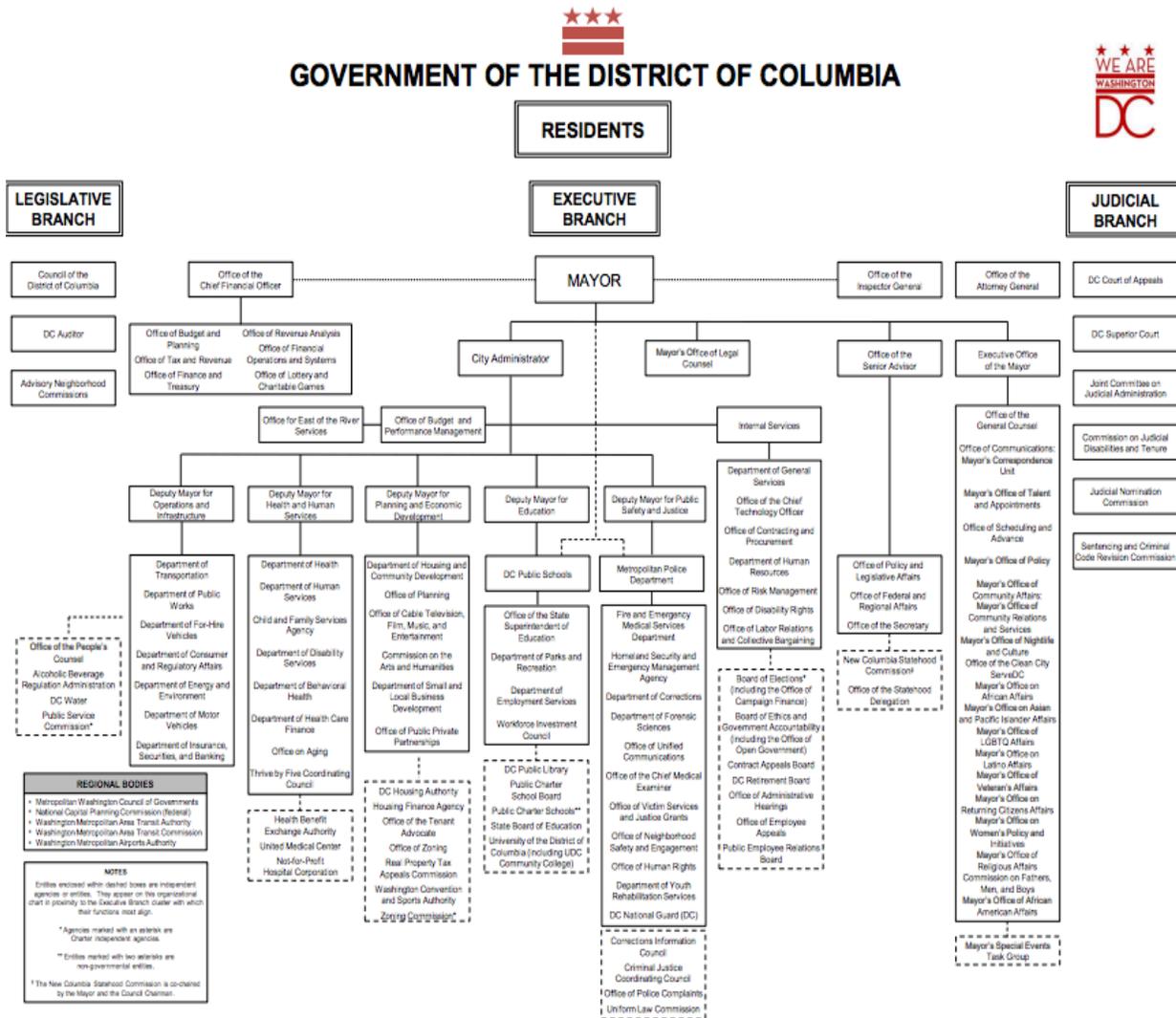
In 1995, after years of local ‘mismanagement’ and local financial instability, Congress established, after President Bill Clinton signed into law the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Act, a five-member board, the DC Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (better known as the DC Financial Control Board or Control Board), to oversee the finances and operations of the District. The Control Board authority officially started in 1996 and its work wrapped up in 2001 after four years of ensuring the District had four consecutive years of balanced budgets (DC Municipal Code § 47–391.01). The Control Board’s oversight of the mismanagement of the city also touched public education in the District (Levy, 2004; DC Municipal Code § 47–391.01). For decades there had long been disappointment from residents and abroad concerning the poor state of student achievement in the District and the ineptness of the public education governance structure in turning around the issues at hand (Levy, 2004). The Control Board laid out their case for their oversight of public education because of the “... lack of oversight by the Board of Education as the primary cause of these failures” coupled with ineffective policy-making and operating procedures (District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, 1996). During the time of the Control Board oversight the Board of Education, and the Superintendent, were excluded from any role in the governance of the school system thus drawing more attention to the areas of criticism the Board had endured for decades (Levy, 2004). The Control Board was not deemed one of the most progressive nor the most “credible source for positive [education] reform,” it was another step in the direction toward more

sweeping reform efforts for public education in the District (Henig & Rich, 2003, p. 192; Levy, 2004). Following the Control Board's oversight in 2001, the public education governance structure again underwent structural changes moving to a Board of Education composed of partially appointed (through mayoral appointment), partially elected Board membership.

In 2007, Mayor Adrian Fenty took office and with his administration he worked to usher in a new wave of education reform in the District. In 2007, the Council of the District of Columbia (DC Council) passed the Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007 (PERRA) (2007). Implementing PERRA notably brought mayoral control of the public school system to the District and removed the day-to-day oversight authority from the local Board of Education (PERRA, 2007). In addition to the removal of the day-to-day oversight from the school board, PERRA abolished the existence of the local school board altogether and replaced it with a mayoral control structure divided into oversight in three bodies — the Executive Office of the Mayor, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). It diverted operational accountability to the Mayor; it transformed the former school board into the District of Columbia State Board of Education (SBOE) (B17-0001, 2007). SBOE, an elected body, advises the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) on policy matters and state-level policy approval (B17-0001, 2007).

From 2007 until today, the structure of the governance of public education in the District has shifted. The overall infrastructure of the government has shifted with mayoral control of public education to include more layers of bureaucracy to support the public education vision of the Mayor.

Figure 5: Government of the District of Columbia Organizational Chart



Source: Government of the District of Columbia Organizational Chart, mayor.dc.gov

In terms of mayoral control, the PERRA legislation was specific in the powers delegated to the mayor, DC Municipal Code § 38–172 specific to the “Mayor’s authority; rulemaking,” states,

*(a) The Mayor shall govern the public schools in the District of Columbia. The Mayor shall have authority over all curricula, operations, functions, budget, personnel, labor negotiations and collective bargaining agreements, facilities, and other education-related matters, but shall endeavor to keep teachers in place after the start of the school year and transfer teachers, if necessary, during summer break.*

*(b) The Mayor may delegate any of his authority to a designee as he or she determines is warranted for efficient and sound administration and to further the purpose of DCPS to educate all students enrolled within its schools or learning centers consistent with District-wide standards of academic achievement.*

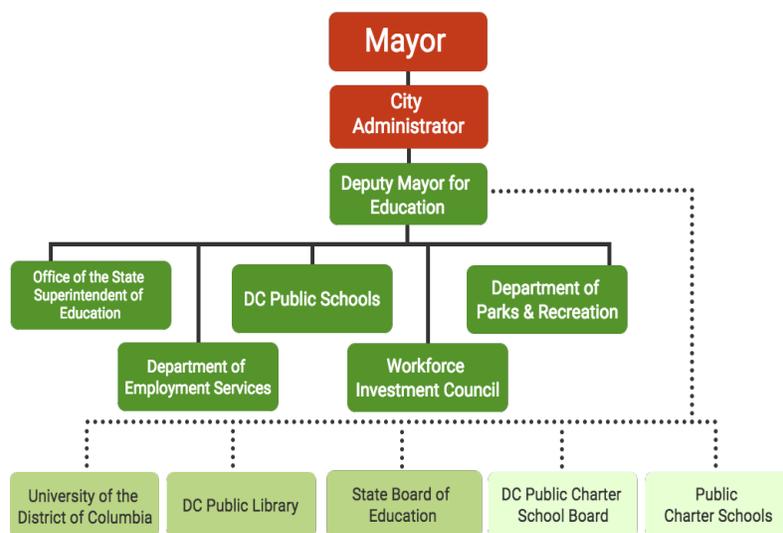
What is most relevant about this structural shift in governance is the power it gives to the Mayor to have authority over public education in the District, or specifically the District of Columbia Public Schools. The most notable absence from this legislative action is the lack of oversight and authority the Mayor has over the robust public charter sector in the District. The US Congress created the public charter sector in the District through passing the District of Columbia School Reform Act of 1995; codified in Title 38, Subtitle IV, Chapter 18 of the DC Municipal Code. Public charter schools in the District:

*... are independent public schools that are free to innovate and are held accountable for student performance. They are publicly funded, tuition-free, and nonsectarian. Like traditional public schools, they are open to all DC residents and receive public funds according to how many students are enrolled. A public charter school exercises exclusive control over its expenditures, administration, personnel, and instructional methods (DC Municipal Code, §§ 38-1800.01—38-1800.03). While the DC Public Charter School Board,*

*an independent DC government agency, is subject to some mayoral and DC Council oversight, the exclusive control individual charter LEAs have means they are not under the direct control, or oversight, of the mayor or the DC Council (DC Municipal Code, §§ 38-1800.01—38-1800.03).*

The current public education governance structure centralizes power in the Mayor's role and the Mayor's designee for public education. The Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) is "responsible for developing and implementing the Mayor's vision for academic excellence and creating a high quality education continuum from birth to 24" (The Deputy Mayor for Education, [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov); DC Municipal Code, §§ 38–191). This role is to "Promote, coordinate, and oversee collaborative efforts among District government agencies to support education and child development as it relates to education, including coordinating the integration of programs and resources..." (The Deputy Mayor for Education, [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov)).

**Figure 6: DC Public Education Governance Structure**



**Source:** DC Public Education Governance Structure, Office of the Student Advocate, [studentadvocate.dc.gov](http://studentadvocate.dc.gov)

In each mayoral administration the role of the DME varies, but its function and purview includes three (3) primary functions outlined on their website ([dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov)):

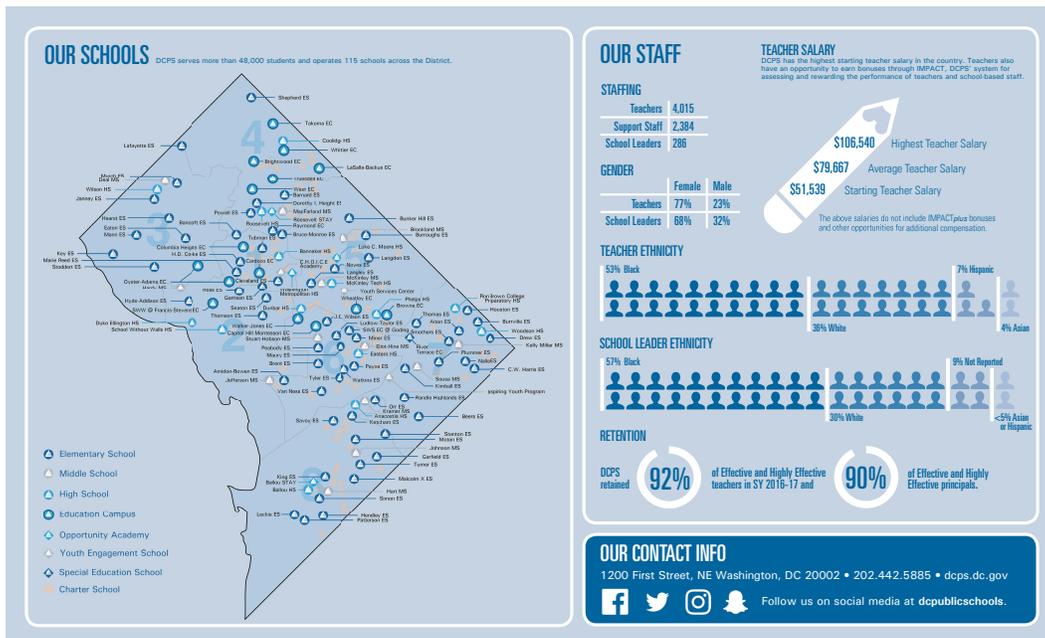
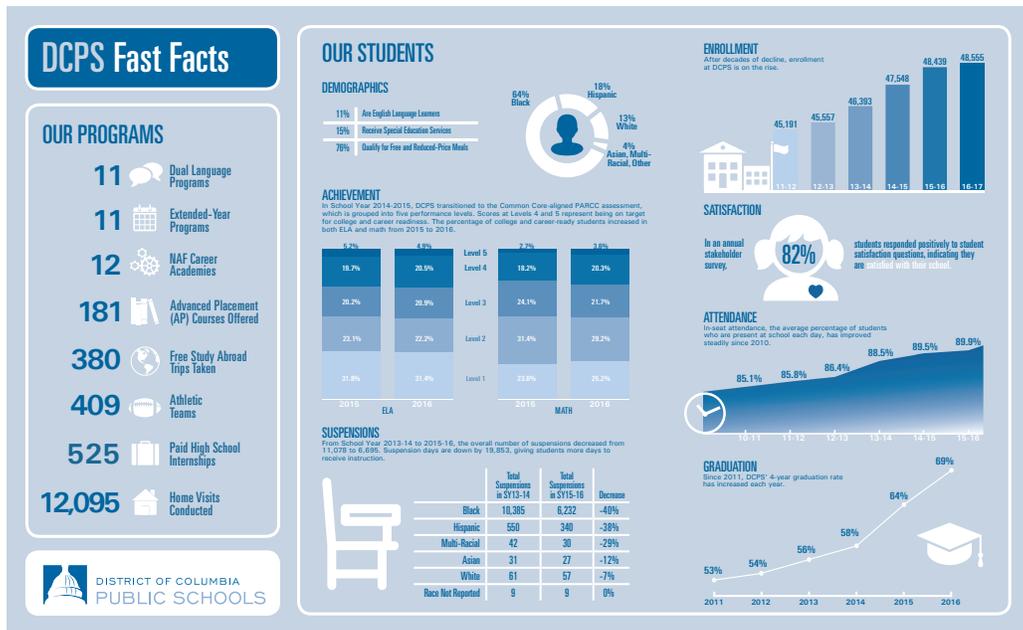
- Overseeing a District-wide education strategy
- Managing interagency and cross-sector coordination
- Providing oversight and/or support for the following education related agencies—District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL); District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS); Office of the State Superintendent for Education; District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (PCSB); and the University of the District of Columbia.

### **The District of Columbia Public Schools**

Congress established public education in the District in 1805 and hit peak student enrollment in the 1960s and has endured a history of frustrations and distrust throughout its endured over its two-hundred-year history. From the late 1960s, which was at the peak of student population in DCPS with roughly 200,000 students and 196 DCPS schools, to today, where DCPS has experienced dozens of school closure or consolidation and internal organizational changes, the system has endured some significant shifts. Over the last 15 years, gentrification has taken hold in the city, but that gentrification is not showing up in the public school population. DCPS is composed of 110 schools, about 4,000 teachers, and educates over 49,000 students. Roughly 76% of DCPS students qualify for the free/reduced lunch program. The percentage of students who qualify for this program reflects the various socio-economic statuses of students in DCPS and highly correlated to the vast array of levels of student achievement. The student racial demographics breakdown is also an interesting reflection of the city's shift in

populations—within DCPS the student population is Black/African American 64%, Hispanic 18%, White 13% and other ethnicity 4%.

Figure 7: DCPS Fast Facts



(Source: <https://dcps.dc.gov/page/dcps-organization>)

The student population in DCPS continues to rise in accordance with the increase of the overall population of the city. Eleven percent of the student population are English language learners, and slightly over 15% of students receive special education services (which is higher than the national average).

Since 1996, with the establishment of a complementary public charter school system, DCPS ceased to be the only provider of free, public education in DC. The public charter school sector has become a vital part of the Washington, DC education landscape. DC public charter schools now educates almost 50% of District students, which is equal to over 40,000 students, in 65 different local education agencies (LEA), or public charter schools throughout the city.

The passage of the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008 called for the full establishment of universal Pre-K and early learning options to be fully functional by 2014 (District of Columbia Government, May 2016, <https://dc.gov/release/district%E2%80%99s-pre-k-program-continues-lead-nation>). This commitment to early childhood ranked the District ahead of many states regarding early childhood spending and focus while also increasing early learning access to all eligible 3 and 4 years olds throughout the District (District of Columbia Government, May 2016, <https://dc.gov/release/district%E2%80%99s-pre-k-program-continues-lead-nation>). This expansion of early learning opportunities is a commitment on the citywide level to match Head Start programs and spending levels with city funds. Families who wish to participate secure their right to a pre-K seat through the city school lottery system, My School DC. Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K3 and Pre-K4) options in both DCPS and public charter schools have become more readily available to families in recent years and has shown a great return on investment in the outcomes for student achievement.

In 2012, there was an initiative spearheaded by the city, in coalition with a host of entities both public and non-profit organizations, to create a citywide, common school lottery that would encompass both DCPS and public charter schools. My School DC was created under the leadership of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education and the first lottery cycle started in December 2013 for the 2014-15 school year. Prior to this initiative, each local education agency (LEA)—DCPS and the individual public charter schools—all hosted their own lotteries which were often seen as overwhelming and complicated for parents, thus creating more barriers to accessing quality education options for their children.

### **Gentrification & Its Impact on Public Education in the District**

Hyper segregation and its impact on public education, and uneven access to economic progress, has long been a part of the landscape in Washington, DC. In 1948, the committee President Harry S. Truman commissioned to focus on segregation in the nation's capital released a report entitled "Segregation in Washington: A Report on the National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital" that described Washington, DC as a "rigidly segregated" city and aptly discussed the role public education should play in "unity and equality" (Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014; Jackson, 2017). The concluded that "[w]hen the public schools in the nation's capital are used instead to divide citizens on racial lines, to perpetuate inequities, to increase them, and worse to justify them, then the time considers what kind of American we want to build for the future" (National Committee on Segregation in the Nation's Capital, 1948; The Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, 2005, p. 224; Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014; Jackson, 2017, p. 15). This report alluded to the challenges of race, class, and segregation to come. In sum, the name "Chocolate City" embodies the story of the District's demographic shifts—the epicenter of black

culture, activism, the civil rights movement, and the black elite—to white flight, and the city’s fall and rise to reinvestment and gentrification (Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014; Asch & Musgrove, 2017). The city’s legacy is also one of widespread neighborhood segregation, the crack cocaine epidemic, episodes of government corruption and mismanagement, the city’s proximity to the Federal government and its tight regulatory control, and its relationship with gentrification (Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, 2005, p. 315; Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014; Asch & Musgrove, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Moskowitz, 2017). Until the mid to late 1960s, the District of Columbia’s population was mostly white; we see reflections of this in the city’s history of public education and housing. With the rise of “suburbanization” of the surrounding areas in the late 1960s, white flight from the District fostered the ability for the city’s African American population growth and for the rise of black culture and leadership—thus making it “Chocolate City” and a mecca for African Americans (Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, 2005; Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014; Asch & Musgrove, 2017). Even with the existence of a black middle-and-upper class, much of the city’s black population was low income and burdened with issues stemming from poverty and access to vital resources (i.e. community violence, housing and food insecurity, unemployment, and waning public education options).

During the 1970s neighborhood individuals and their investment in single homes or unit prompted “revitalization” efforts. Such investments lead to slow, uneven neighborhood changes in various areas of the city. President Reagan’s “War on Drugs,” beginning in the 1980s and reaching into the early 1990s; this was a time of divestment in the city’s infrastructure and revitalizations projects were random and undertaken by individuals who invested in single homes or units thus sparking uneven neighborhood changes (Smithsonian Anacostia Museum,

2005; Jackson; 2017, p. 13; Asch & Musgrove, 2017). State-led public-private partnerships sparked redevelopment through mixed-income housing and through the strategic placement of government builds and services in under-invested areas of the city. Such investments lead to gentrification. Gentrification can, and often does, lead to the displacement of longtime residents and caused the disenfranchisement of these residents socially, politically, and fostered an inability to create new social ties due to isolation from the familiarity of their former communities (Asch & Musgrove, 2017; Orfield & Ee, 2017; Jackson, 2017). Even with such results, supporters of gentrification often note how displacement can allow individuals to be “elevated from poverty” but in the District this result has yet to be seen or quantified (Jackson, 2017).

With the development of suburban communities in Maryland and Virginia, the city experienced white flight in the 1950s and 1960s—thus creating wealth in the form of housing equity for white families while creating a vast wealth and income gap for blacks (Asch & Musgrove, 2017; Orfield & Ee, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Hyra, 2017). The impact of white flight is something intensely tracked unlike the patterns of “black flight,” or displacement, is not similarly studied. Yet, this pattern of demographic changes in the District, while visible in some ways and less visible in others, is a vitally important phenomenon to understand (Orfield & Ee, 2017, pp. 32-33; Asch & Musgrove, 2017). Over the last 20 years, gentrification in the District of Columbia has moved at a rapid pace—with the increase of the white population by over 1,000 percent in some neighborhoods, or by 35% citywide, and the ever-decreasing black population, roughly a 31% drop, throughout the city (Jackson, 2017; Orfield & Ee, 2017; Hyra, 2017). Over the same time the Latinx population has grown significantly, by over 200% (Orfield & Ee, 2017). As Orfield

and Ee (2017) note, the District was one of a handful of school district ordered to desegregate in 1954 because of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Over 60 years after that Supreme Court decision, segregation remains ramped in the District’s public schools. While gentrification has impacted public policy decisions regarding public education in the city, little of the impact of “diversity” from gentrification is present in the city’s public schools (both DCPS and public charter schools) (Jackson, 2017; Orfield & Ee, 2017). Per the Office of the State Superintendent of Education’s (OSSE) equity reports, the traditional public and public charter school sectors are overwhelming composed of black and brown students—and achievement gaps between white students and their black and brown peers (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2018). As Orfield and Ee (2017) note, “... many people who live in diverse communities are sending their children to segregated schools” (p. 11). The impact of segregation is the same now as it was 60 years ago— “separate remains extremely unequal” (Orfield & Ee, 2017, p. 16). This lack of equality is not only present in fiscal and material resources but also in the form of engagement and inclusion.

### **District of Columbia Public School’s Student Assignment and School Boundary Review Process**

In the absence of court-ordered desegregation processes, districts have resorted to other methods of comprehensive public education (kindergarten through grade 12) planning. The student assignment and school boundaries review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), conducted in Washington, DC in the fall of 2013, is a prime example of such an activity. The goal of the most recent process was to engage communities in conversations about not only particular proposals of school boundaries, but also deeper policy conversations focused

on equal education opportunities and issues regarding a need for responsiveness to the changing demographics of the city.

Significant investments in the arena of public engagement have contributed to some evidence of improvement in traditional public schools in the District of Columbia. Introducing the public charter school system, the changing fabric of the city, and a demand for public school quality and accountability, led the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the traditional school system in the District, to diversify its public engagement efforts. Since the early 2000s, around the 2007 shift to mayoral control of schools, DCPS has changed its philosophy engagement beyond just the families and student in their schools, but outwardly to the community at-large. DCPS's strategic focus on public engagement was an effort to nurture trust and foster a community sense of buy-in to the vision, mission, and goals of the system—evidenced through their scaling of the public engagement work through their Office of Family and Public Engagement, the Community Action Team, the Chancellor's Parent Cabinet, a push for community engagement at the school level, and engagement tactics used at various divisions of the district. Besides community buy-in and the building of trust, over the last two decades, the increasing competition, for students, from the growing public charter sector also played a role.

Issues and questions of public education, race, and class share a very high correlation. Across the United States, and the world, bureaucrats and the public have struggled with ways to address the question of race and class in terms of public policy issues. As an issue of public policy, the struggles of public education regularly cited since before the passage of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* until today. In the absence of court-ordered desegregation (Lutz, 2011; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Orfield, 2001) and other means to address school equity and access

issues, student assignment processes have represented what Wells et al. (2009) refers to as, “a policy focus that returns to questions of segregation and education equity instead of standards, testing, and high-stakes accountability systems.” With the increasing freedom of court orders mandating integration of schools, districts, especially rapidly gentrifying cities (similar to DC), have become more racially and socio-economically isolated over time—thus prompting a move from citywide frameworks of student assignment to a demand for improved quality of neighborhood-zoned schools (Lutz, 2011; Reardon, Grewal, Kalogrides, & Greenberg, 2012; Wells, et al., 2009). The shift of demographics, and the demand for updating out-of-date policies, presented the District with an opportunity to re-engineer its education landscape through the process of student assignment (Pride, May, & Vaughn, 1999; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001). In the late 1960s, DCPS updated the school boundary and school assignment policy for the system. At the time DCPS was the only choice for public education in the District. Since that time the city has seen years of decline followed by a recent reemergence of the city. With this reemergence has come the introduction of the public charter school system and a demand for public education in a fashion that has shifted how DCPS operates. As a part of the shift in operational practices, DCPS undertook revisiting its long-outdated student assignment policy and school boundaries in the fall of 2013.

### **Student Assignment and School Boundary Review Process for DC Public Schools (DCPS)**

In Summer 2013, then Mayor Vincent Gray and former DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson announced that the city would take on reviewing the student assignment policies and school boundaries for DCPS. This process was to be a comprehensive review of the student assignment

policy for DCPS, which had not been reviewed since 1968. Over the course of 40 plus years the city had not only seen significant changes in population and demographics but also the rise of the public charter school sector. Each mayor can use their own discretion to determine how to best use the DME to carry out the various functions noted above. In the Gray Administration, the DME role served as a convener of stakeholders to discuss policy problems and potential solutions—sometimes to be a part of the decision-making process. In Fall 2013, DME’s office took on leading the student assignment and school boundaries review process for DCPS.

Chancellor Henderson was clear in stating that this process would not be one that DCPS would undertake itself—but the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), Abigail Smith and her staff, would undertake this process. From the beginning the mayor made the need for transparency and inclusion of the community in this process paramount. As a gesture of good faith, the Mayor announced that not only would the DME be responsible for this task but the DME would also work in concert with an Advisory Committee for this process (Chambers, 2006; Hirota & Jacobs, 2003; Wells, et al., 2009).

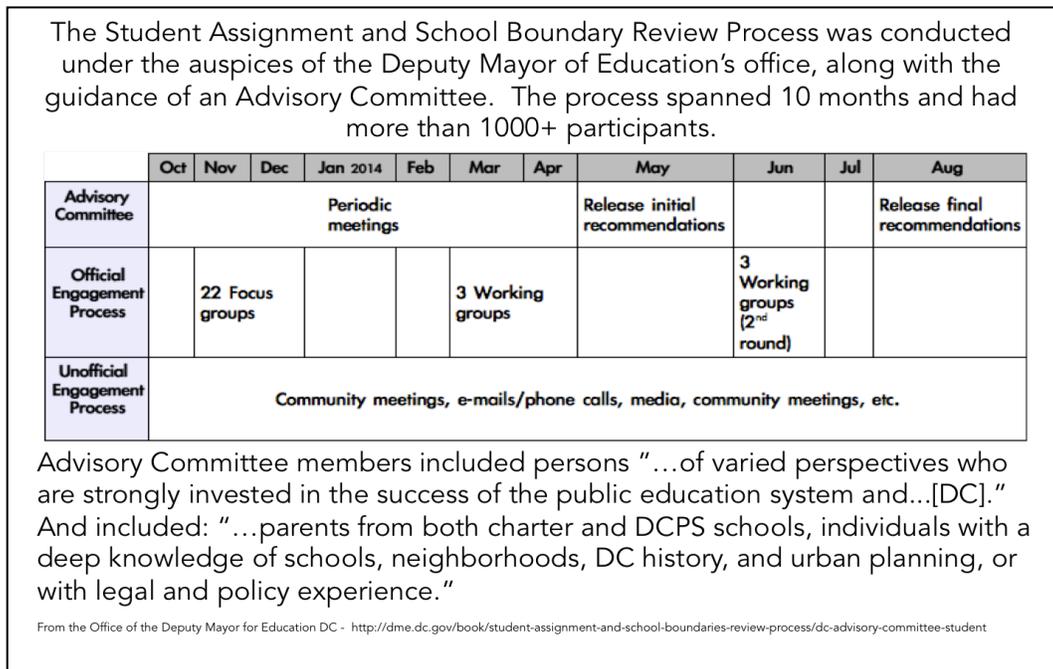
In September 2013, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education appointed me (the researcher) and seventeen other individuals to an Advisory Committee to oversee reviewing the student assignment and school boundaries for DCPS. Abigail Smith, the DME in the Gray Administration, chaired the committee along with a very engaged community leader, John Hill. The committee comprised a mixture of individuals with diverse perspectives (from both public charter and DCPS) who were “strongly invested in the success of the public education system” of the District of Columbia and had varied levels of expertise (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014). Committee tasks included:

- Review current citywide policies on attendance zones, feeder patterns and school choice;
- Formulate guidelines and principles for public school assignment and choice policies and practices;
- Listen to the community and serve as insightful interpreters of public sentiment, concerns, and questions;
- Develop recommendations and scenarios for the revised DCPS attendance zone and feeder patterns;

Make recommendations on how to bridge student-assignment and choice policies across DCPS and charter schools. (Source: [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov))

The committee achieved their work through a combination approach, which included focus groups, large-scale ward-targeted public engagement sessions, an online feedback portal, besides research and analysis conducted by a technical team (which comprised members of the DME staff, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, and the Urban Institute). From the data gathered, the Advisory Committee was to “provide the DME with fair-minded, thoughtful, and informed policy recommendations” specific to updating the student assignment and school boundaries policies for DCPS.

**Figure 8: Student Assignment Process Timeframe**



(Source: dme.dc.gov)

**My Role in the Process**

The belief system of the researcher plays an important role in qualitative inquiry and can influence the approach of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). The researcher’s perspectives of and in the research are a larger part of the challenges Patton (2002) notes a researcher must overcome in qualitative research. As the researcher for this study, I am keenly aware of the perspectives, interests, and direct involvement I bring to this exploration. I acknowledge this study is grounded in the belief system I have developed during my 15-year career in public education; as an engaged resident of the District of Columbia; as a parent of two children—one of whom is a DCPS student; and as a participant and community member

representative of the Advisory Committee for the District of Columbia Public Schools student assignment and school boundary review process.

As a member of the Advisory Committee for the student assignment and school boundary review process, which offered guidance and support to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education through this process, I know of the perspectives and knowledge I gained from my time as an intimate part of the process. Coming to this study with experiences from this case study situation has pushed me to overcome my personal beliefs in the study of a process and the insights that can be gained in understanding how a sharing of power can improve decision making in public education. To engage in such a study, I have grounded myself, as a researcher, in the concepts of empathic neutrality and mindfulness as noted by Patton (2002). Below I have outlined my participation in this process:

*As a member of the Advisory Committee it tasked me with ensuring that my community, Ward 5 (located almost wholly in the northeast quadrant of the city), was engaged in the process and aware of their opportunities to participate. I led engagement sessions, specific to Ward 5, to capture community input and to guarantee that the voice of Ward 5 was reflected in the policy recommendations delivered to the Mayor from the Committee.*

My experience as a member of the Advisory Committee is in part what piqued my interest in this case situation. Throughout my involvement in the process I was very interested in how the modes of engagement shaped the outcomes of the process and its long-term impacts.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH STRATEGY & METHODOLOGY

### Purpose of the Study

For this study I am investigated a case study of coproduction and inclusion within the context of the inherent tension between a bureaucratic process and democratic norms. I have worked to design a qualitative case study that empirically examines the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education planning and policy decision-making processes. This study examines the capacity of administrators to use practices that allow them to respond to the public's voice and values.

I focus this dissertation study on the theoretical frames of deliberative democracy and coproduction. An initial set of questions to guide this empirical evaluation are:

**Q1)** How can the concept of coproduction mitigate tensions between the public and administrators while interjecting a dynamic of power sharing in decision-making processes?

**Q2)** What role does framing play in decision-making processes, and how are both correlated to issues of race, class, and equity in the space of public education?

**Q3)** What elements of process led to the legitimacy of decision-making processes? What evidence exists from this process to show the shared ownership by both administrators and the public of the final policy recommendations?

This chapter will outline the research methods for the study and includes a discussion of the following areas:

- 1) Rationale of the Research Approach
- 2) Description of the Research Sample

- 3) Summarize the Information Needed for the Study
- 4) Research Design Outline
- 5) Data Collection Methods
- 6) Data Analysis & Synthesis
- 7) Ethical Considerations
- 8) Validity: Trustworthiness & Credibility of the Study
- 9) Limitations of the Study

### **Rationale of the Research Approach: Qualitative, Single-Case Study**

As thoroughly discussed in chapter three, this study will be a qualitative, single-case study. Using case study research is "... intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is... to shed light on a larger class of cases" (Gerring, 2007). Qualitative research allows the researcher a holistic opportunity to examine a specific social situation to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Locke, Wyrnick Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Mason, 1996; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 1990; Schram, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). In this form of exploration, the researcher can get a greater sense of the complexities of the case under study, and gather how the case is experienced, interpreted, and conceptualized in its particular context. As a participant in the process, this form of exploration allowed me to interpret and understand my role and experiences in the process while also working to more clearly understand and analyze the experiences of others who participated in the process.

Case studies allow for a researcher to go beyond just the outcomes of a process, thus giving the researcher an in-depth understanding of a specific situation, possesses the ability to examine a situation through the lens of an interest, not just the outcomes (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Insights gleaned from this examination can directly influence both policies and practice (Merriam, 1998 p. 19). In qualitative discovery the method focuses on the examination of the research objectives, and its analysis, through the experiences illustrated in the data and works to extract and interpret the meaning of those shared experiences. The process of qualitative discovery work to test the data collected to establish facts and to highlight the relationship between and the intent of the variables examined. This process was served to be interpretative of my participation and role in the process and its outcomes.

For this dissertation, I will use a qualitative, single-case study research design the nature of the relationship between shared decision-making, authority, deliberative democracy, and coproduction all within the same case study example, Washington, DC. This form of exploration allows for the ability to describe and interpret how a sharing of power, by administrators and the public, through the theoretical framework of inclusion and coproduction, can ease the tensions between bureaucracy and democracy while contributing to the legitimacy of a process and fostering a sense of ownership of the final policy decision. A case study uses empirical inquiry of a sharing of power in public education decision making in the examination of the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Case studies differ from scientific experiments. The contextual conditions in a case study are not delineated or controlled. They happen in real time as a part of the investigation and allow for the explanation of the contextual conditions of the study as it

applies to the phenomenon being observed. In this form of study, I will examine the theories of coproduction and deliberative democracy within the real-life context to describe the process and relationships that result from the process itself. This form of study also allows me, as both the researcher and a participant of the process, to interpret the role I played in the process and to further examine my experience in the process and develop a greater understanding of the process through the experiences of others and the process outcomes.

This research fit well into the case study consideration as laid out by Merriam (1998), as it seeks to understand the role and relationship of shared decision-making authority and coproduction in through public education decision-making processes, an area foundational to the ideals of democracy—public participation. From the qualitative stance, a case study examination provided the ability to (1) have a better understanding of the overall process and actions; (2) develop a deeper contextual understanding of the process and other historical factors connected to the process; (3) gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the process participants perspectives and views; and, (4) develop an interpretive framework to analyze and unpack the findings. As Merriam (1998) explains,

*A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)*

In chapter two, we established the working definition of democracy to be a governance or system of government where the power is vested in the people and evidenced through a representative form of governance. In that very simplistic definition, public participation, and

meaningful engagement, is inherently connected to the principles of democracy as it is evidence of democracy in action. The roots of *deliberative democracy* are a part of the democratic idea of equality and infuses the values of deliberation, reasoned discussion, and collaboration in public governance and decision-making. The concepts of deliberative democracy—as coupled with the elements of coproduction, inclusion—is foundational for shared authority in public decision-making. The role of inclusion and coproduction in a process can help to provide greater access to the process and work to mitigate issues of inequities and distrust through relationship and capacity building. The frameworks of inclusion and coproduction have the ability to foster accountability and legitimize the process and its outcomes. The nature of the relationship between the concepts provides a lens for an understanding of the elements needed for success, and ultimately the buy-in of a public process, possible. The elements the concept, together provides:

- the ability to foster the development of trust, collaboration, and the building of community in decision-making;
- creates the continuous opportunity for community involvement in addressing public issues through decision-making (Quick & Feldman, 2011)
- the ability to foster trust by opening the lines of communication between the government and the public;
- allows for the fostering of knowledge and capacity-building through open lines of communication;
- allows for the sharing of perspectives and historical impacts;

- the ability to work through public issues collectively, and policy solutions can gain traction and support for implementation; and,
- the ability to engage various stakeholders at the table.

From its inception, “public education has always been tied to democracy and its fundamental principle of public participation in governance” (Pappas, 2012; Sarason, 1990; Dewey, 1916). Much of the literature surrounding the concepts of deliberative democracy, inclusion, and coproduction discusses and details the process of decision-making on various policy issue areas but rarely touches on how these concepts impact issues of public education. Much of this research is on relatively homogenous communities with less controversial policy settings—this thread of literature touches on service delivery (i.e. trash collection, and other transactional services) but not policy issues such as public education. In this study, I am exploring the gap I noted in the literature by assessing the ability for shared authority in public decision-making through the case study examination of a diverse community with issues of race, mistrust, and a history of challenges between the city’s residents (both new and old) and their government. This case study assessment works to show how the connection of the concepts together foster greater policy outcomes and can support the development of trust between government actors and the public through meaningful, ongoing interactions intended to build capacity and connection to policy issues and solutions. The exploration of blending of the concepts of inclusion and coproduction as a model of how to implement shared authority in public decision-making is unique to this research—this research takes the exploration a step further by looking at the concepts through the heterogenous lens of public education and the process of its planning.

## **My Role as the Researcher**

As the researcher, it was my belief that the best way to capture the various nuances of the process and relationships associated with coproduction, shared authority, and deliberative democracy in public policy planning and decision-making was through qualitative measures and methods. From my perspective as a researcher, a case study was the most appropriate way to examine this process intensively, with a deep understanding through the description of the context of the case and the experience of those involved (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995, 1998). In that, I realize that my belief system, as the researcher, plays an important role in qualitative inquiry and can influence the approach of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). Patton (2002) notes the challenges that a researcher must overcome in their perspectives in qualitative research. As the researcher for this study, I acknowledge this study is grounded in the belief system I have developed during my 16-year career in public education; as an engaged resident of the District of Columbia; and as a participant and community member representative of the Advisory Committee for the District of Columbia Public Schools student assignment and school boundary review process. Coming to this study with experiences from this case study situation has pushed me to overcome my personal beliefs in the study of a process and the insights to gain in understanding how a sharing of power can improve decision making in public education. To engage in such a study, I have grounded myself, as a researcher, in the concepts of empathic neutrality and mindfulness as noted by Patton (2002).

The case is of particular importance to me due to the intimate nature of my involvement of the process as a District of Columbia resident, DCPS parent, DC Government employee, and

practitioner. As noted by Shön (1983), I am a practitioner and participant of this process, thus I have come to this situation with a unique knowledge and experience of the case. Due to my role as a member of the Advisory Committee for the process, and practitioner in this space, I am seeking to discover, and uncover, features of the case to help shape my understanding of the case, its outcomes, and the possibility of a future for this particular process approach (Shön, 1983). My role as both participant and researcher allow me to view this case through an interpretative lens. The research and examination of this process is in the complexity and uncertainty of this issue being examined – this research gives me the ability to interpret not only my experience, but the experience of others, through the exploration by looking for the problem, or the meaning, within the problem, or the case (Shön, 1983). In this, my role as an interpretive researcher allows me to position myself in the situation, distill and identify the problem, and work to reframe the problem and its outcomes in order to have a greater understanding of not only the case but also the potential benefits of its replication (Shön, 1983).

### **Description of the Research Sample**

For this research the sampling was purposeful in selecting the study's sample; using purposeful sampling a common practice in case study research (Patton, 1990, 2002; Silverman, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the researcher, and as a public education and family engagement professional, a better understanding public participation and shared decision-making in public education planning is of great interest both personally and professional. In the District of Columbia, the process for the review of the student assignment and boundaries for DCPS is held up as the goal-standard for public participation in public education because of the

design of the process. As a researcher and a resident of DC, I wanted to better understand what made the process a “success;” and to test if that assumption was true and if so why? This seemed possible through a case study.

To look at this specific case and the factors surrounding the process, the delimiting timeframe, which correlated with the timeframe of the process. I made this decision as the researcher to adequately capture the experiences of participants of the process during, throughout, and following the final policy decisions made. Using purposeful sampling, as noted above, allowed there to be diversity in the sampling to capture participants, and perspectives, of individuals who played various roles in the process (i.e. government actors, advisory committee members, elected officials, parents, community leaders, etc.). The research sample included over 20 individual participant interviews; process materials, documents, notes, and collected data; and newspaper articles.

### **Summary of Information Needed for the Study**

The public education in the District of Columbia is a bifurcated system of public schools with both a traditional school system, DC Public Schools (DCPS), and a thriving public charter school sector. The focus of this study is on the student assignment and for DCPS. DCPS is composed of 110 schools, about 4,000 teachers, and educates over 49,000 students. Roughly 76% of DCPS students qualify for the free/reduced lunch program. The percentage of students who qualify for this program reflects the various socio-economic statuses of students in DCPS and highly correlated to the vast array of levels of student achievement. The student racial demographics breakdown is also an interesting reflection of the city’s shift in populations—

within DCPS the student population is Black/African American 64%, Hispanic 18%, White 13% and other ethnicity 4%. Approximately 11% of the student population are English language learners, and slightly over 15% of student receive special education services (which is higher than the national average). The student population in DCPS has continued to rise with the demographic changes and overall population increase of the overall population of the city. The establishment of a competing public charter school system in 1996 created a landscape in which DCPS ceased to be the only provider of free, public education in DC. The public charter school sector has become a vital part of the Washington, DC education landscape. To date, the DC public charter schools now educates almost 50% of District students, which is equal to over 40,000 students, in 65 different local education agencies (LEA), or public charter schools.

Based on my area of interest for this research study, I looked at public engagement in public education planning in the context of the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools. This process, as noted in the next section below, was a citywide process open to DCPS families and students, educators, and the community at large. This focus allowed my opportunity for data collection and analysis to be broader, as there were various options for data—the analysis of documents from the process, newspaper and media coverage of the process, participant interviews, focus group data, the advisory committee for the process, and the final report itself.

### **Student Assignment and School Boundary Review Process for DC Public Schools (DCPS)**

Established by the United States Congress in 1805, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and public education, is the longest running locally controlled functions of the District. Early in the term of Mayor Vincent Gray appeared that with the current changes to the city

demographics and other redistricting, his administration would need to revise the student assignment process for DCPS, the city's traditional or matter-of-right system of schools. In the summer of 2013 Mayor Vincent Gray and then Chancellor Kaya Henderson announced that the city would take on reviewing the student assignment policies and school boundaries for DCPS; a comprehensive review of the student assignment policy for DCPS was last done 1968. At that point in 2013, it had been over 45 years since the last student assignment review and the city had not only seen significant changes in population and demographics but also the rise of the public charter school sector. Because of the city's governance structure this process the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) undertook this process in concert with an Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee, composed of seventeen individuals including myself, tasks included with working with the DME to oversee reviewing the student assignment and school boundaries for DCPS. The committee comprised a mixture of individuals with diverse perspectives (from both public charter and DCPS) who were "strongly invested in the success of the public education system" of the District of Columbia and had varied levels of expertise.

The committee's tasks included (retrieved from [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov)):

- Reviewing current citywide policies on attendance zones, feeder patterns and school choice;
- Formulating guidelines and principles for public school assignment and choice policies and practices;
- Listening to the community and serve as insightful interpreters of public sentiment, concerns, and questions;

- o Developing recommendations and scenarios for a revised DCPS attendance zone and feeder patterns;
- o Making recommendations on how to bridge student-assignment and choice policies across DCPS and charter schools.

To achieve the work of the Committee required a combination of approaches, including focus groups, large-scale ward-targeted public engagement sessions, an online feedback portal, besides research and analysis conducted by a technical team (comprised members of the DME staff, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, and the Urban Institute). From the data gathered, the Advisory Committee was to “provide the DME with fair-minded, thoughtful, and informed policy recommendations” specific to updating the student assignment and school boundaries policies for DCPS.

### **Instrumentation & Research Design**

As a qualitative researcher my ability to provide a credible and compelling case argument and recommendations it is vital to have “... a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility” (Eisner, 1991, 110). Patton (1990) notes how the use of triangulation of data ensures the reduction of bias for the researcher in their work. This use of triangulation allows the researcher to draw upon various kinds of data, evidence, and methods to examine a case; thus, allowing for a corroboration of findings across multiple data sets (Patton, 1990; Bowen, 2009, p. 28).

Early in this research, I conducted an in-depth literature review to explore the theories, ideology, and principles that might frame and inform this project. Theories of public participation were foundational to this research as it pertains to the ideals of:

- o collaborative governance,
- o shared authority,
- o deliberative democracy,
- o inclusion, and,
- o coproduction.

The combination of these ideologies makes shared, or coproduced, decision-making possible and directly connects to the role of deep, authentic public engagement in governance. As noted by Ansell & Gash (2007), the process of “collaborative governance” can lead to ‘small wins’ that can lead to greater policy outcomes and connectivity, or legitimacy, of the overall process. Thus, for this study, I will focus on the process of public participation, and shared authority in decision making, defined by Sopanah et al. (2013), as the public’s ability “... to influence any changes in making any [public] policies” and leads to the coproduction of, or shared authority in, impacting public education planning and decision-making. This focus is centered on the case of the student assignment and school boundary review process for DCPS and is time bound to that process, its outcomes, and perceptions.

While the aforementioned what the foundation of this study, the review and selection of data was ongoing throughout the study in order to thoroughly and continuously inform the study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

For the examination of this case, I used three research instruments/methods for the exploration of this study:

- o content analysis of focus group data and surveys;
- o participant interviews; and,
- o document analysis.

Noted below are additional details regarding each research instrument used. From a collective perspective, the data I collected, over the course of two years, provided me, as a researcher, with the context and thick description necessary to examine and contextualize public education planning and public engagement through the case of the student assignment and school boundary review process for DCPS (Geertz, 1974). This form of data collection and use of instrumentation allowed for a more balanced approach to the examination of the case and allowed the research questions developed to be deep, and comprehensively, addressed.

#### **Phase I: Content Analysis—Focus Group Data**

For this dissertation study, I analyzed and coded focus group comments from 22 focus group sessions, which took place prior to the large-scale engagement processes for the District of Columbia Student Assignment and School Boundary review process. A public education focuses non-profit, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, collected the focus group data; who provided technical assistance to the Advisory Committee and the overall process. The comments from the participants of the focus groups are not attribute to any individual. I conducted the analysis of this data to examine how this process worked to guide the overall student assignment and school boundary review process.

Besides the analysis of the focus group data, I also reviewed other relevant documents, reports, notes, articles, and artifacts specific to the process and the engagement interactions with the public.

To code the aforementioned documents, I used a qualitative content analysis procedure shaped by following *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldaña, 2009). The comments given by the participants or text passages in the document is the unit of analysis. I also used a process known as open coding, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), in which the researcher will compare, conceptualize, designate categories that emerge from patterns in the data. This coding process allows for it to raise theoretical and thematic codes throughout the process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This process allows the researcher to make connections between the categories and data being analyzed allowing the researcher to examine the relationship between the process and documents being reviewed to any connections to the theoretical framework of the study.

### **Phase II: Participant Interviews**

Participant interviews were a primary source of data collection in this research. This method allowed me, as the researcher, to gain thick, rich descriptions of the process from the perspectives of its participants (Geertz, 1974) and to interpret my own understandings and knowledge of the process. This form of research is a fundamental tool in the exploration of a phenomenon through the process of a case study (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Patton (1990) further notes “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 278). As a part of this dissertation study, I conducted recruitment methods for the interview process that included using publicly available documents to identify potential interview subjects. Besides mining publicly available documents for subjects, I also conducted outreach to individuals who

had an intimate level of involvement with the process and request participation. These individuals will include:

- administrative and school leaders for DC Public Schools;
- actors in the Mayor's Office;
- Advisory Committee members for the process;
- and leaders from the community/people that participated.

The purpose for choosing the population above was because of their level of involvement with the District of Columbia Public Schools Student Assignment and School Boundary Review Process. While population had an intimate level of involvement in the planning and execution of the process others were deeply engaged and impacted by the ultimate outcomes of the process.

*Interview Process.* After identifying potential interviewees, I drafted an email to send to the participants. I sent each individual participant an email describing the research project, purpose of the interview, and an invitation for their participation. I sent the emails to approximately 30 potential interview participants. Once the invited participant confirmed a willingness to participate, I sent the participant a follow up email to hold the time on their calendar, confirm the agreed upon meeting location, to share the interview questions and consent form for their review. The interviews took place between April 2017 and January 2018. Before starting each interview, I asked each participant to sign the university consent for required for their participation in the study.

I conducted the interviews in-person or via phone. I used a semi-structured interview approach guided by several pre-determined questions (see Appendix A). Even with the use of a set of pre-determined questions, the interviews were open-ended. This approach of an open-

ended interview process allowed the interview participants to interact with me, as the researcher, in an organic fashion and feel at liberty to respond openly. The open-ended nature of the interviews also allowed me to listen for other emerging themes and allowed for flexible. I recorded all the interviews and then transcribed by a third-party. To code any relevant themes or narratives from the interviews, I used a manual method of coding for themes and ideas shared.

I asked the interviewees if they would like to be anonymous or to have their role noted. As the researcher, I decided not to reference the interview participants by name but by a general description of their role. Once the transcription of each interview was complete, I shared the participants interview transcription with them to ensure I captured their ideas as they intended.

#### Exclusion Criteria for the Interview Process:

- o Students are excluded from this list,
- o Persons who were not publically vocal regarding the process, and,
- o Persons who do not fall in the group listed above.

#### **Phase III: Document Review & Analysis**

As noted by Bowen (2009), “document analysis is a systemic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents” (27). This form of analysis allows a researcher to examine, interpret, gain understanding, and develop great knowledge regarding the case of exploration (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007; Bowen, 2009). Atkinson and Coffey (1997) discuss how documents are ‘social artifacts.’ “Social artifacts’ are documents used to organize and share something collectively produced (Bowen, 2009). While documents are not the “precise,

accurate, or complete recording” of an event, they possess the ability to provide valuable context and meaningful contributions to the case being examined (Bowen, 2009, p. 33).

“Documents are ‘unobtrusive’ and ‘non-reactive... [and] unaffected by the research process” (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). This ‘non-reactiveness’ allows for stability (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

Documents allow for a wider, or broader coverage of the event being researched - documents can cover a longer span of time and various aspects of the event (Yin, 2003; Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

I want to use the process of document analysis to evaluate documentary materials (such as newspaper articles, focus group reports, process materials, and the final report) as supplementary data to:

- o Provide additional data and background information of the case context for the research;
- o Raise relevant questions, specifically during interviews; and,
- o Explore additional situations needing observation.

As a researcher, this process of document analysis is another avenue to explore the case being researched while gaining a deeper understanding of the case. I collected documents, such as newspaper articles, interim reports, process materials, and the final report. With each set of data, I coded the items through the process of open and theoretical (or thematic) coding. The document review and focus group notes analysis helped to build themes within the coding process and served as a framework for the development of interview questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **Data Analysis & Synthesis**

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the primary challenge was managing and organizing the sheer volume of data being considered for the project. In following the advice of Merriam (1998), I worked to collect and view the data simultaneously. This process allowed me to avoid the risk of being overwhelmed by the data and helped to maintain my focus as the researcher.

The data analysis process started with my initial inquiry regarding the 22 focus group sessions for the student assignment and school boundary review process, which took place in late 2012 into early 2013. To explore this interest, I worked to conduct a content analysis of the comments from the 22 focus groups through the process of open and thematic coding. I used Dedoose, a qualitative content analysis software, to code the comments. I compared the coded comments to the original analysis and coding of the data by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation during the student assignment processes in 2013/2014 to compare and confirm my designations as a researcher. I worked to prepare narratives based on data and the emerging codes—this process of narratives and the comparison of my designations to the original coding of the data helped with cross-checking the data and served as a second layer of analysis.

The determination of themes guided the development of the questions use for participant interviews and framed the process of the analysis of other supporting documents from the process—the final report from the process, new media, and other process materials. The emerging themes from the focus group comments provided a grouping mechanism through which I could analyze the interview data and guiding me in looking patterns, categories, or themes to link and other divergent or dissent perspective on the process. Throughout this

coding process, I could fragment out comments from the interviews into separate categories to look for themes to piece together a narrative that illustrated the experience of the process from the perspectives of the various interview participants. I could compare connecting threads and patterns across various categories and worked to compare and contrast those findings to the broader literature as outlined in chapter 2. From this process, I could move forward in thinking about the broader implications of the research and its impact on future public education decision-making process specific to the context of the District of Columbia. I could develop several recommendations for consideration and work toward the development of a citywide framework for coproduction and shared authority, authentic engagement, in processes involving public education planning.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The belief system of the researcher plays an important role in qualitative inquiry and can influence the approach of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1988). Patton (2002) notes the challenges that a researcher must overcome in their perspectives in qualitative research. As the researcher for this study, I know of how decided this study in the belief system I have developed during my 16-year career in public education; as an engaged resident of the District of Columbia; and as a participant and community member representative of the Advisory Committee for the District of Columbia Public Schools student assignment and school boundary review process. Coming to this study with experiences from this case study situation has pushed me to overcome my personal beliefs in the study of a process and the insights to gain in understanding how a sharing of power can improve decision making in public

education. To engage in such a study, I have grounded myself, as a researcher, in the concepts of empathic neutrality and mindfulness as noted by Patton (2002).

As a qualitative researcher and social scientist, it is paramount to continue to remember the responsibility I have regarding protecting and respecting the promises made to participants of the study. This research was only possible because of the willingness of voluntary participation of the interviewees. While it imposed no serious ethical threat on the participants, safeguards to protect the information collected and the privacy of the participants was vital.

### **Validity: Trustworthiness & Credibility of the Study**

The robustness, credibility, authenticity of research is essential (Maxwell, 1996; McMillian, 2000). Because of my involvement in the process being tested, I realized the need to address validity and any threats to validity regarding the possibility of researcher bias and reactive arrangements (or reactivity).

My desired goal, and commitment to the authenticity of the research does not negate the need to address the validity threats previously noted. In addressing the validity threats, I took a three-pronged approach. First, in realizing my role in the process the need to focus my perspectives and impressions of the data I needed to collect, I wrote reflective memos at various parts of the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). I first started by writing a reflective memo at the beginning of the research process, which served to better frame the ways and roles I played. After that initially memo, I also wrote several short memos as I was working through the literature review process and as I framed the case for chapter three of my dissertation. I wrote reflective memos after a few of my interviews. This allowed me to sort out

my own thoughts and gave me the ability to focus on the insights each interviewee shared regarding the topic and questions asked.

Second, I recorded all of my interviews. From that recording, I hired a company transcribed each interview. By having the interviews transcribed, it allowed for the actual thoughts, insights, and feedback they shared in response to the questions asked to have a holistically examination. Once I reviewed the transcripts, I reached out to each interviewee to share their interview transcription with them. I asked for each interviewee to review the transcript to ensure their sentiments were captured with fidelity and embodied their intent based on the questions presented. Interviewees could share any corrections to their transcript or elaborate further on questions they felt the need to give additional feedback. This process, while tedious, allowed for the data to reflect the insights of each interviewee and highlight additional research considerations for the project.

Third, to deal with reactivity shared my research with other qualitative researchers—this process was helpful in reviewing and offering validation to the methods used. As a black woman, mother, educator, and a resident of the District of Columbia, this topic is personal. Regardless of my involvement in the process being observed, the role of race, class, equity, and “who’s at the decision-making table” is real. In this kind of research, it is easy to see yourself in the process and easy to fall victim to bias. The triangulation of data and methods was vital to check the innate bias. As previously noted, the triangulation of data ensures the reduction of bias for the researcher in their work and helps to address the issues of researcher bias and reactivity.

As the researcher, the activity of identifying and creating plans to address both internal and external validity threats allowed me to be true to myself and the commitment to this

research coupled with positioning my personal involvement, and investment. The need for internal and external replication of this research is important as I have an interest in further investigating public engagement and shared decision-making in public education planning—particularly in the District of Columbia. From this perspective, ensuring there was the criterion to put my findings up against was essential. Creswell (1994) and Merriam (1998) speak in depth about the credibility of research and finding methods to seek not to prematurely ‘verifying’ conclusions without deep evaluation of the data—this speaks to methods for protecting interpretive validity. Again, triangulated data sources, besides data collection methods and analysis, help support the credibility and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Dependability & Confirmability**

In qualitative research the goal of the study, particularly in case study methods, the focus is less on the study’s replication and more on the ability of the study to provide findings consistent and dependable based on the data collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher, the documentation of procedures, particularly coding schemes and categorization is essential to ensure the dependability and consistency of the methods used in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. This is what Merriam & Associates (2002) refer to as “transparency of method;” it provides an understanding of the thought process and rationale associated with the researcher throughout the research process.

The objectivity of this research is essential. While this research is qualitative, its connectedness to the data collected and analyzed is a direct the researcher’s subjectivity or biases. As noted above, I played an intimate role in the process being observed and it was

important for me to foster my objectivity throughout the process. To accomplish that, I looked to the scholarship of Lincoln & Guba (1985): reflective memos and journaling. Using reflective memos or journaling to help the researcher reflect on their thoughts about the process and to catch as assess any potential bias or subjectivity that might show up in the findings, or throughout the process, of the study. Reflective journaling and memos were something I did as a researcher to reflect on my thoughts throughout the process and as a reminder of my role, or positionality, in this process.

### **Transferability**

Generalizability was not the intended goal of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While Lincoln & Guba (1985) discuss 'transferability' of research as a goal, Patton (1990) speaks directly about a need for "context-bound extrapolations" (p. 491). I explain this idea to be "speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under the similar, but not identical, conditions" (498). Because of the "context-bound" goal of this study, the selection of the method of a single-case study and the rich, thick descriptions of the participants and the context of the case itself, I am confident that the findings from this study could apply to other municipalities or school districts looking to move toward "collaborative governance" and the coproduction of policy solutions. This research can share the 'small wins' and make the opportunity for legitimacy possible.

## **Limitations of the Study**

### **Study Design and Impact Limitations**

The intentional design of this study, to examine only one case study, is a limitation to the overall study design besides the scalability and generalizability of this study.

### **Statistical or Data Limitations and Sample Size**

I design this study to examine public participation and engagement in public education in Washington, District of Columbia. I limit the data to the case study context of the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Schools (DCPS), which took place in the fall of 2013 until the summer of 2014.

The data reviewed for this study is qualitative. Data reviewed for this study includes:

- Qualitative in-person interviews with administrators and participants in the process;
- Document review of newspaper articles and relevant documents published for the process; and,
- Content analysis and review of the focus groups conducted prior to the participation process.

### **Self-Reported Data**

This study relies on in-person, qualitative interviews and focus group participant notes as a part of the research process. In using such a process for research, a researcher is relying on pre-existing self-reported data, and with this study, gathering data by conducting qualitative in-person interviews. This form of research is limited because of the absence of the data collected being independently verified. In a study such as this, I am listening to what other people are saying—in interviews, through focus group notes, and other documents—at face value. With self-

reported data a researcher, and their study, deal with various points and sources of bias that might appear in the data. Some limitations from such a study include: (1) selective memory; (2) recalling events out of chronological order; (3) attributing events the opposite of how they occurred; (3) attribution of actions to their own agency and not the effect of other factors; or (4) exaggerating or embellishing events.

In recognizing these limitations, I, as the researcher, acknowledged my specific research agenda, and my role, upfront. I also worked with my peers and my advisors to thoroughly scrutinize the case selected, methods used, the data collected, and the outcomes from my findings. To ensure clarity of the comments shared during the interviews I conducted, I used a third-party vendor to transcribe all interviews and triangulated the data and methods used to reduce reactivity. The reflective memos I wrote to center my perspectives were also essential in this process.

### **Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to offer a detailed description of the research methods for this study. I used a qualitative, single-case study method to illustrate the uniqueness of this case and to explore the ideas of:

- o collaborative governance,
- o shared authority,
- o deliberative democracy,
- o inclusion, and,
- o coproduction.

For this study, I used three research methods for the exploration of this study:

- (1) content analysis of focus group data and surveys;
- (2) participant interviews; and,
- (3) document analysis; to provide a broader view of the case.

As an early part of this process, I undertook an in-depth literature review to provide a conceptual framework for the design, and subsequently, the analysis of the data collected. The goal of this study is to gain clarity and understanding of public participation, through the process of shared decision-making, would allow for public education planning and decision-making processes to be informed by those most impacted and lead to the legitimacy of the policy solutions. This goal is specific to the case of the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Schools. From this exploration, as a researcher, I would like to see how transferrable these findings are on a citywide level in the District of Columbia to improve trust and provide an opportunity for legitimacy of public education policy solutions.

## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

### **Purpose of this Chapter**

In this chapter I will discuss the findings, which reflect the snapshot of findings noted above, and offer deeper context to support and explain each finding. In using the noted methods of research and data collection, I hoped to share my research through the use of thick, rich descriptions of the broad range of experiences captured in the data through focus group comments; the insights of the interviews of those who participated; and the guiding documents and articles reviewed. The goal of my research was to allow the data to speak for itself to illustrate the multiple perspectives of participants of the process and share with the readers of this dissertation the richness and complexity of my topic of interest and the case under examination.

This chapter shares the key findings got through my data collection process, which includes the content analysis of comments from 22 focus groups that started the review process; 21 in-depth participant interviews; and the document analysis of the review process final report, news articles, and process materials. I organize this chapter into two sections: first, the content analysis of the 22 focus groups that started the review process and the major findings from that analysis; second, the key findings from the document review and 21 in-depth participant interviews as they relate to the themes that emerged from the content analysis process.

From this study, four major findings emerged from the data collected:

**Table 3: Four Major Findings of this Research**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>
<b>FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, &amp; Well-Designed Process</b>
<i>A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.</i>
<b>FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope &amp; Tasks</b>
<i>Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.</i>
<b>FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation</b>
<i>Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.</i>

### **Part I: Content Analysis of Focus Group Comments**

One of the initial steps of my research was to investigate and assess how the first round of public participation for the Student Assignment and School Boundary Review Process, a series of focus groups, used as a roadmap for the process. On page 7 of the final report for the student assignment process the advisory committee states, [t]he vision and recommendations of this report were guided by the voices we heard throughout the city...” (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014). The advisory committee, and its composition, served as one avenue

for integration of the public voice in this process. The report notes how the initial round of engagement, the focus groups, worked to “... shared their perspectives and... and provided feedback on the principles that should guide policy recommendations and boundary changes” (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7). The initial feedback and input of the focus group participants, held in October 2013 and February 2014, guided the principles used by the Advisory Committee. This initial round of engagement worked to set the tone for the need for public engagement. To understand shared decision-making authority in action, this first part of my research explores how the feedback submitted by the focus group participants shows up in the final recommendations of the Advisory Committee. To examine this, I analyzed a unique data set, composed of comments from the 22 focus groups, and coded through a qualitative content analysis procedure shaped by following *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldaña, 2009). I then matched the comments to the guiding principles and final recommendations of the process. The unit of analysis was the comment given by the focus group participant.

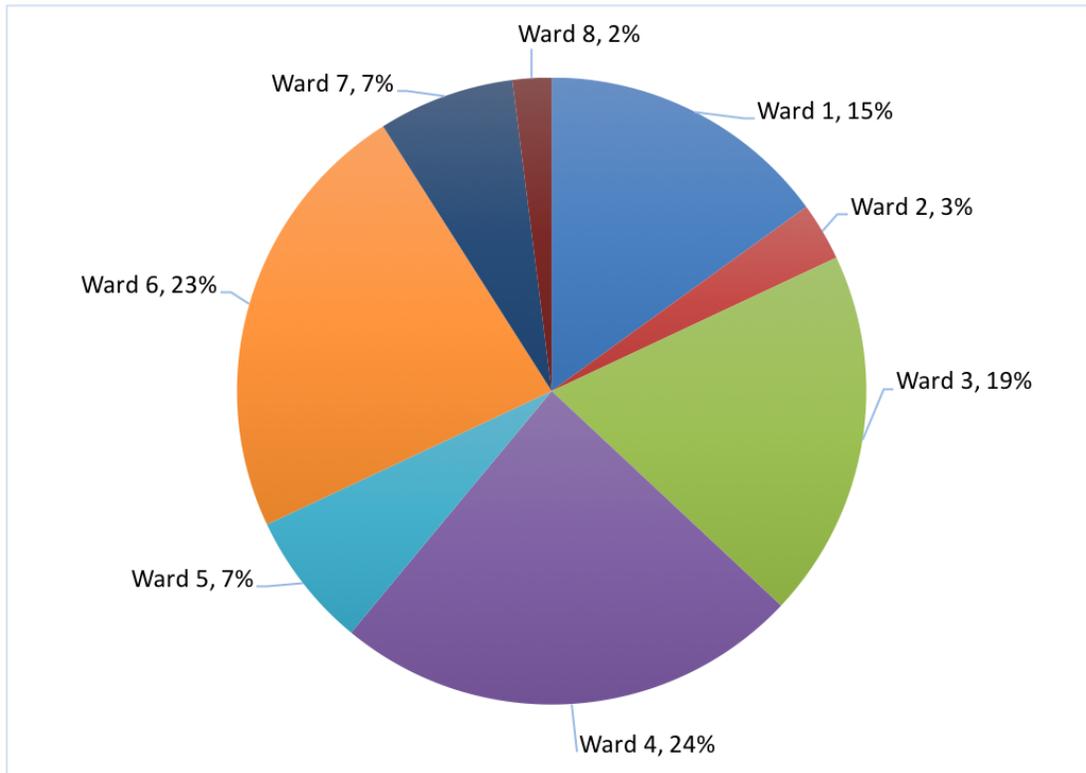
### **Student Assignment Focus Groups (October 2013)**

After the DME’s office selected the Advisory Committee and launched the student assignment and school boundaries review process, and they conducted initially a round of public engagement for the process, a series of focus. The focus groups took place during October 2013—the purpose of the focus groups was to get input from community members, parents, educators, and education stakeholders about “how the current practices and policies of student assignment and school choice affect families and communities” (21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014). Besides gaining valuable feedback another goal of the focus groups was to gain guidance

from the community what principles and issues should guide the Advisory Committee during the process and ultimately included in the final policy recommendations to the Mayor (Stone, et al., 2001). To meet the goal stated above, the DME and Advisory Committee held focus groups throughout the city. Participation in the focus group process was open, but they asked participants to sign up to attend the focus groups. Over 310 participants registered to attend a focus group. Based on the number of people who signed up for each of the focus group opportunities, they could conduct four focus groups at one time at each of the eight locations. In total, they held 22 focus groups with 177 people attending/participating (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014; 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014). Most focus groups were conducted in October 2013. Because of a lack of community voice from east of the Anacostia River (which includes Wards 7 & 8—the two wards with the most school-aged children), they added a focus group in February 2014 to gain increased input from those wards (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014; 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014).

According to a March 2014 report published by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, of the individuals who participated in the focus groups, over 85% of the participants were parents—most commonly the participants were parents of children are yet of school-age. Not all participants identified race but of the 158 participants who did about one fifth, or 30 people, identified themselves as black, over two-thirds, or roughly 104 people, identified themselves as white – less than 3% of participants self-identified as Hispanic/Latinx. Individuals who participated in the focus groups were highly educated: 76% of participants who identified their level of education said they had a graduate degree (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014; 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014).

**Figure 9: Focus Group Participation by Ward**



*Developed by the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process Technical Team/The 21st Century School Fund/The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DC)—March 2014*

Representation from all the city’s wards was an explicit goal of the focus groups but over 60% of the focus group participants were from Wards 3, 4 and 6, which are more affluent areas of the city. The technical team for the committee developed the graphic above to illustrate the level of ward participation in the focus groups. The breakdown of the individuals that took part in the focus groups is vitally important considering that most school-aged children in the city live in Wards 5, 7, and 8. With over two-thirds of the focus group participants self-identifying as white, the “who” that is participating is not reflective of the “who” that is attending DCPS

schools and those most affected by the change of student assignment policies (Brown & Knight, 2005; Hirota & Jacobs, 2003). As noted above, over 60% of the student attend DCPS schools are African American, and 77% of the student served by DCPS qualify for free or reduced lunch. Those demographics are drastically different from the “who,” 76% of focus group participants that self-identified as high-educated and living in the most affluent areas of the city.

### **Focus Group Structure**

As noted above, the initial round of community engagement for the student assignment and school were a series of 22 focus groups. Each of the focus groups followed a similar structure. They asked focus group participants to fill out a consent form to take part. To serve as a facilitating tool for the discussion, they gave participants a survey of proposed principles, or “Guiding Principles Worksheet” (The 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014), to fill out during the group discussion. They designed the survey to assist participants in thinking comprehensively about not only the current issues with the system but to consider the impact that the revision of the student assignment and school boundaries policies would have on their individual communities and the city. The areas highlighted in the survey included guiding principles for participants to rate in the following areas listed below; they encouraged participants to add additional areas as well (The 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, 2014):

**Table 4: Proposed Guiding Principles**

Simple for parents to understand	Simple to administer
Predictable for families	School Proximity to residence
Opportunities for racial/cultural diversity	Opportunities for economically diverse enrollments
Opportunity for academically diverse enrollments	Maximum choice for families
Equitable Access to high-quality programs, staff, & facilities	Efficient use of public funds
Flexibility for local education agencies (LEAs)	Strengthens the system of neighborhood schools
Fully utilization of public school buildings and groups	Others?

A group facilitator conducted each focus group; although the recorded most sessions there was a note taker for each group. Prior to the discussion beginning, each group facilitator shared with the participants an overview of the student assignment and school boundaries review process and highlight the four areas they would divide the discussion into:

- (1) Discussion of the overall student assignment review process;
- (2) Discussion of what works in the current system of student assignment and school choice;
- (3) Discussion of the principles listed on the survey sheet, or what they might add to the list; and finally,
- (4) Discussion/suggestions on how to ensure community engagement and building in and through this process (to keep this process from being divisive).

All the data analyzed for this portion of the research was derived from this process—the survey and feedback forms submitted by the participants, and the notes taken by the group note taker.

## Methods of Analysis

Coding the surveys, feedback forms, and notes taken from the focus groups yielded 2795 excerpts, or comments. A preliminary review of a sample of the document was vital in the initial development of a content analysis scheme to start the coding process. Many of the categories initially developed based on the hypotheses developed early in the research proposal processes (see below). Besides the preliminary codes developed, I added additional categories during the complete, in-depth reading of the documents and notes. I read each comment and coded according to the content analysis scheme—the coding scheme allowed for the opportunity to code each comment for more than one code category at a time. Following the document analysis, I compared the categories to the final policy recommendations of the Advisory Committee—in August 2014, the committee presented the recommendations to Mayor Gray, who promptly accepted them.

**Table 5: Codes and Categories Used for Content Analysis**

Academic Program Quality	Middle School Concerns/Issues
Access	Neighborhood Schools
Allocation of Resources	Out of Boundary Policies/Options
Changing Demographics/Population	Parent/Community Involvement
Charter Schools	Predictability
Choice	Politics
Class/Racial Divide	Poverty
Citywide Planning/Sector Collaboration	Process
Diversity	Proximity
Educational Programming/Curriculum/Program Continuity	Quality
Equity	School Closings/Consolidations
Feeder Patterns	Transparency (Education System/Review Process)
Lottery	Transportation/ Student Mobility
Low-Performing	

## Focus Group Comment Analysis

I applied the content analysis scheme, and the categories listed above to 2795 unique comments made by the 177 focus group participants, the participant variable. Following the coding of the participant comments, I also coded the Advisory Committee's final draft and final student assignment and school using the content analysis scheme, the final policy recommendations variable. I read all the documents in their entirety and coded accordingly. I conducted coding three times—first for a preliminary overview of a sample set from the documents; second, I read and reviewed the documents in depth for the initial coding process; and finally, all documents were re-read and reviewed to validate the process by conducting a second coding round.

Earlier in this article, it mentioned the survey, or “Guiding Principles Worksheet” given to focus group participants to help direct the group discussion. This survey was a starting point for participants and although many comments addressed these guiding principles, participants had the liberty to direct the discussion in other areas, I reflected this in the coding of their comments. Some codes, or categories, applied to the data reviewed came from the survey provided to participants but others had a more organic development sparked by reading the comments of participants.

The software used to conduct the content analysis process was Dedoose—an internet-based content analysis database software. I uploaded each of the documents to the database and analyzed by the application of the code categories developed as a part of the content analysis scheme.

After two rounds of coding the results of the analysis were:

**Table 6: Content Analysis Coding Results**

Code Category	Number of Times Code Applied to a Focus Group Participant Comment	Code Category	Number of Times Code Applied to a Focus Group Participant Comment
Neighborhood Schools	226	Out of Boundary	96
Academic Program Quality	223	Policies/Options	
Equity	202	Middle School	88
Choice	173	Concerns/Issues	
Lottery	171	Educational	77
Allocation of Resources	162	Programming/Curriculum	
Charter Schools	161	Offerings/Program	
Parent/Community	154	Continuity	
Involvement		Quality	72
Process	146	Poverty	66
Feeder Patterns	141	Low Performing	58
Predictability	129	Citywide Planning and	57
Proximity	125	Vision/Sector Collaboration	
Access	122	Class/Culture/Racial Divide	38
Diversity	120	School	35
Transportation/Student	107	Closings/Consolidation	
Mobility		Changing	16
Transparency	97	Demographics/Population	
(System/Review Process)		Politics	12

Following the content analysis process there were a few things that became clear—several code categories has similarities and significant overlap. The purpose for the second round of coding was to gain an even deeper understanding of the topics that were being discussed and to see if the reviewer perceive the participants comments through the same lens in the second round of analysis. For example, many participants discussed feeder patterns as an issue of system predictability.

Likewise, other code categories had similar overlaps or mentions together. The categories of ‘Poverty’, ‘Class/Culture/Racial Divide’ and ‘Diversity’ have similar overlapping mentions by participants—many participants appeared to have considered the terms to be

synonymous with the other. Two codes frequently coupled was Lottery with the category Predictability.

The content analysis process highlighted several code category areas with frequent co-occurrence:

**Academic Program Quality**—during the coding process this category, for coding a participant comment, often appeared in co-occurrence with other categories such as ‘Access,’ ‘Choice,’ ‘Allocation of Resources,’ and ‘Diversity.’

**Charter Schools**—frequently this code category appeared in co-occurrence with other category areas such as ‘Choice,’ and ‘Academic Program Quality.’

**Neighborhood Schools**—had a frequent co-occurrence with code categories such as ‘Lottery,’ ‘Proximity,’ ‘Transportation,’ ‘Academic Program Quality,’ ‘Access,’ ‘Equity,’ ‘Diversity,’ and ‘Parent/Community Involvement.’

No matter the focus group or the direction of the discussion, many participants and discussions always came back to citywide strategic planning, vision for the public education system, and cross-sector collaboration. Although there was a code for Citywide Planning and Vision/Sector Collaboration, most of the conversation that occurred regarding this issue fell into the category areas of ‘Charter’ and ‘Neighborhood Schools.’ One glaring finding from the analysis was that while participants saw the option of charter or neighborhood schools as an either-or choice, other participants did not appear to note a distinction between the two in their comments. The discussion on this topic has commonly highlighted issues of a lack of planning, collaboration, and coordination between the two sectors.

After I conducted a second round of the content analysis process, I became interested in analyzing the documents again because many of the comments spoke to a category, I had not initially considered in my coding scheme—a citywide investment in strong public schools. Every comment, suggestion, or issue raised by the focus group participants ultimately spoke to a need for a focus on the strengthening of all schools in the city. Frequently several of the focus group conversations and comments by participants questioned why improving the public education system, strengthening the city’s schools, and creating a citywide vision for public education was not the focus first, before starting a conversation around the student assignment and school boundaries policies of DCPS. In reviewing the documents by using the coding lens of a citywide investment in strong public schools, the number of times that code applied to a focus group participant comment was 182 times.

In the beginning of the final report issued by the Advisory Committee for Student Assignment in the fall of 2014 it states:

*The vision and recommendations of this report were guided by voices we heard throughout the city... focus groups were conducted in every ward of the city, through which nearly 200 parents and community members shared their perspectives and experiences with student assignment and school choice issues and provided feedback on the principles that should guide policy recommendations and boundary changes.*

(DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment Final Report, 2014)

As further noted in the final report, “everything on the table,” regarding making adjustments to the current policies, but that the community would be a part of guiding the process and the final recommendations. As discussed above, the focus groups conducted as the

initial part of the process were the first step at having a deeper conversation with the community around which issues needed to attention as a part of this process but ultimately addressed. The Advisory submitted the final recommendations to Mayor Gray in August 2014 and he immediately accepted. As noted in the final report and in the material shared with the committee and the public throughout the process, DME tasked the Advisory Committee with “[l]istening to the community and serving as insightful interpreters of public sentiment, concerns, and questions” (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, pp. 2 & 4). Thus, the final recommendations were to reflect that listening and interpretation of the feedback from the community. Later in the chapter I discuss this topic in further detail.

#### Comments from Focus Group Participants

*I would love to send my son to Noyes (the participant’s neighborhood school) ... his friends would be there. But I can’t. Instead, I’m going on 20 plus different school open houses. My husband is afraid... I keep sending him invitations, ‘we have this open house and this application.’ — I mean it is overwhelming. It is overwhelming. My neighborhood school should be a real quality option and work! Why should my child have to leave our neighborhood for ‘quality’?*

*I come from a time when — my parents just moved to a neighborhood because they liked the neighborhood and you went to the neighborhood school, and you did fine. But now you move to your neighborhood—and though I would love for our child to go to our neighborhood school we don’t feel that our neighborhood school is not an option because it doesn’t seem to progress as we would like, nor does it offer the programming like other schools in the city do... so I have to navigate this whole system.*

*And that is not fair.”*

*“The goal should be to invest in strong schools for everyone with equitable access to high quality programs—neighborhood schools can provide that access to all, in a fair and logical way.”*

The guiding principles established for the process after the initial round of public engagement for the process, 22 focus groups, were:

**Table 7: Round 1: Guiding Principles Summary**

Improvements in neighborhood schools, particularly those serving low-income communities, so that every school offers comprehensive, rich, and challenging programs supported by a positive school culture	Structures that support coordination, cooperation, and joint planning within DCPS and between DCPS and public charter schools
An adequate number of seats in DCPS zoned schools to ensure equitable access to and utilization of schools of right	Reduced travel burdens for students, particularly for low-income families and communities

As mentioned in the final report and other guiding process documents, the focus group engagement is the primary shaping mechanism for the process and a vital part of the early foundation for the first three policy examples. Focus Groups proposed the first draft of updated school attendance zones and school feeder pathways and then shared/presented those proposals for public feedback at a series of community working group meetings held in April 2014.

For my research, the content analysis of the focus group raised more questions for me. I wanted to better understand not just how this initial process worked to shape the review process that moved forward, but I also wanted to better understand why many people who participated, in varying degrees, believe this process was one needs replication. The focus group comment analysis was just the first step in examining what public participation in solving policy issues can be a process of shared decision-making authority. Looking at the connection between the focus group comments and the final recommendations of the advisory committee was an example of how such processes contribute to the ability of the public to have access and influence in public policy. The influence of the focus groups was clear in the final recommendations.

From the focus groups to participant interviews and the analysis of process materials, it also mirrored themes that came from the focus group analysis in the finding gleaned from latter part of my research.

## **Part II: A Deeper Analysis—Participant Interviews & Document Review**

As the researcher, I believe greater clarity and understanding of public participation, through the process of shared decision-making, would allow for public education planning and decision-making processes to have the influence of those most impacted and lead to the legitimacy of the policy solutions. The first part of my data analysis looked at how the focus group participation, and the resulting feedback and comments, worked to shape the process to review and recommendations for the DCPS's student assignment and school boundaries. To gain a deeper understanding of this case, the student assignment review process, and to look at how it fits into my interest in studying how shared authority in decision-making can work to address

the tensions between democracy and administration, I did additional exploration of this case through the process of participant interviews and a document review of process materials. For this study I am merging of the basic tenets of public participation with the theories of deliberative democracy, inclusion, public participation as a continuum, and coproduction as a framework for understanding power-sharing arrangements in decision-making processes. Next, I will explain the process I followed for the participant interviews and the document review. Following the explanations, I have organized the findings from the document review and participant interviews through the four findings noted at the beginning of the chapter in Figure 11: Four Major Findings of the Research on page 88.

### **Participant Interviews**

In the first part of this research, the coding of focus group comments from the initial round of public engagement for the student assignment and school boundary process, clarified a need to do a deeper dive in order to understanding the issues raised by the focus group participants. Many of the focus group participants spoke to a need to strengthen all schools in the city and to do a significant improvement of schools—both goals were a peripheral goal of the process but not explicit in the tasks of the process. As the researcher, I wondered why so many of the focus group participants noted a need for system improvement. It connects the legacy of this city to this repeated feedback and the experiences of mistrust and lack of accountability that seemed to be foundational to the comments made by the focus group participants. To better understand that undercurrent, I conducted participant interviews to better understand not only the process but the other issues impacting the process. The interview process took place between April 2017 through January 2018. I conducted each interview in-person or via phone

and followed a semi-structured interview protocol, guided and informed by the findings from the previously coded focus group comments. The interview protocol allowed for the interviews to be more open-ended to allow for additional themes to emerge and for flexibility, thus allowing the interview participants with me to be more organic.

The interview guide used for the participant interviews included a set of open-ended questions listed below:

1. Please describe your role as a member of the Washington, DC community?
2. Please describe how you have engaged with City residents on issues related to public education and public education planning?
  - a. Please describe the kinds of exchanges or processes you have been a part of?
  - b. What kind of information was shared?
  - c. What type of information was collected?
  - d. Please describe how this information reflected the “community”?
  - e. What was the feedback loop?
3. How would you characterize the nature of the relationship between the City and the residents?

I found the individuals interviewed for this project through publicly available documents that identified their participation in the process of examination. The individuals interviewed included:

- o administrative and school leaders for DC Public Schools;
- o actors in the Mayor’s Office;
- o Advisory Committee members for the process;
- o and leaders from the community/people who participated.

As the researcher, I reached out to each of the potential interview participants to explain my research and the desire to set up a time to interview the participant. After each interview participant agreed to the interview, a location and date of the interview participants choice. All interview participants received a list of questions before the interview and the interview consent form. I recorded each interview and then each interview transcribed, word for word, by a third-party to ensure the authenticity of each participants comments. Following each interview, the participants could review the transcript of their interview to ensure the authenticity of their comments and to provide any additional feedback based on the results of their interview transcription. Each interview participant had an equal opportunity to review their transcription and make follow up comments.

The following is a discussion of the findings from the interviews along with details that support each of the highlighted findings. The form of a case study was the most appropriate way to examine this process intensively, with a deep understanding through the description of the context of the case and the experience of those involved (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995, 1998). Patton (1990) further notes, “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 278). The 21 participant interviews conducted allowed me, as the researcher, to gain thick, rich descriptions of the process from the perspectives and experiences of its participants (Geertz, 1974) and provides the opportunity for the reader of this research to understand through study through the lens of its participants. The participant interviews give me the ability to document the broad range of participant experiences, and their voices, in the process through the use of “thick descriptions” (Denzin, 2001). This form of data collection was

fundamental to the exploration of this process and gave me the ability to uncover the valuable information for the purpose of addressing the research questions (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

To let the voices of the interview participants speak for themselves, in this section I am using illustrative quotes taken from the interview transcripts in order to clearly share the perspectives of the participants. Sharing their direct quotes authentically portrayed the richness of participant experiences and the complexity of the topic. Interwoven into the interviews was descriptive data appropriate to further clarify the comments shared by the participant as it applied to the questions being addressed by the interviewee. As the interviewer, the open-end questions allowed for flexibility in the interview to follow the themes and discussion shared by the interview participant.

### **Document Review & Analysis**

Besides the focus group comment analysis and participant interviews, I did an additional analysis of process documents. In following the method for document analysis as outlined by Bowen (2009) and O’Leary (2014), I collected a variety of public records and physical evidence—which included process documents, meetings notes, agendas, community meeting participant data, and news articles—for review. The documents analyzed for the review can be found in Appendix A.

In following the method for document analysis as outlined by Bowen (2009) and O’Leary (2014), I selected an array of documents, as noted above, and I considered the objectivity and perspectives inherent in each document. As a researcher, I evaluated the original purpose, or intent, of the document, and the target audience of the document (Bowen 2009). I considered

the perspective of the author, if they were a firsthand witness or if they relied on secondhand sources or resources (Bowen 2009) and took into account the style, tone, agenda, facts or opinions present in the document (O’Leary, 2014). I examined the documents analyzed to further understand the central questions of my research regarding the role of shared authority in public education planning and decision-making (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The thematic nature of this analysis takes emerging themes and makes them into categories used for further analysis, focused reading and re-reading of data, and then coding and categorizing as additional integrated data for the researcher to consider in their examination of the topic being explored (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Thus, as noted by Bowen, the process of document analysis is the evaluation of “... documents in such a way that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed” (2009, p. 33). So this form of analysis was useful in helping me, as the researcher, paint a broad, overall picture of the topic and case being explored—it allows me to give further evidence of the process in action (Bowen, 2009).

Besides the final report and recommendation, I also analyzed other documents and materials used to guide and support the process. While I could gather several documents, there were only a few which fit the context of the research questions being raised in this case study exploration. The full list of supporting documents and materials analyzed can be found in Appendix A. Throughout the student assignment process, the news sources published various articles regarding the process. I worked to collect those articles, read, re-read, and code for themes pertaining to the process of public engagement, public input, and feedback. Below I have listed the articles of interests and pulled out full quotes to illustrate the conversation happening during the process.

As a final step in the document review process, I reviewed and analyzed the final report from the Advisory Committee which outlines the final recommendations from the advisory committee, the advisory committee and technical team, who compiled the final report, highlights the public input and integrating public sentiments in a variety of areas. Early in the report, the letter from the advisory committee highlights the how the public input shaped the recommendations, and ultimately the final report. Throughout the report, the advisory committee appears to espouse that the ‘road map’ they outlined in the final report was developed in partnership with families/communities to move the city forward regarding its educational environment—as noted throughout the document, the final report reflected the sentiments, participation, input, and feedback received from the public throughout the process.

I used the document review process as an additional layer of validation of the themes that emerged from the participant interviews. For this process, I collected the relevant documents and news articles. Following the collection, I looked back at the themes that emerged from the participant interviews to create a framework and lens for reading and reviewing the relevant documents and articles. I read through each document three times. The first reading was for context and understanding. The second reading was to see what themes emerged from the documents and I used the final reading to see how the themes that emerged from the documents worked to validate the themes shared by the interview participants. I also used the documents to validate one statement made by the advisory committee in the final report:

*The clarity, attention and force of what we (the advisory committee) heard from so many community members and stakeholders over the past nine months in connection with the*

*development of these recommendations give us confidence that they reflect a vision that is firmly rooted in the desires and aspirations of DC families* (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 2).

This statement is one closely tied to my area of interest as a researcher—how public participation in a process of shared decision-making authority, inclusive of a public participation design focused on access and the public’s ability to influence public policy, would allow for public education planning and decision-making processes to have the influence of those most impacted. Following the process as aforementioned can lead to the legitimacy of the policy solutions and can work to mitigate the inherent tensions between democracy and governance/administration. Through a merging of the basic tenets of public participation with the theories of deliberative democracy, inclusion, public participation as a continuum, and coproduction, I worked to gain a deeper understanding of the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education planning and policy decision-making processes as it showed up through the insights offered in the participant interviews and the documents reviewed. From the interviews and document analysis, coupled with my understanding from the content analysis of the focus group comments, the following four themes/findings emerged:

**Table 8: Four Major Findings of this Research**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>
<b>FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, &amp; Well-Designed Process</b>
<i>A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.</i>
<b>FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope &amp; Tasks</b>
<i>Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.</i>
<b>FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation</b>
<i>Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.</i>

I have organized the following discussion by theme and share the findings from the data through illustrative quotes and passages from the participant interviews and documents reviewed.

**Finding 1:**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>

Most interview participants spoke to a need for deep knowledge and a clear understanding the history and context in which a process. In the documents reviewed this sentiment came up often. This historical and contextual understanding matters, as it is directly connected to issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure trust in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to connect to its outcomes. In chapter three I laid out many of the specifics of the case study and the landscape in which the student assignment and school boundary review process took place. The District of Columbia has a sorted, unique, and complex history and while the primary goal of this research study was to examine the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education planning and policy decision-making processes it was clear from the responses of the interview participants that city's history and the context within this process was taking place mattered. Many scholars have noted the vital role both trust and time play in processes of public participation and this finding is highly significant in terms of the overwhelming number of participants who note both the positive and negative impact trust and time played in the student assignment and school boundary review process. The ability to develop trust, particularly in a space where the process participants have varied experiences, takes time and a clear understanding of how such a process can impact not just the people who participate but also those who do not participate or do not realize the process even impacts them.

The first policy brief, which focused on student assignment in the District and school choice policies, published by the technical team for the student assignment and school boundaries review process focused on laying out the case for why student assignment and its

review was necessary. The document notes that school attendance, and relevant policies have been in place since 1925 (Policy Brief #1, October 2013). Of the many things outlined in this brief, one of the most interesting elements was its deep discussion on the historical context in which this process is taking place and its meaning for students:

*The history of student assignment in the District of Columbia is laden with issues of race, class, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation. Although judicial and Congressional actions in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s resulted in legal desegregation and the development of partial home rule for District residents, those developments did not resolve the issues. For decades, African-Americans had no direct input into the oversight of their schools, which were characterized by overcrowding, poor-quality facilities in most cases, and second-hand books and materials that had been discarded from the white schools.*

*Even as late as 1967 [around the same time as the last student assignment review process]—12 years after segregation by law had been overturned and at a time when African-Americans made up more than 90% of DCPS's enrollment—African-Americans were still limited by quota to a maximum of four out of nine seats on the D.C. Board of Education. D.C. and its schools remain racially and socio-economically segregated to a great degree, and both the funding for D.C.'s public schools and the policies controlling their operation remain subject to the approval of Congress.*

*In 1952, parents of African-American students excluded from the recently opened all-white Sousa Junior High School in Anacostia brought the case of **Bolling v. Sharpe** to the Supreme Court to challenge the segregation of the D.C. schools. In 1954, alongside the landmark case of **Brown v. Board of Education**, the Supreme Court ruled in **Bolling** that “racial segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia is a denial of the due process of law guaranteed by the 5th Amendment.” As a result, DCPS was required to relinquish race as a factor in student assignment, leaving residence as the basis for its student-assignment policy. On September 13, 1954, DCPS began implementing its new student-assignment policy and related desegregation plan with those students who were registering for the first time or who had moved from one part of the city to another.*

*In the decade after **Bolling**, many D.C. families—the majority of them white—left the District in such large numbers that the phenomenon was termed an exodus.<sup>14</sup> By 1966, after twelve years of “white flight” out of D.C. and a substantial influx of African-American families from other states, 91% of the students in DCPS were African-American.*

*During these tumultuous years of change, DCPS implemented a mix of student-assignment policies that included both segregative and integrative policies. According to the findings of the federal court in the landmark D.C. case of **Hobson v. Hansen I** (1967), DCPS protected and facilitated segregation through [various]... policies...*

***Ultimately, in the face of the demographic changes of the 1960s, DCPS’s integrative actions** that occurred post **Hobson I** (including the special-admissions programs described*

*below) had little effect on overall segregation in the schools, and to this day the majority of them are homogeneous in terms of race.*

This outlining of historical context shows the role race has played in not only student assignment policies in the District but the overall administration of public education. This overview of the history surrounding public education in the District highlights the emotional role the administration, or lack thereof, public education plays in the experiences of many of the participants of the student assignment process in 2013 and the ‘hot button’ issue it is for the city.

I connect this conversation to a few of the comments shared in throughout the participant interviews:

**Elected Official:** *Our city has failed to recognize the power of education and the value it adds to the longevity of our city and the fact we see still pervasive poverty in the city. Historically, the focus in the District of Columbia has not been on education, it’s been more on jobs and getting people jobs.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *How do you navigate or address these big overlaying issues of race and class... that has been plaguing the city for a long time? Our city is highly segregated in terms of housing and that housing segregation leads to segregation in our schools because we have a right to a school by where you live, that has a lot of political and policy implications. Changing our school boundaries alone will not fix that problem or the other issues at hand.*

**Appointed City Official:** *You try to engage in ideally sincere and authentic ways, because of all these dynamics we have been talking about you get a very skewed response is along*

*race and class lines, so you hear much louder, more insistent, and I would say entitled voices from certain parts of the community and it's almost like (to my mind) that you almost have to like sample and then adjust based on who the actual community and impacted group is. So, it's not just like 100 people said this and 20 people said that. Well, the 20 people who said represent way more than half the city, and so I'd have to give those 20 people more weight.*

One document the technical team for the advisory committee used to provide framing for understanding the historical and racial context of the process was the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division's *Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools*. This document outlined the effects of racial segregation and racial isolation in public education and offered suggestions to a school district on how to avoid the challenges such practices can foster. As the document noted,

*"education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments... It is the very foundation of good citizenship." Providing students with diverse, inclusive educational opportunities from an early age is crucial to achieving the nation's educational and civic goals.*

This document noted various issue areas mentioned throughout the community engagement for the student assignment process and from individual advisory committee members. As noted in various other meeting documentation and summaries, race and racial segregation in DCPS seemed to be of paramount concern to not only the advisory committee but

also to the public. In this document there is mention of the social ills and overall impact of racially isolated schools:

*where schools lack a diverse student body or are racially isolated (i.e., are composed overwhelmingly of students of one race), they may fail to provide the full panoply of benefits that K-12 schools can offer. The academic achievement of students at racially isolated schools often lags behind that of their peers at more diverse schools. Racially isolated schools often have fewer effective teachers, higher teacher turnover rates, less rigorous curricular resources (e.g., college preparatory courses), and inferior facilities and other educational resources. Reducing racial isolation in schools is also important because students who are not exposed to racial diversity in school often lack other opportunities to interact with students from different racial backgrounds.*

While this document uses a legal framework to discuss diversity in public education and shares both race-neutral and racial classification approaches, the areas of this document that speak to how a district may consider race as a “plus factor” might be why the advisory committee found this guidance useful (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2011).

In both participant interviews and in the review of other documents, there is significant evidence of a historical (even generational) lack of trust between the city, government and city leaders, and its residents is well documented and very pronounced in some communities, while in some newer communities the building trust is still being gained.

One *Education Week* article noted:

*Some parents and advocates believe the district needs to do more to bolster neighborhood schools and to close very wide racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps across the city.*

While a *Washington Post* article stated:

*The boundary overhaul is shot through with tensions over race and class, and it has spurred something close to a panic among parents who believe the changes could cut off access to well-regarded schools.*

The sentiments of distrust were also clear in the participant interview conversations. The conversations were not only about the legacy of distrust but the lingering vestiges of why certain groups of residents continue to be hesitant to engage or trust DC government officials:

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Low-income black people in the city have been screwed again, again, and again. There is no reason that any logical human being would look back at all those incidences and say, "I should not trust." I remember talking to folks and saying, "I don't expect you to trust me." Like how you I expect you to trust me.*

**DCPS Official, Former Appointed City Official:** *I think it's like this hate/love situation, right? Our residents and many of our advocates, DCPS advocates or whatever are ultimately wanting to support DCPS and want to support the district and are committed and passionate about these issues. But there is also a lot of distrust in whether the government is equally committed and passionate and willing to do what is best for the city. I think the trust issues are a big thing which is why processes are so important because of that. I feel like it is a love/hate. There is also accountability like we know we*

*are accountable to the public and to our stakeholders ultimately, but I think there are a lot of trust issues in certain areas.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Various issues, like the school closures during Michelle Rhee's tenure, and there have been huge breaks in trust and each time we've [as a government and DC Public Schools] had to build back from. I think we have come a long way since then, but we are not there yet. That takes time. There is still a lot of trust, sort of mistrust, that exists...I don't think it's ever going to go away, I think it is the inherent nature of the relationship of these two entities, the government and public.*

**Parent, Community Leader:** *From a historical perspective, our neighborhood had always been safe from processes like this so there was no need to participate. We trusted the government would do right by us and leave our neighborhood alone. We knew about the issues in other neighborhoods but didn't think it would impact us. We didn't have much of an argument to make because making it a racial issue was kind of ridiculous due to the make-up of our community.*

While a clear understanding of history and context is vital—the people's experiences also play a role. All of the 21 interview participants noted their perceptions of the historical lack of trust experienced by many communities in the city. Each of the interview participants also noted experiences of city residents and the hurriedness or disingenuous actions of past processes.

**Former DCPS Official, Community Leader:** *If the conversation we are attempting to have is not the one the community is having, why should they want to participate? Why should they even legitimize the process? Some complaints I heard a lot was the reason or rationale for why people did not want to participate, they felt like even if they*

*participated, they wouldn't be heard. That's happened many times before. Many times, the experience people had with government was one of disenfranchisement and that leads them to believe that it doesn't matter if they participate because the decisions have already been made before the 'engagement' even started.*

**Former DCPS Parent, Community Leader:** *I was overall impressed with the process for the boundaries, it was well organized, and I think people paid attention to what people were saying. But based on my past experiences with government, I came to the process with a very cynical attitude.*

**DCPS Parent, Community Leader:** *For the most part, we have a system [of public education] right now where the only way you can guarantee access to a good school is if you buy it.*

**DCPS Official:** *You know, we still ask parents to give us the same information multiple times and people have built up a tolerance for it. We continue to ask for something, but many times show no results.*

**DC Government Official:**... *so many government agencies don't touch people and so [people] are basing their experience on the one bad experience they had with someone or something and you feel it applies to the whole government. This feeling makes it so hard to buy into something or believe in anything because of your past experiences. What people don't realize is that things can change so rapidly but many people are living in the past... there are also times when there is a sense of revisionist history.*

Understanding the past and the distrust stemming from experiences takes time. While they had not undertaken the student assignment and school boundary process since 1968, in 2013 the legacy issues from the 1960s and the years that followed still lingered in the minds and experiences of its residents. From start to finish the process lasted a little over a year, but the issues of distrust have been mounting, and festering, in the city since its establishment. Time allows for the fostering of relationships and the creation of the foundation on which trust is build.

**Community Member:** *In this city people have a strong affinity to their neighborhood schools and public education.*

**Advocate, Former DCPS Parent:** *You have to take the time to get to know a community before trying to engage.*

**Community Leader:** *Getting to those most impacted and trying to get their participation requires using networks with known and trusted community members from communities that are historically less represented.*

**Community Member, Parent:** *Because of the legacy of the city, things often fall along race or class line, it gets contentious.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *It takes time for people to get to know each other and work with one another and for someone to hear their voices. With time you get to know these people as people, who and what they care about, so they aren't just objectified or made out to be the enemy. Time allows for the raising of understanding and the ability to build capacity.*

Although most of the interview participants seemed to appreciate the theoretical foundation laid out for the process, the questions and comments connected to the historical perspectives of the city and a need to pay attention to the contextual aspects related to the issues of student assignment we ever-present. This ever-presence was also clear in the advisory committee’s conversations. Below I share two comments, that further support this idea, from the sixth advisory committee meeting:

*Some values may not be equal depending on where you live in the city—a mile in Ward 7 is not the same as a mile in Ward 3.*

*People’s experience with their rights is reflected in whether they [know how to] exercise those rights.*

## Finding 2:

### **FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, & Well-Designed Process**

*A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.*

All the interview participants, and throughout the review of the process documents and articles, expressed a need for clarity of the strategy for action and a well-designed process as a tool for success in processes of public participation. This clarity can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning. One of the first interviews I conducted was with a DC Government Official who stated, “[w]here there is not

*transparency then no, there cannot be any trust.” This one quote sums up the sentiments shared by all the interview participants/documents reviewed and the issues of time and the foundational strategy and overall design of a process makes transparency possible. The need for time in a process coupled with the establishment of a clear plan, strategy, laced with modes and methods of engagement, design was a common thread throughout the interviews and in the documents reviewed.*

Some participants discussed how there is an ability to address concerns if on the front end, and during the process, there is time made for meaningful discussion, thus leading to a feeling of authenticity:

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *It is all about the texture of the conversation... you know when you are in it and you can tell that it is meaningful, where they [the government] is really listening to you and there is a chance that they will address what is on your mind and in a context that there is a greater likelihood you might say, okay this is a genuine back-and-forth. The authentic listening makes room for the development of shared goals.*

**Community Member:** *Without making time to engage it is easy to undervalue things... Time also allows for the appropriate strategy to come together...” in the design the gains from teaming up can become clear.*

**DCPS Official:** *When you can show people not just that you listen to them but that you take their concerns into account and come up with a solution that reflects both your priorities and their concerns that is the win.*

*Listening → creating the plan → sharing the plan → making changes based on feedback*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Authentic back-and-forth discussion between the citizenry and the government is the most powerful exercise in democracy. It is communities saying what they want to see in their public schools and pushing the government in that direction, that is the most powerful manifestation of the public...*

Taking the time to listen allows for a process to not only address concerns are raised but it helps to clarify the problem statement, find a way to tackle the tough issues, and address the “low-hanging fruit:”

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *There needs to be some clarity on the issue we are working to address.... if you [as a community member] don't think a problem exists because I think it exists, we are actually probably really far apart. We would work to solve the problem differently.*

**Former City Official:** *At the end of the day, if you listen to the community and respond to the community that is probably what will be the most sustainable politically.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *You have to develop guideposts and not be in denial about tackling the elephant in the room.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The thing is that people's perceptions and people's feelings about the reality are real and valid. There has to be a willingness to go where the evidence and where the input leads...*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *It is about asking questions and gut checking...*

**City Official:** *Our city's shifting structures makes it challenging to know how to engage.*

*But engaging families is so important as they are an incredibly rich source of information.*

**Former City Official, Philanthropy Professional:** *What are the granular questions? What are the investments we are trying to make? Who are the right people to help answer the questions?*

More than half of the interview participants talked about a need to develop trust and establish a clear strategy for action through early and ongoing engagement:

**City Official:** *... being an honest-broker and establishing trust with the community is essential. That takes time. History matters—knowing that will give you a greater understanding of the context and legacy in which you are operating with the community.*

**City Official:** *... it was very important to go out to the community early and often to try to establish a baseline of trust. That means not just engaging when you want something or a particular outcome.*

**DCPS Official:** *In order to breakdown some of those barriers there needs to be engagement and decision-making opportunities on an ongoing basis.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Former City Official:** *There are various drivers for participation. You have to be intentional about designing a lot of different methods to get input. You have to lower the cost for entry or the threshold for engagement. Not everyone wants to engage deeply.*

As noted throughout various documents for the process, the advisory committee and the DCPS leadership noted:

*The goal of this process is to develop fair and clear school choice and student assignment policies that reflect what families want...[t]o clarify what rights and responsibilities families and schools have regarding access to public schools...*

*This process will not be successful without extensive public engagement and input.*

*Families who send their children to public school and residents who are invested in the social and economic well-being of the city all have a stake in the policies that govern DCPS school assignment. For this reason, we have multiple opportunities for parents and community members to get involved and provide input throughout the process.*

- *Participate in a Focus Group*
- *Volunteer to join a Working Group*
- *Share your ideas and thoughts on EngageDC.org*
- *Attend citywide community dialogues*
- *Participate in an online survey*

*... I am confident that together we will do what is best for students and families.*

(Citation: Letter to Parents and Frequently Asked Questions—October 2013)

In order to clarify of the strategy for action, and to provide tools for success to spark meaningful interactions, the technical team created various policy briefs to help guide and deepen the understanding of the process. In Policy Brief #2, published in January 2014, the purpose of this brief was to lie out the various considerations, and causes or effects, of the historical context and other factors student assignment and choice. They developed this data to provide:

*... information [to] help stakeholders identify key city and public-education factors that affect the relationships between families, communities, and public education in relation to student assignment and school boundary policies.*

The intent of the information shared in this brief was to “... help expand public discussion of the relationship of families and communities with their schools beyond individual personal experiences” (Policy Brief #3, January 2014, p. 3). This brief was an early part of the capacity building process, to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, to foster meaningful interactions. The brief describes much of the contextual and historical information of the city, as outlined in chapter 3 of this dissertation, and provides additional context to give a foundation for understanding what elements might be helpful in moving the conversation and process forward.

**Finding 3:**

**FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope & Tasks**

*Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.*

Throughout most of the interview conducted, and in the document review, the importance of time, strategy, and process design was a common theme. Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion. Most interview participants discussed how clarifying the process context through conversation and information sharing, by setting expectations for the modes and methods of engagement, and establishing feedback loops helps to:

- o Narrow the focus and objectives of the process;

- o Collectively establishes the vision for success or the ‘why’ of a process;
- o Ensures that actionable items rise to the top;
- o Leads to transparency and accountability; and,
- o Reduces barriers to access for participation and clear channels for communication.

Finding 3.1—A clear strategy and process design inclusive of early and frequent engagement touch points can work to refine and narrow the focus and objectives of the process.

**Former DCPS Official:** *I think the ideal is when there has been an exchange of ideas and clarity from each person’s point of view along with a commitment to compromise on a resolution as much as humanly possible. When it’s an honest exchange of those ideas or perspectives, you know the perspectives are real... you know they are validated.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *I remember feeling immediately uneasy about the process because I didn’t understand the goal... The student assignment process we took the time to refine and understand the scope of the task and the possible outcomes. Our role [as advisory committee members] was clear.*

**Community Member, Parent:** *Hallmarks of real community engagement... well it should be (1) a city wide question that people can connect to; (2) People need to believe in what is being undertaken—a commitment to a perspective and to can see that their input matters; (3) there should be a genuine response to the points and issues raised—real engagement with the ideas people are offering*

**Former DCPS Official:** *I actually don’t walk into a situation thinking I know more. I actually walk into a situation assuming there are things I don’t know, and I’m interested in hearing what someone else’s perspective is, and then based on that usually there is*

*commonality. It's meaningful dialog... Those kinds of authentic connections provide clarity. This kind of clarity can give credibility so you can refer back to the discussion as a level for the legitimacy of the process or implementation of something.*

Additional evidence of this finding was clear in the advisory committee meeting notes. The committee discussed, in their seventh meeting held in May 2014, how the community input from the public meetings, and the understanding of other relevant work being done throughout the city, should guide their thinking around the process.

*We can't have unrealistic expectations for this process, but we also would not want to miss the opportunity. We could hit the target or not. We have created a moment where public education is the topic of conversation in the city. In this discussion a lot more than education is coming to the surface. We owe it to those who have participated to bring those messages forward and be mindful of the process.*

*There is a lot going on in the District to address these problems besides this Committee. Planning and Economic Development for instance can address some of these problems with inclusionary zoning, and other programs. The Committee could refer to these other agency efforts in their recommendation as well.*

In the notes analyzed from the advisory committee also highlighted the concern that many advisory committee members had about the varied levels of engagement across the city—they noted it being “concerning” because of their desire to ensure the final recommendations were inclusive of a variety of perspectives:

*There was a total of 410 participants in the first round of meetings (Dunbar and Anacostia were on April 5th and April 8th at Coolidge). There were fewer attendees at Anacostia than at Dunbar and Coolidge. However, the numbers at Anacostia went up substantially for the second round of Community Working Group meetings (April 24, Coolidge and April 28th Dunbar and Anacostia) thanks to efforts by Advisory Committee members. While the total number of participants at the second round of Community Working Group meetings went down a bit to 389. Most participants identified themselves as a “parent” with the next highest type of participant as “community member.” (note: Anacostia is located in Ward 8, one of the most impoverished areas of the city with the largest number of school-aged children) (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

*Some values may not be equal depending on where you live in the city—a mile in Ward 7 is not the same as a mile in Ward 3. (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

*We are in a unique position. We have more of a finger on the pulse of education in the city than any other set of people right now. I personally feel a responsibility around that. It is not about schools only – it is about public services to every block in the city. Quality schools are a hugely important part of this. Short of bussing I don’t know how to address inequality. (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

*If you look at racial make-up in schools of ward 7 & 8 then you see it’s in de facto segregated schools. This is a housing issue and an economic issue as well. And until we*

*see real racial integration in the city, then we are going to have to do something more for schools East of the River. (Community Working Group Meeting notes, June 2014)*

Finding 3.2 – Opportunities for frequent and authentic engagement opportunities can work to clarify the process scope and tasks through the collective establishment of the vision for success or the ‘why’ of a process.

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The narrative is important. I have heard my community members say they are trying to reconcile their past experiences with the new conversations they are being asked to engage in. I think, quite frankly, because they had been so disrespected in the past they were hesitant to engage.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The personal connection is what sparks the desire to get involved.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *Well first we have to help people understand the why before we just jump right into it [a process]. We have to design a process where people understand what we are trying to do....*

**DCPS Official:** *I think often folks get frustrated with it [the process] because they don't understand why something that sounds so simple of a fix is so incredibly complicated and doesn't get fixed.*

**DCSP Official:** *You have to be targeted in your outreach. You have to seek them [people] out and find ways to share information in a way they can see how their kids' future is impacted by this decision. A lot of times people are like I don't really care about that*

*[issue]. This helps to build capacity and the knowledge of why the discussions are important.*

**Community Leader, Parent:** *... articulate how this will affect somebody and how the action will impact the situation at had...*

As a part of the documents analyzed this need to establish a vision that the community would connect to was also clear:

*This goes to the credibility of the process which needs to be strong. When this was done back in 1968 there were all-day meetings to finalize boundaries. We need to take the time. (Advisory Committee Meeting #9, May 2014)*

*I want to make sure we are hearing this right. If we are allowing more middle-class families to go to non-neighborhood schools, then this may be in direct conflict with what we have been striving for with other policies in supporting neighborhood schools as a priority. (Advisory Committee Meeting #12, June 2014)*

*(Regarding finding a way forward) - I am not opposed to this policy, but if we switch or add in a new proposal that the community has never seen before there could be potential backlash from the community.*

*(Advisory Committee Meeting #12, June 2014)*

Finding 3.3—Clarifying the process context through conversation, information sharing, and by setting expectations for the modes and methods of engagement in the process ensures that actionable items rise to the top.

**DCPS Official:**... *sometimes government thinks they know what is best for communities and they think it is a great idea and while in theory it may be, it could be a program that is duplicative of what is actually taking place and resources that are being spent that could be diverted somewhere else.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *Early wins are important. I just feel like groups like that [advisory committee] need to feel as if there are some early decision-making points to feel as if something is progressing. Early wins help to improve things in terms of how folks are able to sort of align on goals, align on sort of the direction that the groups decision-making sort of goes in... It is important because there are so many voices and different people in the room.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *There has to be an undergirding theory of action and philosophy to the steps you are looking to take... think about it in terms of Joyce Epstein's continuum... It is about setting expectations and establishing a framework for action. This gives people a reason to trust. It's about taking the geeky policy things and making them digestible for understanding. In this process you can work to bring people together.*

As noted in Policy Brief 1, *"The assignment of students to schools is an important, often emotional, and always personal concern for families and students."* This brief notes how important this process is to families and even stakeholders who do not have children in schools.

Clarifying the process and expectations for all stakeholders is essential because they all have a stake in the outcomes:

*Changes to student assignment can be as great a factor in neighborhood change as school closings and the construction of new schools. Student assignment has also traditionally been extremely important to property owners and developers, who understand the value of the schools as public land and civic assets and as important amenities associated with neighborhoods. (Policy Brief 1)*

*Different communities balance or prioritize these values differently and choose different combinations of student-assignment mechanisms that reflect the values they view as most critical when formulating a student-assignment policy. (Policy Brief 1)*

Finding 3.4—Deepening and building capacity through information sharing and the establishment of feedback loops can provide transparency and accountability.

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *In our city there has been a real struggle with civil rights, our sovereignty as a city—we've had times where there was a more organic relationship between the residents and the city leaders, more so than now. At that time, some of the characters who built the city had organic constituencies, it is a little different today and I think there is probably less responsiveness and knowledge of where we have been as a city.*

**DC Government Official:** *Transparency is important but there are times when we try to be super transparent and it has the wrong effect. Sometimes we give too much information*

*and people feel overwhelmed or think we are trying to intentionally drown them with information.*

**Community Leader:** *The public is pretty practical. They instinctively know if someone is not being honest with them. They know if the government is trying to sell them something. It can only be a legitimate process if you aren't coming to the community with an end goal already in mind. Because if so, what is the point in participating.*

**Former City Official:** *Being open and straightforward with people [allows you to be] as respectful as you can be to all the voice that you hear. You have to explain the decisions that are made. You have to provide the context of what is happening, sharing the scope of the project, and work to address all the concerns presented.*

From the conversation in the participant interviews to the document analysis, building capacity and methods of transparency and accountability is noted as an essential element throughout this process and as a necessary ingredient for future engagement. It is about more than just government actors distilling what the community wants but about ensuring that community voice is clear and reflected in the process:

*I know you're trying to do a lot here and I appreciate that. I feel like the working group listened to a lot of our feedback from the first round. I hear you talking about data and projections, but we're talking about school communities. Our community is far more than numbers on a census and lines on a map. (Community Working Group Meeting notes, June 2014)*

Finding 3.5—A clearly defined strategy and process design works to support participation by reducing barriers to access for participation and outlines clear channels for communication for information sharing and the ongoing process of data collection through established feedback loops, continuous relationship-building, and understanding.

**Community Leader, Parent:** *Broad outreach helps to remove barriers and creates access. Having a smaller, focused group where you can talk with folks and breakdown barriers that are reflected in hard to understand information.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Giving communities access to decision-making in authentic ways; this allows for trust to be built and maintained.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *You cannot just have one strategy to engage. How can we use technology and electronic platforms for folks to access information, some people are just never going to come to big community meetings. This can be a slow process.*

**DCPS Official:** *Breaking down barriers for access means understanding that not everyone wants to engage in the same way. People are busy, not everyone has the time to engage deeply.*

Working to define the process and being explicit about the need for a prominent role for the community in the process is vital. Removing the barrier that impede participation and fostering an environment of inclusion is only possible when the lines of communication are open:

*... you're trying to improve schools within constraints. Not everyone is going to be happy with any proposed solution. But what saddens me is that I know that Abigail Smith and*

*Kaya Henderson came here with a specific agenda about getting community feedback. But the questions on the worksheet aren't fair questions. The community doesn't have the information to authentically answer them. You guys have data and spreadsheets and analysis and constraints that would make proposed solutions not feasible. So it sometimes feels like these sessions are designed to legitimize decisions that have already been made...* (Community Working Group Meeting notes, June 2014)

#### **Finding 4:**

**FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation**

*Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.*

To share authority in decision-making requires the access, a commitment to capacity building to spark participation and integrating varied perspectives. This kind of participation is not something that can be done without the presence of trusted representation, which makes room for the following things to happen:

- Collectively working to find common ground and seek alignment;
- Recognizes that partnership, between the public and government, is essential;
- Understands that relationship-building requires continuity in engagement and the representation of trusted persons to foster trust;
- Acknowledges a need broad outreach to include a diversity perspectives and ideas;

- Requires representation and an inherent respect for all voices;
- Creates various thresholds for participation while accounting for all methods and ways of knowing
- Clarifies the context and reduces barriers to access;
- Establishes clear channels of communication and establishes feedback loops;
- Promotes accountability through the clarity of engagement and roles/responsibilities;
- Fosters trust and transparency by ensuring that no final decisions are a ‘surprise;’ and,
- Contributes to legitimacy through clarifying the use of input.

Finding 4.1—A need for access to the process through information sharing. This commitment recognizes that partnership (between the public and government) is essential and fosters the ability to work collectively to find common ground and seek alignment.

**Former Appointed City Official:** *the sharing of and access to information is vital... the community and residents desire to know more of what’s happening...*

**City Official:** *I think it’s important that the “in between” layer where you can educate people about the issues, the data, they can in a much deeper way help flush out and “here are what the tradeoffs will be” and “here are things you tiny group of decision makers aren’t thinking about” that we cannot just name, we can like flush out and re-prioritize them and do a much more kind of substantial level of engagement with a smaller group.*

**City Official:** *We shared out an online appendix where we published all the results of all survey information we gathered and the feedback we received. We explained in the narrative report how the feedback impacted, how it impacted the actual strategic plan and what we hear and how that related to the plan we developed.*

**City Official:** *Clear lines of communications means communicating the information people do and don't want to hear. We have to make sure we are not talking past each other.... making sure we are not bailing on the hard decisions.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *Everybody wants to have an equal footing in terms of maybe a baseline of what they are getting [information]... they want to feel that they are being treated equally. You want to create the capacity for everyone to participate.*

Moving from just the engagement of communities to a process in which communities are driving the process can lead to a having deeply established relationships within the community, a clearer understanding of the needs and desires of the community, and the opportunity to work in tandem on issues of importance:

*Public discourse is loud and super complex. But it is important not to squander the level of engagement of the Committee and the professional staff. The issues are very complex; the feedback is wonderful. (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

*We will have to sell the Draft Recommendations to the public. We will not get the policy perfect and we need to spend time on the format and framing. We can do a lot of this with individual [public] feed-back. (Advisory Committee Meeting #9, May 2014)*

The level of access and inclusion needed in this process was beyond just finding the opportunity to "... inform and engage [the] broader community about student assignment..." and

the process but it was to ensure the community was deeply involved and connected to the process and its policy outcomes (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014).

Finding 4.2—Requires a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement and meaningful process contributions.

**DCPS Official:** *Partnering with families and communities and having a direct relationship is a core component for success. This partnership requires a capacity building, finding the value in the relationship, and investing in them in meaningful ways. Making the investments ensures that we are a part of the solution and not a contributor to the problems.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Building capacity means to regularly inform and share. It means getting the right people around the table for the topic. You have to ensure senior level city officials are at every meeting to show that the leadership is invested, and the level of engagement is robust and broad.*

**Community Leader:** *The public is pretty practical. They instinctively know if someone is not being honest with them. They know if the government is trying to sell them something. It can only be a legitimate process if you aren't coming to the community with an end goal already in mind. Because if so, what is the point in participating.*

**Former City Official, Public Charter School Leader:**... *race and class are definitely issues in the city but I think DC can be a very transient city. I see a tremendous amount of mobility... not to mention this is a complex system to understand and navigate.*

**Former City Official:** *Finding ways to operationalize the feedback given and trusting what the community says – what they are sharing, and their desires, is their reality.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *We need to engage them [the community] as partners in the decision-making process. It is not like DCPS makes the final decision; the engaged people actually make recommendations that [in the student assignment process] then the mayor could sign off on or not.*

Building capacity is one aspect; having the context and the ability to access the process is another:

*I have the luxury of making it to meetings — and a lot of people don't have that luxury. I find it a failure to acknowledge (or ignorance of) the difficulty that other families' experience and it is somewhat offensive. We do need more outreach in Wards 7 and 8 and other wards as well. There is a whole contingent of community members that need to be listened to; we do need to reach out; access to the internet and information really is a problem for some families. (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

*People's experience with their rights is reflected in whether they [know how to] exercise those rights. (Advisory Committee Meeting #7, May 2014)*

Finding 4.3—The integration of various ideas and perspectives leads to greater outcomes and process buy-in.

**Community Leader, Parent:** *"... how do you leverage networks" so you do get access to more people and perspectives and when you have a core group of people who are*

*like really invested in this, it helps to do that too so you have that many more people who are sort of eliciting input and feedback who are letting people know that this thing is going on, and so I think that is really important.*

**DCPS Official:** *The representation and composition of a group has to be right. You can't have a group that is majority white when DCPS is not that. It just doesn't build confidence, and it makes us look tone deaf. You have to work at mapping out the type of composition you want to have. The group has to be balanced—asking yourself “where do we need strong voices and honest perspectives.”*

**City Official:** *The best thing about the advisory committee [a group of individuals representative of their communities] is that it is just a way to kind of check your process. [Groups like that] let you know if they think you are going off in the wrong direction and it helps you to distill the information.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Representation is not just about representation across groups but perspective diversity.*

In policy decision-making processes understanding these layers of perspectives is essential—as mentioned above in the interview comments. Similar sentiments also appeared throughout the document analysis—understanding the needs of the public and how that connects to the process is vital:

*Which options are available and how families access them is a crucial part of student-assignment policy. Different communities balance or prioritize these values differently and choose different combinations of student-assignment mechanisms that reflect the values they view as most critical when formulating a student-assignment policy. (Policy Brief 1)*

*I know you're trying to do a lot here and I appreciate that. I feel like the working group listened to a lot of our feedback from the first round. I hear you talking about data and projections, but we're talking about school communities. Our community is far more than numbers on a census and lines on a map.* (Community Working Group Comment, June 2014)

This commitment to hearing from a diversity of voices and perspectives was also evident in the final report. Under the *Vision for Public Schools* (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 6) section of the report, the advisory committee notes:

*The overwhelming input from parents and District residents was that families want a citywide system of neighborhood public schools that is equitably invested in and that provides predictable and fair access to high quality schools in all the city's communities.*

They outline this commitment in *The Community Engagement Process* (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7) section of the report where it stated that the process undertaken by the advisory committee captured the 'overwhelming input' from parents and District residents:

*The vision and recommendations of this report were guided by voices we heard throughout the city, the thoughtful input of the diverse student assignment advisory committee, and the support of a technical team.*

More excerpts and details from the final report can be found in Appendix B.

Finding 4.4—Fostering trust and nurturing relationships through the representation through trusted persons supports moving the process forward through the accountability and leads to a greater level of transparency. Representation can legitimize the process.

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *There should be someone from the community we know... a person who has a constituency to go back to and share the information gathered. That in the very least holds them accountable.*

**DC Government Official:** *I think there is a fine line between making sure you have enough voices represented and having so many voices you actually can't come to any a consensus or you are just so overwhelmed by the various perspectives.*

*Having a dedicated set of people to work through all the issues with you that is supposed to represent direct parts of the city can be impactful.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *True community representatives are actually supposed to be representatives of someone other than themselves. I think the other reason though is because as a Community Ward; I think we are more sensitive to feeling disenfranchised or disempowered and when our institutions we are trying to either have them established and we believe in or build up or are trying to establish are not included, it delegitimizes them, but at the same time, the city often times will come back and want things from those institutions in order for us to be successful, not only, and when I say successful, I mean successful in moving our own agendas forward and being true representatives; we have to be respected and present, and to not include at least someone who is recognized as a representative for our community means you don't respect us. You don't respect our community. You're just looking for a person to fill a seat*

*with whatever and for whatever reason, whether they check a particular box like parent or charter or native or whatever it is, or they have a particular perspective you want to stack the conversation with.*

**DCPS Official:** *Pulling together a group of trusted community representatives can be a good place to vet ideas and to get to a place of common understandings and solutions.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *In the smaller groups, whoever you choose you have to make sure these are folks that people trust. Doing so will show that you value the communities they represent and help the communities feel as if their voice is reflected through the representative. With the Advisory Committee the members spoke up about the communities they represented, and they shared information freely and openly.*

### **The Final Report & Recommendations on Student Assignment For DCPS**

In the final report, which outlines the final recommendations from the advisory committee, the advisory committee and technical team, who compiled the final report, highlights the public input and integrating public sentiments in a variety of areas. The first area that highlights the how the public input shaped the recommendations, and ultimately the final report, is first noted in the letter from the advisory committee to then Mayor Vincent Gray.

Below I have included excerpts:

*[The Advisory Committee on Student Assignment was appointed by the DME and charged with]... making policy and planning recommendations to improve clarity, predictability, and equitable access to high quality school options at locations that make sense for families. The Advisory Committee was composed of community members from every one*

*of the city's eight wards, including both DCPS and public charter school parents, and representatives of DCPS, the Public Charter School Board, the DC Office of Planning, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, and of course, the Deputy Mayor for Education.*

*The clarity, attention and force of what we heard from so many community members and stakeholders over the past nine months in connection with the development of these recommendations give us confidence they reflect a vision that is firmly rooted in the desires and aspirations of DC families (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 2).*

In total, the advisory committee was composed of 22 members—16 community representatives and six DC government agency representatives. Of the 16 community representatives, 11 of the members were parents (there appears to be an even mixture of DCPS and public charter parents) and all the members have organizational or community affiliation within the respective wards they were representing of the advisory committee. This accounting of 'who' participated highlights for the community the city's commitment to representative participation through trusted individuals who each knew their communities and constituencies well. This is a signal of validation for the process through 'who' and they represented the various difference of the city and intimately involved in the deliberation process.

The letter from the advisory committee also states:

*We hope our vision and these recommendations can provide the District with a road map for moving forward in an educational environment that is unique, challenging, and full of promise.*

The advisory committee appears to espouse that the ‘road map’ the share in this document to move the city forward regarding its educational environment reflects the sentiments, participation, input, and feedback received from the public throughout the process.

On page 4 of the report, in the introduction, it states:

*To address the context of today and consider the future, the Deputy Mayor for Education charged the Advisory Committee on Student Assignment with... reviewing data, information, policies and practices and listening to parents and community members and discussing this input in depth with Advisory Committee members, [and] the Advisory Committee came to understand the challenges to the current student assignment system for the city and its families. The recommendations in this document [the final report] were developed to address the following challenges.*

As noted, many times throughout the report:

*The vision and recommendations of this report were guided by voices we heard throughout the city, the thoughtful input of the diverse student assignment advisory committee, and the support of a technical team. (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7)*

The report also notes information sharing measures and the focus group engagement:

*All of this extensive material was made available to the public at [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov). Starting in November 2013 focus groups were conducted in every ward of the city, through which nearly 200 parents and community members shared their perspectives and experiences with student assignment and school choice issues and provided feedback on the principles that should guide policy recommendations and boundary changes.*

There is mention of working group meetings to discuss the initial thoughts of the advisory committee:

*After the focus groups, the Advisory Committee developed three policy examples and proposed the first draft of updated school attendance zones and school feeder pathways, which the Deputy Mayor for Education presented for public feedback at a series of working group meetings held in April 2014. More than 800 city residents participated in the working group meetings and provided us with valuable input, making it clear that school quality and predictable school pathways were the most critical concerns of families.*

Following the feedback from the public after the working groups, the DME and advisory committee notes they hosted a series of three community meetings on a draft policy proposal in June 2014:

*In June 2014, the Advisory Committee released a single policy proposal with a second draft of school attendance zones and feeder pathways. DCPS and DME notified parents and community members of the proposed changes and informed them of the multiple opportunities to provide feedback. The proposals were discussed and debated at another*

*series of three community meetings, which were attended by nearly 300 parents and community members.*

Additional engagement and opportunities for feedback:

*[T]he DME and many Advisory Committee members have had the benefit of attending scores of local and school community meetings throughout the city with hundreds of participants and have reviewed as many letters, e-mail inquiries, and suggestions.*

*Throughout this process, community members expressed their frustration that this process was primarily focused on student assignment rather than on school improvement.*

*The discussions and thoughtful and spirited debate among stakeholders made clear that, to advance an equitable and efficient citywide system of neighborhood public schools that is complemented by a range of school choices, the District needs to continue to engage the public in the planning and implementation of both citywide and school-specific recommendations.*

I grouped the 42 recommendations the Advisory Committee offered to Mayor Vincent Gray in the final report into four areas (DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7):

1. Student Assignment by Right based on DCPS Attendance Zones and Feeder Pathways

*Student assignment policy that spells out the rights of families based on a geographic designation of attendance zones and feeder pathways that are aligned with population, enrollment, and capacity.*

2. Adequate Capacity in Zoned DCPS Schools

*Adequate capacity maintained in the by-right system to responsibly meet the short, medium, and long-term demand of families with school-age children.*

3. Equitable Access to High Quality Public School Options
4. Education Infrastructure Planning

*A culture of investment and planning, on the part of both schools and families, to ensure that schools are fully equipped to meet the needs of their communities.*

Under each of the recommendation sections, I have highlighted the areas in which the committee discussed how the public was engaged in the development of the stated goal/recommendation and ongoing recommendations for follow up and engagement with the public. The final report speaks to how this process was in partnership with the public through extensive engagement and information sharing. The full final report can be found in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis and Findings Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I share the four findings uncovered by this study. The data from the student assignment focus group comments, review and analysis of process documents and artifacts, and participant interviews illustrated and detailed elements of the student assignment and school boundary review process and participant experiences. The data collected and analyzed revealed the elements of the process that fostered an environment in which shared decision-making authority was possible. The data uncovered what elements of the process design fostered the public's access to the process, provide avenues to share and contribute to the process, and to what degree the public could influence the policy outcomes.

As the researcher, I believe greater clarity and understanding of public participation, through the process of shared decision-making, would allow for public education planning and decision-making processes to be informed by those most impacted and lead to the legitimacy of

the policy solutions. For this study, I am merging of the basic tenets of public participation with the theories of deliberative democracy, inclusion, public participation as a continuum, and coproduction to explore how power-sharing arrangements, in decision-making processes, can work to address the tensions between democracy and administration. The data collected worked to illustrate the theory coproduction and chronicles a government entity's attempt to mitigate the inherent tension between a bureaucratic process and democratic norms through the public engagement process connected to the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Through a deep analysis of focus group comments, the document analysis of process materials and news articles, and participant interviews, I could empirically examine the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education planning and policy decision-making processes. Through the use of focus group comment data, text highlighted from the document analysis, and by interviewing and using the participants' own words, I aimed to illustrate for the reader what a process of coproduction and shared decision-making looks like through the experiences of process participants, other artifacts of the process, and situations studied. Through my research, case study analysis, and the data collected and shared, four themes emerged:

**The primary finding of this study is that a deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters**—it is directly connected to issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure at least the belief, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to connect to its outcomes.

**The second finding is that meaningful interactions and authentic engagement, between the government and the public, can foster and be facilitated through the appropriate budgeting of time for process development, implementation, execution, and evaluation.** Ensuring the strategy for process implementation and intended outcomes is clear is possible through paying close attention to the details of the process design. A well-designed process plays a pivotal role in creating trust and signaling the essential role public participation will play in the process and its ability to shape the policy outcomes, thus leading to more meaningful interactions and creating the space for shared decision making in planning.

**The third finding is that taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.** Clarifying the process context through conversation and information sharing, by setting expectations for the modes and methods of engagement, and establishing feedback loops helps to:

- Narrow the focus and objectives of the process;
- Collectively establishes the vision for success or the 'why' of a process;
- Ensures that actionable items rise to the top;
- Leads to transparency and accountability; and,
- Reduces barriers to access for participation and clear channels for communication.

**The fourth finding highlights how sharing authority in decision-making requires access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; the integration of various ideas and perspectives; and trusted representation to**

**support moving the process forward.** These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes and makes space for:

- Collectively working to find common ground and seek alignment;
- Recognizes that partnership, between the public and government, is essential;
- Understands that relationship-building requires continuity in engagement and the representation of trusted persons to foster trust;
- Acknowledges a need broad outreach to include a diversity perspectives and ideas;
- Requires representation and an inherent respect for all voices;
- Creates various thresholds for participation while accounting for all methods and ways of knowing
- Clarifies the context and reduces barriers to access;
- Establishes clear channels of communication and establishes feedback loops;
- Promotes accountability through the clarity of engagement and roles/responsibilities;
- Fosters trust and transparency by ensuring that no final decisions are a ‘surprise;’ and,
- Contributes to legitimacy through clarifying the use of input given.

All the data collected and analyzed for this study worked to corroborate these findings and serve as the building blocks for creating a framework for consideration to design a process inclusive of shared decision-making authority in public planning processes. A process with the goal of shared decision-making authority as a goal creates an environment where the process is informed by those most impacted and can legitimize the process and its policy outcomes.

The next chapter will work to further unpack the data shared in this chapter. In chapter 6, I will analyze the findings more deeply and connect those findings to the literature as shared in chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 6: DEEPER ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, & INTERPRETATION

### Purpose of the Study

For this study, I examined the case through a framework that merged the basic tenets of public participation with the theories of deliberative democracy, inclusion, public participation as a continuum, and coproduction to explore power-sharing arrangements in public policy decision-making processes. As a researcher, it was my belief that merging these ideologies and principles would provide government actors with tools to address and mitigate the inherent tensions that arise between democracy and administration and thus democratic norms and bureaucratic processes. While fraught with the previously mentioned challenges, the case study I examined seemed to also have markers of coproduction throughout the process and in the final recommendation regarding the student assignment and school boundary review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). One goal of the study was to better understand the role public participation plays in giving voice to the public through shared authority with administrators in public education planning and policy decision-making processes. I crafted the design of this study to provide insights for government actors, specifically in the District of Columbia, on how coproduction in policy planning and decision-making processes can work to build their capacity and provide them with the tools to be more responsive to the public's voice and values. Greater clarity and understanding of public participation, through the process of shared decision-making, would allow for public education planning and decision-making processes to be informed by those most impacted and lead to the legitimacy of any policy solutions.

This case study research used qualitative data: by conducting in-depth interviews; analyzing focus group comment data; and, through the collection and analysis of supportive data, process materials, and news articles. I thoroughly reviewed the data, and coded, analyzed, and organized it by the findings. In this chapter, guided by research questions and the conceptual framework, as outlined in chapter two of this dissertation, the findings are discussed, analyzed, and interpreted. I focus this dissertation study through the conceptual framework of deliberative democracy and coproduction. The study was focus around three central questions:

**Q1)** How can the concept of coproduction mitigate tensions between the public and administrators while interjecting a dynamic of power sharing in decision-making processes?

**Q2)** What role does framing play in decision-making processes, and how are both correlated to issues of race, class, and equity in the space of public education?

**Q3)** What elements of process led to the legitimacy of decision-making processes? What evidence exists from this process to show the shared ownership by both administrators and the public of the final policy recommendations?

The research questions were addressed and largely satisfied by the findings presented in chapter 5. The overarching theme of the findings was that public decision-making processes that are intentionally designed to share decision-making authority with the public not only gives voice to the public, but also works to foster trust through relationship and capacity building and can legitimize the process and its policy outcomes. I design this chapter to analyze, interpret, and synthesize the findings. I have organized and categorized the findings analytically by the research questions that guided this study:

- The role of coproduction and shared decision-making authority in mitigating tensions between the public and administrators.
- The role of framing and process design in addressing issues of equity, race, and trust.
- The elements of process legitimacy and how to achieve buy in processes and policy outcomes.

In the previous chapter, these questions and category areas guided the review and coding of the data and presented the findings from that data. In this chapter, my goal is to connect the patterns and findings from the data to the analytic categories associated with the guiding research questions. I also conducted an additional analysis to tie the relevant theory and research previously shared in chapter 2—there is a compare and contrast of the findings and themes from the study to the issues and points raised in the literature. I intend this chapter to be interpretative and to tell the narrative of the research study—the story behind the findings. The data analysis offers an illustrative understanding of the how, what, and why of the student assignment process to have a better understanding of what emerged from the data and how the themes can offer support in similar processes. The elements used to frame this understanding are:

- 1) focus group comments;
- 2) participant interviews;
- 3) the participant experience and understanding of the process through the interview process and other relevant documents from the process;
- 4) the explanations offered in the interviews and relevant documents that lead to connections and understanding of relationship dynamics and the overall context;

- 5) the explanations offered in the literature or any relevant gaps for exploration; and,
- 6) how this data, and the research, can go beyond the literature in filling those relevant gaps in the literature and understanding of shared decision-making authority and coproduction.

**Analytical Category 2: The role of coproduction and shared decision-making authority in mitigating tensions between the public and administrators.**

This research question sought to better understand and clarify the role of shared decision-making authority and how the implementation of the principles of coproduction can mitigate the tension often noted and experienced in interactions between the public and government actors in policy making.

Throughout the process of data collection and interviews, many of the participants discussed the role public voice and authentic engagement has in setting the tone for understanding the historical context and issues of trust inherent to policy decision-making. As noted in chapter two, *coproduction*, at its core, can foster the development of trust, collaboration, and the building of community in decision-making. Coproduction is inclusion in decision-making taken to the next level. This process allows for the “defining and addressing [of] public issues” through a shared decision-making process and collective action, policy solutions leading to a greater sense of investment, and buy-in (Joshi & Moore, 2004). Integrating coproduction, and its ability to open the doors for trust, is only possible when there is a desire and action by the government actors to commit to a process of deep and authentic engagement with the public. While such actors require “... the practice of involving members of the public in

agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities of organizations/institutions responsible for policy formation” (Rowe & Frewer, 2005, p. 253) it also has to be inclusive of a redistribution of power to ensure that the public can influence policy direction, changes, goals, and outcomes (Arnstein, 1969; Sopanah et al., 2013). The first finding below, as shared in chapter 5, explains how coproduction and shared decision-making authority can work to mitigate the issues of trust, context, and lack of access to the process, which can contribute to tensions between the public and government actors.

Trust can be fragile and scarce (Messick & Kramer, 2001). Communities who lack a trusting relationship with the government are more isolated, disenfranchised from political participation (Mayan, Turner, Ortiz, & Moffatt, 2013). Understanding the historical vestiges of the connection between distrust and democracy is useful in examining the public participation and democratic processes of decision-making (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Gay, 2002; Nunnally, 2012). By understanding the relationship between distrust and democracy, we can mitigate tensions between the public and government actors, which leads to Finding 1.

### **Finding 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust**

A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.

Unpacking historical context for a level of a deeper understanding is important in exploring ways to mitigate the tension between the public and government actors. If you do not understand the context in which planning or decision-making is taking place, you risk not getting

those most impacted to the table. The District of Columbia had to overcome its history of not inviting certain constituents to the table, much less listening to their input. Policy Brief #1 describes,

*The history of student assignment in the District of Columbia is laden with issues of race, class, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation. Although judicial and Congressional actions in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s resulted in legal desegregation and the development of partial home rule for District residents, those developments did not resolve the issues. For decades, African-Americans had no direct input into the oversight of their schools, which were characterized by overcrowding, poor-quality facilities in most cases, and second-hand books and materials that had been discarded from the white schools. (October 2013)*

Several comments shared by the focus group, in the process materials, and by interview participants highlighted the importance of historical context and how their own personal experiences shaped their understanding and level of trust.

*I come from a time when my parents just moved to a neighborhood because they liked it... and you went to the neighborhood school and you did fine.... our neighborhood school is not an option... because it doesn't seem to progress as we would like, nor does it offer programming like other schools in the city. And that is not fair. (focus group comment)*

In this comment the focus group member's past educational experience, coupled with their historical understanding of the public education system in the District, has shaped their understanding of the quality, or lack thereof, of their neighborhood school. This current experience, or example of public education, does not seem to connect to their historical

experience of public education, which they seem to associate with being “fine” or that the experience was of greater quality.

A well-documented part of the history of the District are the issues of race, class, and a legacy of distrust rooted in policy decisions and actions of the past. This legacy was present in comments shared by participants:

*Low-income black people in the city have been screwed again, again, and again. There is no reason that any logical human being would look back at all those incidences and say, “I should not trust.”* (interview comment from a Former Appointed City Official)

*... parents have a problem in getting trust from DCPS and how are you going to prove to parents that quality will improve in other schools? Our community is far more than numbers on a census and lines on a map.* (comment from Round 2: Community Working Group Meeting, April 24-26, 2014)

The negative experiences noted above, and other historical vestiges, are challenges that government actors had to work with focus to overcome.

Berner, Amos, and Morse (2011) highlight how the engagement of the public in various levels of governance has long been considered a hallmark of the government working to foster the public’s trust in government and their actions through the infusion of the voices of the public in decision-making processes. If we re-frame participation from one of isolation, with government working to take one form of action and the public going in different directions, to a process of collaboration by framing of the issue through the lens and experience of the public the process overall will be more responsive to those most impacted and any potential solutions

framed with that thinking in mind (Wamsley et al., 1990; King, et al., 1998). This reframing is possible when historical factors and context are accounted for—it signals a level of responsiveness and authenticity that can spark the desire of the public to engage and can open to the door to rebuilding trust.

The first research question focused on the role coproduction and shared decision-making authority can play in mitigating tensions between the public and administrators. We know that “[t]rust between principal (citizens) and agent (government actors) is foundational where trust in the institutional system influences civic engagement” (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Gay, 2002; Rodet, 2015, p. 17). In both the literature and in the case study example examined in this study, the most vital role of coproduction and shared decision-making authority is what Joshi & Moore (2004) describe as the fostering relationships and the development of trust. As Joshi & Moore (2004) noted, this requires all sides to take a risk — “...the community has to be able to trust [the] advice and support of administrators, but the administrators must also be prepared to trust the decisions and behaviors of the community rather than attempting to dictate them.” Considering authentic engagement through the lens of coproduction and a shared decision-making power is relationship building, capacity building, and the fostering of trust in action. Coproduction offers a way to manage the interdependencies between the various actors impacted in decision-making processes (Bovaird, 2005, 2008; Sancino, 2010).

The steps taken to foster such actions requires multiple actors participating in the design of such an action. This idea directly connects to one of the findings highlighted in the data:

#### **Finding 4: The Elements of Procedural Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation**

Shared decision-making authority requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.

In the data, participants shared several comments regarding this idea of providing access to participation. This idea is a “cooperative activity” that makes room for a diversity of voices to actively engage in the process of decision making, and thus governance, in such a way that the government can calibrate their responsiveness to the direct needs of the public (Abowitz, 2013, p. 117). Cooperative activity connects this idea of responsiveness to *Direct Citizen Participation*, which Nabatchi (2012) defines as “a process by which members of society share power with public officials in making substantive decisions related to the community.” Using public participation designs that foster direct citizen participation can lead the public to have a certain level of influence over the decision-making process and moves the involvement of the public to a place of collaboration (Nabatchi, 2012).

Direct participation, and how people want to be heard or valued, is reflected in various ways. For some of the participants the connection showed up in the richness and their feeling of authenticity of engagement:

**Interview Comment:** *It is all about the texture of the conversation... you know when you are in it and you can tell that it is meaningful, where they [the government] is really listening to you and there is a chance that they are going to address what is on your mind and in a context that there is a greater likelihood you might say, okay this is a genuine back-and-forth. The authentic listening makes room for the development of shared goals.*

Authenticity and the “texture” of the engagement are elements that have the ability to address the “wicked problems” of public policy, particularly in public education, a space where most citizens have a deep knowledge and sets of personal experiences to draw from. While the scholarship discusses the challenges of “wicked problems,” such as public education or collaborative governance, we are clear that those kinds of issues require a varied approach, tradeoffs or compromises, and engagement to come to the right policy solution or solutions (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Chambers, 2006; Abowitz, 2013).

Authentic listening and the “texture” of the conversation and the engagement matters, but Arnstein (1969) notes, “... participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power-holders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo” (p. 217). Authentic engagement, through the use of coproduction and shared decision-making authority, moves beyond the status quo and makes room for policy solutions framed by those most impacted by the problem and its solutions. The framing of the process and conversation allows for space to be made to process the historical context. mentioned by various participants like below, to be understood and connected with:

**Interview Comment:** *History matters—knowing that will give you a greater understanding of the context and legacy in which you are operating with the community.*

**Analytical Category 3: The role of framing and process design in addressing issues of equity, race, and trust.**

While the District of Columbia is more than just the White House and monuments, the city's storied local history is filled with issues of race, class, disenfranchisement, and limited governing authority (a detailed accounting of DC's history and context is discussed in chapter 3). Nunnally (2012) notes, "[t]rust and distrust...are [the] counter balancing forces in American democracy." As Blendon (2007) noted, "... Americans evaluate their distrust in institutions (e.g. government) based on the overall perception of [the] environment in which they live." Overall, a particular group's perceptions can serve as an indicator of the historical effectiveness of an institution, closely connecting to the institution's successes or failures. History has shown us African Americans live in social environments threatened by issues of racial discrimination, economic uncertainty, and varied disparities, thus fostering and deepening their distrust of government (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Shoff & Yang, 2012). This public distrust, particularly within groups (i.e. African Americans) who have experienced discrimination, can also shape how they engage in democratic processes, such as decision-making or planning processes, because of their experiences with government entities. Experiences of discrimination, and the impacts of race, further socialize groups and from generation to generation. It passes these experiences down, thus deepening the feelings of distrust and leading to an outside perception of apathy in political or policy spaces (Nunnally, 2012). Nunnally (2012) describes this as the "racial calculus of

trust”—it is the lens through which communities at risk of discrimination assess their ability to trust not only individuals or groups, but it also determines the degree to which they engage with government. Understanding the “calculus” is vital in shaping how communities are engaged by government and essential to process design; with time and strategic clarity, Finding 2 can be realized.

**Finding 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, and a Well-Designed Process**

A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning. Clarity of action is essential, but it is also important to allot the right amount of time for a process. Attention to time, and not moving in a hasty fashion, can provide a foundation for trust to be established and the formation of relationships to be possible. As noted in the interviews:

**Interview Comment:** *“It takes time for people to get to know each other and work with one another and for their voices to be heard. With time you get to know these people as people, who and what they care about, so they aren’t just objectified or made out to be the enemy. Time allows for the raising of understanding and the ability to build capacity.”*

This thread regarding time came up many times in the data and interviews as *“... being an honest-broker and establishing trust with the community is essential.”* (Interview Comment)

**Interview Comment:** *There needs to be clarity on the issue we are working to address. ... if you [as a community member] don’t think a problem exists for the same reason that I*

*think it exists, we are actually probably really far apart. We would work to solve the problem differently.*

As Kasymova & Gaynor (2014) discuss, a public participation design that focuses on an “engagement and partnership platform...[enables] effective decision making and building a partnership with the community... [and ensures] concerned groups gain access to control over policy processes and implementation decisions” (pp. 140-41). This partnership is possible with time and by having a clear strategy. Focusing on time and clarity of action frames the importance of participation in that process and allows the public to see the value of their input from the beginning of the process—it is essential to the process overall and is part of a “collaborative governance” foundation (Sharp, 2012, p. 117). Clarity of action, or strategy, and the allotment of time for a process infuses values of deliberation, reasoned discussion, and collaboration in public decision-making—this is deliberative democracy in action (Cohen & Fung, 2004). Using this approach shifts the focus of participation from the decision, or outcome, and places an emphasis on the overall quality and elements of the process itself (Pereira, et al., 2003; Cavalier, 2011).

The design of the process is an important element, but the data highlighted the need to clarify process scope and to define tasks, which leads to Finding 3.

### **Finding 3: A Well-Defined Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope and Tasks**

Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.

Process design must be “... inclusive and sensitive to the value [of] plurality inherent in complex policy issues, they can help rediscover the public’s preferences” (Nabatchi, 2010, p.

387). Working to clarify the process and tasks to undertake a process allows for the forging of an effective partnership between the government and citizens and makes way for the enhancement of both democracy and accountability in the process (Sharp, 2012, p. 116; Jacobs et al., 2009, p. 7-9). Dryzek (2000) discusses the role of deliberative democracy in expanding franchise, scope, and authenticity of the principles of democracy in decision-making (p. 86; Abowitz, 2013). This expansion affords the participation of citizens to move beyond just a symbolic role to one of deeper substance, inclusiveness, and a degree of shared authority in the process (Dryzek, 2000; Abowitz, 2013). Marshall (2004) discusses the need for collaboration and the interdependency between meeting public needs and the involvement of the public by stating, “the fundamental point is that without active citizen participation the capacity of government to provide public goods and services is severely compromised.”

In the data and throughout the interview process, the sentiment of “the narrative of the process matters” is clear in different ways. In one interview a participant noted:

**Interview Comment:** *I remember feeling immediately uneasy about the process because I didn't understand the goal... [It takes] time to refine and understand the scope of the task and the possible outcomes.*

**Interview Comment:** *... People need to believe in what is being undertaken—a commitment to a perspective and to have the ability to see that their input matters...*

Process design, attention to time, and clarity of process scope and task sets the foundation to establish trust and are the building blocks for the development of capacity and understanding, and thus have the ability to lead to the legitimacy of process outcomes.

**Analytical Category 4: The elements of process legitimacy and how to achieve buy in processes and policy outcomes.**

In the literature, Hysing (2015) noted the role of citizen participation in democratic processes is to increase the “... quality and efficiency of the public policy as well as the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, and accordingly makes government better equipped to handle difficult problems” (2). Public education, its level or lack of quality, and the lack of trust individuals and some communities have in government actions are two difficult problems often coupled together and significant barriers to overcome. How to remove such barriers leads to Finding 4.

**Finding 4: The Elements of Procedural Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation**

Sharing authority in decision-making requires access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.

Participation access provides the “... opportunity for all interested or affected parties to assume any legitimate role in the decision-making process” (Webler & Tuler, 2000). Access to participation coupled with the building of capacity and the understanding of the intended outcomes, or goals, of the process to provide an equal chance for all participants to make their voice heard and to have a hand in the shaping the final decision or outcome (Webler & Tuler,

2000). Integrating diverse voices and varied perspectives, through the representation of trusted individuals and groups, on an issue that needs addressing makes the dialogue meaningful.

During the interview process one participant noted,

**Interview Comment:** *Those kinds of authentic connections provide clarity. This kind of clarity can give credibility so you can refer back to the discussion as a level for the legitimacy of the process or implementation of something.*

Legitimacy in public policy has strength through the engagement of citizens, or trusted representation, in the decision-making process, thus increasing the "... quality and efficiency of the public policy as well as the legitimacy and responsiveness of government, and accordingly makes government better equipped to handle difficult problems" (Hysing, 2015, p. 2).

**DCPS Official:** *Pulling together a group of trusted community representatives can be a good place to vet ideas and to get to a place of common understandings and solutions.*

Legitimacy is only possible if the government works to shape its political agenda through the lens of public participation right from the start of a process (Thomas, 1993, 1995; Wallner, 2008). This collaborative action in agenda setting is the authentic connection, or opportunity for engagement, that can work to legitimize the process by providing the "justification of authority" for collaborative action with government actors and foster trust and a great level of buy-in of the policy solution (Rawls, 1971, 1993; Rakar, 2017, p. 60). In public planning, specifically the arena of public education, this idea of buy-in is more than just "the justification of authority" (Rawls, 1971, 1993; Rakar, 2017, p. 60) but a way of creating *political, substantive, and procedural legitimacy* in the process and the policy outcomes (Wallner, 2008, pp. 431-32; Abowitz, 2013, p. 22). This level of legitimacy is a public and political good necessary for the public's acceptance of

public policy (Wallner, 2008, pp. 431-32). From the normative perspective, this level of legitimacy is earned through the public's acceptance and consent, established when government actors meet the criteria of responsiveness to the needs of those most directly impacted by a policy issue (Wallner, 2008; Abowitz, 2013, p. 39).

**Interview Comment:** *Finding ways to operationalize the feedback given and trusting what the community says—what they are sharing, and their desires, is their reality.*

In the literature, Stivers (1990) refers to this as legitimacy through government accountability to its citizens but through a shared framework for understanding and interpreting the public's basic value. Appealing to their values will signal to the public that the planning/decision-making process being undertaken is legitimate and the voice and input of the public is a vital part of that process (Cooke, 2002). Legitimacy through shared frameworks of understanding is an approach that keeps the lines of communication open and makes room for continuous dialogue thus creating collaborative agreement in action (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004; Pereira, et al., 2003).

**Interview Comment:** *Partnering with families and communities and having a direct relationship is a core component for success. This partnership requires a capacity building, finding the value in the relationship, and investing in them in meaningful ways. Making the investments ensures that we are a part of the solution and not a contributor to the problems.*

## **Summary of Interpretation of Findings**

This chapter summarized and illustrated what sharing authority, within the framework of coproduction and deliberative democracy, can do in moving the process of public policy decision-making away from a “service-dominant approach’ [to one centered on a] ‘citizen-capability’ approach” (Osborne et al., 2013; Sen, 1993; Sicilia et al. 2016). As a potential framework for policy decision-making processes, it not only yields more desirable outcomes for the public and administrators but is also a tool to create “actionable knowledge for policy-making.” Power sharing contributes to the effectiveness of the process, provides for the creation of mutual trust between the government and public by establishing ownership of a policy solution from all sides, thus legitimizing the process (Sicilia et al., 2016). This discussion, and its findings, also reveals the various reasons this shared authority in decision-making is both an art and a science to get it right. Coproduction in decision-making allows for it to foster trust, collaboration in action, thus building community/relationships through the policy process. Movement in this direction allows for the partnership between the public and government actors to be a core component for success. It closely connects to the process outcomes. This form of engagement, or authentic partnership, requires a focus on and value in the relationship through capacity building and making continuous investments in the relationship through collaborative actions.

## **In Conclusion**

The purpose of this single-case study was to examine public participation in processes of shared decision-making authority and how such processes contribute to the ability of the public

to have access and influence in public policy. The conclusions and findings from this study closely connects the research questions outlined in chapter 1, addressing three areas:

- The role of coproduction and shared decision-making authority in mitigating tensions between the public and administrators.
- The role of framing and process design in addressing issues of equity, race, and trust.
- The elements of process legitimacy and how to achieve buy in processes and policy outcomes.

The findings from my data analysis and interpretation supported each of these areas:

- First, a deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes. We do not undertake policy solutions and decision-making processes in a vacuum. It is vital for government actors to have a deep understanding of the context in which the problem solving takes place and work to craft a process mindful of the historical perspectives and experiences of the public.
- Second, the fostering of meaningful interactions happens through allotting time for the process, outlining a clear strategy for action, and executing a well-designed process. These elements are the tools for success in processes of public participation and can lead to authentic connections between government actors and the public, thus creating the foundation and space for shared authority in decision-making/planning. As noted by Feldman & Khademian (2000), it is the role of government actors to build the capacity

and encourage members of the public to work collaboratively toward the goal of success and to provide access that allows the public to have a meaningful influence in policy solutions and outcomes. This is one way that government actors can use the influence of their role to shape the process in a way that promotes a sharing of power and authority (Feldman & Khademian, 2000). Ultimately, this leads to more desired outcomes and process legitimacy.

- Third, taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion. Working to clarify the process and tasks in a process allows for an effective partnership between the government actors and the public. Simultaneously, it provides an opportunity to for continuous refinement, tweaking of process goals, and outlining thresholds and mechanisms for accountability. Continuously seeking the public's partnership ensures the best outcomes for the process and shows the importance of public value in decision-making (Moore, 1995; Feldman & Khademian, 2000, p. 161).
- Fourth, and finally, sharing authority in decision-making requires all of the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes. As noted by Follett (1940), this moves a process from one of "power over" to a process that shares authority and allows the government to take

action and decide in actions inclusive of “power with” the public (Feldman & Khademan, 2000, p. 157).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

While the findings from the study were salient in public education and collaborative governance in the District of Columbia, I also believe they apply in other contexts and policy arenas. To show the deeper connections, I, as the researcher, would recommend conducting further study, in a multi-case study fashion, to see the impact of the above ideology, and the framework in Chapter 7, in action. Further research in this space would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how shared authority and coproduction in public decision-making and planning processes can lead to more effective policy solutions and greater legitimacy of the processes through public acceptance and buy-in. Further study would also allow for the observation of collaborative governance in various policy arenas and as a means for shared authority in public policy decision-making. Further study, with a deeper and broader scope using similar criteria, could be conducted to see how the elements from this study’s framework can work to mitigate issues of equity, race, trust, and historical factors that many cities face when trying to engage with the public regarding policy issues and in addressing those problems. In a further study, it would be useful to explore how public participation and collaborative governance can impact other policy arenas. Furthermore, it would be useful to see the role it might play in the transformation of governance structures.

Based on the aforementioned limitations of this research study and to remove/correct the biases I mentioned as possible in the researcher, a larger sample for case study examination

should we conducted to see if we might discover the same findings, or potentially more.

Someone should do a comparison and analysis of the research to examine the experiences of other public process participants from other jurisdictions to see if their perspectives and process experiences include some of the same insights found in the data or offered by the participants of this study. It would also be interesting to understand the difference in perspectives uncovered through further study.

### **Making the Connection**

In thinking about the findings of this research, what has become clear is that the process and its design is important, but the role of the public administrator, and their belief in the process, its design, and responsiveness to the values expressed by process participants and citizens is essential. What the data has shown is that the sharing of authority in decision-making and planning is only possible if and when the public administrator is the catalyst and works to be:

- a. Intentional in their approach, process design, and actions;
- b. Inclusive and collaborative in their approach to decision-making;
- c. Patient in allowing time for relationships and trust to build, which means they need to be more focused on the relationship than the process; and,
- d. Diligent in building the capacity of other public administrators and staff to focus on inclusive practices and principles of coproducing ideas and processes.

The next chapter will work to flesh out these ideas and offer process steps for implementation.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this single-case study was to examine public participation in processes of shared decision-making authority and to determine how such processes contribute to the public's ability to have access and influence in public policy. Models of collaborative governance speak to a focus on inclusiveness and shared authority in public decision-making processes. As noted by Thacher (2001), the inclusion of the public in the decision-making, through a process of public deliberation, can lead to the greater legitimacy of a process and fosters a deeper level of buy-in to collaboratively created policy solutions.

In earlier chapters of this study, I offered discussions about democracy and its definition. Various scholars note the connection of shared authority and inclusion in decision-making to the fundamental principles of democracy (Box, 1998; Box, Marshall, Reed, & Reed, 2001; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, 2015; King & Stivers, 1998; Vigoda, 2002; Feldman & Khademian, 2007). The goal of this study to examine the role coproduction and shared authority in decision-making can have on the long-term effects of public education planning. As noted in the previous chapter, the role of coproduction in decision-making not only leads to greater legitimacy of the process and its outcomes, but it also can develop better outcomes through the contribution of various perspectives throughout the process; it allows it to achieve the goals and outcomes in a collaborative, and iterative, manner. This process of decision-making put the responsibility for the outcomes and solutions on the shoulders of both the government and the public while valuing the perspectives, historical context, knowledge, and expertise of everyone involved. Feldman & Khademian (2007) refer to this as a “community of participation” that acknowledges

the “... legitimate role... participants [play] in a joint effort to address a problem effectively... [with] actions... in pursuit of core tasks” (pp. 310-11).

The insight offered by Feldman & Khademian (2007), which connects most to the findings of this study and the recommendations offered to the District of Columbia government, is their discussion of the “relational work” necessary for a “community of participation.” The findings from my research are closely connected to this idea of “relational work” and its focus on creating meaningful connections or interactions, and channels of communication, between people who need to work together—in this context it would be government actors and the public (Feldman & Khademian, 2007, p. 311). As outlined by Feldman & Khademian (2007), and evidenced in this study, the importance of relational work is in “... creating a community of participation... and [in] developing the potential for empathy [throughout the process through its]... ability to legitimize different perspectives...,” taking into account historical context, fostering trust, and thus leading to greater policy outcomes (p. 312). This form of collaborative governance integrates participation into the process of decision-making, and problem-solving, as a core goal.

The conclusions and findings from this study answer the research questions outlined in chapter 1, addressing three areas:

- The role of coproduction and shared decision-making authority in mitigating tensions between the public and administrators.
- The role of framing and process design in addressing issues of equity, race, and trust.
- The elements of process legitimacy and how to achieve buy in processes and policy outcomes.

The findings, analysis, and interpretation supported each of these areas:

**Table 9: Four Major Findings of this Research**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>
<b>FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, &amp; Well-Designed Process</b>
<i>A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.</i>
<b>FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope &amp; Tasks</b>
<i>Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.</i>
<b>FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation</b>
<i>Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.</i>

As the researcher of this study, I want to offer recommendations based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions derived from this study. While the study focused on a single case-study of shared authority and coproduction in public policy decision-making and planning, the findings from this study apply to other jurisdictions looking to implement models of collaborative governance, or coproduction of governance, in the public planning or decision-making processes. As previously noted in chapter 2, public participation in governance and processes of public decision-making has been long considered a best practice. Implementing shared authority

or coproduction models in planning and practice can mitigate the issues that arise between the public and government actors—such as the fostering of trust, the ability to nurture meaningful interactions between the public and government, and building capacity and relationships. The role of share authority or coproduction in decision-making can work to authentically integrate the voice and desires of the public into the process of public decision-making in a meaningful and sustainable way. This integration allows for collaborative action and deliberation in governance and can ultimately play a large role in legitimizing the process outcomes through the public’s acceptance, buy-in, and an overall sense of ownership of the policy solutions derived from the process.

### **The Impact of Race and Trust in Government Action**

One additional element that needs to be further explored is the role of race, distrust, and the legacy of inequities in processes of shared authority in decision-making or planning. This study examines the use of inclusion and coproduction but through an understanding grounded in the challenges that come with issues present in a heterogenous communities with a legacy of deep issues of race and lingering feelings of distrust in government institutions (Arneil, 2006). From this perspective, trust is central to the relationship between a principal and agent. As noted by Rodet (2015, p. 17) “[t]rust between principal and agent—defined as the expectation of the latter acting in the interests of the former—is foundational [at both the macro and micro levels] where trust in the institutional system influences civic engagement” (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Gay, 2002). However, we know that in many communities distrust of the government and processes of decision-making persists. Blendon (2007) noted, “... Americans

evaluate their distrust in institutions (e.g. government) based on the overall perception of [the] environment in which they live” (p. 220). Thus, the perceptions of a particular group can serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of an institution; it closely connects to the institution’s successes or failures. Distrust goes deeper than a lack of trust in government along racial lines and evidence is in both scholarship and practice. Communities of color, particularly African Americans, have long showed higher levels of distrust in government than whites (Gay, 2002; Wilkes, 2011). For example, African Americans are living in social environments regularly threatened by issues of racial discrimination, economic uncertainty, and varied disparities, thus fostering and deepening their distrust of government (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Shoff & Yang, 2012). Frequent experiences of racial discrimination coupled with “... poverty... high rates of exposure to crime and violence, higher unemployment rates, substandard housing and schools...” has reduced the level of trust and connectedness African Americans have in government (Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2007; Hammond, 2010; Shoff & Yang, 2012, p. 1344). We can find examples of this lack of trust and connectedness in healthcare and in areas of participation in public governance and decision-making.

This close linkage of distrust and race is deeply engrained in our nation’s history of racial discrimination and white supremacy. It is the nexus between the risk and uncertainty of the nation’s history of race, discrimination, racial construction, and socialization of race that leads communities of color to what Nunnally (2012) coins as a “racial calculus of trust.” This “calculus” is the lens through which communities at risk of discrimination assess their ability to trust not only individuals or groups, but it also determines the degree to which they engage with government. As evidenced throughout history, and government at both the local and federal

levels, institutionalized asymmetrical power relations have victimized communities of color (Nunnally, 2012). It socializes experiences of discrimination and issues of race into a group, and from passes the experiences down generation to generation, thus deepening the feelings of distrust and leading to the outside perception of apathy in political or policy spaces (Nunnally, 2012).

Trust can be fragile and scarce (Messick & Kramer, 2001). Communities who lack a trusting relationship with the government are more isolated, disenfranchised from political participation (Mayan et al., 2013). Understanding the historical vestiges of the connection between distrust and democracy is useful in examining the public participation and democratic processes of decision-making (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Gay, 2002; Nunnally, 2012). If we carefully construct a process, the process can produce trust between the government and its citizens if the public is authentically involved, thus yielding the outcome of public buy-in for the final policy solution (Warren, 1999; Putnam, 1993; Rahn & Transue, 1998; Wilkes, 2011; Nunnally, 2012). As Nunnally (2012) notes, “[t]rust and distrust... are [the] counterbalancing forces in American democracy” and thus determine how the public, particularly groups who have experienced discrimination, engage in democratic processes, such as decision-making and public planning.

Closely linked together are the ideas of social justice and the practice of inclusion (Rawls, 1971; McGary, 2012). Moving a society toward justness requires the inclusion of vulnerable groups and those most impacted by a policy decision (Rawls, 1971; McGary, 2012). Even with inclusion as a goal, it does not alone work to mitigate or eliminate distrust—the development of trust is possible with time and repeat opportunities for inclusion (Arneil, 2006; McGary, 2012).

Rawls (1992) discusses how a stable society is achievable by focusing on addressing the needs of the public in partnership with the public. This perspective highlights the need to include the public in any decision-making processes that shape the environments in which the public lives and breathes. As both Rawls (1993) and McGary (2012) conclude, governments are only successful by showing and continuously showing to their citizens a consistent level of trustworthiness—demonstrated through expending resources and an invitation for partnership in governance. Citizens thus respond to that show of commitment through their willingness to further engage in the evolving improvement of their communities through their involvement in governance. “Trust is best between partners who are on an equal footing... [because] familiarity breeds trust” (Macy & Skvoretz, 1998; Molm, Takahasti, & Peterson, 2000; Levine, 2013, p. 37).

### **Finding a Way Forward: Six Elements or Steps**

From this research, what has become clear is that while process design is important, the role of the public administrator, and their belief in the process, its design, and the values expressed by process participants and citizens is essential. The findings and outcomes of this research, even while focused on processes, highlighted that a sharing of authority in decision-making and planning is only possible if when the public administrator is the catalyst and works to be:

- a. Intentional in their approach, process design, and actions;
- b. Inclusive and collaborative in their approach to decision-making;
- c. Patient in allowing time for relationships and trust to build, which means they need to be more focused on the relationship than the process; and,

- d. Diligent in building the capacity of other public administrators and staff to focus on inclusive practices and principles of coproducing ideas and processes.

Understanding at a deeper level the role public administrators play in the process, I offer the following recommendations to government actors or public administrators for implementing and committing to shared authority and coproduction in public decision-making and planning. This framework, while developed through the lens of collaborative governance, through inclusion and coproduction, in public education planning, its findings are applicable to all forms of public decision-making and planning processes. This framework, as the final recommendations of this dissertation, includes six elements, or steps:

**STEP 1:**

A commitment from government actors or public administrators to create opportunities for proactive and continuous dialogue and engagement. We should not tie these meaningful interactions to any specific 'ask'; it should be about relationship building, fostering trust, and listening.

**STEP 2:**

Government actors or public administrators have to trust what the public is sharing. There has to be a belief that what the public is sharing, and their desires, are truly their reality.

**STEP 3:**

History and context matters. A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place is essential. It directly connects this understanding to the issues of trust that exist and provide an opportunity for trust to be

re-established. This understanding ensures belief, fosters a willingness to participate, and ultimately legitimizes policy outcomes.

**STEP 4:**

Implementing a well-designed process, inclusive of a clear strategic goals and action steps, is necessary for overall success in decision-making processes. The process design clarifies the role and importance of public participation, establishes the expectations for meaningful interactions, and creates a space, or foundation, for shared decision-making or the use of coproduction in public policy or public planning.

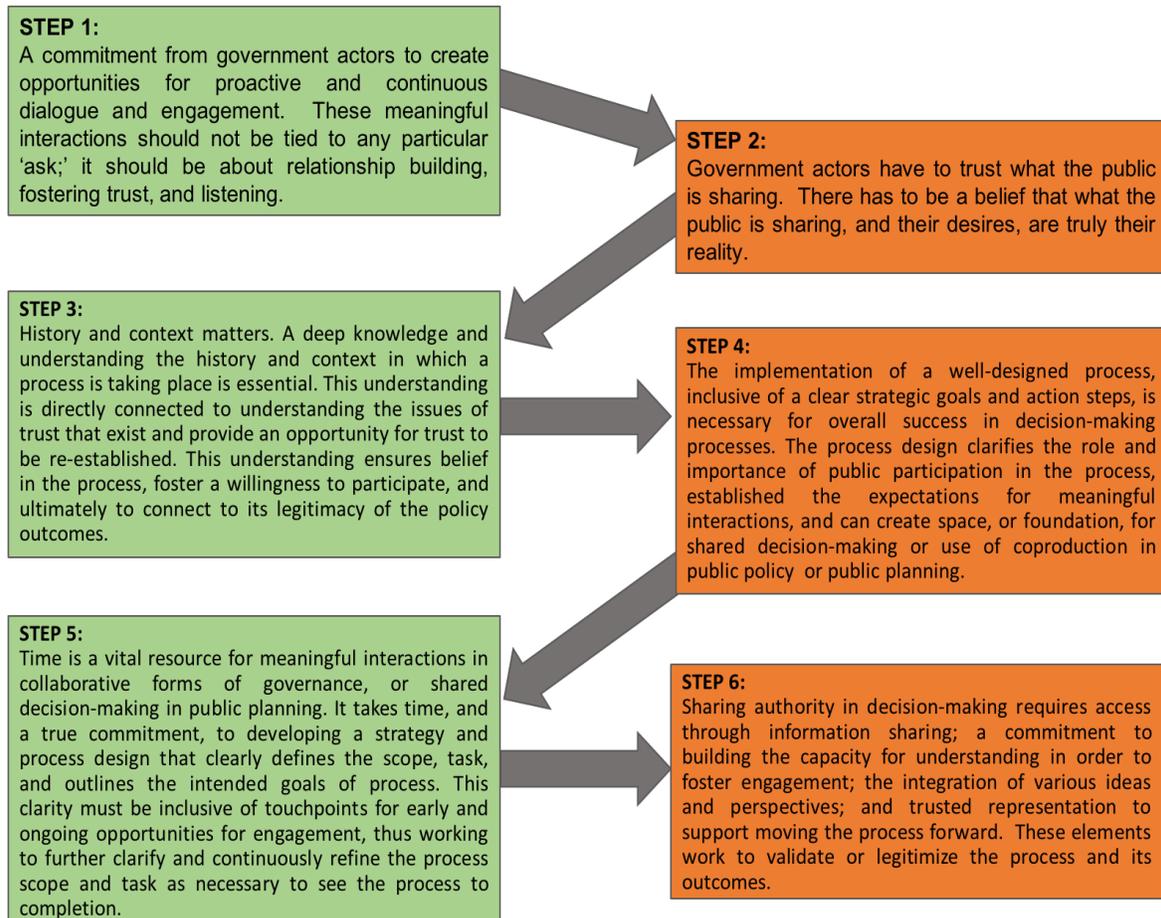
**STEP 5:**

Time is a vital resource for meaningful interactions in collaborative forms of governance, or shared decision-making, in public planning. It takes time, and a true commitment, to developing a strategy and process design that defines the scope, task, and outlines the intended goals of the process. This clarity must be inclusive of touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, thus working to further clarify and continuously refine the process scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.

**STEP 6:**

Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize the process and its outcomes.

**Figure 10: Framework for Action: Elements for Legitimization of Shared Authority in Public Decision Making & Planning**

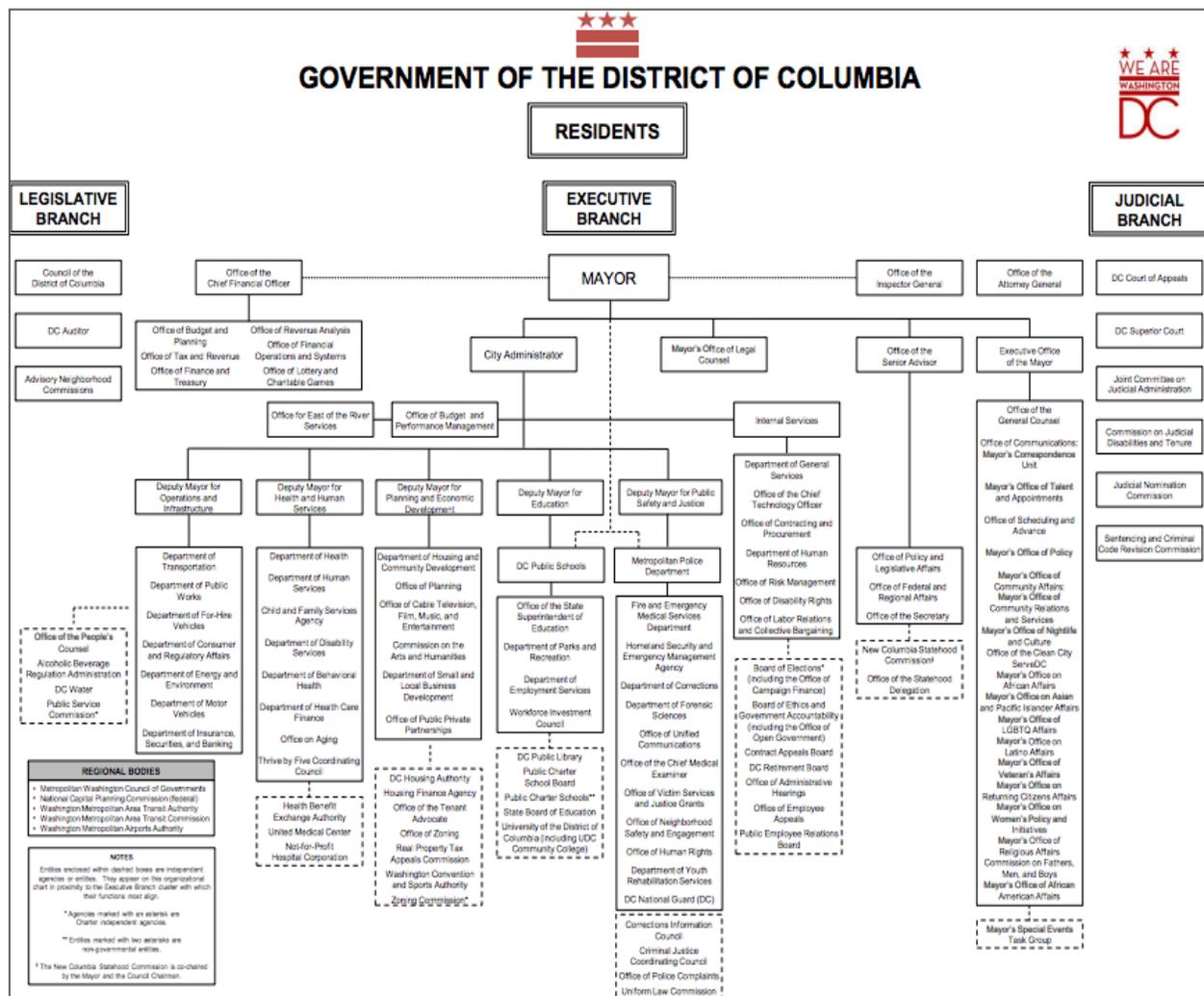


**Shared Authority & Community Driven Partnership: Recommendations for the District of Columbia**

The District of Columbia and its unique positioning as a federal district make many aspects of its governance challenging and complex. Residents are at the top at the top of the DC government organizational structure, but the city’s storied history and current affairs would lead one to believe otherwise. The city’s stated organizational structure should prioritize the needs of

its residents, as it should work to place the services of the city closer to the residents it serves. As a city, we allot the largest portions of the city budget to human services and public education, both of which directly impact the lives of all District residents. With billions of dollars on the line, it would seem that the establishment of open lines of communication and the fostering of relationships would be a primary goal of the city as it works to address policy issues.

**Figure 11: Government of the District of Columbia Organizational Chart**



(Chart retrieved from <https://mayor.dc.gov/publication/government-district-columbia-organizational-chart>)

In fiscal year 2018, the District of Columbia city budget was more than \$10 billion dollars, allotting roughly \$2 billion dollars to public education, yet public education outcomes do not meet the mark. Disparities in student achievement and persistent opportunity gaps continue to widen. While the case observed was specific to one particular aspect of public education planning in the District, the findings from this study apply to other forms of exploration, problem-solving, and policy planning and decision-making in the District. The themes captured in this study and sentiments shared by the participants interviewed, coupled with those comments memorialized in the notes from the process itself, are common across issue areas and continue to echo across the wards of the city.

The city's racial and segregated history continue to make conversation across difference challenging. As noted by a 2017 report by The Civil Rights Project:

*In 2011, Washington, DC reached a non-black majority for the first time in more than a half century, and since 2000, the city's white population has increased from just over a quarter to well over a third of the total population. In the city's most rapidly gentrifying census areas, the white population increased from approximately 5% in 2000 to just under 50% in 2015.*

While this radical demographic shift has "deemed Washington, DC a "hotbed" of gentrification," the integration that has shown up in the neighborhoods is not always clear within the school building nor in the resources or student outcomes (United State Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2011). This new transformation, coupled with the city's legacy, makes relationship building and providing a forum for discussion across difference essential. The

evidence gleaned from this study, coupled with the recommendations below, provide a foundation on which the historical context and legacy of the city, the individual perspectives and experiences of the public, the need for government action, and problem-solving policy issues through collaborative methods and by sharing authority can foster trust between the government and public while creating a platform for ongoing engagement.

The recommendations listed below are through the lens of the role public administrators play in supporting collaborative governance through shared authority in decision-making. By being intentional in their approach and inclusive in their actions, allowing time for relationship building to build trust, and understanding the need to build capacity for and understanding toward inclusion, the implementation of more collaborative processes is possible. This approach in action, and from my understanding as the researcher of this study, District of Columbia resident, and as the parent of a DCPS student, I offer the following recommendations for consideration as to how public administrators can be instrumental in moving toward collaborative governance through processes focused on inclusion and coproduction:

**Recommendation 1:**

The governance structure for the District of Columbia places ‘RESIDENTS’ at the top, yet the structure appears to be confusing and does not clearly outline the role of the structure in providing services and support to District residents. To provide clarity, DC government administrators should use the governance structure as an opportunity to challenge themselves to understand the needs of the community and develop a plan for how to intentionally create a plan to foster meaningful interactions and long-term partnerships with District resident for the purpose of policy, or issue specific, problem-

solving. Working to create this plan will allow DC government administrators to be intentional in removing any barrier to access, and complexities in the structure, and to create channels of communication and interactions that foster trust and spark collaborative actions.

**Recommendation 2:**

Within the current Executive Office of the Mayor structure, the role of deputy mayor should be the place to craft policy and include mechanisms to foster authentic, ongoing engagement with the community.

Each deputy mayor should designate staff to focus solely on public partnerships, engagement, and coalition building with the community at large. This focused role can work to support the cluster agencies it oversees in the development of a similar plan for their individual agencies. Each deputy mayor should provide regular opportunities for touch points with the community in order to not only share with the community what the administration is doing but also to work collaboratively with the community to better understand issues and to generate, consider, and operationalize policy ideas. While the city could realize this process through some form of an advisory group or resident council, it is important for this process to be inclusive of the city's very diverse communities and varying needs.

**Recommendation 3:**

The Office of the City Administrator should work to create, implement, and collect performance metrics specifically focused on how government agencies and offices engage, partner, and include the public in their programming and decision-making

processes. The metrics from this process should not just be checking the box metrics but developing indicators in partnership with key community stakeholders, who can serve as trusted representatives. Such partnership is vital to ensure the metrics are community-driven.

**Recommendation 4:**

The District of Columbia Public Schools is an agency of the city and responsible for educating all students in the District of Columbia. The public education system in the city is complemented by a very robust public charter school system. DCPS plays a pivot role in the education landscape in the District and should annually create and publicly share their family and public engagement strategies for the upcoming school year no later than June, after the passing of the final city budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Any opportunities for families to take part in any decision-making bodies (i.e. cabinets or committees) for DCPS should be announced with at least a 60-day lead time prior to collecting any applications for consideration and include broad outreach through a variety of mediums, and languages, to ensure information access for all families.

**Recommendation 5:**

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) should play a greater role in creating a comprehensive citywide engagement framework for public education planning. Each public education planning or decision-making process should not have to recreate the wheel regarding how to engage and partner with the community in such processes. As noted on the DME’s website— “[t]he DME is responsible for developing and implementing the Mayor’s vision for academic excellence and creating a high-quality

education continuum from birth to 24 (from early childhood to K-12 to post-secondary and the workforce)” (Retrieved from <https://dme.dc.gov/page/about-dme>).

Implementing this vision should not be absent of including the public. The establishment of a citywide framework for public education engagement would support deepening the work of the DME in the three major functions of the office, functions that touch all aspects of the public education continuum: (1) overseeing a District-wide education strategy; (2) managing interagency and cross-sector coordination; and, (3) providing oversight and/or support for [various] education related agencies.

**Recommendation 6:**

The DME should create, or partner with another organization to develop and execute a plan on how to educate the public on how the public education governance structure in the District works. This forum or tool should be inclusive of the various roles the public plays. They should design this tool to spark a deeper understanding of the inner-workings of the structure and be flexible in connecting to the various areas of interest each stakeholder might have. They should also share this tool with students to foster their engagement in city governance and engagement. We can find examples of such a tool on the website of the Office of the Student Advocate ([studentadvocate.dc.gov](http://studentadvocate.dc.gov)).

**Recommendation 7:**

Large scale public education planning or decision-making processes in the District (at the agency-level, city-wide level, school-level, etc.) should have mandatory open government and public inclusion requirements. Such processes might include school-level budgeting, the mayor’s budget process and DC Council budget decision-making processes, school

board decisions, and other examples to be determined. The DME with both DCPS and public charters, and trusted community representatives, should undertake the development of such measures.

**Recommendation 8:**

To see real long-term results and the formation of trust between the residents and DC government, government actors in the District should consider:

- o Starting each decision-making or planning process within the community context, providing a clear definition of the ‘why’ at the forefront of the process.
- o Moving away from processes gear toward the ‘engagement’ of the community in the process to a process that is intentionally community driven and focused.
- o Making a commitment to deepen ongoing community partnerships for the long haul, not just for the short-term. This means moving beyond just inviting the community to be a part of the process to one where the inclusion of the community is paramount. This commitment would require coalition building, deep listening, and meaningful opportunities to interact.

**Recommendation 9:**

The DME should work with the community, public education agencies, and other government stakeholders to create a comprehensive plan for public education in the District. Many issues continue to arise and go unaddressed due to a lack of a comprehensive plan and citywide vision for public education. The commonalities families, students, and other stakeholders are looking for in public education are resounding. The commonalities were present in the student assignment process and

continue to be a part of the discussions today. The lack of a comprehensive plan for public education in the District has led to unintended consequences, scandals, and a decrease in public trust and desire to engage.

### **Researcher Reflections**

As this study comes to a close, I am reminded of one thought I shared in chapter 2—within the ideals and principles of democracy, there is a classic problem of inequity. The practices that stem from democracy can easily work to exacerbate those inequities by creating an imbalance of power, further disenfranchising those most impacted by issues of public policy. I hope that through this study I have offered insights into how government actors might work to reverse the imbalance of power through the intentional and proactive process of public engagement. Fostering trust, listening and accepting the public's realities, providing access to information and building capacity, and welcoming meaningful interactions with the public can lead to collaborative action, finding enduring solutions to public ills.

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## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: Participant Interview Quotes & Document Analysis Materials**

To gain a deeper understanding of the student assignment review process for the District of Columbia Public Schools, and to take a look at how the case fits into my interest in studying how shared authority in decision-making can work to address the tensions between democracy and administration. To empirically investigate this case, I gathered data through the process of participant interviews and through a review of a process materials and document.

### **Participant Interviews**

I decided to conduct participant interviews in order to better understand not only the process but the other issues impacting the process. The interview process took place between April 2017 through January 2018. Each interview was conducted in-person or via phone and followed a semi-structured interview protocol, which was guided and informed by the findings from the previously coded focus group comments. The interview protocol allowed for the interviews to be more open-ended in nature in order to allow for additional themes to emerge and for flexibility in the process, thus allowing the interview participants with me to be more organic.

The interview guide used for the participant interviews included a set of open-ended questions listed below:

1. Please describe your role as a member of the Washington, DC community?
2. Please describe how you have engaged with City residents on issues related to public education and public education planning?
  - a. Please describe the kinds of exchanges or processes that you have been a part of?
  - b. What kind of information was shared?

- c. What type of information was collected?
  - d. Please describe the ways in which this information was reflective of the “community?”
  - e. What was the feedback loop?
3. How would you characterize the nature of the relationship between the City and the residents?

Individuals interviewed for this project were found through publicly available documents that identified their participation in the process of examination. The individuals interviewed included:

- o administrative and school leaders for DC Public Schools;
- o actors in the Mayor's Office;
- o Advisory Committee members for the process;
- o and leaders from the community/people who participated in the process.

All interview participants received a list of questions in advance of the interview as well as the interview consent form. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed, word for word, by a third-party to ensure the authenticity of each participants comments. Following each interview, the participants were able to review the transcript of their interview in order to ensure the authenticity of their comments and to provide any additional feedback based on the results of their interview transcription. Each interview participant had equal opportunity to review their transcription and make follow up comments.

The 21 participant interviews conducted allowed me, as the researcher, to gain thick, rich descriptions of the process from the perspectives and experience of its participants (Geertz, 1974) and provides the opportunity for the reader of this research to understand through study

through the lens of its participants. Furthermore, the participant interviews give me the ability to document the broad range of participant experiences, and their voices, in the process through the use of “thick descriptions” (Denzin, 2001). This form of data collection was fundamental to the exploration of this process and gave me the ability to uncover the valuable information for the purpose of addressing the research questions (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### *Participant Interview Quotes*

The section below shared relevant quotes from the participant interviews grouped into the dissertation findings – Four Major Findings of this Research.

**Table 10: Four Major Findings of this Research**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>
<b>FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, &amp; Well-Designed Process</b>
<i>A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.</i>
<b>FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope &amp; Tasks</b>
<i>Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.</i>
<b>FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation</b>
<i>Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.</i>

I have organized the following discussion by theme and share the findings from the data through illustrative quotes and passages from the participant interviews and documents reviewed.

**Finding 1:**

<b>FINDING 1: History and Context Matters and Connects to Issues of Trust</b>
<i>A deep knowledge and understanding of the history and context in which a process is taking place matters—it sets the foundation for resolving issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital to ensure a belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to legitimize its outcomes.</i>

The majority of interview participants spoke to a need for deep knowledge and a clear understanding the history and context in which a process. In the documents reviewed this sentiment came up quite often. This historical and contextual understanding matters, as it is directly connected to issues of trust or the ability to rebuild trust. An appropriate level of historical and contextual understanding is vital in order to ensure at the very least the belief in the process, foster a willingness to participate, and ultimately to connect to its outcomes. Below I have included quotes from the participant interviews relevant to this finding – a more detailed narrative is in Chapter 5 of this dissertation on page 88.

**Elected Official:** *Our city has failed to recognize the power of education and the value that it adds to the longevity of our city and the fact that we see still pervasive poverty in the city. Historically, the focus in the District of Columbia has not been on education, it's been more on jobs and getting people jobs.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *How do you navigate or address these big overlaying issues of race and class...that has been plaguing the city for a long time? Our city is highly segregated in terms of housing and that housing segregation leads to segregation in our schools because we have a right to a school by where you live, that has a lot of political and policy implications. Changing our school boundaries alone is not going to fix that problem or the other issues at hand.*

**Appointed City Official:** *You do try to engage in ideally sincere and authentic ways, because of all these dynamics we have been talking about, for one thing you get a very skewed response which tends to be along race and class lines, so you hear much louder, more insistent, and I would say entitled voices from certain parts of the community and it's almost like (to my mind) that you almost have to like sample and then adjust based on who the actual community and impacted group is. So, it's not just like 100 people said this and 20 people said that. Well, the 20 people who said that are actually representative of way more than half the city, and so I'd have to give those 20 people more weight.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Low-income black people in the city have been screwed again, again, and again. There is no reason that any logical human being would look back*

at all those incidences and say, "I should not trust." I remember talking to folks and saying, "I don't expect you to trust me." Like how you I expect you to trust me.

**DCPS Official, Former Appointed City Official:** *I think it's like this hate/love situation, right? Our residents and many of our advocates, DCPS advocates or whatever are ultimately wanting to support DCPS and want to support the district and are committed and passionate about these issues. But there is also a lot of distrust in whether or not the government is equally committed and passionate and willing to do what is best for the city. I think the trust issues are a big thing, which is why processes are so important because of that. I feel like it is a love/hate. There is also accountability like we know we are accountable to the public and to our stakeholders ultimately, but I think there are a lot of trust issues in certain areas.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Various issues, like the school closures during Michelle Rhee's tenure, and there have been huge breaks in trust and each time we've [as a government and DC Public Schools] had to build back from. I think we have come a long way since then, but we are not there yet. That takes time. There is still a lot of trust, sort of mistrust, that exists...I don't think it's ever going to go away, I think it is the inherent nature of the relationship of these two entities, the government and public.*

**Parent, Community Leader:** *From a historical perspective, our neighborhood had always been safe from processes like this so there was no need to participate. We trusted the government would do right by us and leave our neighborhood alone. We knew about the issues in other neighborhoods but didn't think it would impact us. We didn't have much of an argument to make because making it a racial issue was kind of ridiculous due to the make-up of our community.*

**Former DCPS Official, Community Leader:** *If the conversation we are attempting to have is not the one the community is having, why should they want to participate? Why should they even legitimize the process? Some of the complaints I heard a lot was the reason or rationale for why people did not want to participate, they felt like even if they did participate, they wouldn't be heard. That's happened many times before. Many times, the experience people had with government was one of disenfranchisement and that leads them to believe that it doesn't matter if they participate because the decisions have already been made before the 'engagement' even started.*

**Former DCPS Parent, Community Leader:** *I was overall impressed with the process for the boundaries, it was well organized, and I actually think people did pay attention to what*

*people were saying. But based on my past experiences with government, I came to the process with a very cynical attitude.*

**DCPS Parent, Community Leader:** *For the most part, we have a system [of public education] right now where the only way you can guarantee access to a good school is if you buy it.*

**DCPS Official:** *You know, we still ask parents to give us the same information multiple times and people have built up a tolerance for it. We continue to ask for something, but many times show no results.*

**DC Government Official:** *...so many government agencies don't touch people and so [people] are basing their experience on the one bad experience they had with someone or something and you feel it applies to the whole government.*

*This feeling makes it so hard to buy into something or believe in anything because of your past experiences. What people don't realize is that things can change so rapidly but many people are living in the past... there are also times when there is a sense of revisionist history.*

**Community Member:** *In this city people have a strong affinity to their neighborhood schools and public education.*

**Advocate, Former DCPS Parent:** *You have to take the time to get to know a community before trying to engage.*

**Community Leader:** *Getting to those most impacted and trying to get their participation requires using networks with known and trusted community members from communities that are historically less represented.*

**Community Member, Parent:** *Because of the legacy of the city, things often fall along race or class line, it gets contentious.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *It takes time for people to get to know each other and work with one another and for their voices to be heard. With time you get to know these people as people, who and what they care about, so they aren't just objectified or made out to be the enemy. Time allows for the raising of understanding and the ability to build capacity.*

## Finding 2:

### **FINDING 2: Meaningful Interactions are Fostered with Time, a Clear Strategy, & Well-Designed Process**

*A clear strategy for action and a well-designed process, tools for success in processes of public participation, can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.*

All of the interview participants, and throughout the review of the process documents and articles, expressed a need for clarity of strategy for action and a well-designed process as a tool for success in processes of public participation. This clarity can lead to meaningful interactions and create the space for shared decision making in planning.

One of the first interviews I conducted was with a DC Government Official who stated, “[w]here there is not transparency then no, there cannot be any trust.” This one quote sums up the sentiments shared by all of the interview participants/documents reviewed and the issues of time and the foundational strategy and overall design of a process makes transparency possible. Below I share quote relevant to this finding – a more detailed narrative can be found in Chapter 5 of this dissertation on page 88.

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *It is all about the texture of the conversation...you know when you are in it and you can tell that it is meaningful, where they [the government] is really listening to you and there is a chance that they are going to address what is on your mind and in a context that there is a greater likelihood that you might say, okay this is a genuine back-and-forth. The authentic listening makes room for the development of shared goals.*

**Community Member:** *Without making time to engage it is easy to undervalue things... Time also allows for the appropriate strategy to come together...” in the design the gains from teaming up can become clear.*

**DCPS Official:** *When you are able to show people not just that you listen to them but that you take their concerns into account and come up with solution that reflects both your priorities and their concerns that is the win.*

*Listening → creating the plan → sharing the plan → making changes based on feedback*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Authentic back and forth discussion between the citizenry and the government is the most powerful exercise in democracy. It is communities saying what they want to see in their public schools and pushing the government in that direction, that is the most powerful manifestation of the public...*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *There needs to be some clarity on the issue that we are working to address. ...if you [as a community member] don't think that a problem exists for the same reason that I think that it exists, we are actually probably really far apart. We would work to solve the problem differently.*

**Former City Official:** *At the end of the day, if you listen to the community and respond to the community that is probably what is going to be the most sustainable politically.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *You have to begin to develop guideposts and not be in denial about tackling the elephant in the room.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The thing is that people's perceptions and people's feelings about the reality are real and valid. There has to be a willingness to go where the evidence and where the input leads...*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *It is about asking questions and gut checking...*

**City Official:** *Our city's shifting structures makes it challenging to know how to engage. But engaging families is so important as they are an incredibly rich source of information.*

**Former City Official, Philanthropy Professional:** *What are the granular questions? What are the investments we are trying to make? Who are the right people to help answer the questions?*

**City Official:** *...being an honest-broker and establishing trust with the community is essential. That takes time. History matters – knowing that will give you a greater understanding of the context and legacy in which you are operating with the community.*

**City Official:** *...it was very important to go out to the community early and often to try to establish a baseline of trust. That means not just engaging when you want something or a particular outcome.*

**DCPS Official:** *In order to breakdown some of those barriers their needs to be engagement and decision-making opportunities on an ongoing basis.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Former City Official:** *There are various drivers for participation. You have to be intentional about designing a lot of different methods to get input. You have to lower the cost for entry or the threshold for engagement. Not everyone wants to engage deeply.*

**Finding 3:**

**FINDING 3: A Well-Designed Process Must Be Clear about Process Scope & Tasks**

*Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.*

Throughout most of the interview conducted, and in the document review, the importance of time, strategy, and process design was a common theme. Taking the time to develop a strategy and process design, with touch points for early and ongoing opportunities for engagement, works to clarify the scope and tasks necessary to see the process to completion.

Finding 3.1—A clear strategy and process design inclusive of early and frequent engagement touch points can work to refine and narrow the focus and objectives of the process.

**Former DCPS Official:** *I think the ideal is when there has been an exchange of ideas and clarity from each person's point of view along with a commitment to much compromise and resolution as humanly possible. When it's an honest exchange of those ideas or perspectives, you know the perspectives are real...you know they are validated.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *I remember feeling immediately uneasy about the process because I didn't understand the goal... The student assignment*

*process we took the time to refine and understand the scope of the task and the possible outcomes. Our role [as advisory committee members] was clear.*

**Community Member, Parent:** *Hallmarks of real community engagement...well it should be (1) a city wide question that people can connect to; (2) People need to believe in what is being undertaken – a commitment to a perspective and to have the ability to see that their input matters; (3) there should be a genuine response to the points and issues raised – real engagement with the ideas people are offering*

**Former DCPS Official:** *I actually don't walk into a situation thinking that I know more. I actually walk into a situation assuming there are things I don't know, and I'm interested in hearing what someone else's perspective is, and then based on that usually there is some commonality. It's meaningful dialog... Those kinds of authentic connections provide clarity. This kind of clarity can give credibility so you can refer back to the discussion as a level for the legitimacy of the process or implementation of something.*

Finding 3.2 – Opportunities for frequent and authentic engagement opportunities can work to clarify the process scope and tasks through the collective establishment of the vision for success or the 'why' of a process.

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The narrative is important. I have heard my community members say that they are trying to reconcile their past experiences with the new conversations they are being asked to engage in. I think that, quite frankly, because they had been so disrespected in the past that they were hesitant to engage.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *The personal connection is what sparks the desire to get involved.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *Well first we have to help people understand the why before we just jump right into it [a process]. We have to design a process where people understand what we are trying to do....*

**DCPS Official:** *I think often folks get frustrated with it [the process] because they don't understand why something that sounds so simple of a fix is so incredibly complicated and doesn't get fix.*

**DCSP Official:** *You have to be targeted in your outreach. You have to seek them [people] out and find ways to share information in a way that they can see how their kids' future is impacted by this decision. A lot of times people are like I don't really care about that [issue]. This helps to build capacity and the knowledge of why the discussions are important.*

**Community Leader, Parent:** *...articulate how this is going to affect somebody and how the action is going to impact the situation at had...*

Finding 3.3—Clarifying the process context through conversation, information sharing, and by setting expectations for the modes and methods of engagement in the process ensures that actionable items rise to the top.

**DCPS Official:** *...sometimes government thinks they know what is best for communities and they think it is a great idea and while in theory it may be, it could be a program that is duplicative of what is actually taking place and resources that are being spent that could be diverted somewhere else.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *Early wins are important. I just feel like groups like that [advisory committee] need to feel as if there are some early decision-making points to feel as if something is progressing. Early wins help to improve things in terms of how folks are able to sort of align on goals, align on sort of the direction that the groups decision-making sort of goes in... It is important because there are so many voices and different people in the room.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *There has to be an undergirding theory of action and philosophy to the steps you are looking to take... think about it in terms of Joyce Epstein's continuum... It is about setting expectations and establishing a framework for action. This gives people a reason to trust. It's about taking the geeky policy things and making them digestible for understanding. In this process you can work to bring people together.*

Finding 3.4—Deepening and building capacity through information sharing and the establishment of feedback loops can provide transparency and accountability.

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *In our city there has been a real struggle with civil rights, our sovereignty as a city – we've had times where there was a*

*more organic relationship between the residents and the city leaders, more so than now. At that time, some of the characters who built the city had organic constituencies, it is a little different today and I think there is probably less responsiveness and knowledge of where we have been as a city.*

**DC Government Official:** *Transparency is important but there are times when we try to be super transparent and it has the wrong effect. Sometimes we give too much information and people feel overwhelmed or think we are trying to intentionally drown them with information.*

**Community Leader:** *The public is pretty practical. They instinctively know if someone is not being honest with them. They know if the government is trying to sell them something. It can only be a legitimate process if you aren't coming to the community with an end goal already in mind. Because if so, what is the point in participating*

**Former City Official:** *Being open and straightforward with people [allows you to be] as respectful as you can be to all the voice that you hear. You have to explain the decisions that are made. You have to provide the context of what is happening, sharing the scope of the project, and work to address all the concerns presented.*

Finding 3.5—A clearly defined strategy and process design works to support participation by reducing barriers to access for participation and outlines clear channels for communication for information sharing and the ongoing process of data collection through established feedback loops, continuous relationship-building, and understanding.

**Community Leader, Parent:** *Broad outreach helps to remove barriers and creates access. Having a smaller, focused group where you are able to talk with folks and breakdown barriers that are reflected in hard to understand information.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Giving communities access to decision-making in authentic ways; this allows for trust to be built and maintained.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *You cannot just have one strategy to engage. How can we use technology and electronic platforms for folks to access information, some people are just never going to come to big community meetings. This can be a slow process.*

**DCPS Official:** *Breaking down barriers for access means understanding that not everyone wants to engage in the same way. People are busy, not everyone has the time to engage deeply.*

#### Finding 4:

**FINDING 4: The Elements of Process Legitimacy are Accessing Participation through Information-Sharing, Building Capacity, Integrating Varied Perspectives, Establishing Feedback Loops and Channels of Communication, and Having Trusted Representation**

*Sharing authority in decision-making requires the following elements: access through information sharing; a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement; integrating various ideas and perspectives; establishing feedback loops and channels of communication; and, having trusted representation to support moving the process forward. These elements work to validate or legitimize its outcomes of the processes.*

To share authority in decision-making requires the access, a commitment to capacity building to spark participation and integrating varied perspectives. Below I have outlined quotes from the participant interviews relevant to this finding – a detailed narrative can be found in Chapter 5 of this dissertation on page 88.

Finding 4.1—A need for access to the process through information sharing. This commitment recognizes that partnership (between the public and government) is essential and fosters the ability to work collectively to find common ground and seek alignment.

**Former Appointed City Official:** *the sharing of and access to information is vital...the community and residents desire to know more of what's happening...*

**City Official:** *I think it's important that the "in between" layer where you can educate people about the issues, the data, they can in a much deeper way help flush out and "here are what the tradeoffs are going to be" and "here are things that you tiny group of decision makers aren't thinking about" that we cannot just name, we can like flush out and reprioritize them and do a much more kind of substantial level of engagement with a smaller group.*

**City Official:** *We shared out an online appendix where we published all of the results of all survey information that we gathered and the feedback we received. We explained in the narrative report how the feedback impacted, how it impacted the actual strategic plan and what we hear and how that related to the plan we developed.*

**City Official:** *Clear lines of communications means communicating the information people do and don't want to hear. We have to make sure we are not talking past each other. ...making sure we are not bailing on the hard decisions.*

**Community Leader, Advisory Committee Member:** *Everybody wants to have equal footing in terms of maybe a baseline of what they are getting [information]... they want to feel that they are being treated equally. You want to create the capacity for everyone to be able to participate.*

Finding 4.2—Requires a commitment to building the capacity for understanding to foster engagement and meaningful process contributions.

**DCPS Official:** *Partnering with families and communities and having a direct relationship is a core component for success. This partnership requires a capacity building, finding the value in the relationship, and investing in them in meaningful ways. Making the investments ensures that we are a part of the solution and not a contributor to the problems.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Building capacity means to regularly inform and share. It means getting the right people around the table for the topic. You have to ensure senior level city officials are at every meeting to show that the leadership is invested, and the level of engagement is robust and broad.*

**Community Leader:** *The public is pretty practical. They instinctively know if someone is not being honest with them. They know if the government is trying to sell them something. It can only be a legitimate process if you aren't coming to the community with an end goal already in mind. Because if so, what is the point in participating.*

**Former City Official, Public Charter School Leader:** *...race and class are definitely issues in the city but I think that DC can be a very transient city. I see a tremendous amount of mobility...not to mention this is a complex system to understand and navigate.*

**Former City Official:** *Finding ways to operationalize the feedback given and trusting what the community says – what they are sharing, and their desires, is their reality.*

**Former DCPS Official:** *We need to engage them [the community] as partners in the decision-making process. It is not like DCPS makes the final decision; the engaged people actually make recommendations that [in the student assignment process] then the mayor could sign off on or not.*

Finding 4.3—The integration of various ideas and perspectives leads to greater outcomes and process buy-in.

**Community Leader, Parent:** *... “how do you leverage networks” so that you do get access to more people and perspectives and when you have a core group of people who are like really invested in this, it helps to do that too so you have that many more people who are sort of eliciting input and feedback who are letting people know that this thing is going on, and so I think that is really important.*

**DCPS Official:** *The representation and composition of a group has to be right. You can’t have a group that is majority white when DCPS is not that. It just doesn’t build confidence and it makes us look tone deaf. You have to work at mapping out the type of composition you want to have. The group has to be balanced – asking yourself “where do we need strong voices and honest perspectives.”*

**City Official:** *The best thing about the advisory committee [a group of individuals representative of their communities] is that it is just a way to kind of check your process. [Groups like that] let you know if they think you are going off in the wrong direction and it helps you to distill the information.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *Representation is not just about representation across groups but perspective diversity.*

Finding 4.4—Fostering trust and nurturing relationships through the representation through trusted persons supports moving the process forward through the accountability and leads to a greater level of transparency. Representation can legitimize the process.

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *There should be someone from the community that we know...a person who has a constituency to go back to and share the information gathered. That in the very least holds them accountable.*

**DC Government Official:** *I think there is a fine line between making sure you have enough voices represented and having so many voices that you actually can't come to any sort of a consensus or you are just so overwhelmed by the various perspectives. Having a dedicated set of people to work through all of the issues with you that is supposed to represent direct parts of the city can be impactful.*

**Advisory Committee Member, Community Leader:** *True community representatives are actually supposed to be representatives of someone other than themselves. I think the other reason though is because as a Community Ward, I think we are more sensitive to feeling disenfranchised or disempowered and when our institutions that we are trying to either have them established and we believe in or build up or are trying to establish are not included, it delegitimizes them, but at the same time, the city often times will come back and want things from those institutions in order for us to be successful, not only, and when I say successful, I mean successful in moving our own agendas forward and being true representatives, we have to be respected and present, and to not include at least someone who is recognized as a representative for our community means that you don't respect us. You don't respect our community. You're just looking for a person to fill a seat with whatever and for whatever reason, whether they check a particular box like parent or charter or native or whatever it is, or they have a particular perspective that you want to stack the conversation with.*

**DCPS Official:** *Pulling together a group of trusted community representatives can be a good place to vet ideas and to get to a place of common understandings and solutions.*

**Former Appointed City Official:** *In the smaller groups, whoever you choose you have to make sure these are folks that people trust. Doing so will show that you value the communities they represent and help the communities feel as if their voice is reflected through the representative. With the Advisory Committee the members spoke up about the communities they represented, and they shared information freely and openly.*

## Document Review

In addition to focus group comment analysis and participant interviews, I decided to also do an additional analysis of process documents. In following the method for document analysis as outline by Bowen (2009) and O’Leary (2014) I collected a variety of public records and physical evidence – which included process documents, meetings notes, agendas, community meeting participant data, and news articles – for review. In addition to the final report and recommendation, I also analyzed other documents and materials used to guide and support the process. The full list of supporting documents and materials analyzed includes:

I collected a variety of public records and physical evidence – which included process documents, meetings notes, agendas, community meeting participant data, and news articles – for review. A detailed narrative can be found in Chapter 5 of this dissertation on page 88.

Documents analyzed includes:

1. Process documents for the student assignment and school boundaries process – full document list below.
2. News articles the process from the fall of 2013 in to the fall of 2014, which include articles published in the following publications:
  - The Washington Post
  - Education Week
  - The DCist
  - WAMU 88.5 – American University Radio
  - The East of the River Newspaper
  - Greater Greater Washington

3. Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries  
(final report)

**Process documenters and materials from the student assignment and school boundaries process.**

All of the process documents reviewed and analyzed for this study can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process. The which includes:

- Letter to Parents and Frequently Asked Questions (October 2013)
- Advisory Committee Meeting Materials
  - (a total of 15 meetings from October 2013 – August 2014) – analysis was conducted of the following meetings:
    - Meeting #4: January/February 2014
    - Meeting #6: March 2014
    - Meeting #7: May 2014
    - Meeting #8: May 2014
    - Meeting #9: May 2014
    - Meeting #12: June 2014
- Policy Briefs:
  - Policy Brief 1: DC Student Assignment and Choice Policy
  - Policy Brief 2: Student Assignment Policies in Other Cities
  - Policy Brief 3: The Landscape for Student Assignment and School Choice

- Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Process Getting Involved and Timeline
  - Working Group Flyer (April 2014)
  - June Meeting Flyer (June 2014)
- Community Working Group Meeting Materials:
  - Materials from April 5-8, 2014
  - Materials from April 24-26, 2014
- Advisory Committee Draft Proposal and Boundaries (June 2014)
- June Community Meeting Materials (June 16, 17, 19, 2014)
  - June 2014 Community Meetings Presentation
  - High School Feeder Patter Breakout Group Presentation (eight presentations)
  - Participant Worksheet (June 2014 meetings)
- June 2014 Community Meetings Participant Worksheet Data
- DC Public Charter School Board Letter to the Advisory Committee (July 2014)
- Mayor Vincent C. Gray's Response Letter to Advisory Committee
- Mayor Vincent C. Gray's Press Release (August 21, 2014)
- Advisory Committee on Student Assignment Press Release (August 21, 2014)
- DCPS Parent Letters (August 21, 2014; October 31, 2014)

Below I have outlined the relevant materials from the aforementioned documents. As a reminder, all of the documents can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

While I was able to gather several documents, all mentioned above, there were only a few which fit the context of the research questions being raised in this case study exploration.

The supporting documents and materials analyzed included:

- Letter to Parents and Frequently Asked Questions (October 2013)
- Advisory Committee Meeting Materials

(a total of 15 meetings from October 2013 – August 2014) – analysis was conducted of the following meetings:

- Meeting #4: January/February 2014
- Meeting #6: March 2014
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- Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Process Getting Involved and Timeline
  - Working Group Flyer (April 2014)
  - June Meeting Flyer (June 2014)

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- Advisory Committee on Student Assignment Press Release (August 21, 2014)
- DCPS Parent Letters (August 21, 2014; October 31, 2014)

**Note:** All documents and materials can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

All italicized text below indicates the use of directly quoted text from the documents analyzed.

### **Letter to Parents and Frequently Asked Questions (October 2013)**

The first form of public communication from the DME regarding the process to revise the DCPS student assignment and school boundaries was sent home to DCPS parents and out to the

community in October 2013. This correspondence discussed the role of public participation and inclusion in the process:

*The goal of this process is to develop fair and clear school choice and student assignment policies that reflect what families want...[t]o clarify what rights and responsibilities families and schools have regarding access to public schools...*

The letter goes on to note:

*To help us [with the process], we [the DME] have established a 21-member committee to evaluate options and offer recommendations. The DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment includes members with varied perspectives who are strongly invested in the success of the public education system and the future of our city. The Committee, which includes public school parents from throughout the District, will incorporate public discussion, research, and analysis to provide fair minded and informed recommendations...*

The letter notes a need for engagement beyond a representative group and shares various ways of engaging in the process:

*This process will not be successful without extensive public engagement and input. Families who send their children to public school and residents who are invested in the social and economic well-being of the city all have a stake in the policies that govern DCPS school assignment. For this reason, we have multiple opportunities for parents and community members to get involved and provide input throughout the process.*

- *Participate in a Focus Group*
- *Volunteer to join a Working Group*

- *Share your ideas and thoughts on EngageDC.org*
- *Attend citywide community dialogues*
- *Participate in an online survey*

*...I am confident that together we will do what is best for students and families.*

### **Advisory Committee Meeting Materials**

The advisory committee met for a total of 15 meetings during the student assignment and school boundaries review process. Those meetings took place from October 2013 until August 2014. In my thorough review of all of the advisory committee materials, the meeting materials and notes from the following meetings were the richest source of data regarding the stated commitment to “extensive public engagement and input” in finding a pathway forward in the process:

- Meeting #4: January/February 2014
- Meeting #6: March 2014
- Meeting #7: May 2014
- Meeting #8: May 2014
- Meeting #9: May 2014
- Meeting #12: June 2014

#### Meeting #4: January/February 2014

In the presentation developed for the advisory committee, the meeting agenda outlines a discussion on updates regarding public input. At this meeting there was discussion about the conducted focus groups and a need to conduct more focus groups in certain target areas, Wards 7 and 8, which did not get an ideal turnout. There was also mentioned made of additional public

meetings to be hosted by advisory committee members in the wards they represent. The only wards that did not host additional public meetings were Wards 3 and 8, all other ward representatives hosted meetings.

At this meeting, the advisory committee members reviewed a document entitled *Summary of Public Outreach/Input January 30, 2014* that outlined the public participation and input to date. This document outline calls and email inquiries regarding the process to the date of January 2014. The emails and calls covered a host of topics from the focus groups, questions on how the process might affect the inquirer's child, and general feedback. To that date, a total of 69 inquiries were received. This document also outlined the focus group participation (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) from October 2013 to January 2014 – but there is also discussion in this document regarding adding additional focus group discussions in order to reach a broader audience. Of the 320 individuals who registered for the eight focus groups help between October 2013 and January 2014, only 171 people participated. The lowest amount of participation took place in Wards 7 and 8, which at the time had the most school-aged children in the city and the wards both dealing with a significant number of social ills and school quality challenges – as noted by various engagement participants and in the interview conducted in my research. In order to address the participation gaps in the focus group participation the document outlines steps to remedy the issue:

*In an effort to address the gaps in the focus group participation numbers, DME will do the following:*

- *Schedule interviews/meetings with recommended community members and leaders in Ward 7 and 8*

- *Work with schools in Ward 7 and 8 to attend already scheduled parent events/meetings*

Furthermore, the document explained the role the upcoming April and June Working Group sessions would play in the process:

*The purpose of working groups is to vet policy scenarios being considered by the Committee [with the public]. Sign-up opened in October [2013], when we launched the initiative. Outreach for working groups [included]:*

- *all DCPS students via backpack*
- *all charter LEAs (via PCSB newsletter) with the request that they distribute to students/families*
- *parent leaders/parent groups via DCPS list serve*
- *all ANCs via email*
- *Targeted personal email to all school leaders (DCPS/PCS) in wards 2,7,8*
- *all community education councils and DME stakeholder list*
- *all Councilmembers*

At the time of the publication of the document, in January 2014, 196 individuals had signed up to participant in this phase of the process.

#### Meeting #6: March 2014

The agenda for the March 2014 meeting noted the discussion of public input and inclusion in the process in two ways:

- The role of Committee in community working groups

- The public participation in the vetting of the policy scenarios and the community working groups

The advisory committee presentation for meeting #6 was geared toward better understanding the role and goal of the community meetings as an opportunity to “...*inform and engage [the] broader community about student assignment.*” The presentation raised various questions to consider and guide the community meeting sessions. Questions were grouped into three areas:

***Inform and engage a broader community about student assignment***

*What particular policies work well? Don't work well and why?*

*How can we make these policies better?*

***Get place-specific feedback***

*Do these boundary revisions make sense in your community?*

*What else does the data say that we did not think about?*

*Are there specific challenges with a particular school or area that are not addressed?*

***Ultimately, we want to:***

*Strengthen the recommendations and narrow the options*

*Respond to issues/concerns raised*

From the minutes from this meeting, the advisory committee's focus appeared to be on how to gain useful insights and feedback. There was an acknowledgement of something that came up in the participant interviews, (1) being responsive to issues and concerns raised by the public and (2) having an awareness of the historical and contributing factors. The need for this sense of awareness and responsiveness was highlighted in the presentation in the section

focused on the “*Role of Committee Members During Working Groups.*” The presentation noted the role of the committee members to:

- *Listen to the feedback received – both positive and negative;*
- *Go into this open-minded;*
- *Remember the goals of the working groups;*
- *Be able to articulate the purpose for each scenario and how the policies support the stated goal;*
- *Be a witness to the process – be able to articulate the challenges and complexities to these issues*

The made it clear that this would not be easy work but also tied the to the overarching principle areas set by the focus groups in the first round of engagement for the process: predictability; equitable access to high quality schools; strengthening neighborhood schools; and parental choice. The last principle of *parental choice* is connected to all of the previous ones and something noted throughout the process as a driver for public participation as foundational to the overall process.

In the community meeting process, advisory committee members were not only participants but also supported in the facilitation of the meetings. As representatives of the community many of the members appear to have close ties and deep understandings of their communities – thus a reason for their participation on the advisory committee and in the outward engagement of the process.

## Meeting #7: May 2014

The agenda items for meeting #7 was focused on the outcomes of the participation from the April community working group meetings. With the repeatedly stated focus of intensive community engagement regarding the process and gathering of feedback on the draft policy proposals and preliminary recommendations circulated from the committee. Early in the minutes from this meeting the DME noted getting broad engagement and hearing from varied perspectives and voices was paramount. She further acknowledged the challenges presented by a process such as this, due to the challenges with having total clarity of all the issues connected to the process or student assignment.

The minutes focus on the outcomes of the two rounds of community working group meetings and noted the participation numbers:

*There were a total of 410 participants in the first round of meetings (Dunbar and Anacostia were on April 5th and April 8th at Coolidge). There were fewer attendees at Anacostia than at Dunbar and Coolidge. However, the numbers at Anacostia went up substantially for the second round of Community Working Group meetings (April 24, Coolidge and April 28th Dunbar and Anacostia) thanks to efforts by Advisory Committee members. While the total number of participants at the second round of Community Working Group meetings went down a bit to 389. Most participants identified themselves as a "parent" with the next highest type of participant as "community member."*

*Input was also secured through [www.EngageDC.org](http://www.EngageDC.org), the Code for DC web application [www.ourdcschools.org](http://www.ourdcschools.org), various community outreach forums, e-mails and letters from community groups and individuals. Hundreds of comments about the boundaries from Code for DC have been downloaded and are being reviewed.*

The low number of participants in east of the river in wards 7 and 8 was concerning to many of the advisory committee members and there was further discussion about additional outreach functions in order to hear from more voices from both wards. There is discussion about

utilizing trusted groups and persons to connect with more families and community members in those wards – going to housing cooperatives and public housing, getting the support of the two family collaboratives in that area, setting up meetings at schools, going door to door and surveying community members, and identifying events where parents and families are already attending in order to get their thoughts on the process.

The notes highlight how the community input from the meetings, and the other opportunity for feedback online, was to not only be reviewed and utilized by the advisory committee but also made public (with the redaction of any identifying information) in order to guide their understanding and thinking around the process. But the varied levels of engagement across the city was concerning to advisory committee members. Some of the comments made and concerns raised by committee members included:

Understanding to the Issues and the Process

*I don't want families to stampede toward Ward 3, but these families go there since they want high quality PS-12 schools. I want to support neighborhood schools, choice and reform. We have to talk about trying to solve segregation.*

*Set-asides don't generate diversity.*

*Whatever recommendation this committee comes to we should re-visit it in a certain amount of time: two years, or possibly every five years. We have this conversation backwards because we can't make decisions about where we want the structure of our school system to go - - DCPS AND charter - - but still we are trying to move boundaries around to try to better serve our children.*

*We can't have unrealistic expectations for this process, but we also would not want to miss the opportunity. We could hit the target or not. We have created a moment where public education is the topic of conversation in the city. In this discussion a lot more than education is coming to the surface. We owe it to those who have participated to bring those messages forward and be mindful of the process.*

*There is a lot going on in the District to address these problems besides this Committee. Planning and Economic Development for instance can address some of these problems with inclusionary zoning, and other programs. The Committee could refer to these other agency efforts in their recommendation as well.*

What is the problem we are solving for?

*I need to see the list of guiding values again; how are we supposed to be relating to all those values [guiding principles] to the proposal?*

*My children's school is 93% high poverty because the many middle-class neighbors send their children elsewhere. If a school's student population changes with gentrification and it changes from a Title I school, then the children don't get the Head-Start services, even though a large number of children needing those services still attend the school.*

*The other strong comment from the community was that school quality and set asides do not go far enough to address quality. There is a duty on the part of DCPS to provide quality in neighborhood schools. This is tricky. The holy grail of school quality takes time.*

Exacerbation of racial and economic segregation

*One member explained "of the community meetings I attended, I was struck by the fervor around neighborhood schools. [I am] concerned that it was putting a cloud on earlier conversations around equity that included enhanced choice zones and conversations about locating additional programs to ameliorate inequity. ... the racial and socio-economic split in the city continues to grow and we are still living in completely separate worlds.*

Equity

*Where are we seeing large areas where students lost multiple rights? What were the issues that caused this?*

*Some of the values may not be equal depending on where you live in the city – a mile in Ward 7 is not the same as a mile in Ward 3.*

*We are in a unique position. We have more of a finger on the pulse of education in the city than any other set of people right now. I personally feel a responsibility around that. It is not about schools only – it is about public services to every block in the city. Quality schools are a hugely important part of this. Short of bussing I don't know how to address inequality.*

Diversity of Voices on the Issues/ How do the options connect to our values?

*People's experience with their rights is reflected in whether they [know how to] exercise those rights.*

*Who is vetting the values and the intended outcomes?*

*Some of the values [adopted] are clearly at odds with each other.*

*I have the luxury of making it to meetings - - and a lot of people don't have that luxury. I find it a failure to acknowledge (or ignorance of) the difficulty that other families' experience and it is somewhat offensive. We do need more outreach in Wards 7 and 8 and other wards as well. There is a whole contingent of community members that need to be listened to; we do need to reach out; access to the internet and information really is a problem for some families.*

*Public discourse is loud and super complex. But it is important not to squander the level of engagement of the Committee and the professional staff.*

*The issues are very complex; the feedback is wonderful.*

Meeting #9: May 2014

The agenda for meeting #9 was focused on the review of the policy proposal from the committee and planning for the next round of community working groups – June 2014. The conversation regarding the proposals did outline the role of the community and ways the community has been engaged not only in the boundaries process but also within the feeder patterns as they currently existed. The meeting conversation noted the role of the community in driving the interim changes within feeder patterns and in the requests that individual school communities have made in an effort to improve accessibility to their schools.

The meeting ended with conversation about the upcoming community working session meetings. It was noted the work that had been done on the draft of the report to date. The goal

was to ensure the report was able to capture the voice of the advisory committee and the feedback given from the community.

*As a Committee we have to remember that this has to be in our voice. We need ownership over the language; we need to own this draft recommendation...*

*We are not going to get this completely right with this draft; it goes to the public because it needs more public input.*

*This goes to the credibility of the process which needs to be strong. When this was done back in 1968 there were all-day meetings to finalize boundaries. We need to take the time.*

*We will have to sell the Draft Recommendations to the public. We will not get the policy perfect and we need to spend time on the format and framing. We can do a lot of this with individual [public] feed-back.*

*The Committee should provide feed-back and engage in these conversations [community working group meetings] so we can revise in the next go-around. Framing and timing is important.*

#### Meeting #12: June 2014

Meeting #12 took place after the final round of community working group meetings. The goal of the meeting was to discuss the feedback in response to the draft proposals shared with the community regarding potential recommendations. This round of engagement yielded less participation – there was a total of 287 participants and of that participant, only 125 worksheets were submitted with written comments. In addition to the working group worksheets 74 surveys were received through the EngageDC.org website, several formal letters from communities and parent groups were sent to the DME, and “tons” of individual emails from community members were sent to the DME regarding the topic.

Initially the conversation highlighted the challenges around helping people fully understand the process and what was actually being proposed. Several advisory committee members noted the conflating of issues and policies that seemed to occur at the community working group meetings. For example:

*One thing that is not on this list for clarification is a lot of people conflated the at-risk preference with the set aside policies. I think community members didn't realize that the set aside reserved seats were not just dedicated for at-risk students. Can we make it more clear who is eligible for the set-aside seats?*

*The community was confused with the mobility questions posed during the June community meetings, and often times they interpreted that as student transportation and not about the transient issues of students switching schools.*

*[W]e often used neighborhood preference and neighborhood priorities in our conversations, and I was getting caught up in wondering if they meant something different?*

*The name "Center City MS" was confusing for many since a charter school already exists called Center City PCS and they didn't realize Center City MS was actually future Shaw MS.*

The committee seems to wrestle with how to make these draft recommendations and policies understandable and they seem to struggle find ways to make the recommendations align with the feedback being given and the guiding principles for the process. The conversation was focused on the feedback given, what could be solved for, what rights and access is being lost or gained, and how to move forward. Several questions were addressed in the meeting, many of the questions are noted as coming from the feedback the advisory committee heard from the public at the community working group meetings:

*Is this a concern we need to solve for through a change in policy recommendation?*

*What are the potential solutions to address the concern/issue raised?*

*Are there concerns we need to address that we have not listed?*

The areas of policy concerns transportation, set-asides, specialized feeder patterns, the policy phasing-in process, and at-risk preferences. Some policy proposals seemed to give the community angst. One in particular was the focus of at-risk policies, which were aimed at supporting vulnerable populations of students.

*The biggest concerns we heard during the community meetings was that the middle-class families would be pushed out. (Regarding at-risk set-asides)*

*Communities with higher levels of poverty feel positively about the possibilities offered by at-risk set-asides. Support for such set-asides in more gentrified was mixed.*

*The enrollment of the school at-risk may not necessarily reflect the economic make-up of the surrounding neighborhood area.*

*I want to make sure we are hearing this right. If we are allowing more middle-class families to go to non-neighborhood schools, then this may be in direct conflict with what we have been striving for with other policies in supporting neighborhood schools as a priority.*

*(Regarding finding a way forward) - I am not opposed to this policy, but if we switch or add in a new proposal that the community has never seen before there could be potential back lash from the community.*

From the analysis of the meeting summary, the aforementioned community and advisory committee concerns and feedback lead to meeting #12 wrapping up with a timeline for additional community input and feedback in the process. The timeline was as follows:

By July 21, 2014, the advisory committee noted they wanted the following actions taken:

- Collect additional draft policy feedback worksheets – this would be done by directing people to the DME website in order to offer feedback on the policy recommendations.
- Collect ideas and concerns shared via emails and letters – this would be done by ensuring community members were aware of the channels for offering additional feedback.
- Make the survey available on EngageDC.org.
- Advisory Committee members to attend community meetings and gather additional perspectives
- Targeted outreach to specific communities as follow-up to concerns shared and revisions being considered – this was particularly important given the concerns advisory committee members raised about a lack of, or low participation, from wards 7 and 8.

Another opportunity for community feedback on the process was the Council of the District of Columbia Committee on Education roundtable on the process, which was scheduled for June 26, 2014. The advisory committee discussed a strategy of how to encourage people to testify at the Council roundtable and discussed how to include testimonies offered at the roundtable as additional public feedback for the advisory committee's consideration.

### **Policy Brief 1: DC Student Assignment and Choice Policy**

The first policy brief published by the technical team for the student assignment and school boundaries review process focused on laying out the case for why student assignment and its review was necessary. The document notes that school attendance, and relevant policies have been in place since 1925. The document notes the following:

*Student-assignment policy and practice as they affect families refer to the processes that determine which school or schools each student living within a jurisdiction may or must attend. Student assignment as it affects the administration of public education ...therefore is a key component of a community's system for managing the demand for education services and for allocating the supply of education services.*

*The assignment of students to schools is an important, often emotional, and always personal concern for families and students.*

*Changes to student assignment can be as great a factor in neighborhood change as school closings and the construction of new schools. Student assignment has also traditionally been extremely important to property owners and developers, who understand the value of the schools as public land and civic assets and as important amenities associated with neighborhoods*

The document further layout of the role of the community in the process:

*Which options are available and how families access them is a crucial part of student-assignment policy. But when it comes to the utilization of scarce public resources for education, communities must weigh competing values to make decisions about how to allocate those resources. In assigning students to schools, the community must balance its collective values, needs, and desires with those of individual families.*

*Different communities balance or prioritize these values differently and choose different combinations of student-assignment mechanisms that reflect the values they view as most critical when formulating a student-assignment policy.*

As previously mentioned, historical context and issues or race play a large role in public administration and policy. In policy decision-making processes understanding these layers is essential – as mentioned in depth from the interview participants earlier in this chapter. Policy Brief #1 discusses the historical context in which this process is taking place and its meaning for students:

*The history of student assignment in the District of Columbia is laden with issues of race, class, disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation. Although judicial and*

Congressional actions in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s resulted in legal desegregation and the development of partial home rule for District residents, those developments did not resolve the issues. **For decades, African-Americans had no direct input into the oversight of their schools**, which were characterized by overcrowding, poor-quality facilities in most cases, and second-hand books and materials that had been discarded from the white schools.

Even as late as 1967 [around the same time as the last student assignment review process]—12 years after segregation by law had been overturned and at a time when African-Americans made up more than 90% of DCPS’s enrollment—African-Americans were still limited by quota to a maximum of four out of nine seats on the D.C. Board of Education. D.C. and its schools remain racially and socio-economically segregated to a great degree, and both the funding for D.C.’s public schools and the policies controlling their operation remain subject to the approval of Congress.

**In 1952, parents of African-American students excluded from the recently opened all-white Sousa Junior High School in Anacostia brought the case of *Bolling v. Sharpe* to the Supreme Court to challenge the segregation of the D.C. schools.** In 1954, alongside the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled in *Bolling* that “racial segregation in the public schools of the District of Columbia is a denial of the due process of law guaranteed by the 5th Amendment.” As a result, DCPS was required to relinquish race as a factor in student assignment, leaving residence as the basis for its student-assignment policy. On September 13, 1954, DCPS began implementing its new student-assignment policy and related desegregation plan with those students who were registering for the first time or who had moved from one part of the city to another.

In the decade after *Bolling*, many D.C. families— the majority of them white—left the District in such large numbers that the phenomenon was termed an exodus.<sup>14</sup> By 1966, after twelve years of “white flight” out of D.C. and a substantial influx of African-American families from other states, 91% of the students in DCPS were African-American.

During these tumultuous years of change, DCPS implemented a mix of student-assignment policies that included both segregative and integrative policies. According to the findings of the federal court in the landmark D.C. case of *Hobson v. Hansen I* (1967), DCPS protected and facilitated segregation through [various]...policies...

**Ultimately, in the face of the demographic changes of the 1960s, DCPS’s integrative actions** that occurred post *Hobson I* (including the special-admissions programs described

*below) had little effect on overall segregation in the schools, and to this day the majority of them are homogeneous in terms of race.*

This outlining of historical context shows the role race has played in not only student assignment policies in the District but the overall administration of public education. This overview of the history surrounding public education in the District highlights the emotional role the administration, or lack thereof, public education plays in the experiences of many of the participants of the student assignment process in 2013 and the ‘hot button’ issue it is for the city.

## **Policy Brief 2: Student Assignment Policies in Other Cities**

The second policy brief published by the process technical team talked less about the historical context of this process and the input of families through traditional channels but its focus was more in the lane of how families exercise their choice in the school selection process. The brief noted the role student assignment policies can play in “...revers[ing] the trend of racial isolation and the concentration of underserved students in the same school” (Policy Brief #2, p. 7, November 19, 2013).

The consideration of the historical context was mentioned in DC’s uniqueness relative to other “...surrounding jurisdictions not just because of its history and status as a federal district” and for that reason the technical team decided to look at “...peer districts...for comparisons and insights” (Policy Brief #2, p. 18, November 19, 2013). Those peer district of observation included:

- San Francisco, California
- Boston, Massachusetts

- Baltimore, Maryland
- Seattle, Washington
- Denver, Colorado
- New Orleans, Louisiana
- New York City, New York

Interestingly, most of those cities share a similar historical context regarding race and equitable access to public education options.

### **Policy Brief #3: The Landscape for Student Assignment and School Choice in DC**

As noted early on in this policy brief the “...effects of the historical and current student-assignment and school-choice policies and practices of the District of Columbia...” are no secret (Policy Brief #3, p. 3, January 2014). The purpose of this brief was to lay out the various considerations, and causes or effects, of the historical context and other factors student assignment and choice. This data was developed to provide:

*... information [to] help stakeholders identify key city and public-education factors that affect the relationships between families, communities, and public education in relation to student assignment and school boundary policies.*

The intent of the information shared in this brief was to “...help expand public discussion of the relationship of families and communities with their schools beyond individual personal experiences” (Policy Brief #3, p. 3, January 2014).

The brief goes on to describe many of the contextual and historical information of the city as outlined in chapter 3 of this dissertation. This brief is broken up into five sections:

### **Section 1: The City: District of Columbia Population and Demographics**

*The District's population, demographic history and projections provide an important context for student assignment policy. Student-assignment policies in communities with growing school-age populations are often very different from student-assignment policies where there are declining enrollments. Allocating school seats as enrollments increase tends to require more directive planning and greater controls on student assignment. (Policy Brief #3, p. 4, January 2014)*

### **Section 2: The Children: Characteristics of D.C.'s Public School Students**

*[S]tudent assignment and school choice planning it is important to look for opportunities to support and expand strong multi-racial and multi-cultural communities in schools and neighborhoods, since all students benefit from experiences across differences of race, ethnicity, and family socio-economic status. A major advancement of the last decades (following the end of de jure segregation by race) ...[it is necessary to] understand the opportunities and limitations for integration of any number of types, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the student population.*

*Student assignment and school choice policies and systems will impact the rights, access and distribution of students by race, ethnicity, and special needs differently. (Policy Brief #3, p. 9, January 2014)*

### **Section 3: The Schools: Qualities of the District's Public Schools**

*The issue of equitable access to high-quality schools is at the core of student-assignment and school-choice policy. Access to schools is rationed through policy that establishes attendance zones, feeder patterns, and preferences used in lotteries. The scarcity or abundance of this public good affects how it should be rationed and how families feel about whether there is equitable access to high-quality schools.*

*Families also use informal information in formulating their opinions about schools, and families may interpret official information differently. (Policy Brief #3, p. 14, January 2014)*

### **Section 4: The Students: Public School Enrollment Patterns**

*[An examination of] ...the interplay of the city, child population and schools by analyzing patterns of where public school students attend school, how far they travel, and whether they go to their neighborhood school or their feeder schools. D.C.'s current student-assignment system is based on neighborhood schools and destination schools (feeder pattern) of right.*

*The current data shows low in-boundary participation and high PCS and out of boundary DCPS participation results in students of the same age, from the same neighborhood boundary, attending many different schools. (Policy Brief #3, p. 20, January 2014)*

The technical team for the process notes that the data for this brief was a combination of both primary and secondary sources – thus using a variety of previously compiled reports, studies, and publicly available data from DCPS and the state education agency, the Office of the State Superintendent for Education.

*The primary source of information that the study team used to analyze where students live and the schools they attend is a snapshot of student level data pulled on September 19, 2012 by OSSE from their Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLED). The student-level data include student records from DCPS, public charters, and non-public placement paid for by the District.*

*The study team geo-coded the students' addresses to enable analysis by boundaries, wards, neighborhood cluster, and census blocks. [And data was taken from] D.C. Educational Facilities Master Plan, January 2013. (Policy Brief #3, p. 28, January 2014).*

### **Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools**

One of the documents shared with the advisory committee for their consideration was a document authored by the United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division entitled *Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools*. This document outlined the effects of racial segregation and racial isolation in public education and offered suggestions to school district on how to avoid the challenges such practices can foster. As the document noted,

*“education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...It is the very foundation of good citizenship.” Providing students with diverse, inclusive educational opportunities from an early age is crucial to achieving the nation’s educational and civic goals.*

This document noted various issue areas that were mentioned throughout the community engagement for the student assignment process and from individual advisory committee members. As it was noted in various other meeting documentation and summaries, the issue of race and racial segregation in DCPS seemed to be of paramount concern to not only the advisory committee but also to the public. In this document there is mention of the social ills and overall impact of racially isolated schools:

*where schools lack a diverse student body or are racially isolated (i.e., are composed overwhelmingly of students of one race), they may fail to provide the full panoply of benefits that K-12 schools can offer. The academic achievement of students at racially isolated schools often lags behind that of their peers at more diverse schools. Racially isolated schools often have fewer effective teachers, higher teacher turnover rates, less rigorous curricular resources (e.g., college preparatory courses), and inferior facilities and other educational resources. Reducing racial isolation in schools is also important because students who are not exposed to racial diversity in school often lack other opportunities to interact with students from different racial backgrounds.*

While this document uses a legal framework to discuss diversity in public education and shares both race-neutral and racial classification approaches, the areas of this document that speak to how a district may consider race as a “plus factor” might be why the advisory committee found this guidance useful (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2011). From the conversation summarized throughout the advisory committee meetings and in the public feedback, issues of race and the undertones of a compelling interest to achieve

greater diversity in DCPS, the approaches to achieving diversity and avoiding racial isolation likely served as a useful framework for the advisory committee's consideration. The examples offered in the document included "...practical examples of actions that schools may consider, consistent with prior Supreme Court opinions....as necessary to achieving diversity or avoid racial isolation" (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2011, p. 9). The examples that seem to be the most relevant to the advisory committee's task were:

- Decisions about Grade Realignment and Feeder Patters
- Open and Choice Enrollment Decisions
- School Zoning Decisions. (United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2011, pp. 9-11)

### Community Working Group Materials

#### **Round 1: Materials from April 5-8, 2014 Meetings**

The meeting materials from the community working group meetings held in April 2014 were designed to gather feedback from the community on the initial round of draft recommendations shared from the advisory committee. The presentation discussed the why of the process and spoke to the opportunity for action as laid out my advisory committee. As the presentation noted:

*Student assignment policies are complicated and personal. We [the advisory committee] are committed to an open and transparent process where we engage the public every step of the way. We believe that:*

- *Building a plan with the community will lead to more successful policies*

- *Neighborhood-specific input on options is necessary*
- *Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in these hard and important conversations.*

As outlined in the presentation, the meetings had a few goals:

- *first, to share progress of the process;*
- *second, to get feedback on what policy concerns are important to the community and to understand what policy concepts do not connect with the community; and*
- *lastly, to gather feedback on how the various policy elements and school boundary revisions would impact your community*

(Round 1 Community Working Group notes, p. 9-11)

The meeting agenda to follow included a sharing of the policy options for consideration, table discussions of the options, filling out a participant worksheet to gather feedback, facilitation of the discussion and capturing of notes by the notetaker, and wrapped up with a question and answer session. The worksheet requested policy option feedback through the following questions:

- What about each policy example best supports your vision for public education in the District of Columbia?
- What is most important to you in evaluating these policy scenarios?

## **Round 2: Materials from April 24-26, 2014 Meetings**

At the second round of community working group meeting the advisory committee and technical team shared out the findings and data from the first round of engagement – data

available can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process. The initial feedback from Round 1 was shared and the conversation was geared toward getting deeper feedback on the draft policy recommendations and making refinements to the proposals. To help guide the public understanding of the impact, an impact map was shared with participants of the meetings. This document/worksheet can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

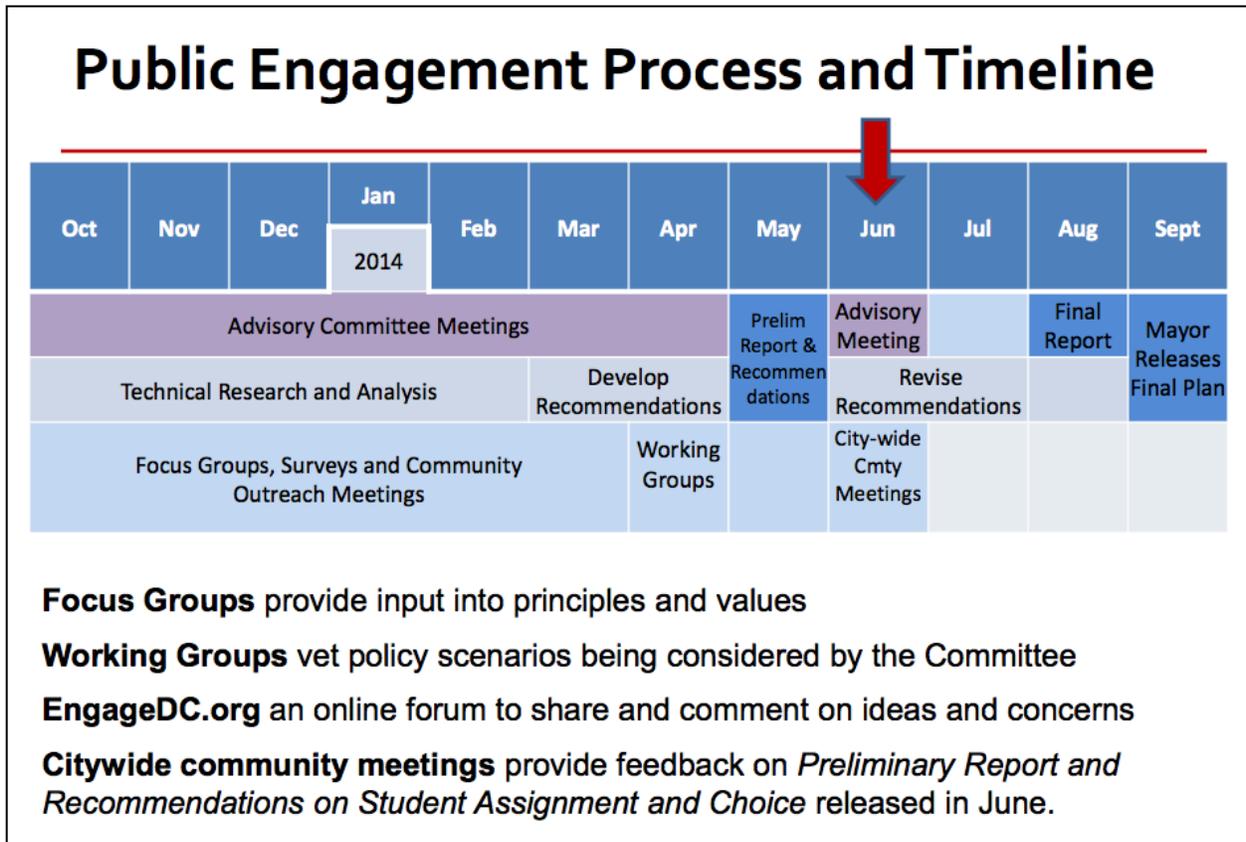
### **Round 3: Materials from June 2014 Meetings**

The third round of community working group meetings was structured slightly different than the first two rounds. In the June 2014 community working group meetings, the advisory committee shared out their listening and public feedback over the last several rounds. They also shared the goals of the process:

*Develop student assignment and school choice policies that provide families with clarity, predictability, and access to high quality school options at locations that make sense for them.*

Additionally, the public engagement timeline was shared again and highlighted where things were in the process:

Figure 12: Public Engagement Process and Timeline



Part of the opening comments shared by the DME and advisory committee in the opening of the meeting was that the current proposals for their consideration took into account the following:

- *What we heard from the community*
- *Extensive data analysis*
- *Key principles (as shaped by the initial round of engagement, focus groups, and from public input):*
  - *Predictable public school pathways.*
  - *High quality schools of right in every neighborhood.*

- *Access to choices other than assigned schools.*
- *Walkable and safely accessible DCPS elementary schools.*
- *Diversity in student enrollment.*
- *Coherent and efficient citywide public school infrastructure.*

After the opening comments an overview of the proposals was shared:

- *Revising the core system of zoned schools*
- *Updating the high school geographic feeder patterns*
- *More predictability for preschool and prekindergarten*
- *Complementary System of Choice: at- risk preference for vulnerable student populations*
- *Out of Boundary set-asides*
- *Phasing- of the policy recommendations once determined*
- *Cross-sector planning and collaboration*
- *Additional policies to address transportation issues; specialized and selective schools; and continuation and transfer rights.*

After the initial conversation the meeting was broken up into breakout groups to discuss the high school feeder patterns and to capture more individualized feedback. The materials from the meeting can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

Questions asked of the participants included:

- *What proposals do you support?*
- *What alternatives would you propose?*

- *What is missing?*

Some of the feedback captured in the notes from those meetings included – more detailed documents can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

*Lots of parents who know how to work the system, and lots of parents who don't. These elementary schools aren't meeting the grade. So, you're telling these families that's their school of right, but they have to apply OOB if they want to get into a better school. Let's say you get awarded your 2nd choice, but you really wanted your 1st choice. But then you can't apply in the second round... you haven't made any other elementary schools worth going to. And with 10% set-aside, if there are only 50 seats available, then that's only 5 for OOB.... You are mandating that the floor is 10%. But if you're over the max at other schools, such as Kelly Miller, then there are no options.*

*Now we're seeing parts of SW that are no longer feeding into Wilson, and some of that makes sense. But when you tell parents that they're getting something but they're not really getting anything.... You need to define parity.*

*Middle class families who don't qualify for these preferences – African American families – would only get their 4th and 5th choice. They'll apply to private schools or charters. Or they'll move out of the district.... You need to make it fair. Should you give at-risk families a preference? Kids who are homeless or special needs, you must provide for them. But we're saying make it fair across the board....*

*...you're trying to improve schools within constraints. Not everyone is going to be happy with any proposed solution. But what saddens me is that I know that Abigail Smith and Kaya Henderson came here with a specific agenda about getting community feedback. But the questions on the worksheet aren't fair questions. The community doesn't have the information to authentically answer them. You guys have data and spreadsheets and analysis and constraints that would make proposed solutions not feasible. So it sometimes feels like these sessions are designed to legitimize decisions that have already been made....*

*Is there a transition plan in place to help the communities that are going to see an influx of new students which may cause the school's cultural to shift and the schools need to be prepared for that and make that transition smooth.*

*If there isn't parity or equality in schools right now, we shouldn't implement any of these policies until you have that.*

*If you look at racial make-up in schools of ward 7 & 8 then you see that it's in de facto segregated schools. This is a housing issue and an economic issue as well. And until we see real racial integration in the city then we are going to have to do something more for schools East of the River.*

*Concern about neighborhood conflicts not being sufficiently considered and taken into account in the process of revising zones and feeder patterns. ...Dunbar's recent suspensions have resulted from conflicts between Dunbar-area students and former Spingarn-area students coming to Dunbar as a result of Spingarn's closure*

*We are getting rezoned to a lower performing school. Can you talk about that point? Do you think we will all go to these lower performing schools? We want performance data. You can't say you are going to zone to schools with no data. That is unacceptable.*

*How are you factoring in charter schools?? I want to know why charters are not overlaid in the proposal and not talked about more.*

*My question is that parents have a problem in getting trust from DCPS and how are you going to prove to parents that quality will improve in other schools?*

*I want to make sure with at risk students they are being served appropriately. I have heard that Deal and Wilson has two tiers of systems some for high performing and then for others and I want to make sure we are serving these students and not just placing them.*

*I know you're trying to do a lot here and I appreciate that. I feel like the working group listened to a lot of our feedback from the first round. I hear you talking about data and projections, but we're talking about school communities. Our community is far more than numbers on a census and lines on a map.*

## Mayor Vincent C. Gray Response Letter to the Advisory Committee (August 21, 2014)

Mayor Gray's response to the committee made several mentions of community engagement:

*The process you undertook to conduct the first comprehensive student assignment and boundary review in the District in more than forty years was impressive including unprecedented community engagement and the rigorous use of data.*

*The reason District leaders have put off this project for a generation is the work is complex, inevitably controversial, and there is no way to avoid difficult choices.*

*...it is clear you took the time to consider the full range of perspectives and all relevant information before developing your final recommendations.*

*I appreciate that they [the recommendations] incorporate extensive feedback received from so many parents and community members throughout the District...*

*I have determined that it is in the best interest of the District...to accept your recommendations...*

*...we will immediately begin the process of notifying families...[and] we will engage in a broad ongoing information effort over the next year.*

*...implementation of these policies will require further stakeholder engagement.*

The full letter can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

## DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment Press Release on Final Recommendations

On August 21, 2014, the advisory committee released the report with their final recommendation on the student assignment and school boundary review process for DCPS. Upon review and analysis of the press release for the announcement, there were a few areas where the level and methods of public participation, input, and feedback was discussed as essential in shaping the final recommendations:

*The recommendations were developed following substantial research and data analysis and extensive community input. Over the past ten months, the Advisory Committee held more than a dozen committee meetings and spent hundreds of hours considering input received in focus groups, community working groups, and through numerous e-mail inquiries and comments.*

*The committee considered the diverse and unique needs of the District's families. As such, the recommended phase-in policies are extensive and minimize the impact of boundary changes.*

*"We are deeply grateful to the hundreds of parents and community members whose voices helped to shape these recommendations. It was a huge undertaking and we did our best to weigh the many factors that affect where children are assigned and how families access public school options. I hope this process encourages more ongoing comprehensive education planning."*

Furthermore, the release reminds readers that the advisory committee itself is comprised of non-government, community members who are public school parents and stakeholders themselves. The full document can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

### Student Assignment Letter to Parents (August 2014)

Following the release of the final student assignment recommendations from the advisory committee a letter went home to all DCPS families from then DCPS Chancellor Kaya

Henderson. The letter makes families reminds families of the process, which was previously shared with families upon the start of the process in the fall of 2013, and made families aware of the release of the final recommendations. The letter clarifies that no changes will happen in the 2014-15 school year but notes that additional information will be forthcoming.

The one area that notes the public input and feedback in the process comes at the end of the letter:

*I want to thank the many parents, families, and community members who participated in this process. Parent and community input was integral to the final recommendations, and we will need your continued engagement as these changes take place. Your vision for a strong system of neighborhood-zoned schools resonated deeply with me, and I look forward to continuing our work to invest in and improve all of our schools.*

The full letter can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

### **Student Assignment Letter to Parents (October 2014)**

Another follow up letter was sent to DPCS parents to update them on the implementation of the new student assignment and school boundary recommendations. The letter outlined the timeline for implementation and offered additional resources for clarification. At the end of the letter public input and feedback was again noted:

*The process for developing these new policies is a great example of what happens when we work together to solve the problems we face. The Deputy Mayor for Education and the citywide Student Assignment Advisory Committee worked exhaustively to collect and listen to every single piece of feedback over the past year.*

The full letter can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

### **News Articles Regarding the Student Assignment Process (Fall 2013 – Fall 2014)**

Throughout the student assignment process various articles were published regarding the process. I worked to collect those articles, read, re-read, and code for themes pertaining to the process of public engagement, public input, and feedback. Below I have listed the articles of interests and pulled out full quotes to illustrate the conversation happening during the process.

Article analyzed came from the following publications:

- The Washington Post
- Education Week
- The DCist
- WAMU 88.5 – American University Radio
- The East of the River Newspaper
- Greater Greater Washington

The section below highlights relevant quotes and excerpts from the articles reviewed and analyzed.

## EDUCATION WEEK

### ***Volatility of D.C. Mayoral Campaign Raises Stakes for City Schools' Future***

Lesli A. Maxwell

March 11, 2014

Retrieved from:

[https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District\\_Dossier/2014/03/with\\_dc\\_mayor\\_on\\_the\\_ropes\\_w\\_h\\_a.html](https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2014/03/with_dc_mayor_on_the_ropes_w_h_a.html)

*Some parents and advocates believe the district needs to do more to bolster neighborhood schools and to close very wide racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps across the city.*

## WASHINGTON POST

### ***D.C. mayoral race injects uncertainty into school boundary overhaul***

Emma Brown

March 28, 2014

Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-mayoral-race-injects-uncertainty-into-school-boundary-overhaul/2014/03/28/03ab9e7e-b67a-11e3-b84e-897d3d12b816\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.4be88c2f4e90](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-mayoral-race-injects-uncertainty-into-school-boundary-overhaul/2014/03/28/03ab9e7e-b67a-11e3-b84e-897d3d12b816_story.html?utm_term=.4be88c2f4e90)

*...parents have been flocking to community meetings, voicing anxiety about what the changes might mean for their children and their property values.*

*...officials say the city must redraw its school boundaries because they have grown increasingly unworkable as traditional schools have closed, charter schools have flourished and demographics have shifted dramatically.*

*Most families noted a desire to improve the quality of schools rather just redrawing school boundary lines. DC officials felt that the process "...if done right...could help accelerate school improvement."*

*The boundary overhaul is shot through with tensions over race and class, and it has spurred something close to a panic among parents who believe the changes could cut off access to well-regarded schools*

*Smith has faced many parents at recent community meetings who have threatened to leave the city if they don't like the outcome of the process. She has acknowledged that it is not going to be popular or easy.*

*An advisory group has been meeting with Smith for four months...*

*Residents will have a chance to give feedback on those proposals before the committee settles on a preliminary decision in May and again before the panel makes final recommendations to the mayor in July.*

## **WASHINGTON POST**

**D.C. releases proposed school boundaries and far-reaching student assignment policies**

**Emma Brown**

**April 5, 2014**

**Retrieved from:** [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-releases-proposed-school-boundaries-and-far-reaching-student-assignment-policies/2014/04/05/368521e0-bc46-11e3-96ae-f2c36d2b1245\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a72229ca9191](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-releases-proposed-school-boundaries-and-far-reaching-student-assignment-policies/2014/04/05/368521e0-bc46-11e3-96ae-f2c36d2b1245_story.html?utm_term=.a72229ca9191)

*Officials will settle on a plan after considering community feedback in coming months. Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) is scheduled to release a final policy in September that would take effect in fall 2015.*

*[The advisory committee,] ...staff and stakeholders have poured countless hours into thoughtful planning and intend to devote much more time in coming months*

*The prospect of new boundaries and student-assignment policies has triggered enormous anxiety among parents across the city, who have flocked to meetings with questions about what the process might mean for their children and property values.*

*Some see it [the process] as a step away from diversity in a city where housing patterns are segregated by race and class.*

*The Dunbar [community working group] meeting was the first of six planned for this month. Smith said that the proposals are not set in stone and that it is important for parents to weigh in on which elements they do and do not support.*

## WASHINGTON POST

D.C. releases new boundaries proposal with emphasis on neighborhood schools

Emma Brown

June 12, 2014

Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-releases-new-boundaries-proposal-with-emphasis-on-neighborhood-schools/2014/06/12/828e30b0-f245-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.af41fd69f3d0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-releases-new-boundaries-proposal-with-emphasis-on-neighborhood-schools/2014/06/12/828e30b0-f245-11e3-914c-1fbd0614e2d4_story.html?utm_term=.af41fd69f3d0)

*The city's re-commitment to neighborhood schools comes in the wake of enormous resistance to a previous set of proposals released in April, which had considered replacing neighborhood schools — which students have a right to attend based on their home addresses — with lottery admissions.*

*"We believe strongly that this document reflects public input," said Deputy Mayor for Education Abigail Smith, who heads an advisory committee that is working to overhaul city school boundaries for the first time in four decades. "Overwhelmingly, what we heard was people wanted a guaranteed system of right."*

*The new proposal now goes out for another round of feedback, starting with three public meetings next week. The advisory committee plans to send a revised set of recommendations to Mayor Vincent C. Gray (D) in August, and Gray is expected to announce the final policy in September, with changes taking effect in fall 2015.*

*Politicians and parents have repeatedly questioned whether it makes sense for the city to spend so much energy overhauling boundaries when so many schools are in need of improvement. Smith acknowledged that school quality varies widely across the city, but said that the committee concluded that a smart revision could help strengthen schools and families' connections to them.*

*"Families want a city-wide system of neighborhood public schools that is invested in equitably and that provides predictable and fair access to high quality schools in communities everywhere in this city," the committee wrote in a letter introducing its proposal.*

WASHINGTON POST

D.C. school boundary proposal spurs citywide debate about quality

Emma Brown and Michael Alison Chandler

June 21, 2014

Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-school-boundary-proposal-spurs-citywide-debate-about-quality/2014/06/21/d95d9922-f893-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e85804e97b9f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-school-boundary-proposal-spurs-citywide-debate-about-quality/2014/06/21/d95d9922-f893-11e3-a606-946fd632f9f1_story.html?utm_term=.e85804e97b9f)

*D.C. parents and activists are calling the District's latest proposal to overhaul school boundaries an improvement over previous iterations, but many continue to voice concerns that the plan does not address some of the most pressing challenges facing the city's public schools.*

*Chief among those [concerns] is the uneven quality of schools across the city, parents said repeatedly at a series of public meetings last week. Some urged city officials to slow or stop the boundary overhaul until more schools improve, when redrawing lines on a map and rewriting rules for out-of-boundary enrollment might cause less pain and concern.*

*Parents expressed worries that new boundaries won't fix struggling schools and could make it more difficult for children, especially those living outside a few affluent and gentrifying pockets of the city, to get into better options on the other side of town.*

*D.C. Council member Yvette M. Alexander (D-Ward 7). Alexander said she would like to see the boundary overhaul put off until school quality improves enough that parents start volunteering to return to neighborhood schools.*

*The citizens advisory committee that developed the boundary proposal, said the effort is not meant to solve the problem of school quality on its own. But revised boundaries and student-assignment policies are a way to encourage improvement by giving parents a more predictable path from preschool through high school, she said.*

*...the boundary process already has triggered an intense citywide focus on school quality and is the first step in forcing the kinds of investment — both from D.C. Public Schools and from local communities — that families want to see in schools.*

*appreciates the “good and healthy” discussion*

#### WASHINGTON POST

##### ***D.C. school boundaries plan gets more specific just before new mayor is elected***

Michael Alison Chandler

November 3, 2014

Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-school-boundaries-plan-gets-more-specific-just-before-new-mayor-to-be-elected/2014/11/03/daaa3ffc-6386-11e4-bb14-4cfea1e742d5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.162dec2934f0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-school-boundaries-plan-gets-more-specific-just-before-new-mayor-to-be-elected/2014/11/03/daaa3ffc-6386-11e4-bb14-4cfea1e742d5_story.html?utm_term=.162dec2934f0)

*The plan represents the first comprehensive overhaul of the city’s school boundaries in more than 40 years and was developed through a 10-month, emotionally charged community process. Residents have worried about how the new lines will affect their children’s academic opportunities or the value of their homes in a city where school quality varies dramatically.*

*Others are relieved to see a more coherent plan for assigning schools and dealing with crowding and under-enrollment.*

#### WAMU

##### ***D.C. School Boundary Changes Draw Opposition, But Not From Entire City***

Martin Austermuhle

April 29, 2014

Retrieved from:

[https://wamu.org/story/14/04/29/dc\\_residents\\_oppose\\_school\\_boundary\\_changes\\_but\\_opinion\\_skewed\\_based\\_on\\_location/](https://wamu.org/story/14/04/29/dc_residents_oppose_school_boundary_changes_but_opinion_skewed_based_on_location/)

*A majority of D.C. residents who participated in a series of community meetings in early April expressed opposition to many of the proposed changes to school boundaries and feeder patterns, according to data released by city officials.*

*Despite the opposition to the proposals, city officials and members of the advisory committee that helped draw up the proposals caution that participation rates have not been fully representative of the entire city.*

*“To date, input not representative of the city as a whole,” says a presentation from Smith office. “Should be cautious about drawing citywide conclusions from these data.” According to the data from the meetings, 175 of the 305 worksheets submitted by participants came from residents in wards 3 and 4, while only 23 came from residents of wards 7 and 8.*

*[Online platforms – such as the OurDC Schools app were used]*

*According to data from the app’s creators, only four percent of queries came from wards 7 and 8, while Ward 3 had 22 percent and wards 1 and 6 had 20 percent each.*

*Although upper Northwest in Ward 3 and those areas have been the loudest voices... their realities are just very different than other areas of the city. I don’t feel like there are enough diverse voices at the table so that everyone can understand the landscape of what’s going on in the city,”*

*“It’s really hard, because there are a lot of communities in the city that may feel jaded by certain processes that have taken place in the past regarding DCPS and education and so it may be hard to really reach those people because they may not feel the process is genuine...”*

**WAMU**

**Under Revised D.C. School Boundary Proposal, High Schools Would See Changes**

**Martin Austermuhle**

**June 12, 2014**

**Retrieved from:**

[https://wamu.org/story/14/06/12/revised\\_proposal\\_aligns\\_dcs\\_school\\_boundaries\\_and\\_feeder\\_patterns/](https://wamu.org/story/14/06/12/revised_proposal_aligns_dcs_school_boundaries_and_feeder_patterns/)

*The committee's recommendations, culled from public feedback and debate after the first set of proposals, also including setting aside at least 10 percent of seats in elementary schools for out-of-boundary students, as well as giving priority to at-risk students when they apply to out-of-boundary schools where fewer than 30 percent of students are considered at-risk.*

*"There are obviously lots of things to balance, but the feedback process was very helpful. And so one again, we'll be putting out draft boundaries and expect to get more feedback, so those should not be as final either. We think those will also benefit from more feedback..." [Advisory Committee Member]*

## **East of the River Newspaper – Capital Community News**

### **Reactions to New DCPS School Boundaries**

**Fall 2014**

**Retrieved from:** <http://www.capitalcommunitynews.com/content/reactions-new-dcps-school-boundaries>

*According to the impact analysis, Wards 4, 7, and 8 will be most affected by the elementary school boundary changes, with over 1,000 students being reassigned; Ward 8 has the largest, with 330 being reassigned. However, 759 Ward 8 students and 482 Ward 7 will have a shorter walking distance to school and a large amount of Ward 7 students will attend a school with higher DC CAS scores.*

*The Committee had 17 community representatives, four of which came from Wards 7 and 8.*

*"To be in that Committee, you really need to understand the landscape and the context of what's happening." Thompson said that the Committee had a lot to consider during the ten-month process. "I don't think people realize how complex the process is," she explained. "There were many competing needs. It hasn't always been comfortable, but in a good way."*

*While Thompson acknowledge that not all concerns were addressed, the Committee tried to weigh each consideration.*

*“However, it's a question of investment.” Thompson believes that the investment is just as much a family's responsibility as it is DCPS'; while DCPS can use the Committee's suggestions, parents can continue to raise their expectations.*

*So far, response from Wards 7 and 8 residents have been mixed. ...said that “things turned out pretty well”*

*Others... are against the proposal, arguing that DCPS should focus on improving schools east of the river. “If you're not trying to make all schools equal, then you shouldn't change boundaries,”*

## **Greater Greater Washington**

**School boundary review, part 1: Committee grapples with a changed DC, while parents worry**

**Natalie Wexler**

**March 27, 2014**

**Retrieved from:** <https://ggwash.org/view/34224/school-boundary-review-part-1-committee-grapples-with-a-changed-dc-while-parents-worry>

*The Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), Abigail Smith, is in charge of the boundary overhaul process. A 23-member advisory committee, composed of parents and community members representing every ward in the District, has been meeting since October. The DME's office has also convened focus groups to get feedback and has held community meetings.*

*The next phase of the process will begin April 5, when several proposed school assignment scenarios will be presented, and working groups will begin to meet to discuss them. The presentations will be open to the public, and community members...to participate in the working groups.*

*Three different community meetings will be held in three different sectors of the District: Center City (at Dunbar HS), East End (at Anacostia HS), and Upper NW & NE (at Coolidge HS). While residents are free to attend any of the meetings, and the presentations will be the same, the working groups will focus on schools in the area where the meeting is located.*

Greater Greater Washington

***School boundary review, part 2: Parents at two Northwest DC schools want to keep current boundaries***

Natalie Wexler

March 28, 2014

**Retrieved from:** <https://ggwash.org/view/34242/school-boundary-review-part-2-parents-at-two-northwest-dc-schools-want-to-keep-current-boundaries>

*The Mt. Pleasant Family Association sent its letter about Bancroft, with 137 signatures, earlier this month. The letter said that many young families move to the area in part because of its “access to excellent schools,” and predicted those families would go elsewhere if the feeder pattern changed.*

*The Lafayette School Boundary Working Group has about 700 signatures on its letter, which the group originally sent to both Mayor Vincent Gray and DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson in May 2013, when DCPS was in charge of the review process. Leadership of the process was later transferred to the DME’s office, and the group has since sent their letter directly to that office twice.*

*Claudia Lujan, a senior policy advisor to the DME, said her office and the advisory committee “are considering all the issues raised by these communities, as we are doing with the proposals and petitions we have received from across the city.”*

*Backus said that parents feel confused about the goals of the boundary review. She and others from the community have participated in focus groups led by the DME’s office, and she said the discussions have largely addressed qualitative issues, like what parents’ value in a school, rather than boundaries per se.*

*... the process feels rushed, and the fact that it’s happening with a mayoral election looming is another source of concern. And both said that DCPS should improve schools across the District before engaging in the process of redrawing boundaries.*

*The issue of diversity is one that frequently comes up in boundary review discussions. As more neighborhood parents send their kids to Ward 3 schools, the out-of-boundary students, who are generally less affluent and are more likely to be racial minorities, are being squeezed out.*

## **APPENDIX B: Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries**

Prepared by the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment

Full report retrieved from <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process

### **Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries (final report)**

In the final report, which outlines the final recommendations from the advisory committee, the advisory committee and technical team, who compiled the final report, highlights the public input and the integration of public sentiments in a variety of areas. The full report can be found at <https://dme.dc.gov/page/projects-and-initiatives> under the tab for the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Review Process.

The first area that highlights the how the public input shaped the recommendations, and ultimately the final report, is first noted in the letter from the advisory committee to then Mayor Vincent Gray. Below I have included excerpts:

*[The Advisory Committee on Student Assignment was appointed by the DME and charged with] ... making policy and planning recommendations to improve clarity, predictability, and equitable access to high quality school options at locations that make sense for families. The Advisory Committee was composed of community members from every one of the city's eight wards, including both DCPS and public charter school parents, and representatives of DCPS, the Public Charter School Board, the DC Office of Planning, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, and of course, the Deputy Mayor for Education.*

*The clarity, attention and force of what we heard from so many community members and stakeholders over the past nine months in connection with the development of these recommendations give us confidence that they reflect a vision that is firmly rooted in the desires and aspirations of DC families. (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014)*

This letter is then followed by a listing of who served on the advisory committee, their name, Ward of the city they represented, if they were a parent or not, and their community role and/or organizational affiliation. In total the advisory committee was comprised of 22 members – 16 community representatives and six DC government agency representatives. Of the 16 community representatives, 11 of the members were parents (there appears to be an even mixture of DCPS and public charter parents) and all of the members have organizational or community affiliation within the respective wards they were representing of the advisory committee. The letter from the advisory committee also states:

*We hope our vision and these recommendations can provide the District with a road map for moving forward in an educational environment that is unique, challenging, and full of promise.*

In many ways the advisory committees appears to espouse that the ‘road map’ the share in this document to move the city forward regarding its educational environment is reflective of the sentiments, participation, input, and feedback received from the public throughout the process. On page 4 of the report, in the introduction, it states:

*To address the context of today and consider the future, the Deputy Mayor for Education charged the Advisory Committee on Student Assignment with... reviewing data, information, policies and practices as well as listening to parents and community members and discussing this input in depth with Advisory Committee members, [and] the Advisory Committee came to understand the challenges to the current student assignment system for the city and its families. The recommendations in this document [the final report] were developed to address the following challenges.*

The report goes on to highlight the aforementioned 'challenges' and groups them into five areas:

### ***Unpredictable and Complex Student Assignment System***

*Many schools do not have a clearly defined community for which they are responsible, and many families do not have obvious pathways to their schools of right. In some cases, due to the consolidation of attendance zones, families are assigned to schools that are not within easy walking distance of their homes.*

*Parents recounted the stresses of trying to get into DCPS and charter schools through lotteries. Many reported entering multiple lotteries over multiple years, in hopes that one child might be accepted, and clearing the way for the rest of the family. ...but continued confusion and angst over which schools were "good" schools, how to commute to these schools, and the odds of getting into them were prominent issues for many parents.*

### ***Uncertainty of Population and Enrollment Projections***

*At the core of any school district's challenges regarding student assignment, school enrollment, and facilities planning, and management is the difficulty of accurately projecting child population changes and school specific enrollment growth, stability, or decline. Decisions about school openings, closings, boundaries and feeder patterns necessarily respond to historic behaviors of families but also affect their choices in the future.*

### ***Enrollment Patterns and Student Movement***

*The amount of movement among and between public schools is a challenge for students and schools. Students who repeatedly change schools have statistically worse outcomes, including significantly lower graduation rates.*

### ***Travel Burdens on Students and Families***

*Another challenge in the current student assignment and school choice system is the travel burden on students and families. Because of school closings and, in some cases, low density residential areas there are communities without a zoned school within a half mile ...since most students do not attend their closest grade appropriate school, families must drive or use public transportation to get their children to school – something many parents reported as burdensome.*

### ***Fiscal Inefficiencies***

*Each of the 62 local education agencies (LEAs) can independently determine where to locate their school or schools and how to use the District's per pupil and facilities funding...without a structure or process for coordination across LEAs. This lack of coordination has resulted in inefficient use of public dollars.*

Under the *Vision for Public Schools* (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 6) section of the report, the advisory committee notes:

*The overwhelming input from parents and District residents was that families want a citywide system of neighborhood public schools that is equitably invested in and that provides predictable and fair access to high quality schools in all of the city's communities.*

The process undertaken by the advisory committee to capture the 'overwhelming input' from parents and District residents is outlined in *The Community Engagement Process* section of the report (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7):

*The vision and recommendations of this report were guided by voices we heard throughout the city, the thoughtful input of the diverse student assignment advisory committee, and the support of a technical team.*

The report also notes information sharing measures and the focus group engagement:

*All of this extensive material was made available to the public at [dme.dc.gov](http://dme.dc.gov). Starting in November 2013 focus groups were conducted in every ward of the city, through which nearly 200 parents and community members shared their perspectives and experiences with student assignment and school choice issues and provided feedback on the principles that should guide policy recommendations and boundary changes.*

There is mention of working group meetings to discuss the initial thoughts of the advisory committee:

*After the focus groups, the Advisory Committee developed three policy examples and proposed the first draft of updated school attendance zones and school feeder pathways, which the Deputy Mayor for Education presented for public feedback at a series of working group meetings held in April 2014. More than 800 city residents participated in the working group meetings and provided us with valuable input, making it clear that school quality and predictable school pathways were the most critical concerns of families.*

Following the feedback from the public after the working groups, the DME and advisory committee notes they hosted a series of three community meetings on a draft policy proposal in June 2014:

*In June 2014, the Advisory Committee released a single policy proposal with a second draft of school attendance zones and feeder pathways. DCPS and DME notified parents and community members of the proposed changes and informed them of the multiple opportunities to provide feedback. The proposals were discussed and debated at another series of three community meetings, which were attended by nearly 300 parents and community members.*

Additional engagement and opportunities for feedback:

*[T]he DME and many Advisory Committee members have had the benefit of attending scores of local and school community meetings throughout the city with hundreds of participants and have reviewed as many letters, e-mail inquiries, and suggestions. Throughout this process, community members expressed their frustration that this process was primarily focused on student assignment rather than on school improvement. The discussions and thoughtful and spirited debate among stakeholders made clear that, to advance an equitable and efficient citywide system of neighborhood public schools that is complemented by a range of school choices, the District needs to continue to engage*

*the public in the planning and implementation of both citywide and school-specific recommendations.*

The 42 recommendations the advisory committee offered to then Mayor Vincent Gray in the final report were grouped into four areas (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 7):

1. Student Assignment by Right based on DCPS Attendance Zones and Feeder Pathways  
*Student assignment policy that spells out the rights of families based on a geographic designation of attendance zones and feeder pathways that are aligned with population, enrollment, and capacity.*
2. Adequate Capacity in Zoned DCPS Schools  
*Adequate capacity maintained in the by-right system to responsibly meet the short, medium, and long-term demand of families with school age children.*
3. Equitable Access to High Quality Public School Options
4. Education Infrastructure Planning  
*A culture of investment and planning, on the part of both schools and families, to ensure that schools are fully equipped to meet the needs of their communities.*

Under each of the recommendation sections, I have highlighted the areas in which the committee discussed how the public was engaged in the development of the stated goal/recommendation and ongoing recommendations for follow up and engagement with the public moving forward.

#### **Student Assignment by Right Based on DCPS Attendance Zones and Feeder Pathways**

*Although the current practice of most families has been to explore and use school options outside their assigned neighborhood school, the public was clear that they wanted predictable public school pathways of right for children in the District of Columbia. Parents and community members strongly rejected policy examples that were introduced*

*in April 2014 that suggested expanded lottery access, either through choice sets or citywide schools. Families wanted to know and be able to make decisions that give them control over the schools their children attend (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 8).*

## **Adequate Capacity in Zoned DCPS Schools**

### ***Early Childhood Capacity***

***Recommendation 12:*** *DCPS shall work with local schools, parents and communities to develop a written program, facility plan and budget in support of the expansion of early childhood rights for families living in zones of Title I schools.*

### ***Capacity for Elementary Grades***

***Recommendation 14:*** *DCPS shall undertake a boundary and student travel study for the Kenilworth, Thomas, and River Terrace communities; consider re-opening Kenilworth; and explore options for River Terrace so the children living within the new Thomas boundary are adequately served.*

***Recommendation 15:*** *DCPS shall undertake a boundary and student travel study to consider reopening Marshall to adequately serve the community living within the new Langdon boundary.*

(District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 9)

## **Equitable Access to High Quality Public School Options**

*Parents expressed strong desire for high quality neighborhood schools, but they also wanted access to schools other than their zoned schools. Acknowledging the limitations of a strictly neighborhood assignment system, the Advisory Committee supports a complementary system of school choice to address current inequities in DCPS zoned schools, the desire for socioeconomic diversity, and the desire of families to exercise personal preferences for school programs and culture. Some communities raised concerns*

*about the travel burdens on families whose DCPS zoned elementary school is not within easy walking distance from their homes. For a complementary system of choice to be equitable, the travel costs for families and the District need to be understood and minimized.*

*The Advisory Committee makes the following recommendations in order to:*

- *Give families increased access to schools that may better fit their children's needs or that may be more convenient for those families;*
- *Increase and preserve socioeconomic diversity in DCPS neighborhood zoned schools;*
- *Provide "at-risk" students better access to high demand public schools; and*
- *Ameliorate travel burdens on students and families.*

*(District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 10)*

#### ***Waking and Public Transit to Public Schools***

*Throughout this process, the Advisory Committee, parents, and community members expressed a strong desire to locate and sustain DCPS zoned elementary schools that can be reached safely by walking.*

*[T]he Committee seeks to relieve the transportation burden placed on parents, students, and families and find ways to better support transportation to school, which is currently the responsibility of families, not the district, except in the case of students who receive special education services. Currently all students have access to free Metrobus transportation to and from school, and subsidized Metrorail (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 11-12).*

***Recommendation 34:*** *DME shall work with Metro, Metro Police, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), DC Department of Transportation, and public school parents and students to review bus routes and other Safe Routes to School services and ensure that bus routes and services are maximized to support safe and efficient public school travel by*

*DCPS and public charter school students (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 12).*

### **Education Infrastructure Planning**

*As the system of right, DCPS must monitor its buildings and programs, engage families and communities, and ensure that it has the capacity to meet the current and future demands for public schools.*

**Recommendation 37:** *As part of DCPS boundary studies, DCPS shall work with the local school and community to secure input into the studies on school capacity, utilization and attendance zones.*

**Recommendation 39:** *The Chancellor shall support local school and community participation in the planning of re-commissioned and new schools.*

**Recommendation 40:** *The District shall revise DC Municipal Regulations to ensure that the same public notice and engagement requirements in DC Municipal Regulations for boundary changes are required for changes in feeder patterns (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 12-13).*

### **Better Planning Across Public School Sectors**

*There was widespread recognition that devising student assignment policies that support a core system of high quality neighborhood schools of right without consideration of the role played by DC's charter sector would lead to policies that do not realistically foster the stated goals of predictability and access to high quality schools close to home for families across the District. (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014)*

*The Committee echoes the public sentiment heard throughout this process that the city must develop the means to plan its public education infrastructure across sectors and to identify the policies that should apply across sectors. To advance these objectives, the Advisory Committee makes the following recommendation. (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014)*

***Recommendation 42:*** *The Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) shall establish a task force of relevant stakeholders, including representatives from a diverse sample of LEAs and schools, parents with students in DCPS and public charter schools, as well as residents and community leaders to make recommendations to the Mayor on the following:*

- *Methods and systems for information sharing across sectors;*
- *Structures for increased accountability and transparent decision-making on school openings, closings, co-locations, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment across sectors; and*
- *Processes for securing and considering public input about school openings, closings, co-location, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment across sectors.*

*By the end of December 2014, the DME will appoint members and define the charge per the recommendation above and propose a timeline for the task force (District of Columbia Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, 2014, p. 13).*

## **Summary**

Chapter 5 of this dissertation, on page 88, offers a more detailed analysis of the data shared in this appendix.